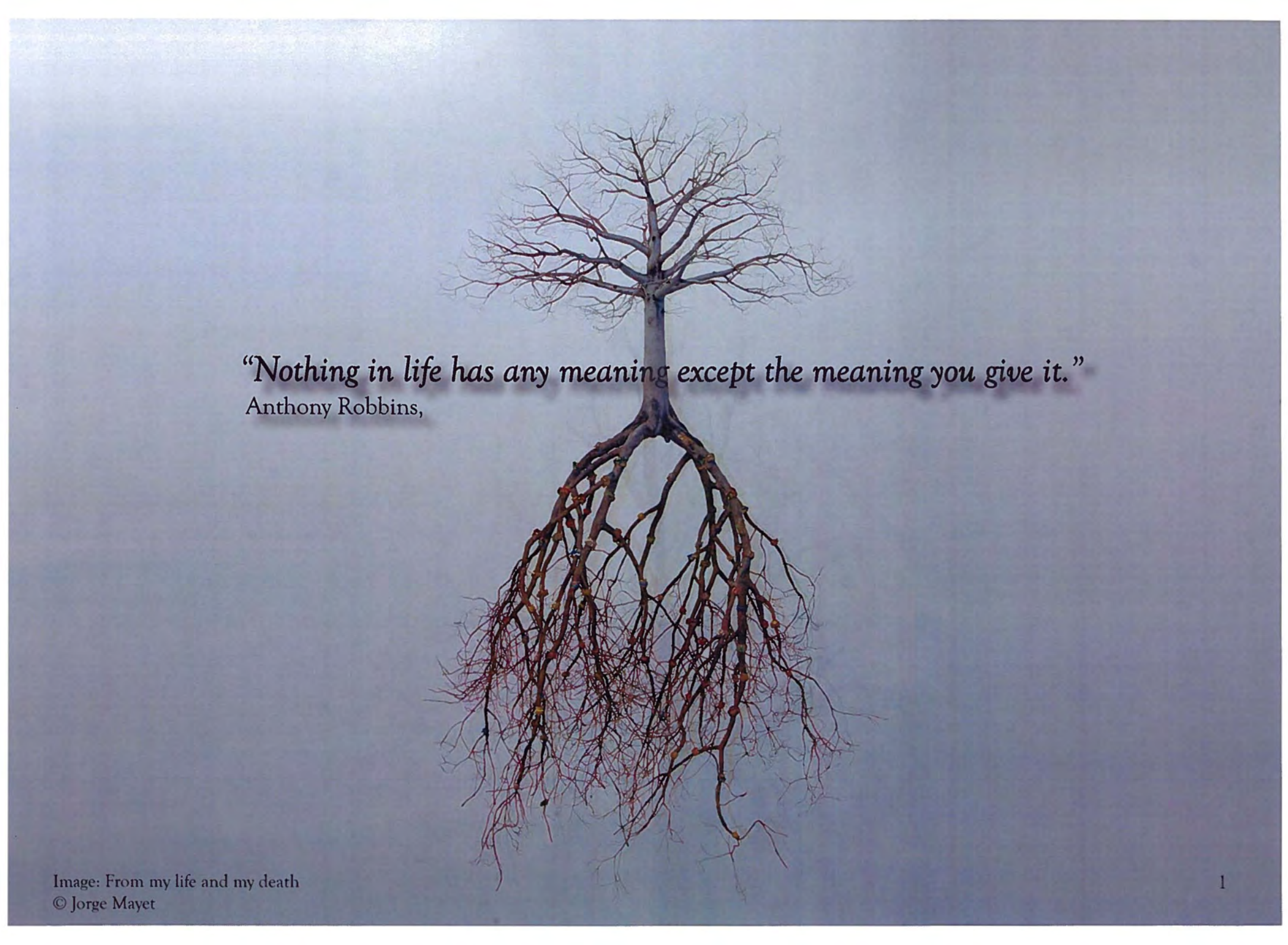
# Path of life in mixed reality

## 7th stage

September 2012 -June 2013

By Kiarash Irandoust



*"Nothing in life has any meaning except the meaning you give it."*
Anthony Robbins,

Image: From my life and my death
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Path of life in mixed reality
Proposed by: Prof. G.W.M. Rauterberg
September 2012 – June 2013

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General
Overview

# General overview

This report is a brief overview of my master graduation project "*Path of life in mixed reality*"; a project which intends to create an interactive installation that enable visitors to experience deeply rooted cultural dimensions based on seven stages in life.[i] The design challenge is drawing on results from different disciplines: religion, sociology, design, and engineering sciences[1].

I started this project by looking at various definitions of culture. What is culture? And how does culture manifest itself in life? Subsequently, I looked at the meaning of life; what does life mean? And how do different cultures look at life (seven stages of life). Furthermore, I looked at the concept of death from different perspective; history, culture, religion, psychology, philosophy sociology and finally art and architecture. In each category, my focus was mainly dedicated to western society. I will describe my intention for this deliberate limitation later in this report.
Observation, field research, interviews and reading literatures formed the required knowledge for this project. All these knowledge defined the direction and shaped the foundation of my design process.

First iteration, **investigation and positioning**: this iteration can be divided into two phases; first phase dedicated to understanding the concept of life, gathering information regarding seven stages of life and choosing a particular stage in order to continue the project upon that. Different interviews, analysis and readings devoted my direction to the final stage in life, "death"
And second phase, focused on attaining knowledge about final stage of life from different disciplines' viewpoint. It was tried to get a comprehensive picture of the final stage of life.
During this iteration I attempted to understand how society and individuals are influenced by the concept of life and death. Furthermore, what are the crucial factors on this impact? The main focus dedicated to find a common agreement on the concept of death regardless of religious or specific point of view.

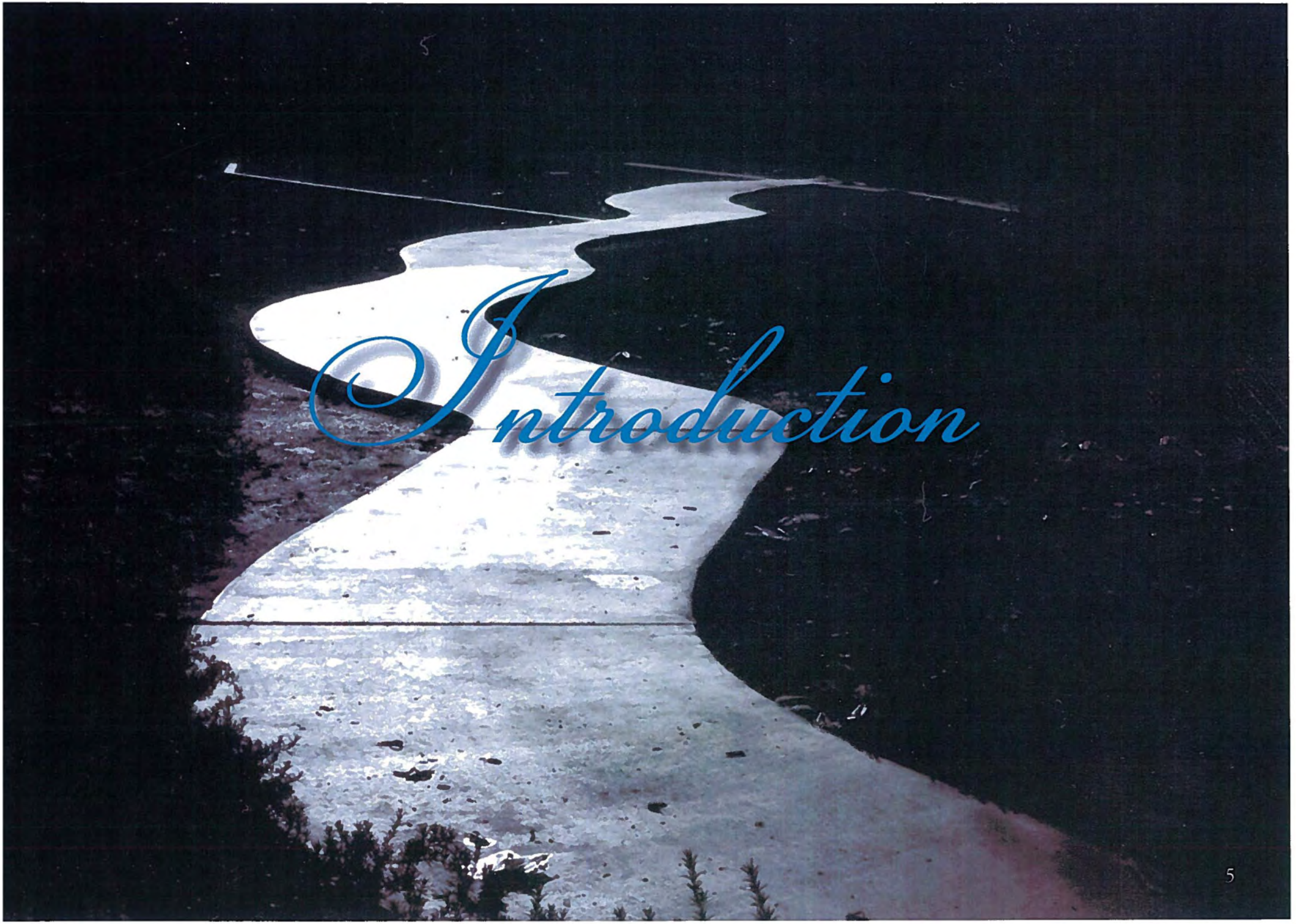
It is worth mentioning that the information and knowledge that I gained in this stage are the foundation of the final design.
My reason for choosing this topic was due to my vision on creating societal changes and the responsibility that I feel as a designer. My intension was to inform people and invite them to re-think about issues which are inseparable part of our life and consciously/unconsciously have a great impact on our life.

Second iteration, **conceptualization and validation**: the conceptualization process was through idea generation and model making. It was an iterative process in which the final concept shaped gradually. At the end of this iteration, the final concept was formed based on the results of the first phase and different interviews and discussions.

Third iteration, **realization and confirmation**: during this iteration I focused on the embodiment of the final design. All the information which was gathered during previous iterations was merged into a tangible experience. In other words, it was putting pieces of puzzle next to each other. The confirmation of the core concept was during the two day exhibition.

Even though the information presented in this report is divided into three iterations, in practice there was not a clear line between these iterations; for instance, lots of information presented in the first iteration was gathered during the other two iterations. And conceptualization even continued during the last iteration.

i. These stages are established upon Christian rituals



# Introduction

# Introduction

This project finds its roots in my identity as a designer which is shaped throughout the years especially last four years of my study at this faculty. And its direction was determined by three aspects: background information, goals of the project and my own vision on design.

*An introduction to the project*

Comprehending the cultural basis of our lives and those who are distant is essential for each individual.[2] Every human being walks his/her own unique path through life. Our images of life and humanity are in need of continual refurbishing, since the world and our knowledge about the world change. Therefore, the so-called eternal questions about what it is to be human need to be contextually reworded[3].

*"In all cultures and religions there was this understanding that life happens in distinctive eras with each a specific content, that there are thresholds that give entrance to it and that it is important to cross them consciously and with the right effort"*. The perception of phases and transitions is still existent in religious and non-religious views[4]. This project is a new direction in cultural computing: symbolic cultural heritage. It aims to create an interactive installation that enable visitors to experience deeply rooted cultural dimensions. Based on seven Christian rituals several interactive stages are described and my focus dedicated to the final stage, "death".

Cultural issues usually are solely explained and thought of in various studies, however are seldom physically experienced through our senses. The focus of this project is about interconnectedness in cultural and sensorial experiences; providing a platform for cultural experiences and communication.

## MY VISION

The initial starting point for this project is my vision on design and my passion for designing. I consider design as a medium for creating changes; changes in surrounding world and human's mindset which consequently enriches life.

Seeing myself as a designer passionate to improve society, with a focus on human cultural heritage, my ideal is to improve our understanding of humanoid needs. I believe design is a way to convey this original message to society.

I regard this world as a wonderful place that many cannot comprehend it. As a designer I want to make people aware of this beauty. In that regard, I define design as the joining point of human, technology and art; where imagination and reality, beauty and functionality touch each other and come to existence.

In my opinion the UCD approach in design is not sufficient for transforming society. This approach leads to more consumptive products. I think our deeply rooted culture is an important aspect which is mostly excluded in this approach. In my designs, I would like to trigger interaction, by usage of human's perceptual, emotional and cognitive skills. I want to create rich and meaningful experience by addressing these different skills.

# Table of contents


GENERAL OVERVIEW ..... 3
INTRODUCTION ..... 5
MY VISION ..... 6
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... 7
BACKGROUND INFORMATION ..... 11
WHAT IS CULTURE? ..... 12
Culture based on values ..... 13
Hofstede definition of culture ..... 13
Schwartz's cultural value definition ..... 14
WHAT IS LIFE? ..... 15
I. Supernaturalism ..... 15
II. Objective Naturalism ..... 16
III. Subjective Naturalism ..... 16
IV. Nihilism: Pessimistic Naturalism ..... 17
PATH OF LIFE ..... 18
Seven stages of the path of life ..... 18
A different perspective on stages of life ..... 21
ITERATION 1 ..... 22
WHAT DOES DEATH MEAN? ..... 23
CONCEPT OF DEATH THROUGHOUT HISTORY ..... 24
*i. Tamed death* ..... 24
*ii. Death of self* ..... 25
*iii. Remote and imminent death* ..... 25
*iv. Death of the other, Thy death* ..... 26
*v. Invisible death* ..... 26
Conclusion ..... 26

# Table of contents

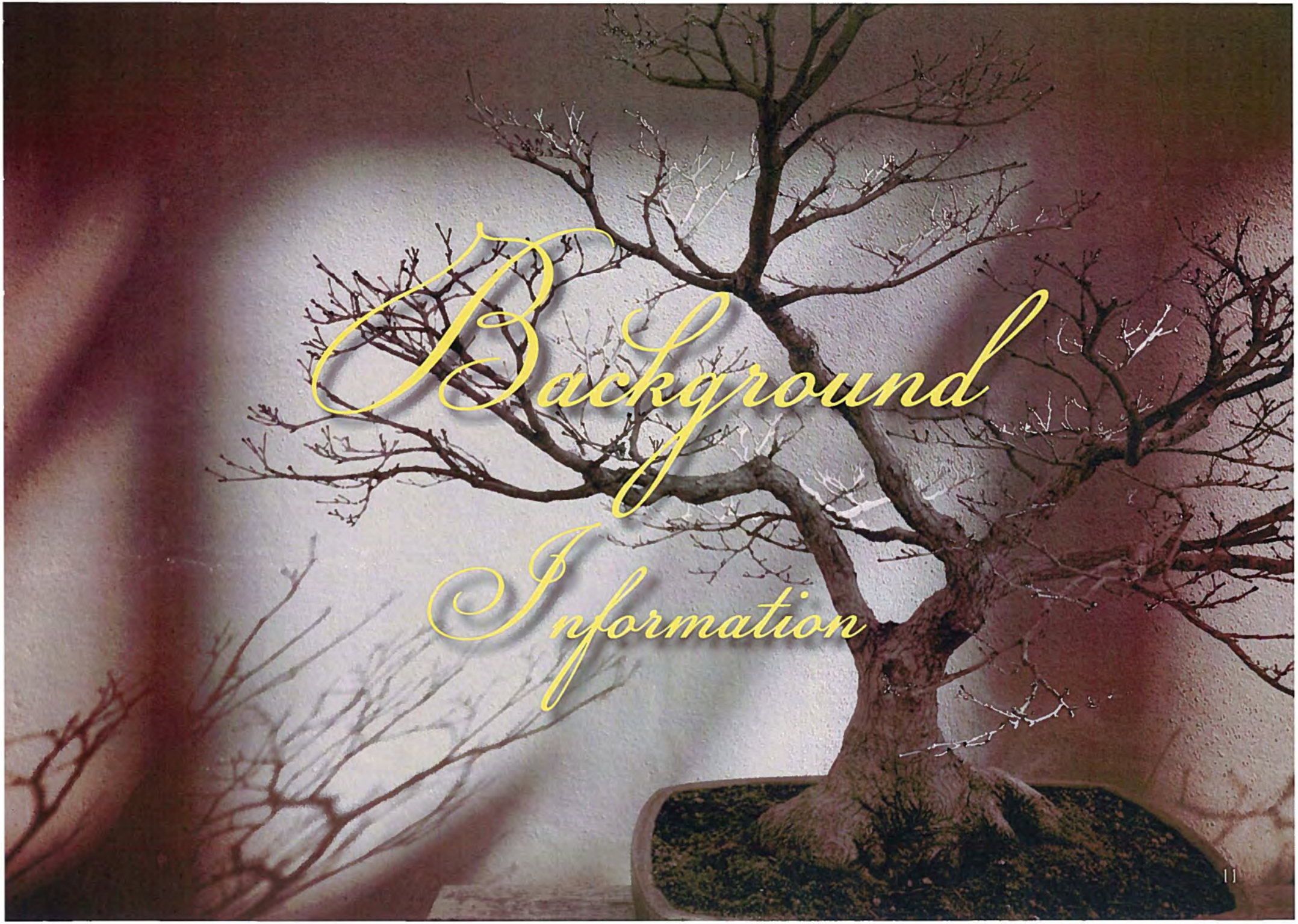

CONCEPT OF DEATH IN PSYCHOLOGY ..... 27
i. Thanatophobia ..... 27
ii. Terror management theory, TMT ..... 27
iii. Death and adjustment hypotheses ..... 28
iv. Ego Integrity vs. Despair ..... 28
v. Being, time, and Dasein ..... 28
Conclusion ..... 28
WHAT IS FEAR? ..... 29
ORIGINS OF FEAR OF DEATH ..... 29
CONCEPT OF DEATH FROM CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ..... 30
CONCEPT OF DEATH FROM RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE ..... 31
Hinduism ..... 31
Buddhism ..... 32
Judaism ..... 32
Christianity ..... 33
Islam ..... 33
Conclusion ..... 33
DEATH IN SOCIOLOGY ..... 34
Conclusion ..... 35
Thanatology ..... 35
WHAT IS A TABOO? ..... 36
Taboos on death and dying ..... 36
Conclusion ..... 36
IS THERE ANY LIMITATION FOR BRUTALITY AND ATROCITY OF MAN? ..... 37
DEATH BY ARCHITECTS ..... 39
Capela dos Ossos, ..... 40

# Table of contents


Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, France ..... 40
Funeral home and garden in Pinoso ..... 40
Family Tomb ..... 41
Conclusion ..... 42
DEATH THROUGH THE EYES OF ART ..... 42
Death in contemporary art ..... 43
DEATH FROM THE CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS' VIEWPOINT ..... 43
DAMIEN HIRST ..... 44
GABRIEL OROZCO ..... 46
PIERO MANZONI ..... 47
DEATH FROM THE PERFORMANCE ARTISTS' VIEWPOINT ..... 48
MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ ..... 48
CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE ..... 50
BERLINDE DE BRUYCKERE ..... 50
CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY ..... 51
Joel-Peter Witkin ..... 51
Walter Schels & Beate Lakotta ..... 52
Andre Penteado & Joachim Froese ..... 53
Maeve Berry ..... 54
Andres Serrano ..... 54
Patrik Budenz ..... 55
DEATH IN SCULPTURE, 15th-20th ..... 56
DEATH IN PHOTOGRAPHY ..... 59
Post-Mortem Photography, Victorian Era ..... 59
Franz Fiedler ..... 60
DEATH IN PAINTINGS ..... 61

# Table of contents


Danse Macabre ..... 61
Vanitas ..... 62
CONCEPT OF DEATH IN PHILOSOPHY ..... 65
ITERATION 2 ..... 66
Analysis ..... 67
Conceptualization ..... 71
Conclusion ..... 81
ITERATION 3 ..... 82
Analysis ..... 83
Guidelines ..... 83
Final concept ..... 84
Description of the space ..... 84
Description of the interaction ..... 84
DESIGN ARGUMENTATION ..... 88
What is Mixed Reality (MR)? ..... 88
i. Using a metaphor ..... 88
ii. Psychological arguments ..... 88
iii. Philosophical argument ..... 89
iv. Designing for emotions ..... 89
A brief description about construction ..... 90
Designing the space ..... 91
Designing the lights ..... 95
Acknowledgements ..... 96
References ..... 97


Background
Information

# Information

Cultural heritage forms the foundation of this project and culture plays a significant role. Therefore, I commenced the project by asking the general question of "what is culture?"

Williams (1985, p.87) argued that "*culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language*[5]." Culture has been studied for over a hundred years in several distinct intellectual disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, business management and so on. The wide variety of studies in these areas has resulted in numerous definition of culture[6].

Reading and reviewing several conceptualization and definitions of "culture" revealed that there is wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory or inconsistent opinion about culture and what in fact constitute the culture[7].

Hence, the first step was to have a clear understanding of culture and choosing suitable interpretation and definition which could be used for later discussion and argumentation in the project. Following paragraphs are outcome of my study on definition of culture.

## WHAT IS CULTURE?

The concept of culture is quite complicated, and the word has many interrelated meanings[8]. Scholars have always dithered between material and nonmaterial definitions of culture; Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) compiled a list of over 160 definitions of "culture".

According to Kroeber (1949), the term "culture[ii]" as discrete from cultivation and refinement was first used by Tylor in Primitive Culture. Tylor (1871, p. 1) defined culture as "*that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society*[9]." This definition of culture was the first explicit definition in its anthropological sense which has never been became entirely obsolete[10].

- Early 20th century, anthropologists considered culture not as a set of distinct activities or products (whether material or symbolic), but rather as the underlying pattern of such activities and products; a pattern which is clearly bounded together[11].

ii. Culture (Latin: cultura, meaning "a cultivating, agriculture" from pp. stem of colere "tend, guard, cultivate, till ") Harper, Douglas (2001-2012). Online Etymology Dictionary [Accessed 17 October 2012]

## Information

- Mid- 20th century cultural studies were concurrent with reintroduction of Marxist thought in sociology[12]. White (1959, p.10) suggested that a culture could be viewed as a three-part structure composed of *ideological*, *technological*, and *sociological* subgroups[13]. In a similar classification, Huxley identified three components of culture as mentifacts, sociofacts and artifacts for ideological, sociological, and technological subsystems respectively[14].

- Late 20th century, Bodley (1994) suggests that culture is made up of at least three components: *what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce*[15]. Moreover, he included culture has several properties. For example, **there is common agreement in a culture on what things mean.**

### Culture based on values[iii]

Among multiplicities of culture interpretation, definitions based on shared values are the most common view on culture[16]. **These definitions consider shared values as the dominant feature and distinguishing characteristic of a culture.**

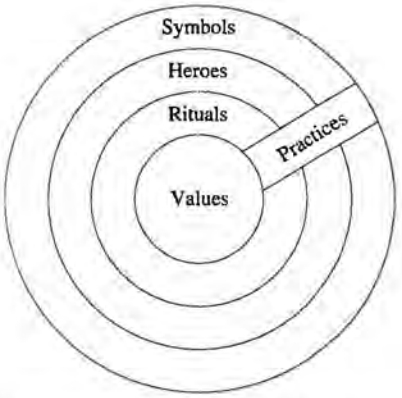
Values refer to relationships among abstract categories that are characterized by strong affective components (Karahanna, et al., 2005). Values are acquired through life altering experience such as childhood and education. **They provide the fundamental assumptions about how things are.**

Among different definitions of culture based on values two definitions two definitions are quite prominent :

### Hofstede definition of culture

Hofstede (1973, p. 89) defined culture as "*an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life*"[19].

Hofstede (1991, p. 260) asserts culture as "*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another*"[20].




The onion diagram: manifestation of culture at different levels of depth Adapted from "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind", Geert Hofstede (1991, p.9)

According to Hofstede (1991) cultural differences manifest themselves in symbols, heroes, rituals, and values[iv].
He makes a distinction between values and the other three[v]. He suggests that values are acquired early in life (not consciously, but implicitly) are enduring. However, practices, which are learned later through socialization, can be altered. He argues that many values remain unconscious to those who hold them. Therefore they cannot be discussed, nor can they be directly observed by outsiders.

iii. Describing and identifying culture as a set of value patterns which are shared goes back to the 1950s[17]. Parsons and Shils (1951, p. 166) classify the basic components of the culture's structure as: (1) types of cultural symbol systems, (2) types of standards of value-orientation (values), and (3) types of orientation action (norms)[18].

iv. *Symbols* are words, gestures, pictures or objects that carry a particular meaning which is only recognized by those who share the culture.
*Heroes* are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics which are highly prized in a culture, and who thus serve as models for behavior.
*Rituals* are collective activities, technically superfluous in reaching desired ends, but which, within a culture, are considered as socially essential.
*Values* are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others. The core of culture is formed by values.

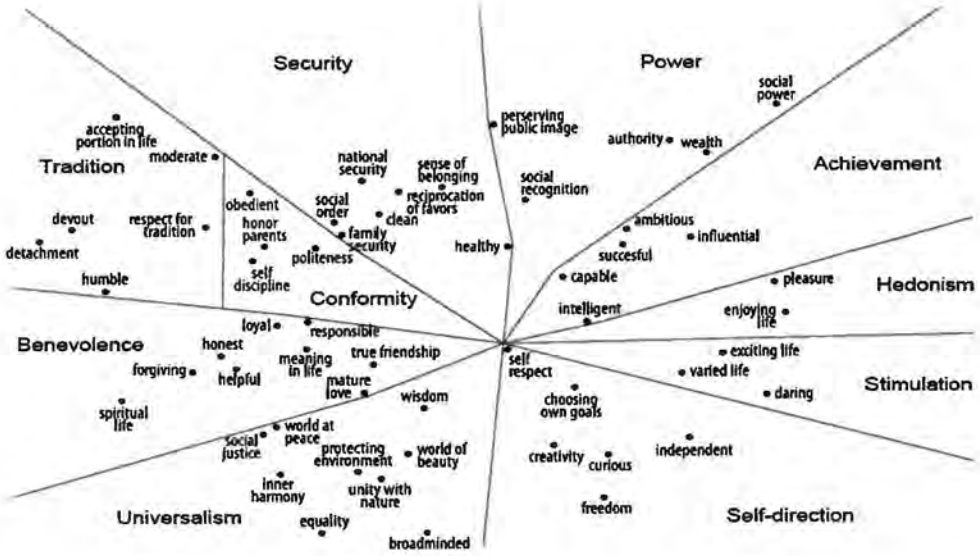
# Information

## Schwartz's cultural value definition

Schwartz (1999) identified ten motivationally distinct value orientations that people in all cultures recognize. He defines Cultural values as "*desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serves as guiding principles in people's lives*[21]".

The decisive aspect that distinguishes values is the type of motivational goal they express. Schwartz (1999, p.25) characterized each of the ten basic values according to the motivation that underlies each of them: (1) Self-Direction, (2) Stimulation, (3) Hedonism, (4) Achievement, (5) Power, (6) Security, (7) Conformity, (8) Tradition, (9) Benevolence and (10) Universalism[22].

In addition Schwartz explicates a structural aspect of values. He asserts the conflicts and congruence among all ten basic values yield an integrated structure of values. And he summarized this structure with two orthogonal dimensions: Self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence[vi] and Openness to change vs. conservation[vii].




The empirical structure of human values (Schwartz 1992).

Schwartz study distinguishes between culture-level value and individual values, an aspect which has not been considered in Hofstede studies.

All these readings led me to the conclusion that each individual, consciously or unconsciously, is greatly influenced by the values which he/she holds. These values are **unique** and deeply rooted in the culture.

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These definitions have been extracted from "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind", Geert Hofstede (1991, p.7-9)

v. Symbols, heroes, rituals are subsumed under the term practices - Hofstede (1991)

vi. On this dimension, power and achievement values oppose universalism and benevolence values. Both of the former emphasize pursuit of self-interests, whereas both of the latter involve concern for the welfare and interests of others.

vii. On this dimension, self-direction and stimulation values oppose security, conformity and tradition values. Both of the former emphasize independent action, thought and feeling and readiness for new experience, whereas all of the latter emphasize self-restriction, order and resistance to change. Hedonism shares elements of both openness and self-enhancement.

*Information*

## What is life?

This project is all about *life*. The most common definition for life is "*the period between birth and death*" and "*the quality which makes people, animals and plants different from objects, substances, and things which are dead*[23]".
The main question which raises here is what that quality is; a quality which at first place distinguishes "*live*" human from objects and secondly discriminates between human and animals or plants.

The merely simplistic answer to this question can be summarized in the biological characteristics. However, answering this question has concerned philosophers for centuries. And defining the *meaning* of life has been one of the most profound questions of human existence. Philosophers have been trying to develop and evaluate principles which are meant to capture all the particular ways that a life could obtain meaning. The primary views on the meaning of life can be divided into *supernaturalism*, *objective naturalism*, *subjective naturalism* and *nihilism*[24].

The Miracle of St Augustine, c.1550
By Jacopo Tintoretto

### I. Supernaturalism25

Supernaturalist views in the monotheistic tradition is divided into *God-centered* and *soul-centered* views (Cottingham2005 and Craig 2008).

While God-centered views believe God's existence, along with "appropriately relating" to God, is both necessary and sufficient for a meaningful life, soul-centered views suppose having a soul and putting it into a certain state makes life meaningful, even if God does not exist.
In God-based views meaning in life is that one's existence is more significant, the better one fulfills a *purpose* God has assigned. Common idea is that God has a plan for the universe and that one's life is meaningful to the degree that one helps God realize this plan, perhaps in the particular way God wants one to do so. Fulfilling God's purpose (and doing so freely and intentionally) is the sole source of meaning, with the existence of an afterlife not necessary for it (Brown 1971; Levine 1987; Cottingham 2003)[25]. Life would be meaningless, if a person failed to do what God intends him to do with his life.

Generally, Soul-centered view considers that meaning in life comes from relating in a particular way to an immortal, spiritual substance that supervenes on one's body when it is alive and that will forever outlive its death. If one lacks a soul, or if one has a soul but relates to it in the wrong way, then one's life is meaningless[26].

## II. Objective Naturalism27

This view proposes a physical life without believing in presence of a supernatural reality. According to this view, a meaningful life is possible and the meaning of life is connected with solid or intrinsic nature and is independent of mind- related matters. In other words, a meaningful life by objective naturalism is not constituted based on a person's choice or will, instead it is presented by inherently worthwhile or finally valuable conditions. Objective naturalism is distinguished from subjective naturalism by its emphasis on mind-independence.

*Morality* and *creativity* are widely held instances of actions that give meaning to life. These actions are meaningful regardless of whether any autarchic agent (including God) believes them to be or seeks to engage in them. To obtain meaning in one's life, one ought to pursue these actions.

Rodin &The Thinker,
Photographed by by Edward J. Steichen, 1902

## III. Subjective Naturalismvii

Similar to Objective naturalism, subjective naturalism posits a meaningful life without believing in existence of a supernatural reality, however the current view proposes that life is a function of what a person wants or chooses. Therefore meaning of life varies among different people, as mental status of one person varies from another. Common views are one's life is more meaningful if, the more one gets what one happens to want strongly, the more one achieves one's highly ranked goals, or the more one does what one believes to be really important.

"*Lately, an influential subjectivist has asserted that the relevant mental state is caring or loving, so that life is meaningful just to the extent that one cares about or loves something (Frankfurt 1982; Frankfurt 2002; Frankfurt 2004)*[25]".

viii. Subjectivism was dominant for much of the 20th century when pragmatism, positivism, existentialism, noncognitivism, and Humeanism were quite influential (James 1900; Ayer 1947; Sartre 1948; Barnes 1967; Taylor 1970; Hare 1972; Williams 1976; Klemke 1981). However, in the last quarter of the century, "reflective equilibrium[ix 28]" became a widely accepted argumentative procedure.

ix. "*Reflective equilibrium is the end-point of a deliberative process in which we reflect on and revise our beliefs about an area of inquiry, moral or non-moral. The inquiry might be as specific as the moral question, "What is the right thing to do in this case?" or the logical question, "Is this the correct inference to make?"* "

Even though objective and subjective naturalism disagree on the conditions for meaningfulness, both are united in their rejection of supernaturalism and necessity of God in order to secure a meaningful life. In this way, both forms of naturalism can be thought of as optimistic naturalisms which agree that meaningful life is possible in a godless universe.

## IV. Nihilism: Pessimistic Naturalism

Despite above mentioned views, which believe in presence of a meaningful life, nihilism or pessimistic naturalism denies existence of a meaningful life. As some forms of nihilism is related to boredom or dissatisfaction of human in life; in general nihilism argues that life is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value, and if there would be a value there is no base for that. Most commonly, Friedrich Nietzsche is the most often philosopher associated with this life view[27].

"*The idea shared among many nihilists is that there is something inherent to the human condition that prevents meaning from arising, even if God exists. For instance, some nihilists make the Schopenhauerian claim that our lives lack meaning because we are invariably dissatisfied; either we have not yet obtained what we seek, or we have obtained it and are bored (Martin 1993)*[25]".

All these reading disclosed how drastically opinions varied on the meaning of life. A term which seems to have a quite simple definition has disputed complex opinions; opinions which counteract each other. So, when talking about a society and designing (designs which target cultural issues) for a society means considering all these opinions.

Nihilistic Optimistic, London, 2006
By Tim Noble & Sue Webster

## PATH OF LIFE

Every human being walks a unique path through this life. What happens in the life, regardless of being religious or nonreligious, is in essence the salvation history of that person[29]. Probably all people on this planet have this in common[1].

In distinct cultures and religions there was this conception that life happens in distinctive eras, each with a specific content, which were thresholds for the next entrance. Therefore, it was important to cross them consciously and with the right effort. "*When the time was right the community prepared together with that person, symbolized the transition often with a rite and celebrated the moment. This partition of life was an attempt to procure conscious life*". In contemporary societies, little is left from the earlier union of rites; however the perception of phases and transitions is still present in religious and nonreligious people[x 4].

These stages can also be considered as ongoing processes of learning and discovering that life is not all about ego and achievement, but **it is about living;** living with love, receptiveness and thus becoming a mild, responsible and peaceful human being. A truly free human being who knows what resignation is.

These stages which are mostly common among different cultures and religions can be classified into seven steps.

### Seven stages of the path of life[xi]

In Christianity (i.e. mainly Catholicism) seven stages were initiated with holy rituals traditionally known as "sacraments". Following paragraphs describe these seven symbolic stages which belong to the three universal phases of: "*(1) depending on love (e.g. happiness, bonding, friendship, caring, and lust); (2) taking power (e.g. self-confidence, maturity, autonomy, responsibility, and preservation), and (3) preparing for death (e.g. anxiety, fear, violence, destruction, and dissolution)*[4]"
It also has to be mentioned that there is an emphasis on the symbolic nature of these ritualized experiences.

### Stage 1: The gateway of origin and entering

**Birth experience - Beginning of every new life**

For Christians, of whichever denomination, it stands at the beginning of every new life through the rite of baptism, which actualizes the complete salvation history from passage to resurrection[30]. In a certain sense baptism is God's creation of the Individual[31]. For the Catholics in particular it was retaken with every re-entering of the church by dipping the hand in the holy water and in crossing oneself for cleansing (washing) and blessing.

x. In the Christian (i.e. mainly Catholic) tradition the same phases were initiated or marked with holy rituals traditionally known as "sacraments" [8], indicating that in this vision engaging in them means a special God encounter[30].
xi. Following paragraphs are extracted from the article "Path of Life in Mixed Reality[1]" and "The Three Phases of Life: An Inter-Cultural Perspective[4]".

# Information

## Stage 2: The gateway of opening up

**Becoming adult - Standing on our own feet**

For Christians, of whichever denomination, it stands at the beginning of every new life through the rite of baptism, which actualizes the complete salvation history from passage to resurrection[30]. In a certain sense baptism is God's creation of the Individual[31]. For the Catholics in particular it was retaken with every re-entering of the church by dipping the hand in the holy water and in crossing oneself for cleansing (washing) and blessing.

## Stage 3: The gateway of union

**Unification with society**

We will leave the width to go in depth, to incarnate. This concern is making a real choice that is no longer free of obligation, or be punished by not being a choice at all. This is the condition for maturity and for fertility. It has everything to do with 'giving our life' without guarantee to find it. This might happen by going through the three gateways of 'communion of humanity and the mystery of her soul' (stage 3), 'engaging in a relationship' (stage 4) and participating in the 'giving yourself in building the house of the world' (stage 5).

## Stage 4: The gateway of connection

**"You can count on me, I connect with you"**

The realization of the union with humanity and with God happens in daring to take the step of giving oneself to a concrete person: "You can count on me, I connect with you". A covenant entails a choice, a letting go of all other possibilities, concentrating on this other human being. This is what happens in friendship relations, but most of all in partner relations. Here the resignation of the "ego" happens; the 'I' is no longer floating around[33], but dares to lose itself to someone else and becomes fertile (e.g. in parenthood) because of it.

## Stage 5: The gateway of creation

**Creation through profession**

We will go through this gate when we invest ourselves into our creating power in a distinct choice of (education and then) labor. It is the 'building of the house' for our loved ones, but also of the house of the world.

## Stage 6: The gateway of letting go & maturing

**Preparing for death - the 'empty nest' (children have left home)**

At the end of all stages in phase II a stage is situated that is harder to express. It is in its most prosaic form connected to retiring. But also to the 'empty nest' (e.g., children have left home), to reducing our position in society. It is transforming our life experiences into wisdom, getting at ease, daring to leave the active role to others. Lao Tzu[34] clearly emphasized this aspect of the "egoless" wise man who can persuade and influence without intentions and desires.

## Stage 7: The gateway of farewell & destination

**Farewell & destination .....**

Every human being comes into the world alone, passes through the community and goes the last part of the road alone again. In all cultures there are ways of saying farewell and trying to escort man in her/his last phase as far as possible. In the Catholic tradition s/he was strengthened with forgiveness, anointment and food for the journey. Even though opinions may differ about what happens at death, what the perspective is, still every culture has its symbols to express something of a continuation, a suspicion, a trust, or at least a wish and to send off the departed with love and respect.

# Information

Within the context of these seven stages, I interviewed several persons in order to know how different people consider these stages in their life. I can conclude that for many people the very first and last stages are the most important stages in life; two stages which cannot be changed. The rest are your journey (salvation history) in life and how you decide to do this journey.

I consider these two stages as inevitable facts of life. Interestingly, the way you look at the final stage (personal beliefs about death) can influence other stages as well.
Among these stages my direction dedicated to the final stage "death".

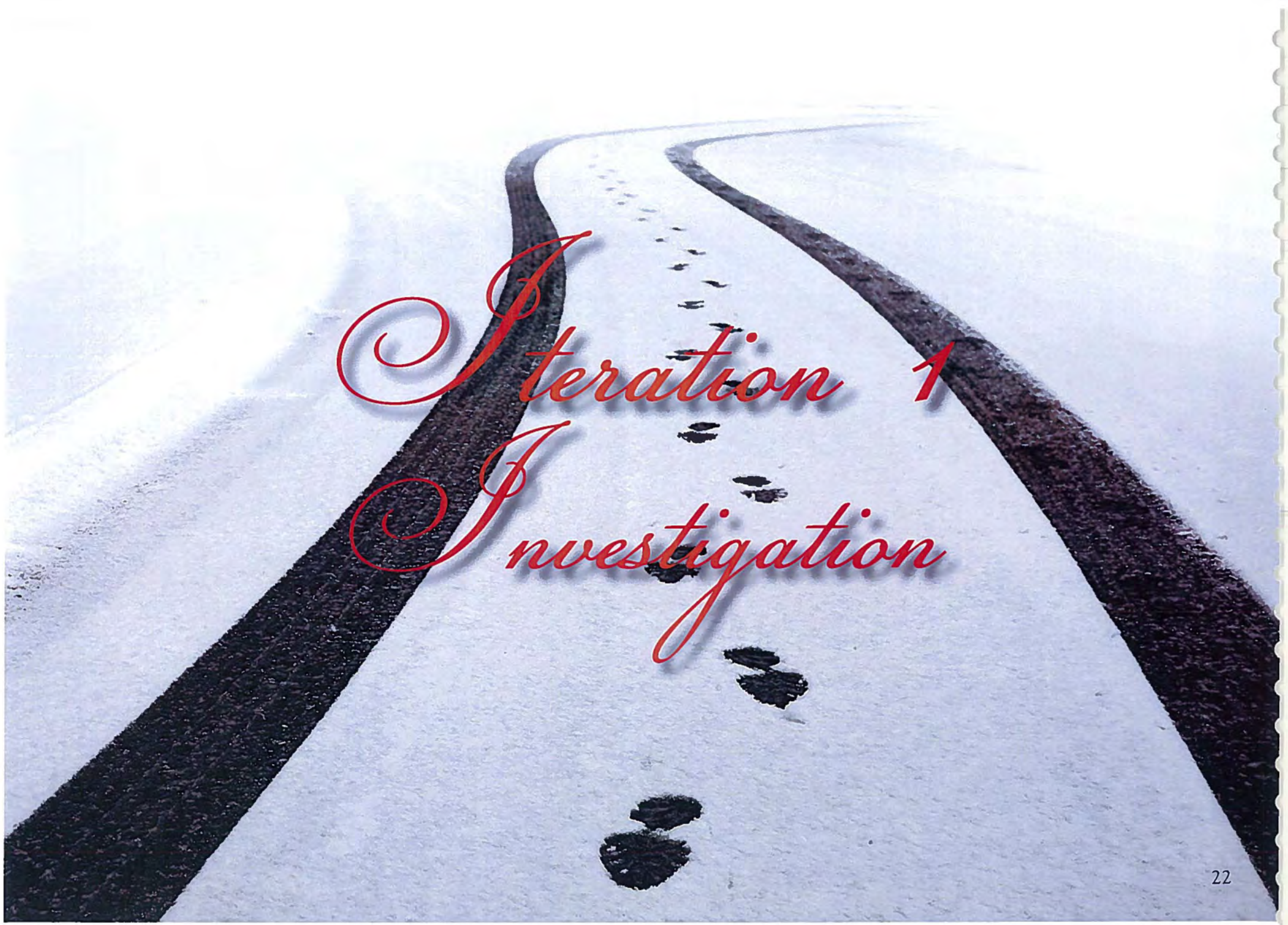
## A different perspective on stages of life

Described stages were from cultural and religious viewpoint, moreover relatively similar division in life span can also be found in psychological theories. Erik Erikson (15 June 1902 - 12 May 1994) is a psychoanalyst who is well-known for his theory on psychosocial development of human beings. Much like Sigmund Freud, Erikson believed that personality develops in a series of stages[xii] .

One of the main elements of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory is the development of *ego identity*. "*Ego identity is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction*[35]". The Erikson life-stage virtues, in order of the eight stages in which they may be acquired, are[35 36]:

1. Infancy: Birth to 18 Months: Trust vs. Mistrust
   Drive and Hope
2. Early Childhood: 18 Months to 3 Years: Autonomy vs. Shame
   Self-control, Courage, and Will
3. Play Age: 3 to 5 Years: Initiative vs. Guilt
   Purpose
4. School Age: 6 to 12 Years: Industry vs. Inferiority
   Method and Competence
5. Adolescence: 12 to 18 Years: Identity vs. Role Confusion
   Devotion and Fidelity
6. Young Adulthood: 18 to 35: Intimacy and Solidarity vs. Isolation
   Affiliation and Love
7. Middle Adulthood: 35 to 55 or 65: Generativity vs. Self-absorption or Stagnation
   Production and Care
8. Late Adulthood: 55 or 65 to Death: Integrity vs. Despair
   Wisdom

xii. Unlike Freud's theory of psychosexual stages, Erikson's theory describes the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan.]



# Iteration 1 Investigation

## WHAT DOES DEATH MEAN?

I started this phase of the project by seeking a meaning for "*death*"; a term which has remained a great mystery from the beginning of human history. And one of the main issues with which philosophy, religion and science have struggled.

Death has been defined in various ways. Encyclopedia Britannica defines death as "*the total cessation of life processes that eventually occurs in all living organisms*". In addition, it says "*the state of human death has always been obscured by mystery and superstition, and its precise definition remains controversial, differing according to culture and legal systems.*"[i]

This definition shows no certainty or confidence, talking about death. Even though dying is a natural part of existence death is viewed as a taboo (or at least to some extent) in many cultures. Usually people tend to view death as a terrifying phenomenon that can and should be defeated by modern science[ii].

Reading more revealed how various opinions exist about death and afterlife; opinions that no one can prove or reject it. Appendix A describes some of these opinions.
In general, religions simply accept the inevitability of death and try to offer alternatives that await the faithful in the afterlife. It is believed that these ideas bring comfort to many people who have lost loved ones or are facing death themselves. Overall, six common philosophical views about concept of death are:

*i.* Death is permanent interruption to life.
Two possible attitudes towards this view are either ignorant[iii]or rebellion[iv].

*ii. Death is considered as the act of culminating of life in which a person expresses his/her aim of life*
This happens in two ways:
- By the context or manner of dying or both which also referred as internal and external expression of life's context.
- By providing an opportunity as a "final option" in order to authorize "fundamental option"[v].

*iii. Death is regarded as part of life, in which a person has to confront it and accept it as finitude*
According to Heidegger, this is one of the key features of human existence "we are to live authentically"[vi].

*iv. Death is considered as transition between two lives, from this life to eternal life*
In this view which goes back to Plato, soul survives the body. Next life is eternal and death has not to be feared as real life starts after that[vii]. However in traditional religion hell and suchlike exist in this philosophy[viii].

i. *In the first edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, death was summarized as "the separation of the soul and body; in which sense it stands opposed to life, which consists in the union thereof" (1768, v. 2, p. 309). The confidence and concision had dissolved by the time the fifteenth edition appeared in 1973. The entry on death had expanded to more than thirty times the original length. The earlier definition was not mentioned, and the alternative that death is simply the absence of life was dismissed as an empty negative*[17].
ii. This mentality is reflected in our language ("combat" illnesses).
iii. Sartre, Pascal, Nietzsche and Epicurus
iv. Camus
v. Karl Rahner, Theology of Death
vi. Heidegger, Hegel
vii. According to some philosophers like Schillebeeckx and David Coffey kind of immediate resurrection is also conceivable.
viii. Hume

*v. This view like the previous one considers a transition between lives without the idea of this life is for the sake of the next one*
Life starts here and will last forever. Resurrection of body and final coming of the god kingdom is considered in such everlasting life.

*vi. Death is identified as passage from current life to a similar life, which could be better or worse depending on one's deeds (karma).*
This view can combine with 4th philosophy, as life does not end and there is another chance to do it (" re-incarnation as the wheel of re-birth, final salvation")

In order to understand how non philosophers and ordinary people think about death. Therefore, I interviewed more than twenty persons. In my surprise, I found that people are reluctant to talk about death a kind of "taboo" for many people and they try to evade it by making fun of it. At this point it was necessary to understand which factors form our notion of death. Therefore, I looked at the concept of death from various perspectives. Following pages, briefly describe my exploration in this topic.

Hegel wrote that history is the record of "*what man does with death*" (Whaley 1981) Gaining insight about historical changes of attitudes towards death is important in order to have a better understanding of social norms and forces which have shaped these norms. This understanding helped me to strengthen my own view and develop a critical approach towards these norms. Following paragraphs are based on Philippe Ariès studies on Western cultural history.

## CONCEPT OF DEATH THROUGHOUT HISTORY

*Acceptance, fear, or denial*[37]

*"Man is the only species to bury his dead.*[38] *Of the recurrent crises of the human condition - birth, marriage and death - it is death that has generated the largest number of rituals, most of them based on a belief in an afterlife."*[39]

Philippe Ariès discerns five distinctive attitudes towards death throughout human history. However the chronology is not completely clear, due to the overlap between stages. Following paragraphs briefly describes these stages and their characteristics.

### i. Tamed death
### Around 8th BC onward

During this era "*death was a very simple thing*"; it was considered natural and inevitable, not an object of horror. *Death was a ritual organized by the dying person,* who was in charge of it and knew its protocol.[40] It was also a public ceremony.

"*The coexistence of the living and the dead*" was another aspect of the old familiarity with death. Blurred borders between life and death can be shown by the fact, that cemeteries were also used for non-funeral purposes such as public

performances and market places.
Until late sixteenth and seventeenth century, the individual graves were unusual and the exact place of burial was not so important. The fact clearly reveals "community-oriented personal identity that was dominant" in this period.

## ii. Death of self
### 14th to 16th century

The idea of being confronted with individual judgment right after death was a new development during the Middle Ages towards the Renaissance. The perception of death was not greatly affected; however, death began to change subtly becoming dramatically personal.[ix] An individual's sins and God's reckoning of such sins also became more personal. Facing death a person thought that exuding posture and not grasping onto one's Earthly possessions would earn favor towards Heaven. Individual values arose changing how funeral were conducted, while rites administered on the deathbed remained the same. During the 12th century and reserved only for saints and kings, epitaphs appeared.

## iii. Remote and imminent death
### 17th and 18th century

As Ariès says, "*Where death had once been immediate, familiar, and tame, it gradually began to surreptitious, violent, and savage... death, by its very remoteness, has become fascinating...*"

The fear and natural acceptance of death was an intermediate phase which occurred in the 17th and 18th century. In 1787 Mozart reflected the views of his time in a letter to his father:

"*As death, when we come to consider it closely, is the true goal of our existence, I have formed during the last few years such close relations with this best and truest friend of mankind, that his image is not only no longer terrifying to me, but is indeed very soothing and consoling! And I thank my God for graciously granting me the opportunity . . . of learning that death is the key which unlocks the door to our true happiness*". (Anderson, 1966, p. 122)

Interestingly, mourning was regulated by the church to the extent of dictating what the mourning family member should wear and how long they are allowed to mourn. It was inappropriate to show one's emotions in public while mourning, and if it was not possible to overcome grief in a reasonable amount of time the person was forced into solitude or a monastery.

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ix. In this period, Ariès count four phenomena which introduced the concern of individuality into the old idea of the collective destiny:
- *The portrayal of the Last Judgment at the end of the world*
- *The displacing of this judgment to the end of each life, to the precise moment of death*
- *Macabre themes and the interest shown in portrayals of physical decomposition*
- *The return to funeral inscriptions and to a certain personalization of tombs*

Ariès, P., 1975. Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present. The Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 28

### iv. Death of the other, Thy death
### 19th century

An enormous shift occurred in the 19th century where death became more romanticized as beautiful[x], and the concern from one's death was replaced by the concern of losing family or friends. The relationship between family members have become exceedingly closer and emotional expression was accepted as normal when losing a family member or friend. The grave site is property of the family in the 19th and 20th centuries which is considered to be a cemetery cult. Family and friends visit the deceased in the cemetery indicating the significance of the burial site. Pictures of the deceased are often attached to the tombstone in remembrance.

### v. Invisible death
### Contemporaryxi

Where dying was once done in one's home, in the contemporary the unpleasant is ignored and relegated to institutions like funeral homes and hospice care[41]. Thus far, death has not progressed in this era leaving excessive mourning to be indecent and society choosing to remove the topic from public discussion. While death is inevitable, the natural sciences in the contemporary is focused on constant progress rather than death.[42]

## Conclusion

During the history of Western civilization, a fundamental shift in the conception and attitude towards death occurred; death which once had been a familiar and "tamed" concept twisted into the radically different conception that characterizes by untamed, strangeness, and forbidden.

*These changes result largely from the gradual replacement of community-oriented personal identity with today's radical individualism.* The contemporary society tends to deny death existence and banish it from sight. We do not longer die among beloved ones but alone in the hospital.

None the less, the strangeness of the society in facing death leaves individuals isolated and makes it more intimidating than ever before.

x. Ariès argues that this period was concurrent with giving a new meaning to death; it was tried to "*exalted it, dramatized it, and thought of it as disquieting and greedy.*" The major phenomena that he notes are themes concerning death began to take on an erotic meaning "*death raped the living*" and changes in the relationship between the dying person and his family.
xi. Because of man's modern delicate sensibilities, society has tried to banish death from everyday consciousness.

A significant aspect of human nature is emotions[xii xiii]; an aspect that plays a crucial role in this design. Therefore, I looked up the psychological impact of death and dying on individuals. My intention was to understand how people differ in encountering this phenomenon.

## CONCEPT OF DEATH IN PSYCHOLOGY

Death is an extremely emotional experience in human life span. Coping with a death involves a complex set of emotions[43]. Individuals may undergo various kinds of emotions such as: sadness, fear, shock, confusion, anger and so on.

*Fear* and *anxiety* are among the common emotions towards death and dying. Humans have embraced such a fear, as long as the philosophy is raised; Publilius Syrus (100 B.C.E.) noted "*the fear of death is more to be dreaded than death itself.*"[44]

Within following paragraphs I looked up different theories which describe theories concerned with death related fears and anxiety. The two prevalent opposing views of death anxiety were proposed by Sigmund Freud and Ernest Becker.

### i. Thanatophobia[xiv]
**By Sigmund Freud**

*"No one believes in his own death. Or, to put the same thing in another way, in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality."*
Sigmund Freud, The interpretation of dreams

Freud hypothesized that, it is not actually death that people fear because "*we cannot imagine our own death and when we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still spectators, hence, no one believes in his own death*". In other words, the unconscious does not deal with the passage of time nor negations. He considers this fear as concealment for a deeper source of concern; individuals who express death-related fears, probably are trying to deal with unresolved childhood conflicts that they cannot openly admit or express emotions.

### ii. Terror management theory, TMT[xv]
**By Ernest Becker[xvi]**

"*Here we introduce directly one of the great rediscoveries of modern thought: That of all things that move man, one of the principal ones is his terror of death*" (The Denial of Death, p. 11).

Psychologically, there is a state of opposition between living and knowing the fact that avoiding death is impossible. According to Becker, fear from death and its inevitability is so profound in some people's life that they try to suppress it all the time either by denying or avoiding it. Although subconsciously, the fear from utter destruction make some people try to understand death and as a result symbols, regulations, religious definitions, cultures and belief systems are built in order to imbue life with meaning.[45]
"*Awareness of vulnerability and mortality about death does not only results in terror, but also motivate people to have faith in the cultural views and regulations.*"[46]By such symbolic systems, humans obtain a sense of immortality, which is believing in afterlife or living on through cultures.[47]

xii. Emotion is an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all or most of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism (Scherer, 1987, 2001).
xiii. Human beings are naturally sentimental
xiv. Freud called death-related fears *thanatophobia*, from the Greek, meaning fear of death
xv. This theory was developed by Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski based on Ernest Becker's The Denial of Death
xvi. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for his monograph, *The Denial of Death*

### iii. Death and adjustment hypotheses

**By Mohammad Samir Hossain**

This theory which has an eastern philosophical approach, argues cessation of life cannot be scientifically proven nor some sort of life after death; hence "*death should be regarded or defined as something very significant that does not necessarily bring absolute end to one's existence.*" The second part of the theory states that the first part can only be established when humans have a stronger attitude towards morality by restraining the desire for materialistic life.
He argues that such a redefinition will result to a better adjustment of the idea of "death" into life.[48] [49]

### iv. Ego Integrity vs. Despair

**By Erik Erikson**

As mentioned earlier, integrity versus despair is the eighth and final stage of Erikson's theory of psychological development. By growing older people go through different series of crisis; Erikson titles this as "*ego integrity*", when an individual comes to terms of finding a meaning or purpose with his or her life. Those who have had accomplishments throughout their life will feel a sense of integrity. In contrast those who see their lives as an unproductive and dissatisfied stage, develop despair.[xvii] It is believed the first category exhibits less fear while confronting death.

### v. Being, time, and Dasein[xiii]

**By Martin Heidegger**

"*Holding to the truth of death–death is always just one's own–shows another kind of certainty, more primordial than any certainty regarding beings encountered within the world or formal objects; for it is the certainty of being-in-the-world.*"
Martin Heidegger, Being and Time

Heidegger shows while death is unavoidable for every single person, it exposes its uncertainty through the fact that no one knows when and how it happens. On the other hand he does not hypothesize about the life after death. He discussed about occurrence of death in the future; this creates fear[xix] and such fear can result in "clearing", which is acceptance of death as a possible mode of existence according to Heidegger. Therefore if we accept mortality, fear by itself can lead to freedom; this is titled as "stop denying being-for death".[50] [51]
For Heidegger "death itself" has no significance, but dying, the manner in which the human being lives as it aims toward death.

## Conclusion

Life and death merely form a continuous line. And it is fascinating how they are opposite ends of a same line.[xx] There is an embedded fear with human being, whether it is fear of life or death . By acknowledging the existence of this fear, we can direct our life out of which death is segment of it. At this point it was important to understand which factors lead to such a fear.

xvii. According to Erikson, "*achieving a sense of integrity means fully accepting oneself and confronting with the death. Individuals who are unable to obtain a feeling of completion and fulfillment will despair and fear death.*"
xiii. Dasein ("there being") is a fundamental concept in the philosophy of Heidegger which often is translated as "*existence*". For Heidegger, *the human subject had to be re-conceived in an altogether new way, as "being-in-the-world." This notion represented the very opposite of the Cartesian "thing that thinks."*
Philosophical anthropology, 2013. Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc.
xix. He argues that human existence is embedded in time: past, present, future. Considering the future, is encountering with the notion of death which results in angst.
xx. Otto Rank, considers the fear of life and death as a fundamental human motivation.

## WHAT IS FEAR?

While reading and talking with different people I came to conclusion that death is a phenomenon which is dramatically surrounded by fear. An important question at this point was: what is fear?

Fear is apparently a universal emotion; all individuals, consciously or unconsciously, have fear in some sort. *Fear is an intense, unpleasant emotional reaction to perceived danger* (Öhman 2008, p.710). Fear is considered to be one of six/seven basic emotions which are thought to be common in all human communities[52].
It is worth noting that the origin of fear usually comes from other sources that are not present in the recent time. Therefore, fear almost relates to future events which are unacceptable or unpredictable.[53]

The experience of fear is deeply impacted by cultural and historical influences.[54] It has been proved that predispositions to fear vary systematically across countries. In some countries, people are more fearful than in others.

## ORIGINS OF FEAR OF DEATH

Death is an experience which was dominated by religion in the past and by medicine in the present. Fear of death on an individual level can be classified in one of the following factors:

### i. Fear of the unknown

The fear of death is tightly related to the fear of the unknown; a fear which has been with the mankind from his existence. Desire to perceive and understand is part of human nature and when we cannot comprehend it leads to fear. What happens when we die is a fundamental question which cannot be answered while we are alive. In fact, developments of all cultural and religious beliefs are human endeavor to answer this question.

### ii. Fear of loss of control

It is an inherent human trait to control the outcome of events. In other words, control is something for which humans strive. Yet the act of dying is thoroughly outside of our control. This fear can lead individuals to go through rigorous and extreme health checks or attempting religious rituals.

### iii. Fear tied to religious beliefs

For many fear of death is rooted in their religious beliefs. Those who think that they know what will happen after death, but worry that they may be mistaken. *Some believe salvation's path is quite straight and narrow, and fear that any deviations may cause to be condemned eternally.*
In contrast, some studies suggest that a strong sense of religion can be related to a lower sense of anxiety towards the death.[55]These studies have found that moderately religious individuals fear death more than either atheists or extremely religious individuals.[56]

### iv. Fear of the pain

There is also some who do not actually fear death itself, yet their fear is due to the circumstances which frequently surround the act of dying. They might be afraid of pain, illness or even rejection.

Death, the final stage of life for an individual person, is also a transition for family members and friends. Religion and culture play an enormous role in death, the funeral process, and grieving. The rites and rituals associated with death vary greatly depending on religious beliefs, cultures, and traditions. Based on these differences, funerals are a form of communicative symbolic practices that express an ethnic, cultural, or religious identity.[57] My focus dedicated to understand the underlayer of these different rites and rituals in order to comprehend how they affect routine life.[xxi]

## CONCEPT OF DEATH FROM CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Cultural rites and rituals[xxii]

*"In most of the world's simpler societies and in may "civilized" societies, too, there are a number of ceremonies and rituals designed to mark the transition from one phase of life or social status to another."* (Victor Turner, 1977)

Even though death influences all humans in the same manner, cultures vary dramatically in the way they conceptualize death and what happens after a person dies. Some cultures consider death as a total cessation of life, while other conceive it to be involved in different stages, including sleep, illness, and reaching a certain age. Analogously, particular cultures view death as a transition to other forms of existence; others consider an uninterrupted interaction between the dead and the living;[xxiii] some regard a repetitive pattern of deaths and rebirths; and yet others view death as the termination of life, with nothing afterwards.[58]

Although a same terminology may be used to describe death, the actual conceptualization and meaning of death differs widely across cultures. A suitable analogy of cultural diversity is weaving (Kagawa Singer,1998). *Even though, weaving is a universal technique, the patterns that result from this process are culturally unique and identifiable.* These various conceptions have an evident impact on people's lifestyles and their readiness for dying.

The manifestation of these differences can be seen in rites and rituals such as settlement of dead bodies and diversity on grief and mourning across cultures. To conclude, two dimensions define the approach of a specific culture towards death:

- A Culture may be death-accepting, death-denying or even death- defying
- Death may be considered either as the end of existence or as a transition to another state of being or consciousness.

Mentioned dimensions, form the vision of the cultures to the death which is either *sacred* or *profane*.

xxi. It is important to understand these cultural variations because they have significant implications on how people act in life.

xxii. *Ritual is behavior; it is "religion in action"* (Wallace, 1966)

xxiii. An example of a cultures rites and rituals that are not connected to a "standard" form of religion can be seen among African tribes. A study conducted by Turner on the Ndembu tribe, he founded that the Ndembu believe during mourning the shade of the dead is revisiting the living and trying to communicate with people they knew best.

Distinct cultures and religions employ a variety of rituals in relation to death. These rituals are shaped by the way each religion contemplate death.[59] Faith in some form of afterlife is a consequential facet of many religions. Within following paragraphs I explored how the concept of death and afterlife concerned in the five most influential religions.

## CONCEPT OF DEATH FROM RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

The idea of death and afterlife are integrated with religions. Such concepts have been with religious notions since primitive religions.[xxiv] It is unclear to what extent early man adopted the idea of the afterlife, yet it has been kept within historical context. According to Barnes (vol. 1, 1965), the creation of the supernatural being was actually introduced against "*an all-mighty-being who created the existence of life*".[60]

Even though the details concerning afterlife may differ among religions, such a belief serves as:

- "*provides an intention to life*
- *helps people to make sense of life*
- *gives support and comfort at times of loss and bereavement*"[62]

Generally, five common views in religions regarding life after death are as following:
i. *The soul dies with the body,*
ii. *Re-incarnation*, it is probably the most widely belief
iii. *The immortality of the soul by itself*, the soul continues in heaven or hell or purgatory and/or in some kind of fine relationship with this world
iv. *The resurrection of the body on the last day*, with or without a belief in the immortality of the soul
v. *The immediate resurrection of the body*, with full salvation however still awaiting the salvation of all other people and of the cosmos on the last day.[62]

### Hinduism

*"Lead me from darkness to light, from death to immortality."*
Vedic prayer

Hindus believe in the rebirth and reincarnation.[xxv] They consider Atman, soul or deep-self, was trapped in the world of "samsara" (the cycle of death and rebirth).

The law of karma keeps individuals trapped in the samsaric cycle. In Hinduism death is not an end, but a natural process in the existence of soul as a separate entity; *death is a temporary cessation of physical activity, a necessary means of recycling the resources and energy and an opportunity for the soul to review its programs and policies.*"[64 65]
Hindus are cremated as they believe burning the body releases the spirit.

Looking to the following pictures, I found it quite unfamiliar and strange how life and death are intermingled.

xxiv. In Ancient Egyptian religion the concept of afterlife had a significant role. Its belief system is one of the earliest known in recorded history. (Richard Taylor, 2000)
ixxv. Unlike Western treatments of reincarnation, which tend to make the idea of coming back into body after body seem exotic, desirable, and even romantic, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other southern Asian religions portray the samsaric process as unhappy. Life in this world means suffering.

Image: Manikarnika Ghat, Varanasi, India, 2013
© Michal Huniewicz[63]

## Buddhism

*Buddhists believe in rebirth and that when they die they will be reborn again.*[xxvi] *The goal is to escape the cycle of death and rebirth and attain nirvana or a state of perfect peace*[xxvii] They consider death merely as the end of the body individuals inhabit in this life. Freeing oneself from desire is the necessity of getting off the reincarnation cycle.[66]

There are different types of Buddhism and many different ways of dealing with death. Depending on their tradition the person may either be cremated or buried.
The common belief among Buddhists is that the soul leaves the body immediately. Therefore a person's state of mind as they die is important in order to find a happy state of rebirth.[67]

## Judaism

Judaism firmly believes in afterlife and death is not the end of *human existence.*[xviii] Death is seen as a natural process which has a meaning, like life, and is part of God's plan.[68] Since Judaism primarily focused on life here and now, rather than on the afterlife, *there is not much dogma about the afterlife which leaves a great deal of room for personal opinion.*[69]

It is a basic principle of Judaism that a dying person should not be left alone. The burial takes place as soon as possible following the death. Unlike Hindu's or Buddhists, cremation is considered to be a desecration of the body. A period of seven days is observed for mourning.

xxvi. Buddha accepted the basic Hindu doctrines of reincarnation and karma
xxvii. In both Buddhism and Hinduism, life in a material body is viewed negatively as the source of suffering. 40, p.77
xxviii.There are not much in Jewish literature about what happens after death. The Torah and Talmud focus on the "*purpose of earthly life, which is to fulfill one's duties to God and one's fellow man*".

## Christianity

"*Death is at the very core of the Christian religion*"[70] The essence of Christian belief about death is that there is an afterlife, that conduct on earth will determine where in the afterlife you will eventually end up.[xxix]For Christians, the reality of death is acknowledged as part of the current human condition.[71]

A Christian may be either buried or cremated, depending on their preference. If the deceased has been cremated the ashes may be scattered. Otherwise, the ashes or body will be buried in a cemetery and marked with a gravestone to remember the deceased.

## Islam

Muslims believe in a *continued existence of the soul and a transformed physical existence after death.* Death is considered as God's omnipotence. Islamic faith considers death as the completion of the physical life and the beginning of a period of rest until the resurrection.[72]During life human can shape their soul for better or worse based on how they live their life. According to Islamic believes there will be a day of judgment "*when all humans will be divided between the eternal destinations of Paradise and Hell*".[xxx]

Muslims believe the soul leaves the body at the moment of death. The body will not be cremated as this is not permitted in Islam. The body is buried at the bottom of the grave.[73]

## Conclusion

While studying different religions viewpoint on afterlife, the psychological and social impact of these beliefs was important for me; social indicate how the society is affected by a belief and psychological influences refer to direct effects on individuals.

It has been debated by Karl Marx and Max Weber that belief in afterlife does create social integration (Hynson, 1979). Social impacts can obviously be observed within rituals about death. However the psychological influences are relatively hidden.

Apart from research on death anxiety relatively few studies have examined psychological impact of belief in afterlife. Generally, these researches have found a positive association between belief in life after death and psychological health.[74 75]

Another psychological impact which can be explored is the psychology of grieving, and how the rituals affect healing. This can also address the social impact.

*"In most of the world's simpler societies and in many "civilized" societies, too, there are a number of ceremonies and rituals designed to mark the transition from one phase of life or social status to another"*[76]

Rituals are symbolic activities which help to *express deepest feelings and thoughts about life's most important events.* However, the modern society tries to banish these rituals. These rituals can provide a set of psychologically healthy mourning practices for the bereaved (Martinson, 1998). According to Volfelt (2005, p.15) six "*reconciliation needs of mourning*" are:

- Acknowledge the reality of the death
- Move toward the pain of the loss
- Remember the person who died

xxix. Catholic Christians believe in purgatory, a temporary place of punishment for Christians who have died with unconfessed sins.

xxx. When someone dies the soul of the deceased is transferred into the interworld in which they remain until the Judgment Day/resurrection. On this day the souls will be judged depending on the way they lived their earthly life and will sentenced to heaven or hell

- Develop a new self-identity
- Search for meaning
- Receive ongoing support from others

Taking all together, funeral rituals, affirming faith, social support received, expressing emotions, and connecting with family or cultural heritage are all vehicles in the healing process. They offer a form of closure for the surviving family and friends and aids in recovery[77]

## DEATH IN SOCIOLOGY

Although death is a universal human experience, societal responses to death significantly vary. These differences can be considered from two perspectives: historically and geographically.
Within this part I explored altering social behaviors towards death over the course of time while my main focus remained on western societies. My intention was to understand how the modern society treats the phenomena of death.

I deliberately limited my research on modern western society for one main reason: attitudes and approaches towards death are profoundly cultural oriented. Different cultures throughout the world have their unique and distinct approaches and practices which are in contrast to more common western practices. After reviewing the abundant amounts of information I came to conclusion that it is essential to define these boundaries. To clarify more these essential differences I just highlight Tibetan sky burial or celestial burial;[i] a sort of burial which is deeply root in Tibetan concept of death and reincarnation.

i. A funerary practice in which a human corpse is cut in certain locations and placed on a mountaintop, exposing it to the elements and animals – especially predatory birds (Robert Lamb, How Sky Burial Works)

Throughout history, death has been considered as an event of social significance. Each individual culture has had strived to define rules and norms for dealing with its consequences. As mentioned earlier, Ariès in his influential works[78] argues how concept of death has changed in western societies; from tamed and familiar concept to hidden and forbidden. He characterizes the modern society as death denying. Consequently, death has become solitary and a taboo surrounds death and dying.[79] [80]

Ariès is not the only scholar with such an idea, Geoffrey Gorer has similar vision. They both consider the end of First World War as starting point of this notion.

Elias' 'Loneliness of dying' also argues that "*modern man distrusts rituals and formality, so these are not available as means of expressing grief*"[81]. The possible reasons for transformation in culture of death, from acceptance to a denial, can be traced to social changes within modern society (ibid).
Walter (1994: Chapter 1) argues four reasons for the death denying nature of contemporary society. [ii]

- Rationalism
- Medicalisation
- Secularisation
- Individualisation[82]

On the other hand, the death denying perception of modern society has been challenged by a number of sociologists such as Clive Seale (2000).

The counter-argument disputes that the modern society is not death denying. It is as death-aware as earlier eras, just in contradictory and different manner.[iii]

## Conclusion

Death and birth are two phenomena that all humans share to experience. While discussions concerning birth are exciting, contemporary society is extremely reluctant to talk about death. However, considering the contemporary society as exclusively death denying, is not the only trend; there are plenty of evidence in contrast. Overall, the division of opinions (modern society is either death denying or death aware) highlights the significance and sensitivity of the concept death for society and sociology.
To emphasis on the importance of death and dying in sociology (Psychology of society), it is worth mentioning there is a sub field of psychology which only deals with these issues. Many scholars who address death and dying merely use the generic label of "thanatology" to address the extensive interdisciplinary and intertwined nature of death.[83]

### Thanatology

Thanatology is the "*description or study of death and dying and the psychological mechanisms of dealing with them* [84]". It investigates the different aspects of death, such as physical changes concurrent with death and the post-mortem period, as well as social dimensions of death, dying, and bereavement.
At this stage, I wanted to have a broader view on the topic taboo and its formation. Following paragraphs are a brief exploration in this extensive topic.

ii. Walter describes each term as following:
"Rationalisation, where society becomes more controlled, governed and ordered but at the expense of spontaneity and human emotion
Medicalisation, where the medical profession increasingly colonizes more aspects of everyday life, and what were once regarded as normal social problems (shyness, for instance) are recast as medical problems.
Secularisation, where society becomes less religious and more inclined to humanistic or scientific understandings of social and natural events.
Individualisation, where people focus less on the wider community and more on themselves, with their actions being self rather than other directed."
iii. While, unlike Victorian society, contemporary society denies death (the topic of death has banished in conversation and daily practices) it is frequently addressed in many cultural products such as films and serials.

## WHAT IS A TABOO?

Encyclopedia of Britannica describes taboo as "*a Prohibition against touching, saying, or doing something for fear of immediate harm from a supernatural force* [vi] [85]."
Wundt (1906, p. 308) referred to taboos as the oldest unwritten code of law of humanity. "*It is generally assumed that taboo is older than the gods and goes back to the pre-religious age.*"[86]

Taboos have been present in virtually all cultures. Ancient Romans used the word ' *sacer* ' as the same as the taboo of the Polynesians. The ayos of the Greeks and the Kodaush of the Hebrews also have signified the same thing. Generally, there is no accepted explanation of most taboos. most scholars agree that they tend to relate to *objects and actions that are significant for the maintenance of social order* (Wundt, p. 31-32).[v]

There is general agreement that the taboos common in any society, tend to relate to objects and actions which are consequential for the social order and that, as such, taboos belong to the general system of social control. Freud (1913, p.56) provided perhaps the most acceptable explanation for the apparently irrational nature of taboos, sited that "*they were generated by ambivalent social attitudes and in effect represent forbidden actions for which there nevertheless exists a strong unconscious inclination*".

### Taboos on death and dying

Freud (1950, 88-102) notes three taboos on the dead: touching of the corpse and those surrounding it; the taboo against mourning and mourners; and the taboo against anything associated with the dead. He argues that the basic reason for the existence of death related taboos is the fear of the return or presence of the deceased ghost. It is this fear which leads to number of rituals[vi] aimed at keeping the ghost far from living[vii] [87]. Wundt also relates the taboo to a fear that the soul has transformed to a demon (ibid).

### Conclusion

This literature study disclosed that the taboo which is generally associated to death and dying in contemporary modern society has a different nature compare to other regions.
This incongruity between death and its relation with taboo might also be the result of usage of a term with an old notion. In other words, using an old terminology (taboo) for addressing a new perspective may results in confusion.
Overall, it was an eye opening research which revealed how concept of death, a human universal experience, varies based on culture. As mentioned earlier it was important to limit my research in the framework of western contemporary society.

iv. Taboo may include prohibitions on eating certain foods, interacting with members of other social classes, coming into contact with corpses, and (for women) performing certain activities during menstruation.
v. Generally, the prohibition that is inherent in a taboo includes the idea that its breach or defiance will be followed by some kind of trouble to the offender. In some cases proscription is the only way to avoid this danger.
vi. Human burial practices are the "manifestation of the human desire to demonstrate respect for the dead, and to prevent the possibilities of revenants harming the living" (Claude de Ville de Goyte, 2004).
Freud quotes from Westermarck that "Death is commonly regarded as the gravest of all misfortunes; hence the dead are believed to be exceedingly dissatisfied with their fate [...] such a death naturally tends to make the soul revengeful and ill-tempered. It is envious of the living and is longing for the company of its old friend."

*Investigation*

## IS THERE ANY LIMITATION FOR BRUTALITY AND ATROCITY OF MAN?

No comments

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- Hamidian massacres, 1894–1896
With estimates of the dead ranging from anywhere between 80,000 to 300,000[88]

- Nanking massacre, December 1937 and March 1938
During the six-week period estimated that 250,000 to 300,000 people were killed[89]

- Babi Yar Massacre, September 29–30, 1941
In a single operation 33,771 Jews were killed[90 91]

- Rwandan Genocide, Between April and June 1994
An estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed in the space of 100 days[92 93]

- Srebrenica massacre, July 1995
More than 8,000 mainly men and boys were killed.[94]

- Houla massacre, May 25, 2012
According to the United Nations, 108 people were killed.[95 96]

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*And, it is still going on.....*

George Rodger, Belsen Extermination Camp, April 20, 1945
© Life Images

# Investigation

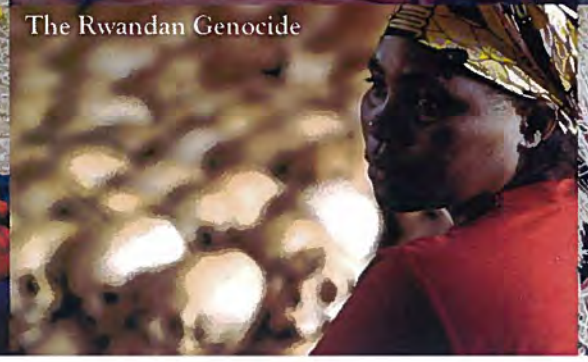
Armenian Genocide

Massacre Houla

Massacre at Syria

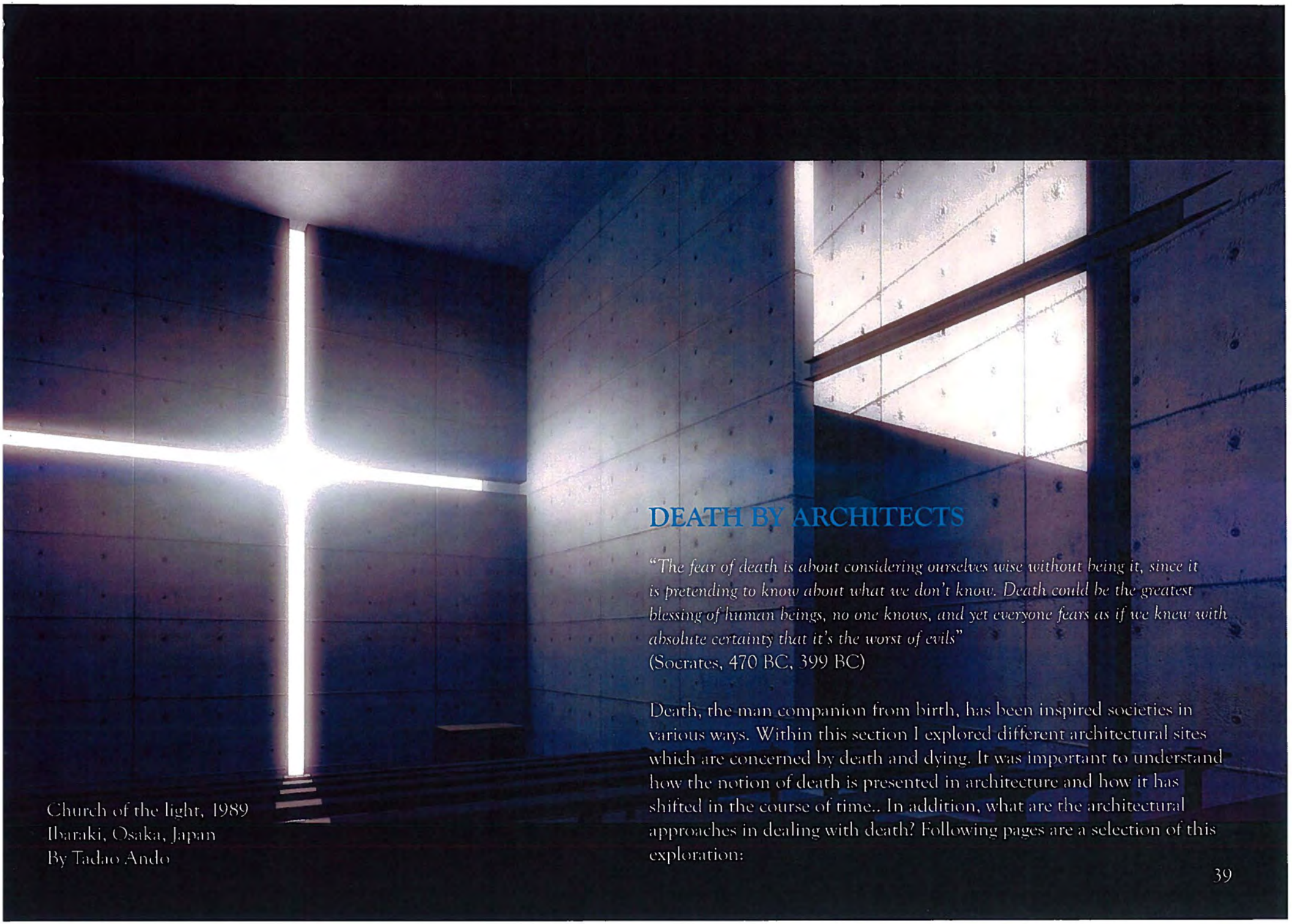
Massacre Sabra and Shatila

Massacre at Halabja



The Rwandan Genocide

My Lai Massacre



Church of the light, 1989
Ibaraki, Osaka, Japan
By Tadao Ando

## DEATH BY ARCHITECTS

*"The fear of death is about considering ourselves wise without being it, since it is pretending to know about what we don't know. Death could be the greatest blessing of human beings, no one knows, and yet everyone fears as if we knew with absolute certainty that it's the worst of evils"*
(Socrates, 470 BC, 399 BC)

Death, the man companion from birth, has been inspired societies in various ways. Within this section I explored different architectural sites which are concerned by death and dying. It was important to understand how the notion of death is presented in architecture and how it has shifted in the course of time.. In addition, what are the architectural approaches in dealing with death? Following pages are a selection of this exploration:

## Capela dos Ossos,
**Chapel of Bones, Évora, Portugal**

This chapel was built by a few Franciscan monks in the 16th century who wanted to urge fellow monks to contemplation and communicate the message of inevitability of death; which is clearly shown in the entrance "Nós ossos que aqui estamos pelos vossos esperamos , *We, the bones that are here, await yours*[97]."

There are few more places which use bones and skeleton to recall the ephemeral nature of life; such as Sedlec Ossuary - Sedlec, Czech Republic, San Bernardino alle Ossa - Milan, Italy and Catacombs - Paris, France. Another example which fits to this category with slightly different approach is Capuchin Catacombs of Palermo in Italy.
Other architectural places which indicate death are tombs and cemeteries. In fact, existence of graves and tombstones are reminder of death.

## Cemeteries
Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, France
Poblenou Cemetery, Barcelona, Spain

Capela dos Ossos

Capuchins' Catacombs

Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, France


Poblenou Cemetery, Barcelona, Spain

## Funeral home and garden in Pinoso
**Alicante, Spain, is by Spanish studio Cor**

Studio Cor describes how they have found a shift in the definition of death within the course of time; "*from positions closer to darkness, pain and fear, to positions related to the concept of sadness, change and light*". Designing a building for the most unknown stage of human existence "*necessarily involves the assumption of uncertainty as a concept to include in the process of ideation*".

## Family Tomb
**Arganil, Portugal, by Pedro Dias**

*"A project of this nature must encourage introspection and peaceful visual harmony through a discrete use of materials and lighting."*
Pascal Arquitectos

The concept behind this rather unusual and challenging project was the creation of a simple, restrained and minimalistic architectural object that plays its role as a "tribute to the memory ". *And interact directly with the impressive surrounding mountain landscape (without blocking its view), by literally framing it, in order to use the moment of its quiet contemplation as a "transmission vehicle" for transcendental communication between the "living" and "missing" ones.*[98]

Other inspiring examples are Holocaust History Museum – Jerusalem - Israel by Moshe Safdie/ Chapel of St. Lawrence – Vantaa – Finland by Avanto Architects/ Mourning House – Mexico city – Mexico by Pascal Arquitectos/ Panteón Nube – Murcia – Spain by Clavel Arquitectos/ Erlenbach Cemetery Building – Erlenbach – Switzerland by Andreas Fuhrimann and Gabrielle Hächler, and ....

### Conclusion

Hidden nature of death in contemporary society challenges the idea that "*the sequestration of death contributes to peoples' fear of it and its taboo status.*"[99] On the other hand, human experience of dying is not solely biological; embodied experiences of spaces and places related to death are quite influential in shaping individual's understandings. Therefore, architecture can be quite influential on the way society approaches the issue of death.

## DEATH THROUGH THE EYES OF ART

*"Art has the great power to change something into something else and thus subvert emotions so that they can become new emotions."*
Rudi Fuchs, 2007

There might be nothing that provokes more questions than the subject of death. Throughout history, death, an emotionally challenging idea, has been both a subject and motive for artists and artistic production; perhaps as much as any other subject.
The significance of the concept of death in ancient Egyptian culture is clearly visible in the creation of the pyramids and other burial artifacts.[viii] [100] On the contrary, ancient Greek art mainly focused on materialistic representations of life, which can be interpreted as an art adoring life, and the cultural rejection of mortality.

It is interesting, how different notion of life and death is represented in artworks through human history. Following pages depict a selection of my exploration in this topic. My main focus dedicated to contemporary artists and how they imply concept of death in their artworks. Within my research I also looked to categories of music (requiem), theater and literature (Shakespeare's Hamlet & Dante's Divine Comedy) which are not presented here.

viii. In order to understand the ancient Egyptian concept of death and dying, one must first understand the absolute longing and love for life the ancient Egyptians had (Brewer & Teeter 2008: 166). In fact ancient Egyptian devotion for life propelled them into an obsessive desire for continuation of their lives after death.

## Death in contemporary art

The theme of mortality exists in many modern artworks, and death remains a central theme in many contemporary artworks, though the themes surrounding the concept of death are not reflective of religious, metaphysical or romantic concerns anymore.

## DEATH FROM THE CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS' VIEWPOINT

In order to understand how artists tackle the delicate issue of life and death, I looked up artworks of several artists; subsequently, their interpretations and related criticism of the works. The intention was to understand different approaches for addressing death and mortality in the context of mundane enigma. Within following pages a selection of these works has been presented with a brief description.

Carrona, 2011
© Javier Perez

## DAMIEN HIRST

*"...Whenever I look at the question of how to live, the answer's always staring me in the face. I'm already doing it."*
Damien Hirst,[101]

Hirst artworks criticize science and religion in an equal manner; he considers both as elaborate systems we put our faith in to avoid the subject of death.

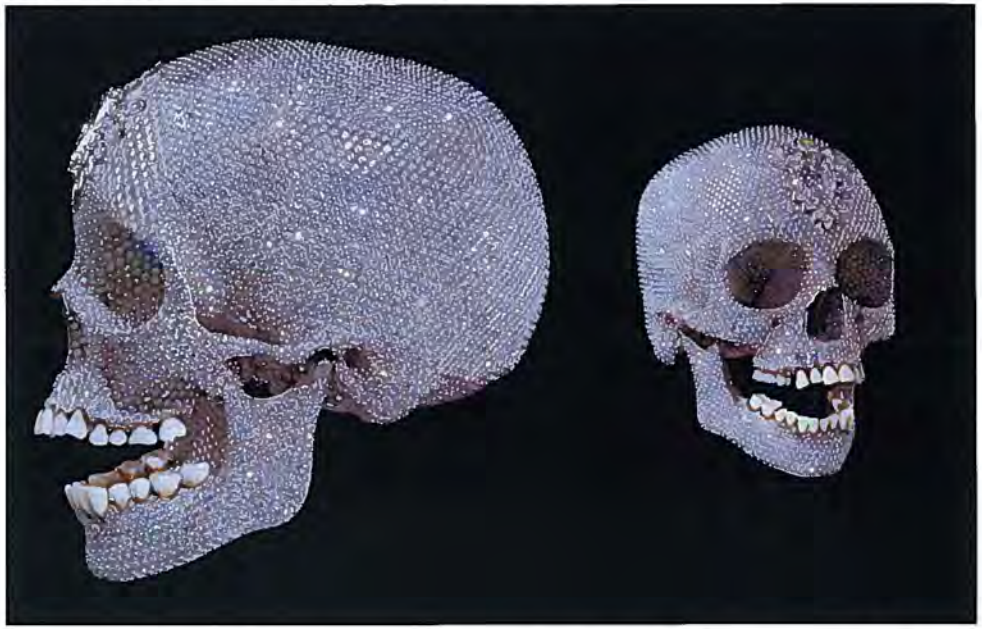
**For the love of God, 2007**
Platinum, diamonds and human teeth

'For the Love of God' is considered as one of the most widely recognized works of contemporary art, since its first exhibition in 2007. It consists of a life-size platinum cast of an eighteenth century human skull, covered with 8,601 high-quality diamonds, weighing a total of 1,106.18 carats, completed with the original skull's teeth.[102]

The single most expensive piece of contemporary art ever created[103], represents the artist's interest in mortality and notions of value. It is a reminder of transient existence of human. Indicating to the iconography of the skull in art as a memento mori – a reminder of the inevitability of death– the work can be viewed as *a glorious, devotional, defiant or provocative gesture in the face of death itself.*[104]

This controversial piece has led to different reactions; Rudi Fuchs[ix] describes the work as: "*The skull is out of this world, celestial almost. It proclaims victory over decay. At the same time it represents death as something infinitely more relentless. Compared to the tearful sadness of a vanitas scene, the diamond skull is glory itself.*"105

In contrast, director of the Hayward Gallery in London, Ralph Rugoff, criticized the work as a mere decorative object, saying "*It's not challenging or fresh. It's a decorative object which is not particularly well done.*"[106]



Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012

ix. Rudi Fuchs is an art historian who since 1974 was director of museums in Eindhoven, Turin, The Hague and Amsterdam. He has organized numerous major exhibitions, and was artistic director of Documenta 7 in 1982. He is an authority on modern and contemporary art and now is an independent writer.

## With Dead Head, 1991

Photographic print on aluminum

A black and white photograph of Damien Hirst posing with the head of a corpse, at the age of sixteen. In 1991, ten years later, he selected the photograph and enlarged it. Within this photograph, he is shown literally face to face with death, a theme on which his work is founded - *the split or relationship between life and death and the irresolvable mystery of the point where one ends and the other begins.*[107] [108]

Hirst Describes: "*To me, the smile and everything seemed to sum up this problem between life and death. [...] This is life and this is death.*"[109] Indeed, 'With dead head' is an utterance of the difficulties inherent in attempting to understand human mortality, and in dealing with the "**unacceptable idea**" of death.[110] [111]

Photographed by André Morin-Le-Jeune © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012

## The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, 1991

Glass, painted steel, silicone, monofilament, shark and formaldehyde solution

The sculpture, which successfully pushed the boundaries of contemporary art111, consists of a tiger shark suspended and preserved in formaldehyde in a vitrine, weighing a total of twenty three tons.

Isolating the shark with the formaldehyde provided an illusion of life. And as Hirst described his intention was to force the viewer out of their element by encountering with a shark that was "*real enough to frighten you*"[112]. The work tended to explore greatest fears and the difficulty involved in trying to express them sufficiently. As Hirst states: "*You try and avoid [death], but it's such a big thing that you can't. That's the frightening thing isn't it?*"[113]

The Physical Impossibility of Death has received mixed responses likewise the rest of Hirst's works. While many critics believe this work led to Hirst's fame, Robert Hughes, an art critic, considered it as a prime example of "cultural obscenity" of the international art market at the time, without naming the artwork.[114]

Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012

# Investigation

## GABRIEL OROZCO

(Francesco Bonami, 1998) called Orozco as "*one of the most influential artists of this decade, and probably the next one too.*"

### Black Kites, 1997

Human skull entirely covered in a checkerboard grid made of graphite.

Orozco drew a checkerboard of black squares over a human skull by a graphite pencil. The grid meticulously follows the contours of the skull. Therefore "squares" are not really squares at various points; they are occasionally stretched and distorted to adapt to the contours, crevices and irregularities of the skull's form. "*There is a relationship that is formed between the rigidity of a system such as a grid and the naturally created shape of a human skull*". [115]

The whole design is a contradiction: a 2D grid superimposed on a 3D object; one element is geometric and precise while the other is organic and uneven. The two are not resolved.[116]

Many critics consider Black Kites as a timeless work, which even after abundant viewings never loses its power. This work brings to mind questions of human fate and mortality. Orozco imposes order on death by imprinting a geometrical grid on a human skull; a two dimensional geometric grid tries and fails to impose order on a three dimensional organic skull. Black Kite **suggests science can never overcome death.**

### Lintels, 2001

Sheets of dryer lint, clothesline

This installation consisted of numerous sheets of dryer lint hung up clothesline in the gallery space. Orozco collected lint from filters of dryers in New York laundries, over the course of a year. The fragile sheets were full of dust, human hair, clippings, and particles of clothing. When viewers walked through the installation they would sway ever slightly which reflected ephemerality and corporeality of life.[117]

The "Lintels" was the gathering of residue remains by the human body's presence. This work looked into how delicate human life is. In addition, hanging the sheets on washing lines indicates a strong metaphor; the strength and structure needed to destroy a human life.[118]

## PIERO MANZONI

### Artist's Breath, 1960

Balloon, rope, lead seals and bronze plaque on wooden base
Image: © DACS, 2002

'Artist's Breath' is remaining of a red balloon fastened to a piece of string with two lead seals. The string is attached to a wooden base. The artist's name and the title of the work are inscribed on a small bronze plaque.
Manzoni blew into a balloon which ever since has evaporated, leaving behind a brittle of red rubber.[119]

Manzoni in 1960 said: "*When I blow up a balloon, I am breathing my soul into an object that becomes eternal*". This piece, however, is far from eternal. It is a bitter Memento Mori which can be considered as "*the result of a gesture of creative resignation that is now a metaphor for a deflated body*". [120]

## DEATH FROM THE PERFORMANCE ARTISTS' VIEWPOINT

### MARINA ABRAMOVIC

*"This is the function of an artist. I am not a therapist. I am not a spiritual leader. These elements are in the art: it is therapeutic, spiritual, social and political – everything. It has many layers. But art has to have many layers. If it doesn't, then forget it."*[121]

An artist whose body has been both her subject and medium.[122] Abramovic's work explores possibilities of the mind and limits of the body.[123]

**Death Self, 1977**
Marina Abramovic and Ulay[x]

This performance consisted of the two artists seated in front of each other, connecting their mouth. They took in each other's exhaled breaths until they had used up all the available oxygen.

Seventeen minutes after the beginning of the performance they both collapsed to the floor unconscious, having filled their lungs with carbon dioxide.

*"This piece explored the idea of an individual's ability to absorb the life of another person, exchanging and destroying it."*

Abramovic Archives © Marina Abramovic

x. German artist Frank Laysiepen, Abramovic's partner in life and co-performer for thirteen years

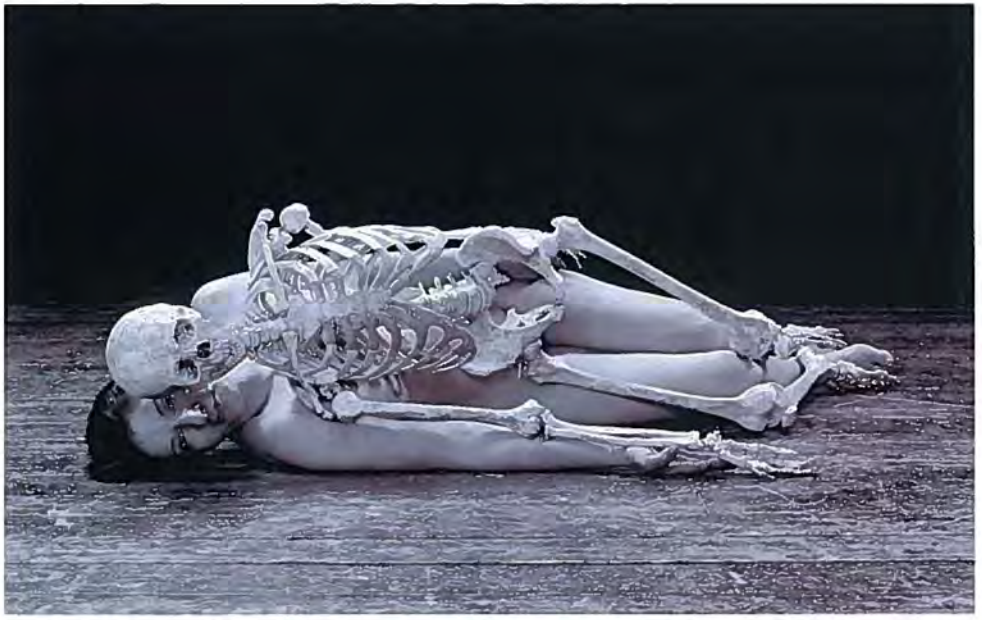
## Cleaning the Mirror I, 1995

Marina Abramovic Archives and Sean Kelly Gallery New York © Marina Abramovic

Five-channel video installation with stacked monitors, with sound
In the performance, Abramovic sat with a skeleton on her lap. She brushed the different parts of the skeleton obsessively. In the installation, each of the five screens depicts Abramovic scrubbing one part of skeleton's body. Hence, the whole body is physically recreated over the length of the five screens. By being cleaned, the color of the skeleton becomes lighter, while the dirty fluid starts to cover Abramovic herself.

Abramovic used repetitive movement so that the actions transmuted into rituals. By continuing the movements, the boundaries between she and the skeleton started to blur; the dead and the alive started to merge. As for Abramovic the skeleton metaphorically represents "*...the last mirror we will all face*". The main themes addressed in this work are death and temporality of life.[124]

## Nude with Skeleton, 2005



Marina Abramovic Archives © Marina Abramovic

During this performance, a skeleton laid supine on her nude body[xi]. "*The living and dead body were almost aligned.*" The skeleton's head, ribcage and spine followed her accentuated breathing. Skeleton got animated with her inhales and exhales; a scope of life was penetrating the bones as Abramovic continued to breathe, presenting a strong image of unity between life and death.[125] By 'animating' the skeleton, "*life and death were simultaneously made visible*". As she described "this work is really about facing your own mortality. It's something that in our life we fear the most. It is about fear of pain and fear of dying".[126]

xi. *She evoked a traditional exercise undertaken by Tibetan monks, during which they sleep alongside of the dead in various stages of decomposition. Through this practice Buddhist monks meditate on life, death, mortality and gain an understanding of the process of death.*

# CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE

## BERLINDE DE BRUYCKERE

Suffering, loneliness, death and remembrance have always confronted humanity. These themes are addressed in Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptors. "*She revisits religious and mythological subjects, re-imagining motifs from art history, yet her works possess a powerful resonance, startling in their vulnerability and associative reach.*" (Hauser & Wirth)[127]

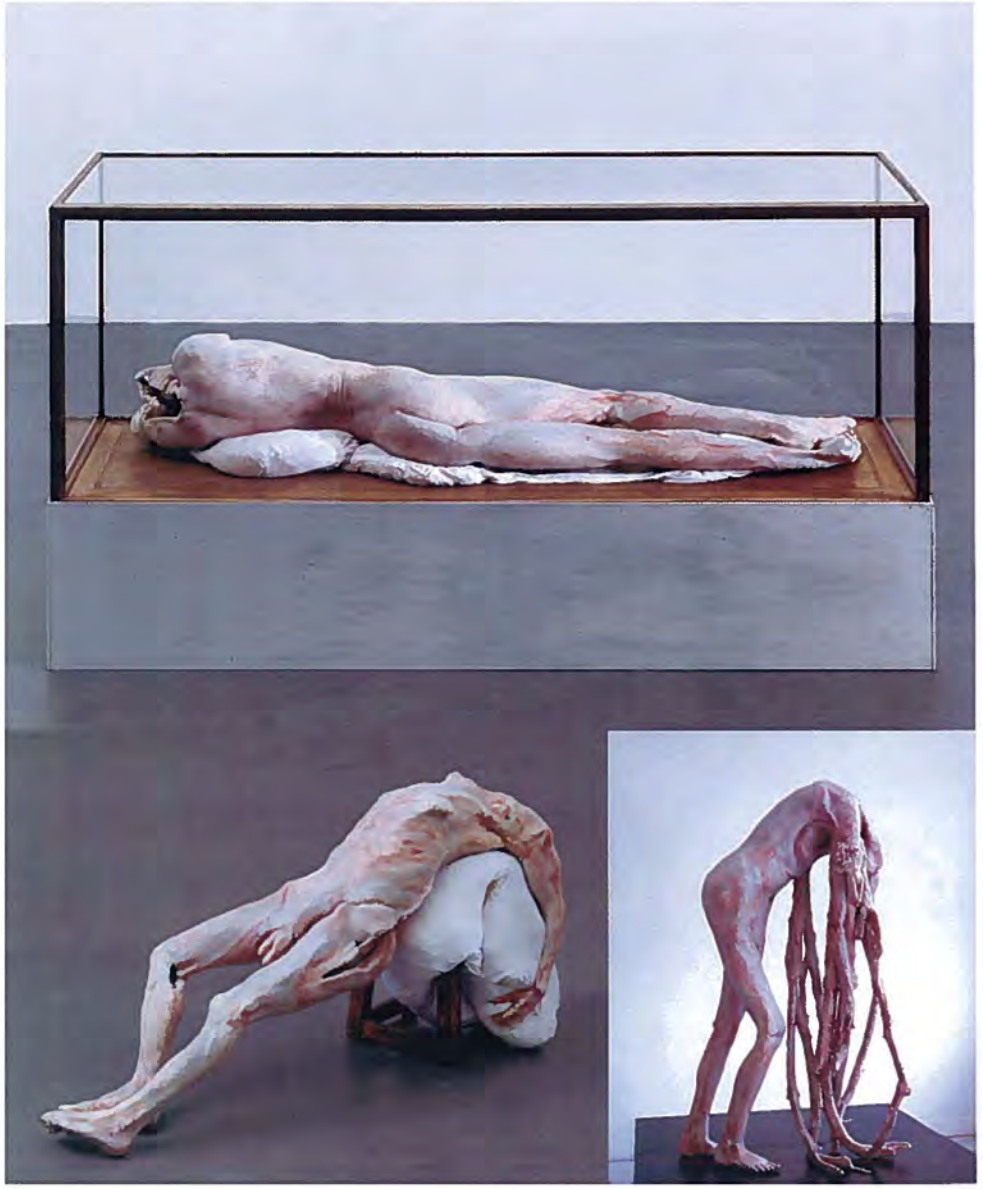
### We are all Flesh, 2012

Wax, wood, iron, wool, hair and the hides of horses

"*If you are honest with yourself as an artist, there are not many possibilities. You have your questions, angers and fears, and while the format or form might change, the topic remains the same.*" *she explains "I don't need human bodies to talk about humanity.*"
Berlinde De Bruyckere

As Tim Stone noted 'We are all flesh' questions our "preconceptions about the depiction of death in art". It can be considered as a provocation of death or a frank examination of the vulnerability of life.

Bruyckere's sculptures look like humans and animals suspended between life and death, which arouse a range of powerful responses in the viewer "*The figures are often mutated, sometimes emaciated and on the verge of decomposition*". For many her work is brutal and challenging, yet some consider it poetic and comforting. Following artworks is exhibited at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art under the title of "We are all flesh".



*Investigation*

## CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographs are used to elicit specific and planned emotional reactions in the viewers. Following pages briefly exhibit my research on how modern artists use photography as media to project their understanding of life and death.

### Joel-Peter Witkin

*"I never photograph anything I don't believe in. If I love working with death, it's because even in death I find this power of reality that no sculptor or painter could recreate, not even a Michelangelo or a Da Vinci."*
Joel-Peter Witkin,

It is almost impossible that someone look upon a Witkin's photography without strong reactions. He has been commended as immoral, perverted and mentally disturbed while others praise his work as fearless and divine.[128]
Witkin's work often deals with such themes as "*death, corpses (and sometimes dismembered portions thereof)*, and people abandoned by society such as *dwarves, transsexuals, hermaphrodites, and physically deformed people.*[129]

Witkin's complex tableaux often recall religious episodes of classical paintings."
His interest lays in spirituality and how it impacts the physical world. The resulting photographs are *haunting and beautiful, grotesque yet bold in their defiance – a hideous beauty that is as compelling as it is taboo.*[130]

*Making decision is up to you .....*

## Walter Schels & Beate Lakotta

### Life before death, noch mal leben

*"Few experiences are likely to affect us as profoundly as an encounter with death. Yet most deaths occur almost covertly, at one remove from our everyday lives. Death and dying are arguably our last taboos."*
Beate Lakotta,

These portraits which are taken shortly before and immediately after death of terminally ill people, explore their hopes and fears. And it gives them one more chance to be heard.
The interviews recorded on hospice patient's final days disclose how they each perceive death differently.[131]The majority who come to hospices know there is not much time left, yet hardly anyone without hope: *"they hope for a few more days; they hope that a dignified death awaits them or that death will not be the end of everything."*[132]

Heiner Schmitz
age: 52
born: 26th November 1951
first portrait taken: 19th November 2003
died: 14th December 2003

# *Investigation*

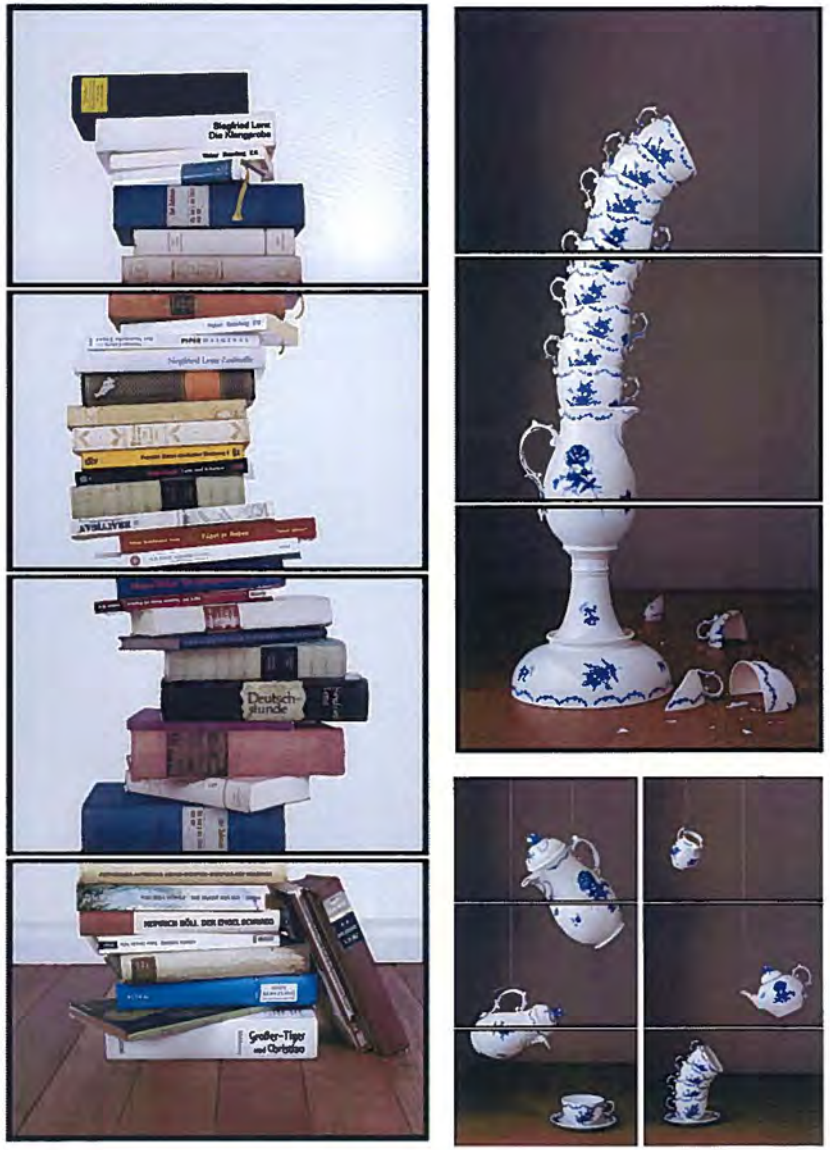
## Andre Penteado & Joachim Froese
### Dad's suicide/ Archive, 2011

Following photographs exhibit two different approaches towards the subject of death of a parent.

Andre Penteado's photos are concerned by the effect his dad's suicide had on him. Firstly, he photographed his dad's funeral. Afterwards, he photographed himself wearing his father's clothes; a *way of getting close to him for a final time after a year without any physical contact.* Then he photographed the empty hangers, as "an expression of the emptiness and loneliness he was feeling".[133]

Books and porcelains left from Joachim's mother construct the 'Archive'.
He Arranged the objects in precarious stacks, to create his own archive of his mother's possessions, "*which seemed so unfamiliar to him when they were removed from the context of her house.*"
'Archive' is a comment on the nature of the possessions we collect to preserve our past. These images depict an illusion of stability and rationality we construct in our memory.[134]

Other photographs which follow the same theme in their pictures: Briony Campbell – 'The dad project', Nobuyoshi Araki – ' Sentimental journey' & 'A winter journey', Philip Toledano – 'Day's With My Father'



# Investigation

## Maeve Berry
### The Incandescence, 2009

A photographer who captured the burning embers of bodies within the crematorium; she photographed the end of a process when the very last particles in the body feed the flame and disappear.
In her words 'Incandescence' is "*a series of images capturing the last moments of the human body in the material world.*" And "*the images we will never see of ourselves*".

## Andres Serrano
### The morgue, 1992

Controversial photos which depict morgue photographs of the victims of violent death

# *Investigation*

## Patrik Budenz
## Post mortem, 2009

A person's death ends her existence. Still the body remains.
What happens with a corpse between the moment it is given into the care of professionals and the burials? This series accompanies the dead body on its last journey from cold rooms, storages, pathology, taxidermy, scientific collection, morticians, crematories and cemeteries, revealing what is hidden to society.[135]

*Investigation*

## DEATH IN SCULPTURE, 15th-20th

An important category in visual art is sculpture. I looked up how death has been portrayed in sculptors from 15th to 20th century. In fact, how different artists personify death in their artworks.

### The Angel of Death and the Sculptor, 1893

**Forest Hills Cemetery, Boston, Massachusetts**
**By Daniel Chester French**

In 1889 Daniel French was commissioned to create a funeral memorial for the Milmore Family. He was asked to create a monument for commemorating the life of Martin Milmore who had been a sculptor. Hence, French depicted the winged angel of death, appears to the young sculptor in the prime of his life.

This important sculpture depicts the Angel of Death in a quite different way than its medieval or renaissance imagery: her cloak falling in heavy folds, carrying a group of poppies, symbolizing eternal sleep, in her right hand[xii] French wrote: "*My message, if I had any to give, was to protest against the usual representation of Death as the horrible gruesome presence that it has been represented to be ever since the Christian era. It has always seemed to me that this was in direct opposition to the teachings of Christ which represented the next world as a vast improvement over this one.*"[136]

In 1917, French was asked by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City for a replica of the Milmore Memorial which was completed in 1926.[137]

vii. ... So do not fear this gentle touch. I hold dark poppies here whose languid leaves of lethargy will bring deep sleep to you, and an incredible spring! Come with your soul, from earth's still blinded hour,... (The inscription in front of the sculpture)

## The Kiss of Death, 1930

**Poblenou Cemetery, Barcelona, Spain**
**By Jaume Barba or Joan Fontbernat**

'The Kiss of Death' was ordered by Llaudet family as a memorial for the tomb their young deceased son. The statue is attributed to Jaume Barba but it is quite likely that it was made by Joan Fontbernat. The statue demonstrates a rather un-orthodox display of affection between the angle of death and his captive. "Death" is depicted in the form of a winged gelid skeleton, instead of an angel, placing a kiss on a young man's forehead. The sculptor is horrifying and romantic; it attracts and repels at once.[138] [139]

## Tomb of Pope Alexander VII, 1671- 1678 [140]

**St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City**
**By Gian Lorenzo Bernini**

Bernini, who designed and partially executed Pope Alexander VII Tomb, transformed the underneath door, leading to the St. Mary Chapel, into a symbolic entrance to Eternity; he used scenographic draperies raised by a skeleton brandishing an hourglass. Scholars are fairly certain the skeleton represents 'Death', since Pope's life was filled with encounters with death. This extreme sign of death was different from the norm. 141 142

Some more examples are as following:

# Investigation

Monument of Tenax Vitae, 19th century
© Courtauld Institute of Art
Galleria Carnielo, Florence, Italy
By Rinaldo Carnielo

Eternal Silence, 1909
Graceland Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois, USA
By Lorado Taft

Tomb of Carhelineau, c. 1874
Cimetière de la Chartreuse, Bordeaux, France
Anonymous

Death & the Maiden, 1905-1912
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark
By Elna Borch

Pendant with Monk and Death, 16th/17th
Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland

Tomb of Lady Elizabeth Nightingale

## DEATH IN PHOTOGRAPHY

### Post-Mortem Photography, Victorian Era

Commemorating deceased person in art is a tradition which goes back centuries. The invention of the daguerreotype made portraiture available for middle classes, since portrait painting was not affordable for many. This cheaper method also gave the middle class an opportunity for memorializing deceased one[xiii]. Taking their portrait after death was a method to keep a visual remembrance.

This shift in photography is a confirmation for Ariès theory to some extent; portrayal of dead which once was perceived as beauty and sensitivity has become indecent and taboo. This cultural transformation may reflect social discomfort with death. As a matter of fact, it should be considered that, high mortality rate made death as a part of life in 19th century and individuals died and were prepared for burial at home therefore people were more accustomed to death . Following photographs have been taken in this fashion:

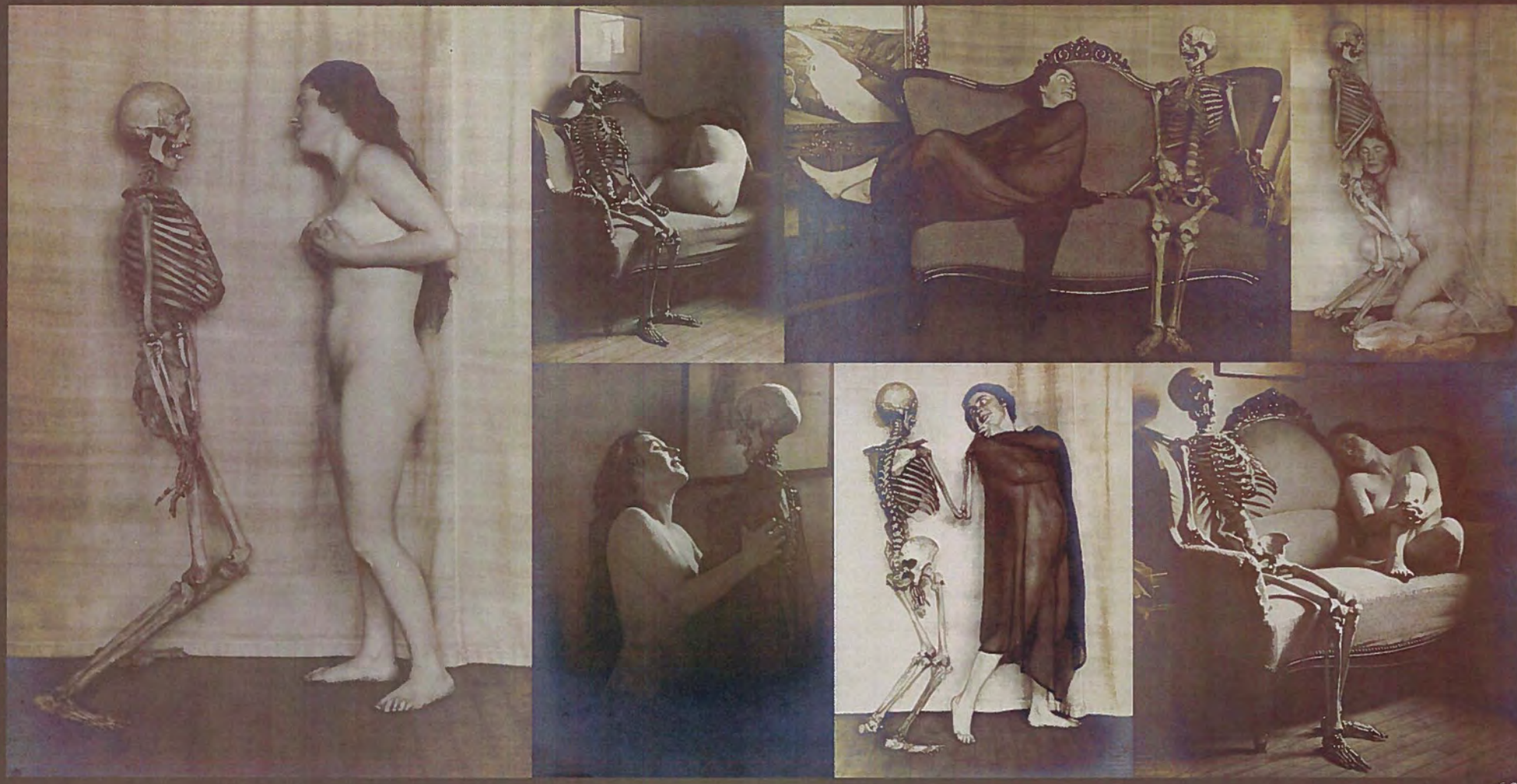
xiii. In many occasions, no photograph of the people existed before their death.

# *Investigation*

## Franz Fiedler 143

**Fool death, My playmate, (Narre Tod, Mein Spielgesell), 1921**

Quite accidentally, I encountered with Franz Fiedler works. I found his approach treating the concept of death distinctive in his time.



*Investigation*

## DEATH IN PAINTINGS

This part, depict my exploration on the topic of death in painting. I wanted to know how different painters represent the notion of death in their artworks; this representation is the reflection of society's understands of the concept of death. These painting are illustrated in the chronology of five stages of Philippe Ariès: The tamed death, the death of self, remote and imminent death, death of the other and invisible death.

### Danse Macabre

As mentioned earlier, from 14th to16th century the concept of death shifted towards the death of individuals; the self-identity prevailed over the traditional relationship between self and others.

A common a genre in art of late-medieval ages is Dance of death/ Totentanz. It was an allegory on the universality of death; a reminder on the fragility of life and ephemerality of glories. The reason for popularity of such an imagination was the frequent destructive epidemics, such as the Black Death.144

The Triumph of Death, by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, c. 1562
Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

Lübecker Totentanz by Bernt Notke, c. 1463,
Destroyed in a bombing raid in 1942

# *Investigation*

During 17th & 18th centuries, concept of death gradually transformed from tamed and familiar to savage and violent; the barriers between love and death, pain and pleasure were banished and became one. Vanitas was a sub-genre of memento mori t which rose to prominence in the Netherlands in the early 17th century.

**Vanitas**

*"Vanity of Vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity."*
Ecclesiastes 12: 8

Vanitas, (Latin, "vanity") is a genre of still life painting which "*meant to remind the transience of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death.*"[145] Vanitas earliest paintings were monochromatic compositions consisting of few elements (usually books and a skull), which the palette became diversified with more objects in the later versions. Vanitas paintings used a symbolic language to urge the viewer to relinquish earthly pleasures and to atone.[145] They share a common symbols including[146]:

- skull, a reminder of the definiteness of death;
- rotten fruit, symbolizes decay;
- bubbles, symbolize the shortness of life and suddenness of death;
- smoke, watches, and hourglasses, symbolize the brevity of life;
- musical instruments, symbolize ephemeral nature of life;
- goblets, pipes, and playing cards, symbolize earthly pleasures;
- ears of corn, sprigs of ivy and laurel, symbolize resurrection and eternal life

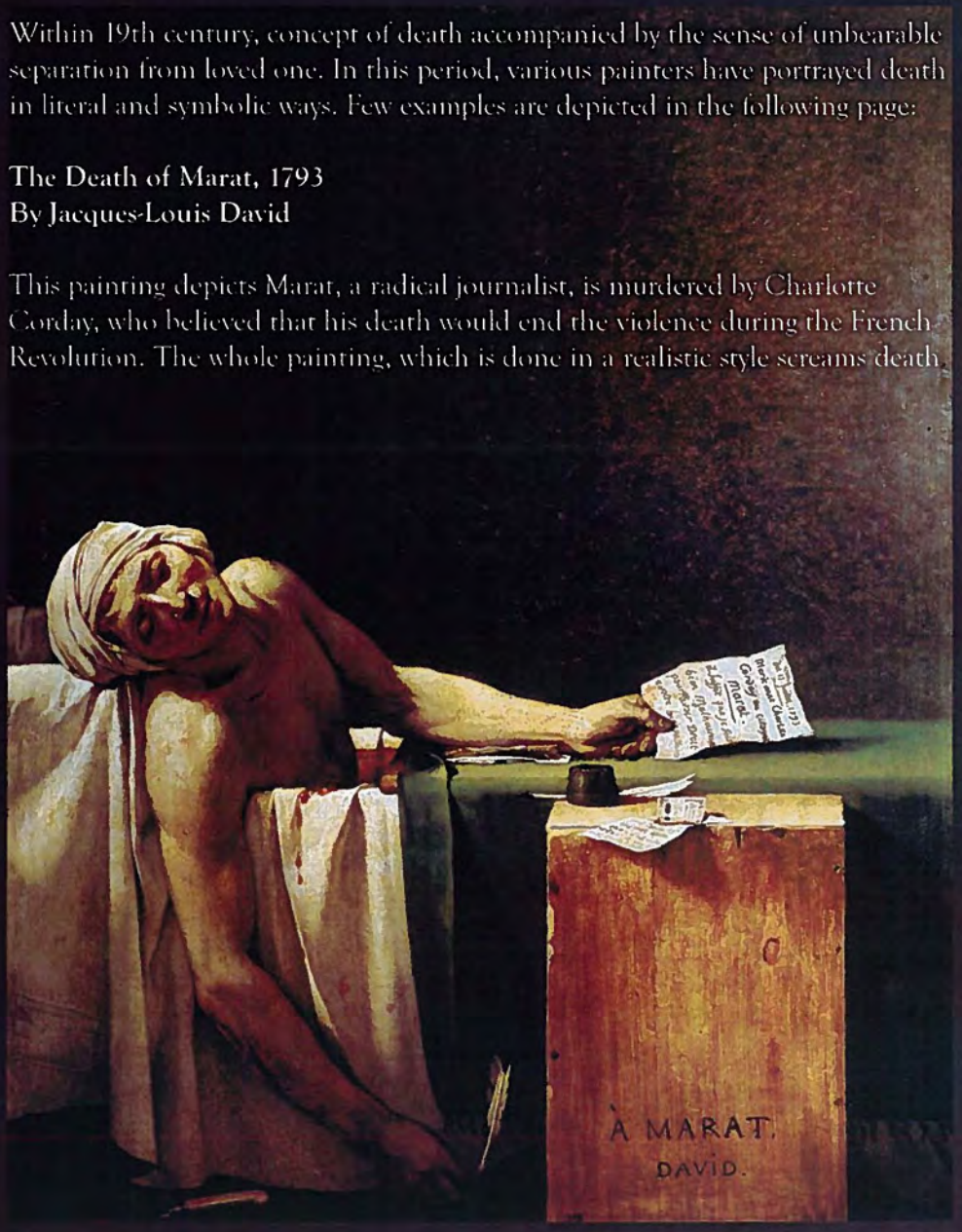
Vanitas Still-Life, 1630
By Pieter Claesz Mauritshuis, The Hague, The Netherlands

# Investigation

Within 19th century, concept of death accompanied by the sense of unbearable separation from loved one. In this period, various painters have portrayed death in literal and symbolic ways. Few examples are depicted in the following page:

**The Death of Marat, 1793**
**By Jacques-Louis David**

This painting depicts Marat, a radical journalist, is murdered by Charlotte Corday, who believed that his death would end the violence during the French Revolution. The whole painting, which is done in a realistic style screams death



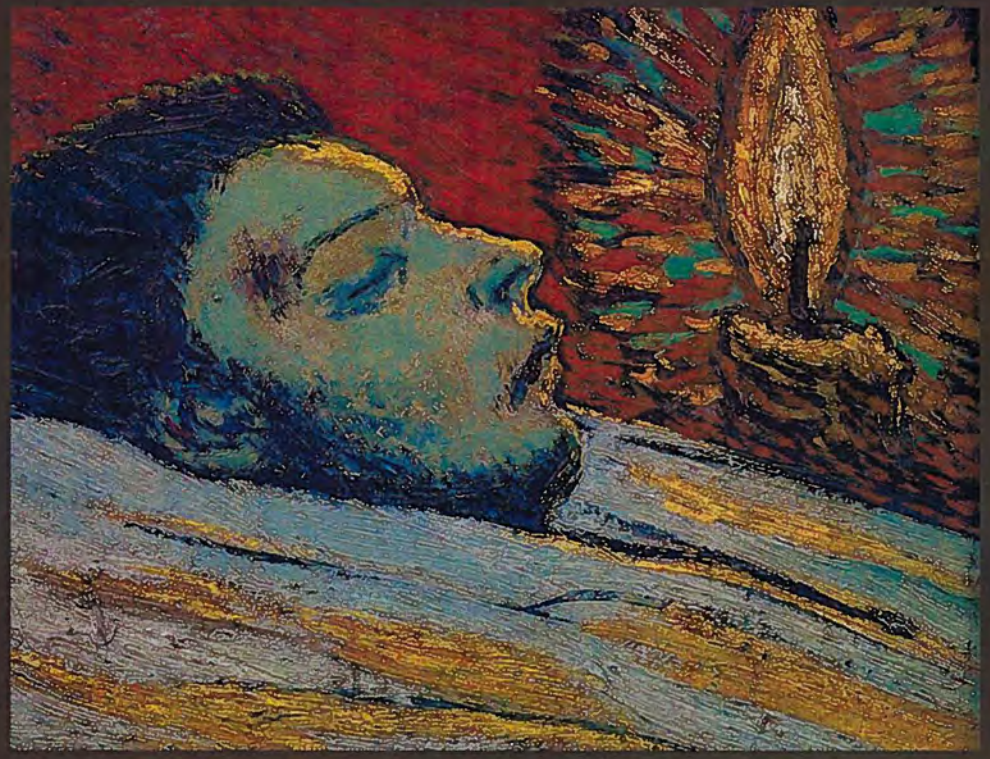

**By the Deathbed, 1895**
**By Edvard Munch**

The focus is not so much on died person, but rather on grievers. Munch has used some symbolism; while the first four mourners are focused on the died, the fifth one is facing the viewer directly. Her somewhat skeletal face sends the message that one day, death will come to the viewer.

# Investigation

## Death of Casagemas, 1901
**By Pablo Picasso**

With this painting, Picasso is mourning the death of his close friend Casagemas, who has committed suicide.



Other examples are: Still Life with Skull by Pablo Picasso, Pyramid of Skulls by Paul Cezanne, The Kiss of Death by Edvard Munch and an etching by James Ensor, created in 1904 which death is an allegorical bird with a human skeleton head, terrorizing a group of people by flapping its wings above their heads

## Death and Life, 1916
**By Gustav Klimt**

Klimt has portrayed the allegorical figure of death as a robed skeleton with a stick, approaching a family. The family is filled with life, and they are portrayed in the full range of life, from a young baby to a grandmother. In their grouping and position, they are turning away from death and seemingly unconcerned by it.

*Investigation*

## CONCEPT OF DEATH IN PHILOSOPHY

*"Death is life ending; the ending of the vital processes by which an organism sustains itself. However, life's ending is one thing, and the condition of having life over is another. 'Death' can refer to either."*[147]

'The ending of life' might be a process wherein life is gradually extinguished, or a momentary event. The momentary event might be understood in three ways (ibid):

- *Denouement death*, the ending of the dying process
- *Threshold death*, the point in the dying process when extinction is definite
- *Integration death*, when the physiological systems of the body irreversibly stop to function as an integrated whole

"Therefore death can be a *state* (being dead), *the process of extinction* (dying), or one of three events that occur during the dying process."

There are three main philosophical views on death concerned with the reality of human being: *animalism* (Snowdown 1990, Olson 1997, 2007), *personism* (Locke 1689, Parfit 1984) and *mindism* (1990, Olson 1997, 2007).

*Animalism* view suggests that we as human beings persists our existence to remain the same animal. In this view death is an irreversible end to all critical processes, which maintain such existence.

*Mindism* view indicates that regardless of having self-awareness, we are minds and persist to remain the same mind. In this philosophy death is an irreversible end to the processes that maintain existence of our minds.

*Personism* view says that we have self-awareness and it is mostly involved with our psychological characteristics and loss of such characteristics results in death.

Understanding death from mentioned philosophical point of views have different significances, for example dementia affects psychological characteristics (personism view), but not the mind (mindism view). It can be imagined that our mind can survive death, when the body is spoiled (assuming that brain is not a part of the body). These examples show that the way mindists interpret and understand death is different from animalist. In conclusion approaching death by different philosophical views have different implications.

# Iteration 2 Conceptualization

# Conceptualization

*"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."*
Lao-tzu

## Analysis

All the research, interviews and analysis proved that people in the contemporary society consider death as *a separate phenomenon from life*. This point of view on death has led to an unfamiliar perception of death which can be considered as a taboo. Furthermore, even though death is a universal experience people have their own individual understanding of the concept of death; these distinctive understanding is clearly reflected in art, cultures, religions and philosophy.

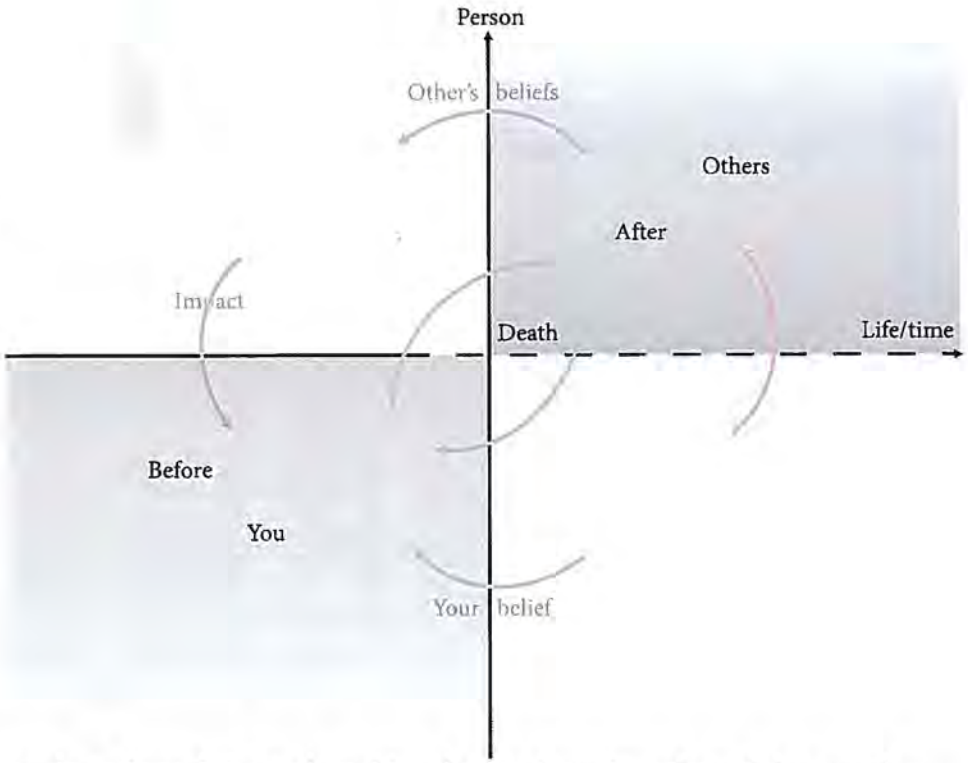
Based on all the research and personal understanding I defined following guideline to continue the project based on it:

- Designing an installation which encounter people with the "*reality*" of death
- This reality is quite *subjective*; therefore it should be in a way that individuals can perceive it based on their personal believes
- It should emphasis on *common agreements* about death rather than distinctive point of views

These three criteria are the pivotal pillars of my design process.

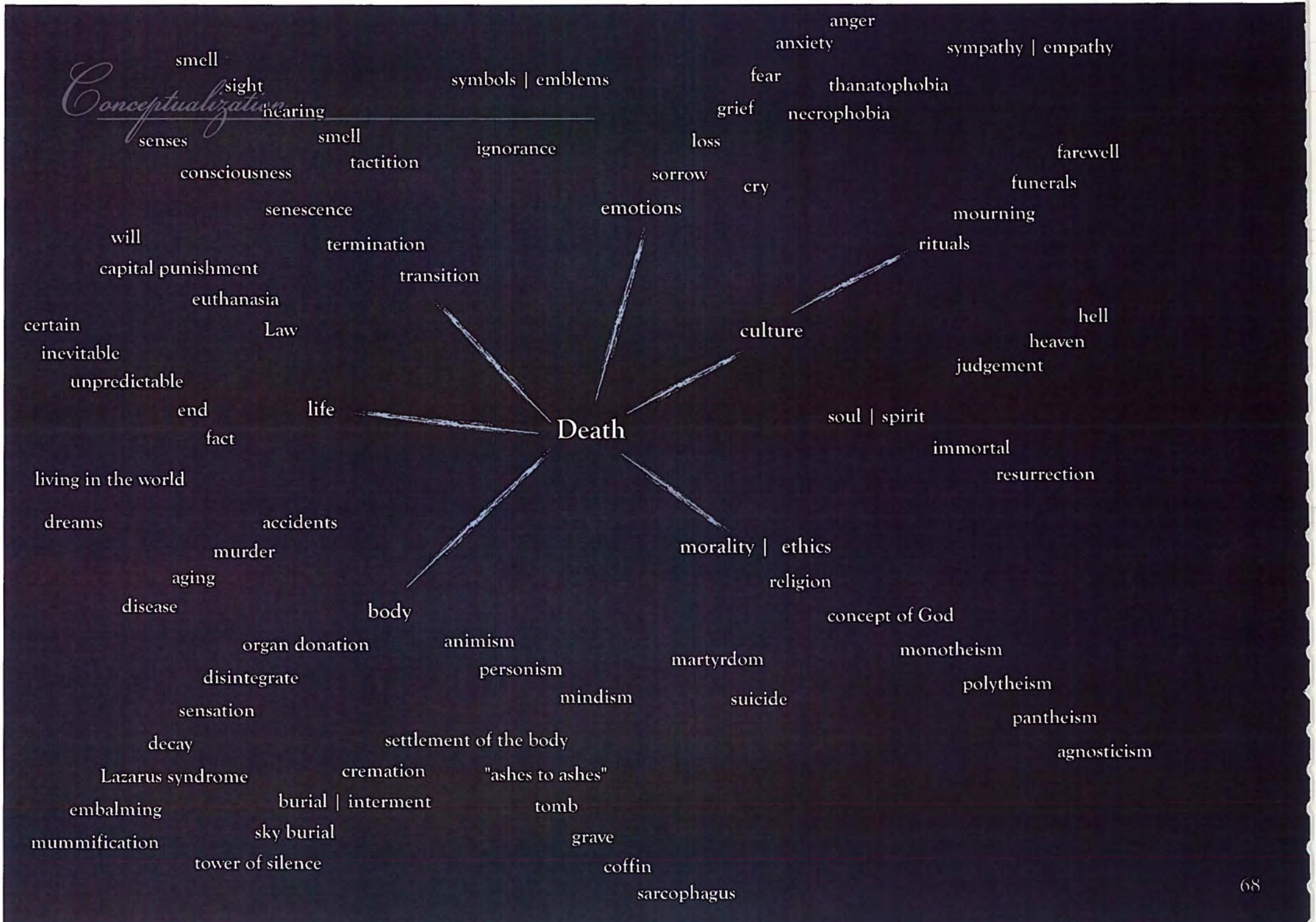
Within this framework, concept of death was analyzed from different point of views. Following mind-map illustrate one of the many analyses which intended to find how life and death are influenced by each other. In other words, how individuals are influenced by death; it can be contemplating on death of themselves or death of the others:

This diagram disclosed that individual's life is often influenced by death. In fact, death of the others has such a significant impact which should be consid



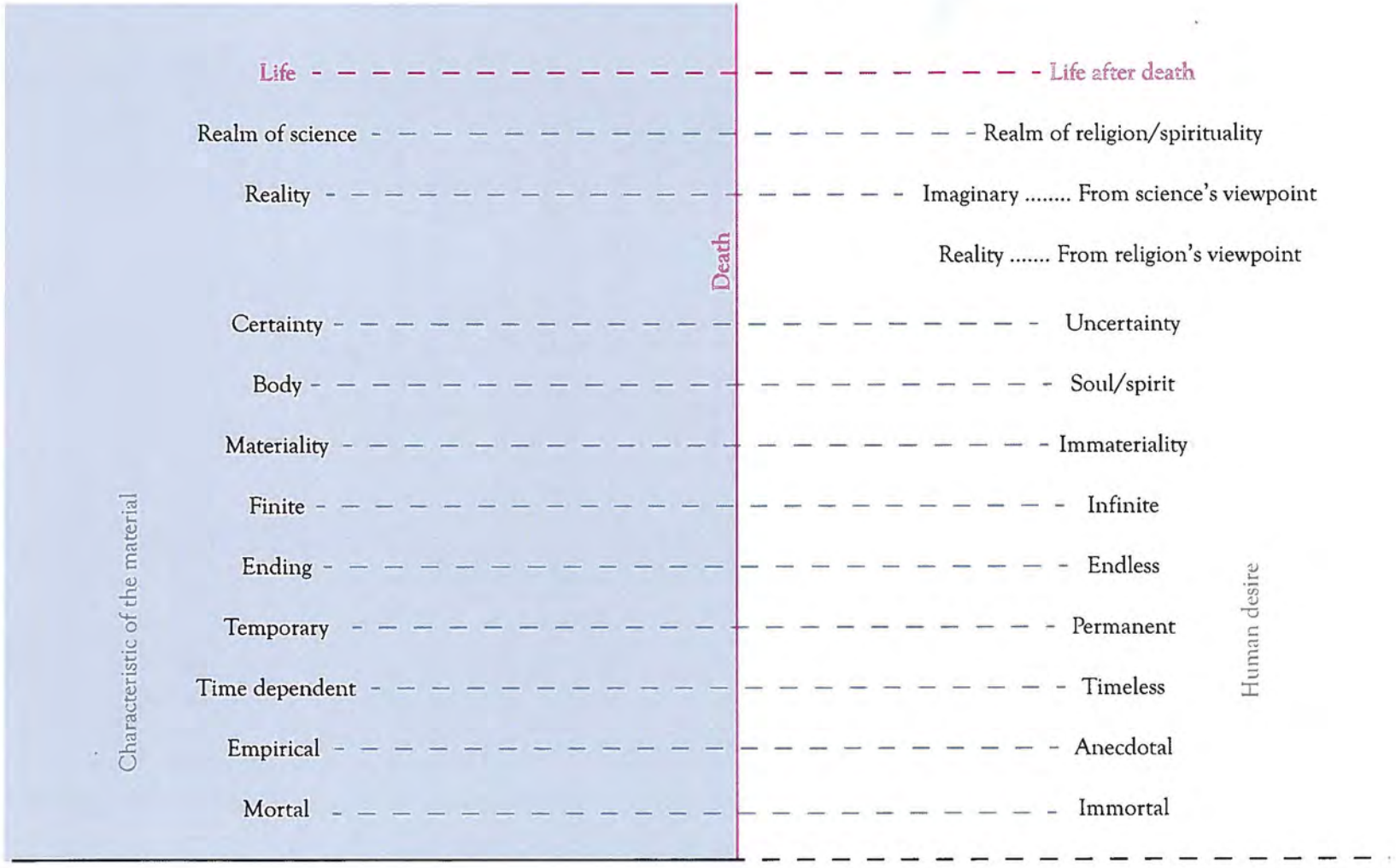

-ered as a factor.It is worth nothing that the interviews showed that people ignore the reality of death unless they realize it is going to happen for them or someone who is really close to them. Another interesting aspect which is shown in this diagram is the conception that death for some people is the moment when they feel they have no efficiency, (before the biological death). In general, life and death are merged in a way that one without the other has no meaning.

Another mind-map dedicated to analyze all the issues which are directly or indirectly related to death. It was important to have a clear picture of all these issues since it could help to have a better understanding of life and death. It is a general overview on death. Following picture is the illustration of this mind-map:


Conceptualization
Death
life
smell
sight
hearing
senses
smell
tactition
consciousness
senescence
will
termination
capital punishment
transition
euthanasia
certain
Law
inevitable
unpredictable
end
fact
living in the world
dreams
accidents
murder
aging
disease
body
organ donation
animism
disintegrate
personism
sensation
mindism
decay
settlement of the body
Lazarus syndrome
cremation
"ashes to ashes"
embalming
burial | interment
tomb
mummification
sky burial
grave
tower of silence
coffin
sarcophagus
symbols | emblems
ignorance
emotions
anger
anxiety
sympathy | empathy
fear
thanatophobia
grief
necrophobia
loss
farewell
sorrow
cry
funerals
mourning
culture
rituals
hell
heaven
judgement
soul | spirit
immortal
resurrection
morality | ethics
religion
concept of God
monotheism
martyrdom
polytheism
suicide
pantheism
agnosticism

# Conceptualization

Another important analysis was considering the concept of death from two different perspectives; death from life and from afterlife viewpoints. While in the first one the concept of death was considered from *empirical* point of view, the latter dedicated to *theoretical and anecdotal* aspects of death. It is interesting how these two perspectives can stand in contrast. It revealed why death has such a distinct definitions and it is difficult to find a common agreement on the concept of death.



# Conceptualization

During all these analysis I was looking for a criterion which links life to death and vice versa; a criterion which makes death a universal experience regardless of personal believes, culture and religion. I came to conclusion that I can look at life and death from two different angles:

- **Life is passage of time and death is cease of this passage (the end of 'earthy' life);** while birth is the commencement, death is the end (regardless of what is going to happen subsequently). This end is directly linked to the time. While life is the **passage of time,** death is the moment when this passage stops.
- **Reflection;** life shapes by reflection of death on it and death is the reflection of life. To state it differently, what we do in our life is influenced by our notion of death and these *creations, words* and *thought* remain even subsequent to our death (a reflection which continues even after of death).

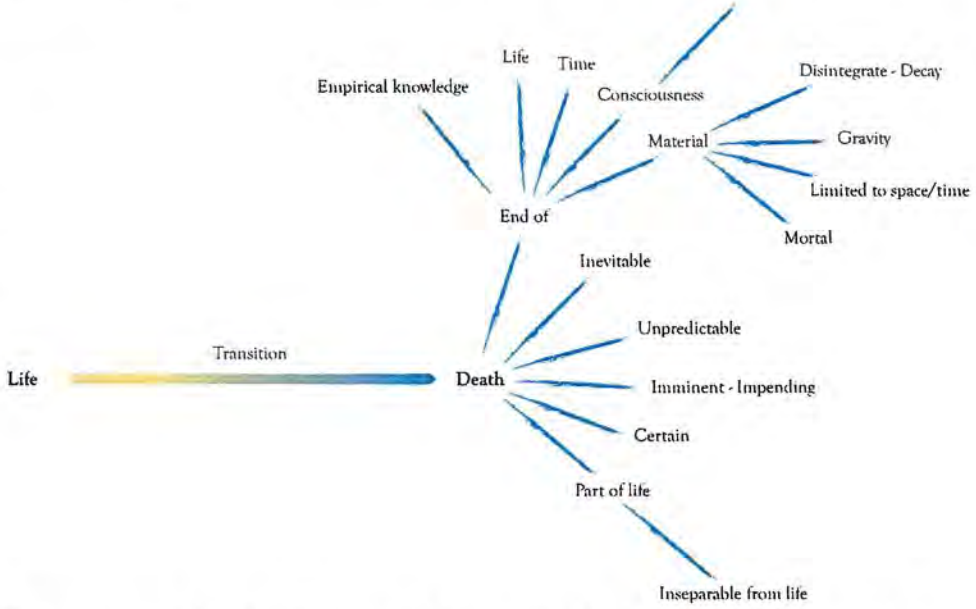
Following two examples can describe these two aspects of life and death.
The first one is a *catenary curve*; a curve which is supported at its ends and acted upon by a uniform gravitational force. Life can be considered as a catenary curve with two ends: birth and death. What forms this curve happens within the course of time (which is universal like gravity).

Life is a catenary curve which stands its weight between death and birth.

The second one was a statue by Jonty Hurwitz. For me, this statue clearly demonstrates the reality of life and death; within our life we cannot see the picture that we our creating from ourselves. And death is the reflection of this created image.

A statue by Jonty Hurwitz which demonstrates life and death for me.

Following mind-map shows how these two notions are implemented in the concept of life.




By considering these two notions of life and death, I started to conceptualize. The following concepts are a selection of my concepts:

# Conceptualization

## Concepts based on *passage of time* and *the end*

*"Only 'now' exists. Past and future exist in our present; time is subjective."*
St. Augustine of Hippo

The main questions at this point were: *what is time? And how do we perceive time?*

*What is time?*
Traditionally, time is simply seen as a measure of the distance between events. It has a past, present and a future. Isaac Newton's classical description of time is that it *'flows equably of itself', which means that time 'flows' at a constant rate that is the same for everybody; it is independent of the events that take place in it.* We think of time as a flow from past through the present and future. Albert Einstein noted "the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion". Whether time is real or not, the main concern was how to represent it: by ticking of a clock, pages of calendar or ....

*How do we perceive time?*
While we perceive some aspects of the world such as sound and color with a particular sense, some other aspects require more than one sense. For example perception of time is certainly not occurred through one sense. We are principally **hearing, listening or even touching the time.** From the scientific point of view, our brain is responsible for perception of time[i]. Furthermore, the meaning of time is different for people.

Following ideas intended to illustrate the passage of time in life and death as a moment when time stops for individuals. A kind of symbolic language is used for this demonstration.

i. Neurons in lateral intraparietal area (LIP) seem to represent the passage of time relative to a remembered standard duration (Leon and Shadlen, 2003). This procedure is called interval timing that keeps track of time.

Concept I
*Tree of life*

*Tree of life in your hands*

Heart is in the center of life; an organ which its pulse is synonymous to life. Visitors hold a heart which has a pulse. Each stage of the life cause the red veins grow (these veins can also be seen as the *tree of life*). When the visitors reach to the death the pulse stops while symbolically holding the tree of life in their hands.

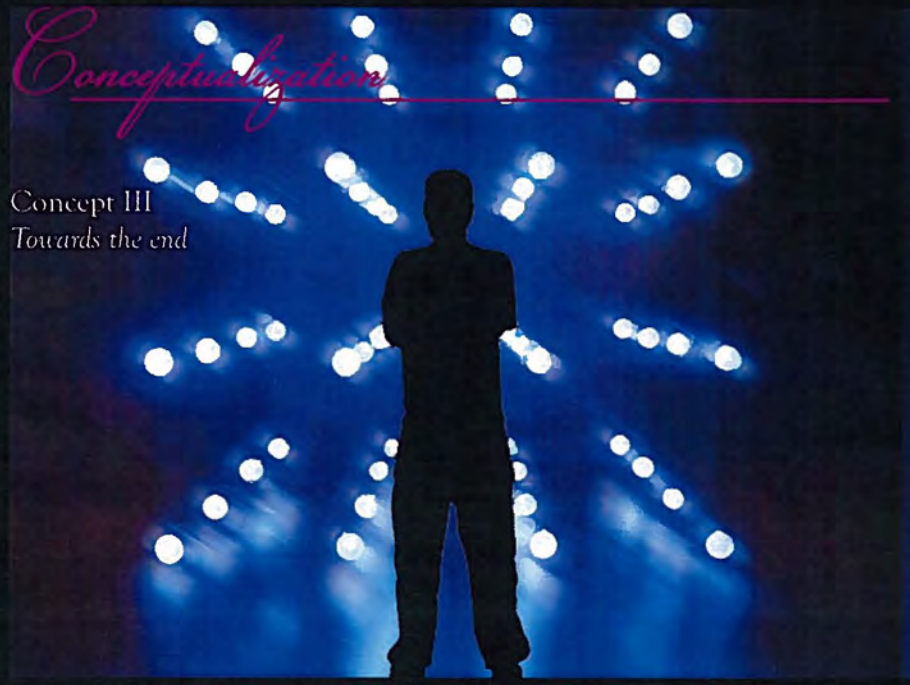
*See the moment*

This concept is the moments that no one can see in his life. There is an outline of a figure which doesn't have any face. The empty face provokes the feeling to look inside. By looking inside, individuals will see their funeral and the moment of resting in the grave (a reminder for the end of time).

Concept II
*See the moment*

# Conceptualization

Concept III
*Towards the end*



Concept IV

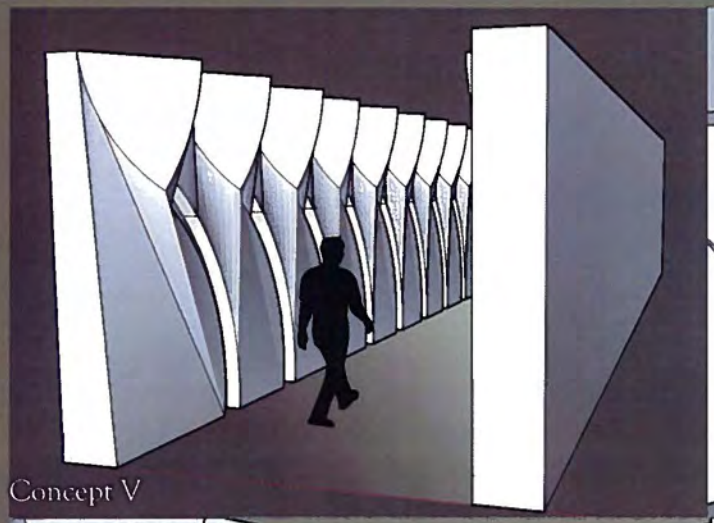
Considering the concept of life and death as a ubiquitous phenomenon, two perspectives are:

- Individual's **life** is a *variable* in contrast with **time** as a *constant* concept
- Concept of life is the same while different persons have different perception of it

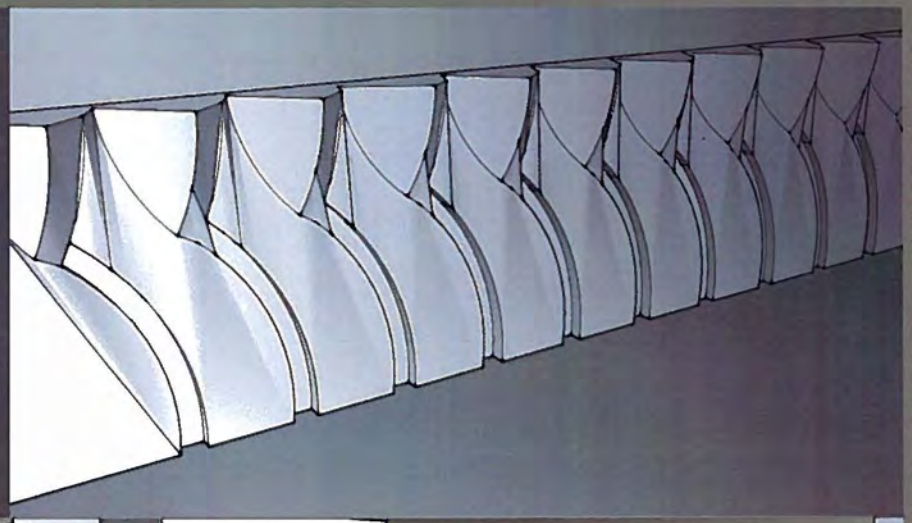
Therefore, *time* is an important factor in relation with life and death. With these two ideas I intended to show death as the end of time for individuals.
- One possibility to demonstrate time is by using light. In the first concept there is no direct time indication; by moving in the space the lights get off; moving from the state of being to not being.

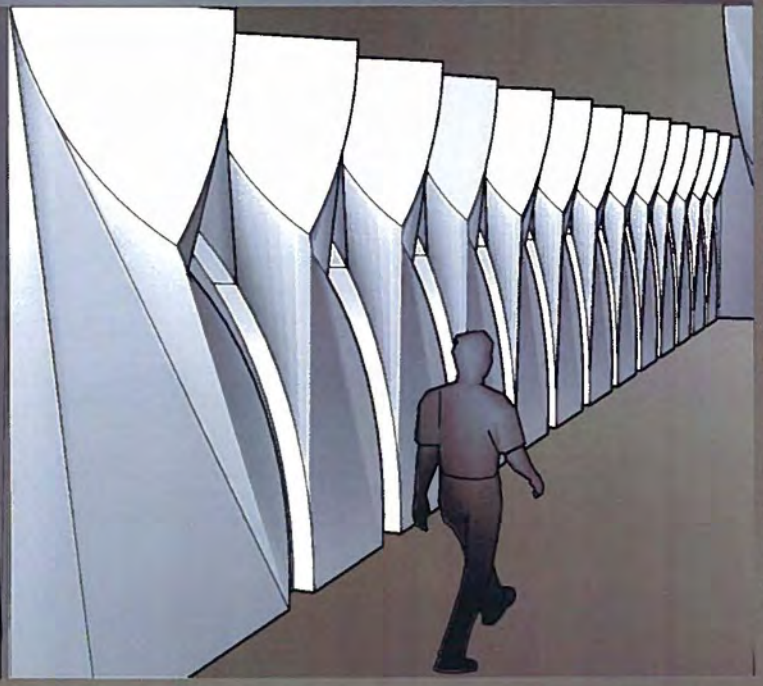
- In the second concept, the digital timer underneath each light bulb indicates time. By passing each they start the count down.

# Conceptualization



Concept V





time

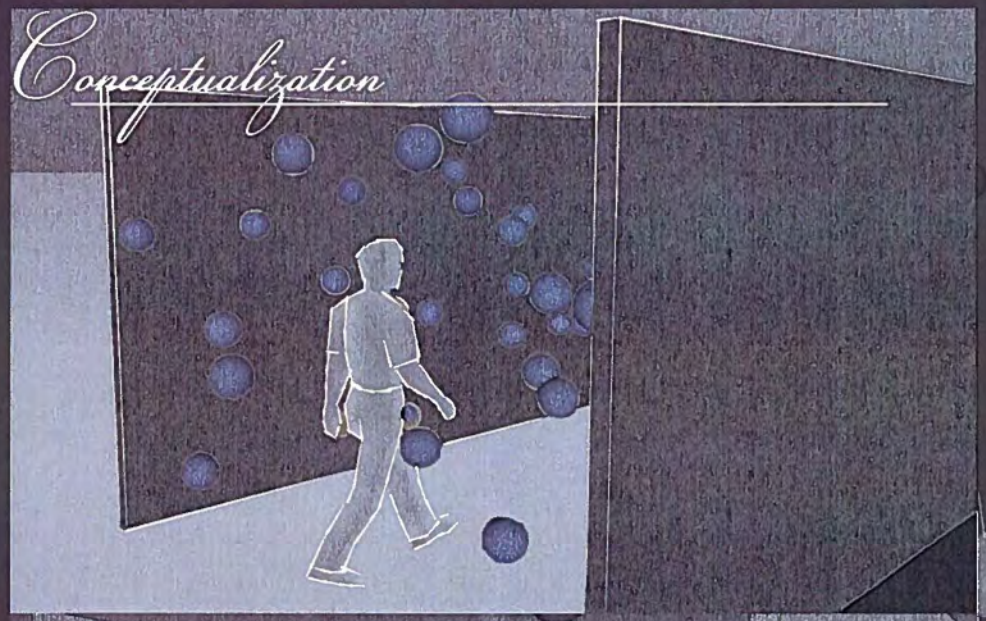
life ⟶ death

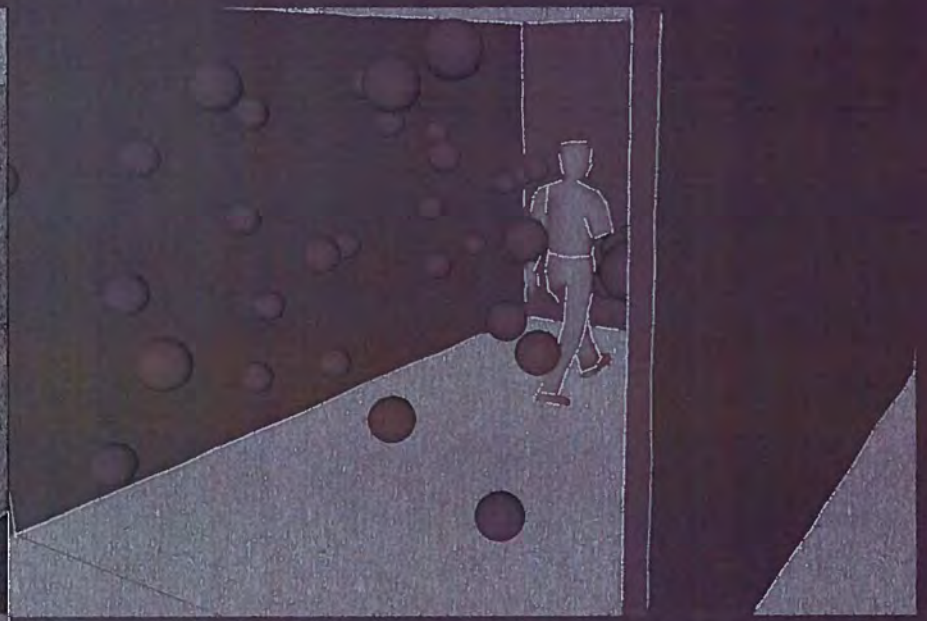
*"The moment you are in, is the youngest moment you will be and the oldest moment you have been."*

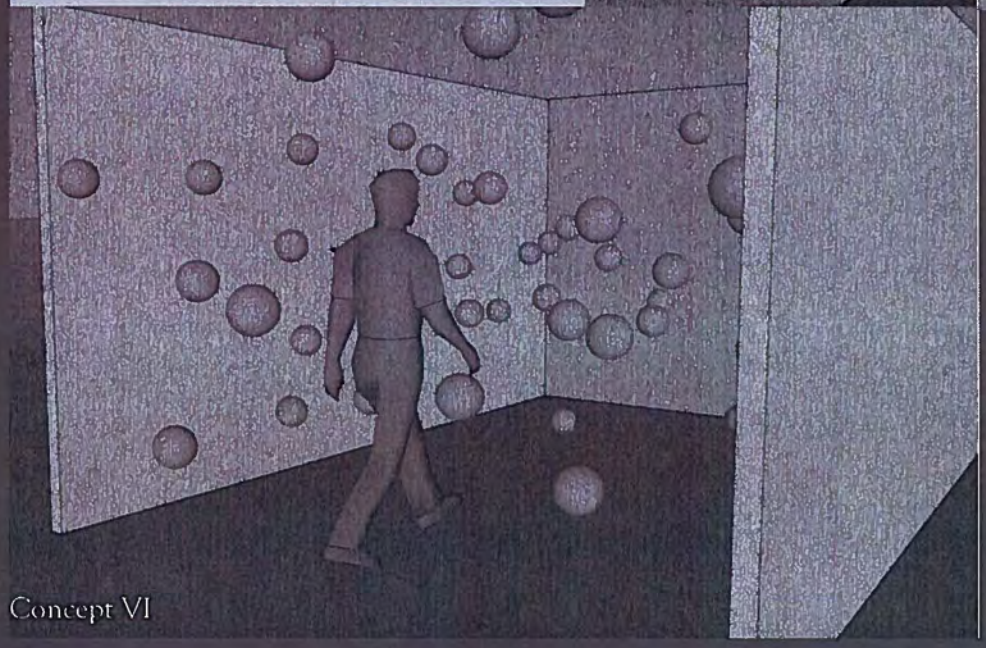
As mentioned earlier time has an important role in relation with life and death. Within this concept I got inspiration by *hourglass*. The whole space was designed in abstract forms which resemble hourglasses. These abstract hourglasses contain light instead of sand. Passing by each the light starts to fall down, an indication of passage of time/life. Reaching to the end, all the lights are off behind you and just a big door in the fort, which imply death.

By moving from light towards darkness I wanted to create passage of time and transforming from life to the death.

# Conceptualization







Concept VI

Death is an experience which is completely out of our control. As mentioned earlier, life is influenced by death with two distinctive manners: thinking/experiencing death for yourself and death of the others. This concept aims to show these two aspects of death.

Within this concept participants enter a space and interact with hanging lights. Each light represent one life. Once in a while one light goes off (one life ends) which consequently influences the other lights. These lights can react to each other. In fact participants define how their light reacts.

# Conceptualization

Concept VII

The three mentioned questions were my main concern in the whole design process. In fact I was looking for a way to answer these questions; having the knowledge that the concept of life and death is subjective, makes it almost impossible to have a comprehensive answer.

A solution could be creating a moment of self-reflection; designing an environment that individuals contemplate on the purpose of their own life and death. In other words, instead of answering these questions, each person finds the answer by himself/herself.

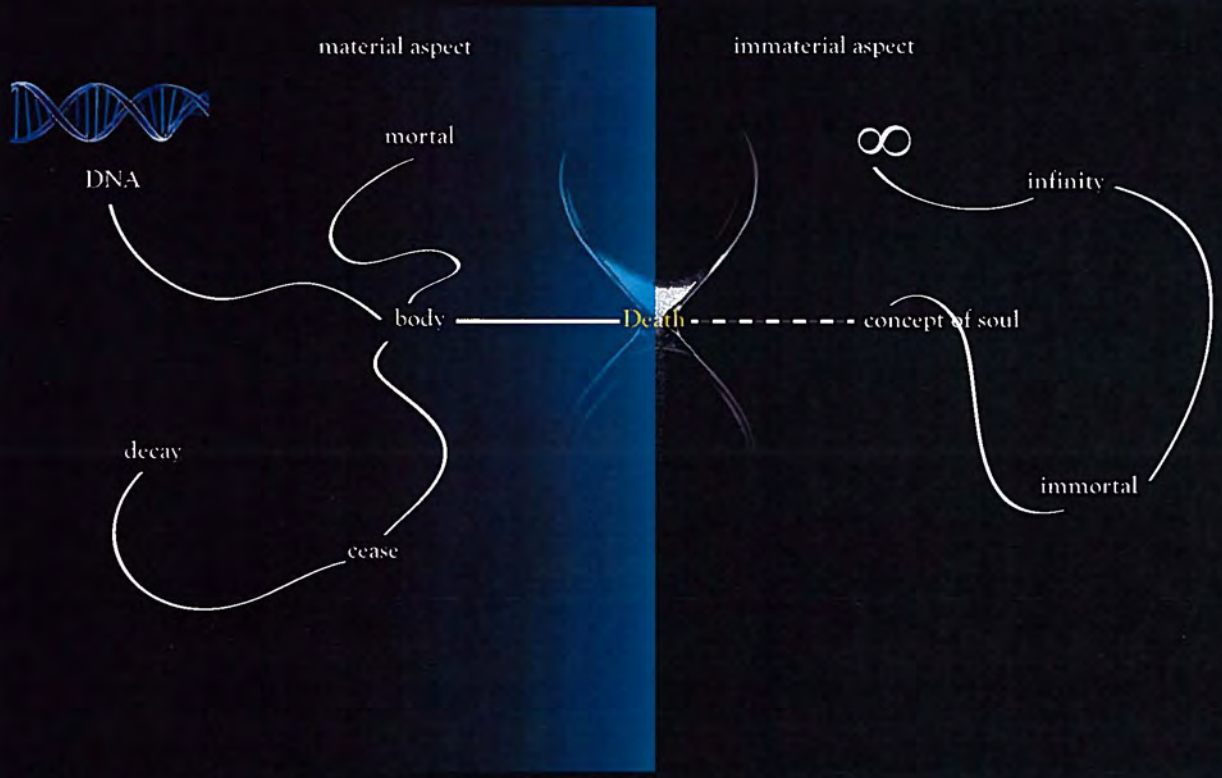
Inspired by the Creation of Adam by Michelangelo, this concept is a big sphere hanging in the middle of the space. A hand is attached to the sphere. However, this hand dies when it is held. By touching the hand the whole environment dims and creates a dark room. Implicitly this transition in light indicates death and intended to trigger people to think.

Death is the end of consciousness and vision is an important sense of human. Being in a dark place can be interpreted as losing the sense of vision; the reason for transitioning from light to darkness.

# Conceptualization

At this point I made a mood-board to visualize my personal concept of death.
An important element in the mood-board was transition. I consider death as a transition. Subsequently, I look for symbols of transition in life.

# Conceptualization




Human DNA, hourglass and sign of infinity are three symbols which have almost a common shape.

By considering death as a transition I looked at death from two different perspective; material and immaterial aspects. I wanted to find a link between these two aspects.

I found body at the center of materialistic aspect while soul stand on the other side. It was quite difficult to find a correlation between these two. However I related body to the human DNA; a characteristic which remains as long as the body exists. Furthermore, human DNA has relatively similar form to the infinity's sign.

Looking into the symbols of the death I also found the hourglass and grim reaper's scythe as the most common symbols, which have their origins in Greek and Roman Paganism. Hourglass with concealed promise of life, because the hourglass is reversible, has been the time emblem science ancient days.
By combining these three elements I conceptualized a space which is formed based on these elements. Concept IX indicates this space.

The next two concepts are an exploration in designing a space which indicates transition.

# Conceptualization

Concept VIII

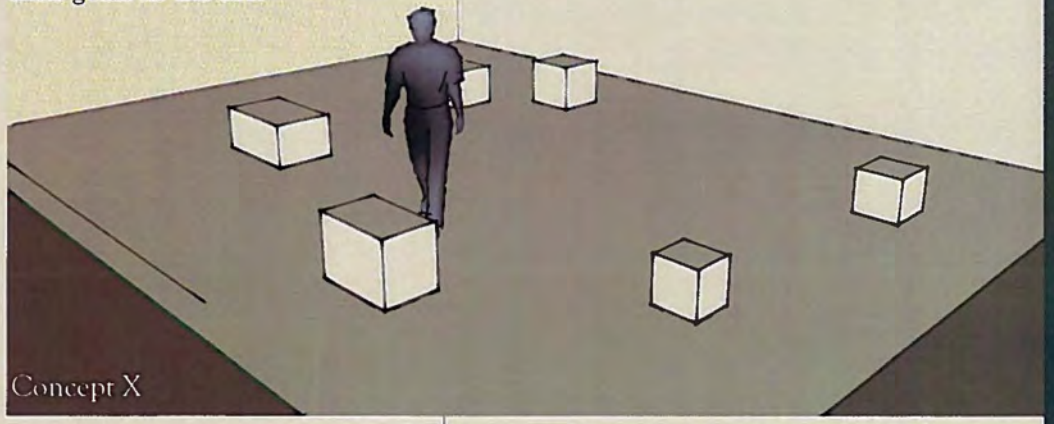
An exploration in designing a space which indicate transition. Moving from darkness towards light through passing different stages of life.

Concept IX
*Infinity*

A space which has been designed with a strong symbolic meaning.
This space has formed by combing the *hourglass* (symbol of death), *human DNA* and the sign of *infinity* which is the essential characteristic of the concept of soul.

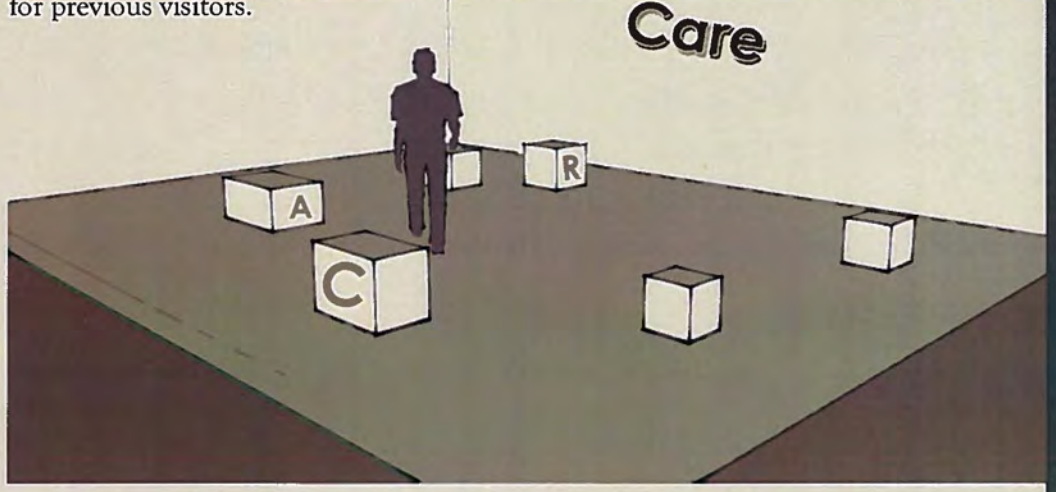
# Conceptualization

This concept is based on the seven stages of the "path of life". Participants gather objects which have a specific meaning for them in each stage of life. These objects carry a symbolic meaning. In fact, they form their life according to these meanings/values. These meanings are a form of reminder to people of their goals in the life.



Concept X

Leaving the space, passing through the door of death, this composition remains behind each person and other partidipants can see what had a specific meaning for previous visitors.

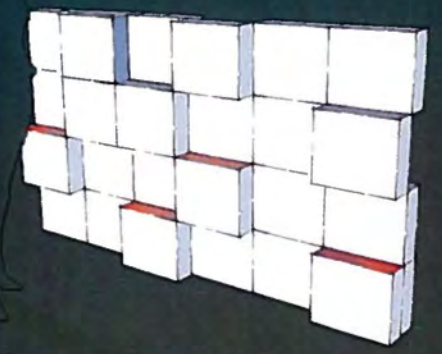


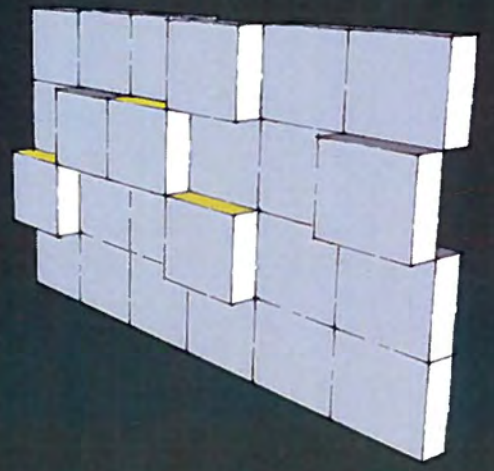

Concept XI
*Puzzle of life*

Participants are asked few questions based on the Erickson's theory of personality.

They answer these questions by moving cubes. In other words, they define their achievements in each stage of life and placing these achievements next to each other (from birth to death).

These pieces of puzzles gradually form a complete picture of personal life. This is the picture each person has created and remains after his/her death. It also disclose norms and values each person holds.





# Conceptualization

Concept XII

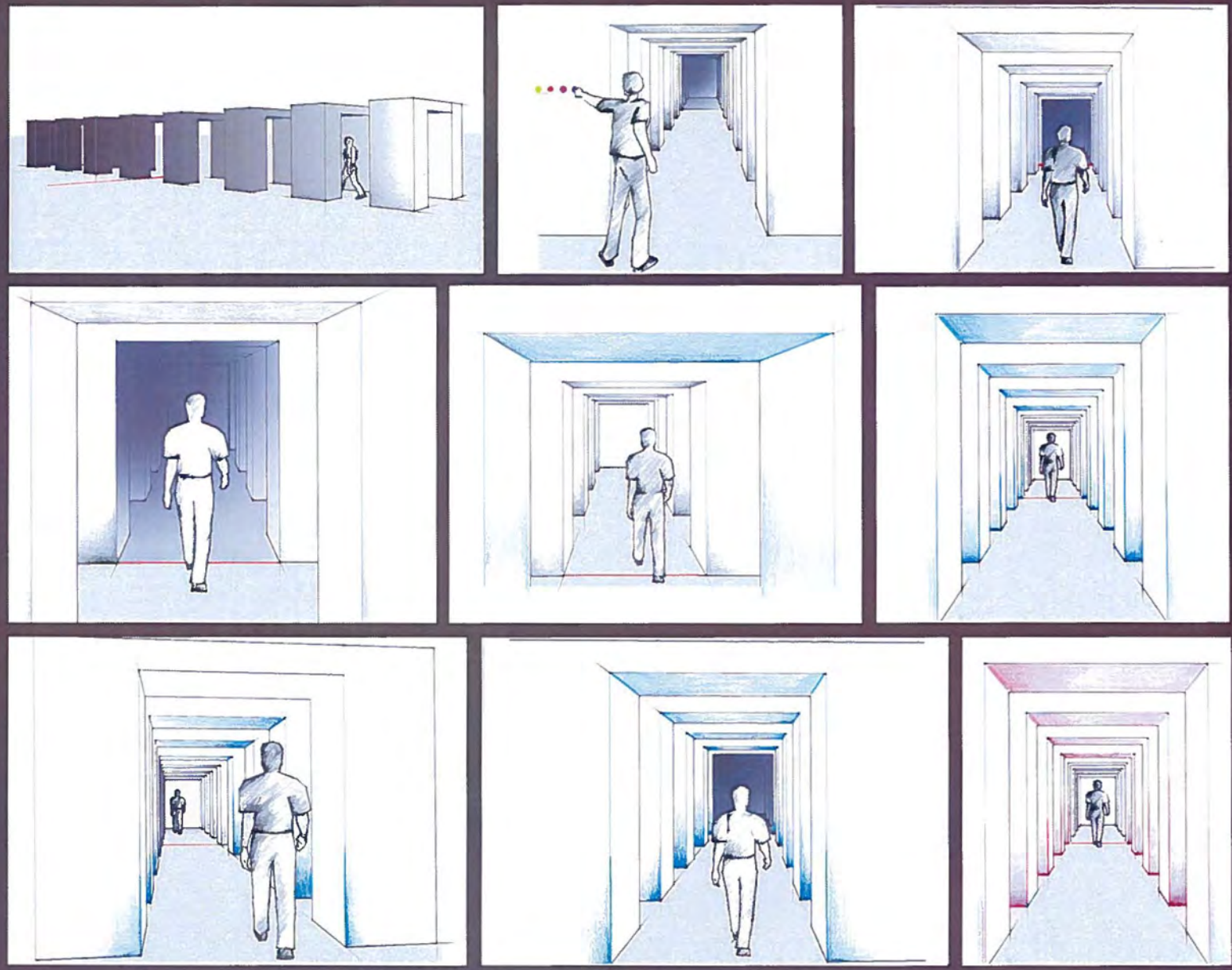
Within this concept the red line indicates the moment of death; the space before the red line represents current life - final moments of life - and the other side represents after death.

The first half (life side), light dims towards the line of death. And the second half (death side) remains dark till the moment the passer-by has not passed the red line.

In the entrance, participants take a colored token which associate it to their life. By passing the line of death, second half will light up and in the first half, the color of light will change to the chosen colored token.

Our *thought*, *words* and *creations* which remains after death is illustrated with color.

Each parson colors the first half with his/her chosen color after passing the death line. This colors remains there until other person changes it.



# Conceptualization

## Conclusion

So far, life and death and their connection have been considered from different perspectives. During previous iteration, several brain-storms dedicated to the existing relations between life and death and a selection of ideas was presented.

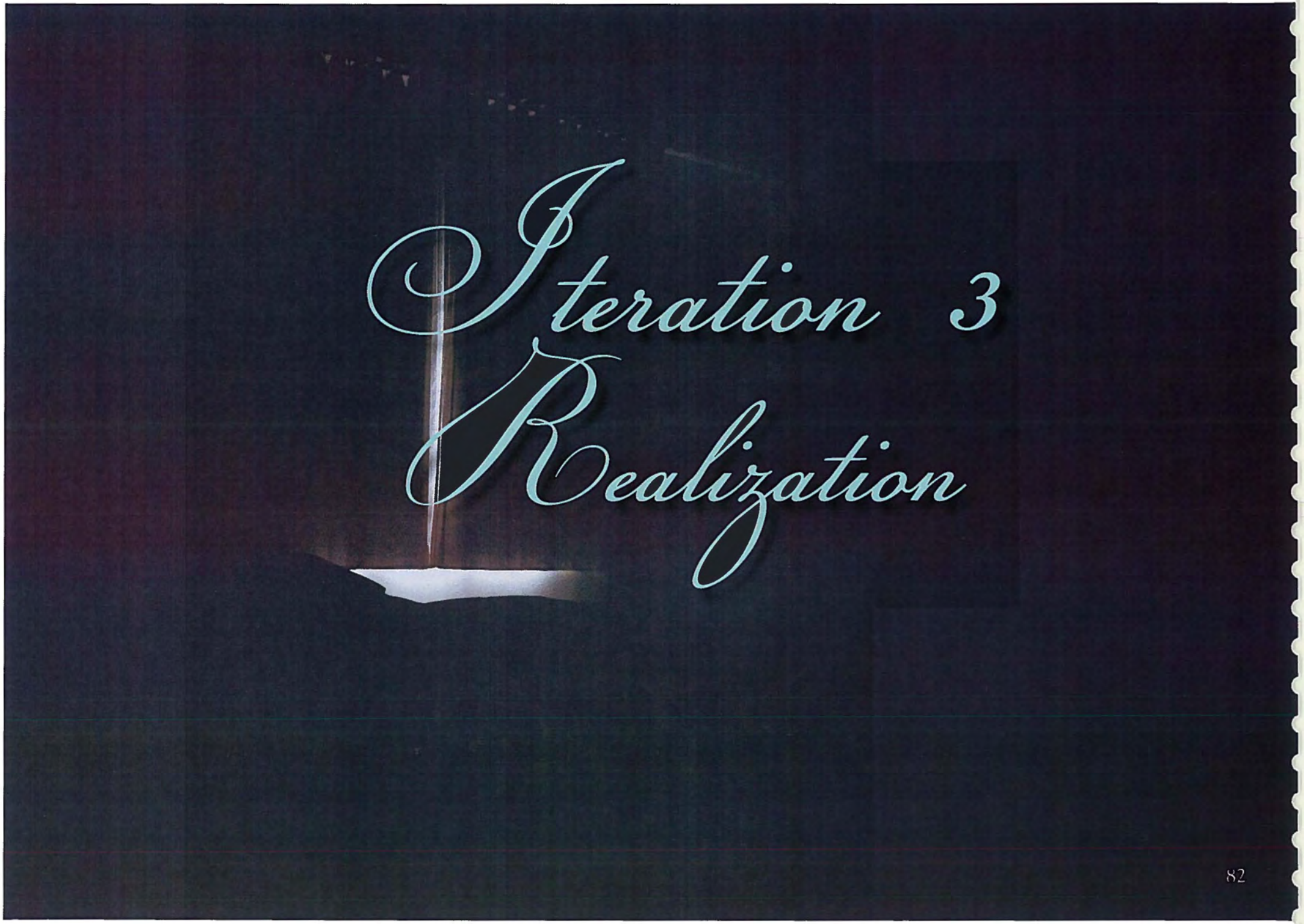
All these studies and ideation helped to get to the conclusion that: death does not exist without birth, "*as soon as we are born we are old enough to die*". In other words, birth and death are two definite points in life which cannot be separated. The problem is that this linked has been banished in the contemporary society and *death has become an accident/event which cease life.*

Based on these understanding I decided to consider death from just two perspectives: death as '*the end*' and '*not the end*'

| | |
|---|---|
| Death is the end of life | materiality and (earthy life) |
| Death is not the end | after death, you will still be remembered |

This perspective led me to consider death in three distinctive levels:

1. End of consciousness - *immediately*
2. End of materiality - decay & decomposition starts *after three to seven minutes*, when heart stops beating, brain cells are the first to die
3. End of remembrance - .....


Iteration 3
Realization

# Realization

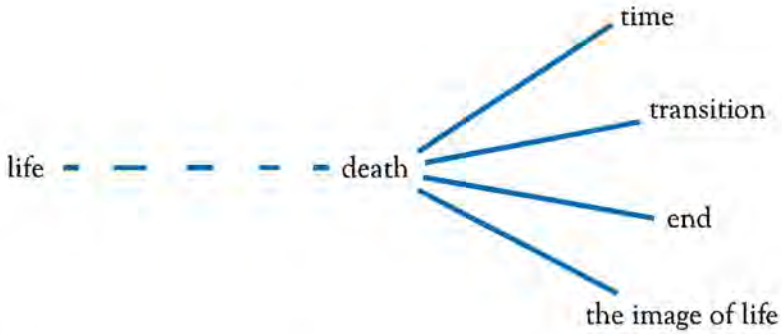
## Analysis

This iteration has a focus to combine all the information gathered from last iterations into a final concept and to deliver a tangible experience of death. Furthermore there will be a brief description that how the final concept is made. Using all the information form all interviews and discussions, background information to the last iteration I defined a guideline as following:

## Guidelines

- Simplify the complex nature of death
- Death is part of life ..... It's not separate
- Death in contemporary society is considered as black &negative, however the experience that I want to create is not black and negative.
- Whether believing in death as the end of life or not, the most important aspect of death is how we have lived and what we live behind. In other words, our creations (deeds), thoughts and words remains even after death (a link between life and death)
- This aspect of life and death is not dependent to personal believes.
- Birth and death are connected together by time (a link between life and death)
- Death is a transition in life (a link between life and death)
- There is no answer to the questions concerned by death, the answered is the person who enters the installation
- There is shift in interpreting old symbols, symbolic language should be used carefully

Following schematic depicts this guideline:




Another important aspect was how we *perceive our surrounding*. Therefore, I looked up what is reality and how it is shaped in our mind. Following paragraph describes it:

The reality shapes by our five senses and that is how our mind perceives the surrounding. In other words, the mind and senses create our world. Therefore based on one person's interpretation and imagination, his surrounding world becomes to reality. In addition those parts that are perceived will be further strained by other elements such as culture, language, beliefs, values, interests and assumptions. This world is then probably different from the one person to another. A simple example can be mentioned while an object is observed we then create images from that in our mind. This image or imagination differs between different observers. What we see actually depends on what we predict or want to see from that certain object. The important point eventually is the interpretation of things that we experience by our senses[148].

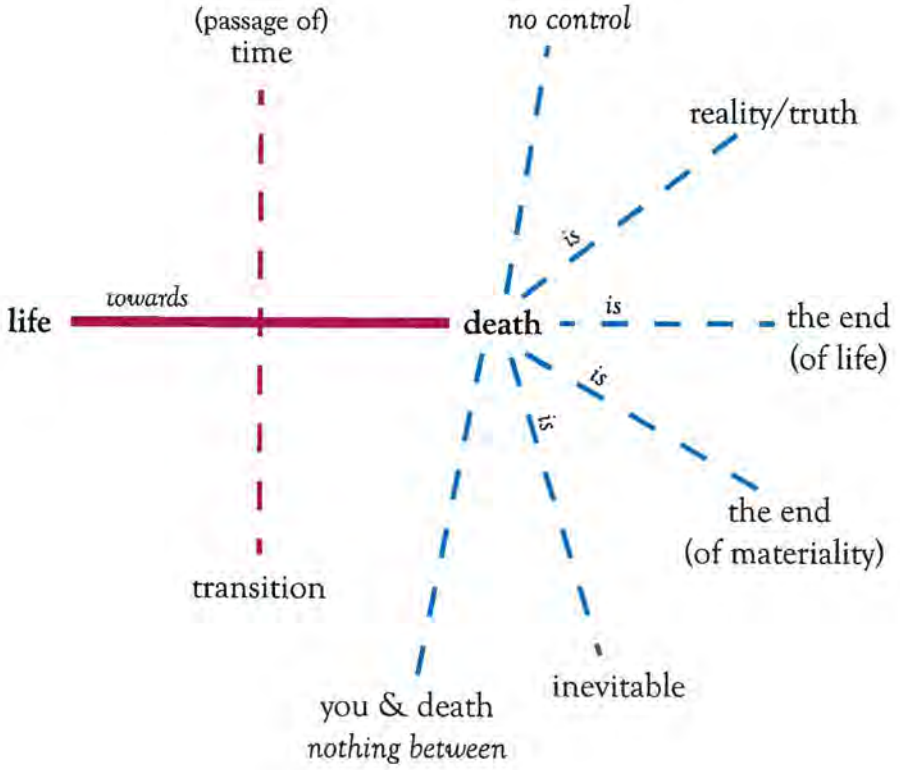
All different aspects of death and life which formed the final design can be concluded as following:

- Death is a *transition* ..... it is accepted by everyone (Even from existence to non-existence can be considered as a transition)
- Life is connected to death by *passage of time*

# Realization

- Death is the *reflection of life* or vice versa; contemplating on death influence how we look at life
- Life is the most real belonging we have
- Within our life we create an images which is formed by our thoughts, words and deeds (creations)
- Death is the end of path of life, and we carry an image to this end

Following mind-map which tries to overcome the complexity of death and divide it into separate sections formed the final concept:




## FINAL CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

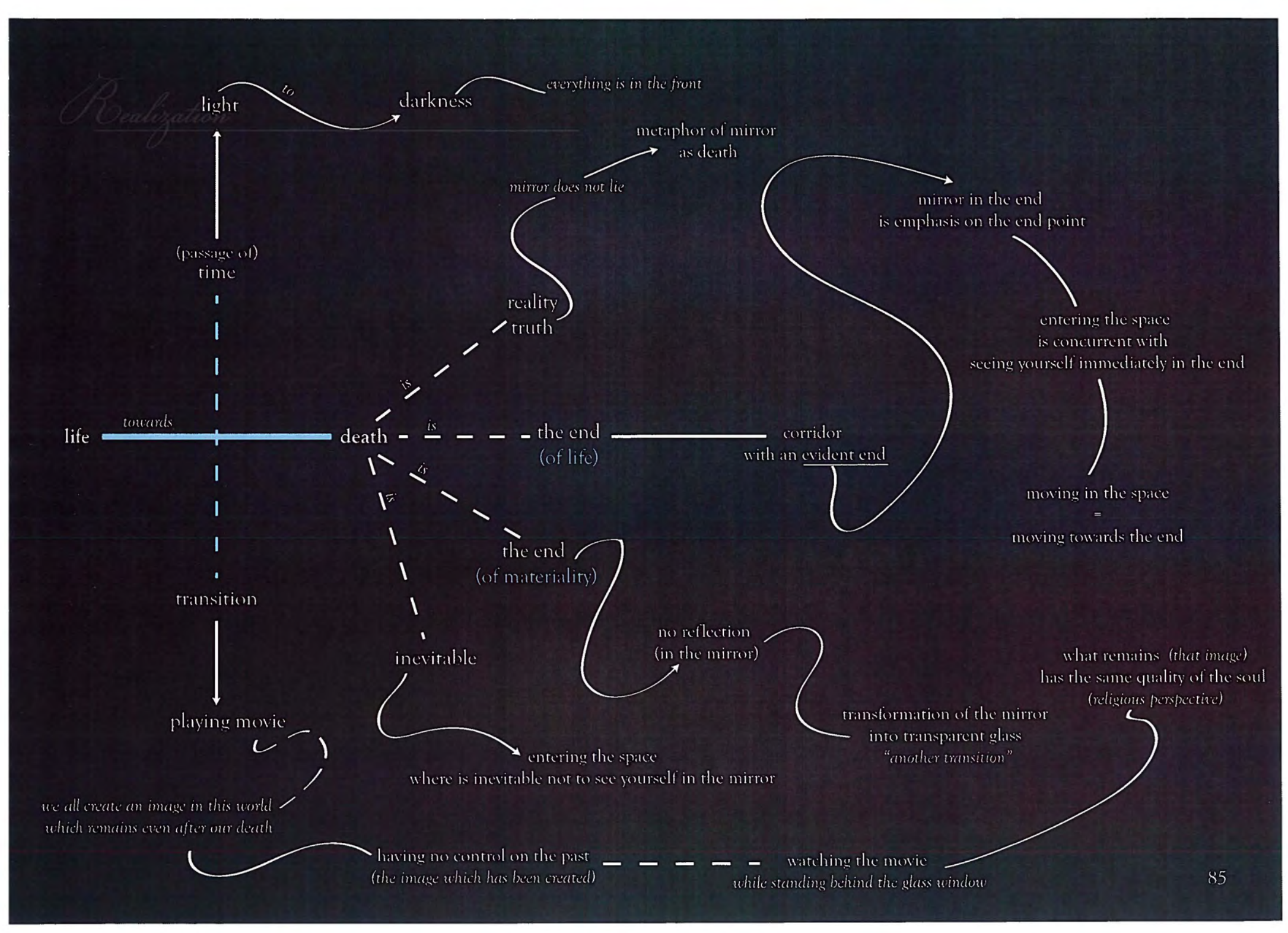
### Description of the space

This installation compromised of a long corridor which ends to a mirror. There is no color in the space; everything is plain black. The only existing color is the person who enters the space.
Three rows of light are located on one side. These lights are made of half transparent half brushed Plexiglas; which imply concept of Yin & Yang in the life.

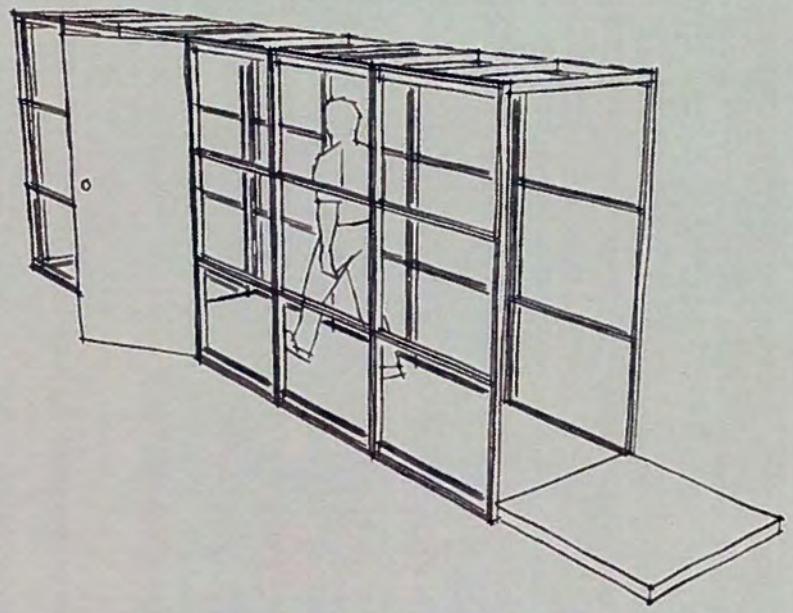
### Description of the interaction

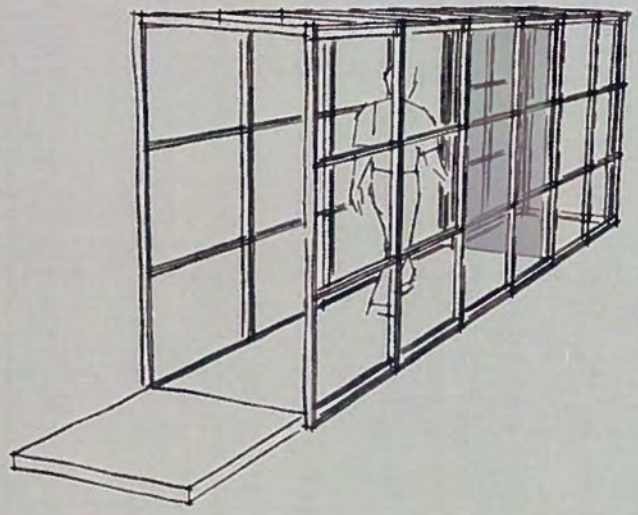
In order to have a better understanding of the interaction first I explain the sensors.
The whole interaction is controlled by five different sensors; two PIR (passive infrared) sensors and three LDR (light dependent resistor) sensors. One PIR sensor is located in the entrance. It controls the film record commencement. The other one which is located close to the end command the end of recording and start of the playback (the recorded movie). Three LDR sensors control the lights.
Whenever anyone enters the installation, the first PIR sensor detects the motion and subsequently recording starts. By passing along each light, it gradually dims and turns off. Concurrent with reaching the second PIR sensor (almost to the end of the corridor and near the mirror) playing back the movies starts. At this point all the lights have turned off.
Due to the changes in the ambient light, the mirror transfers into a transparent glass. In fact, this "one way" mirror acts as a mirror when one side is brighter than the other side.

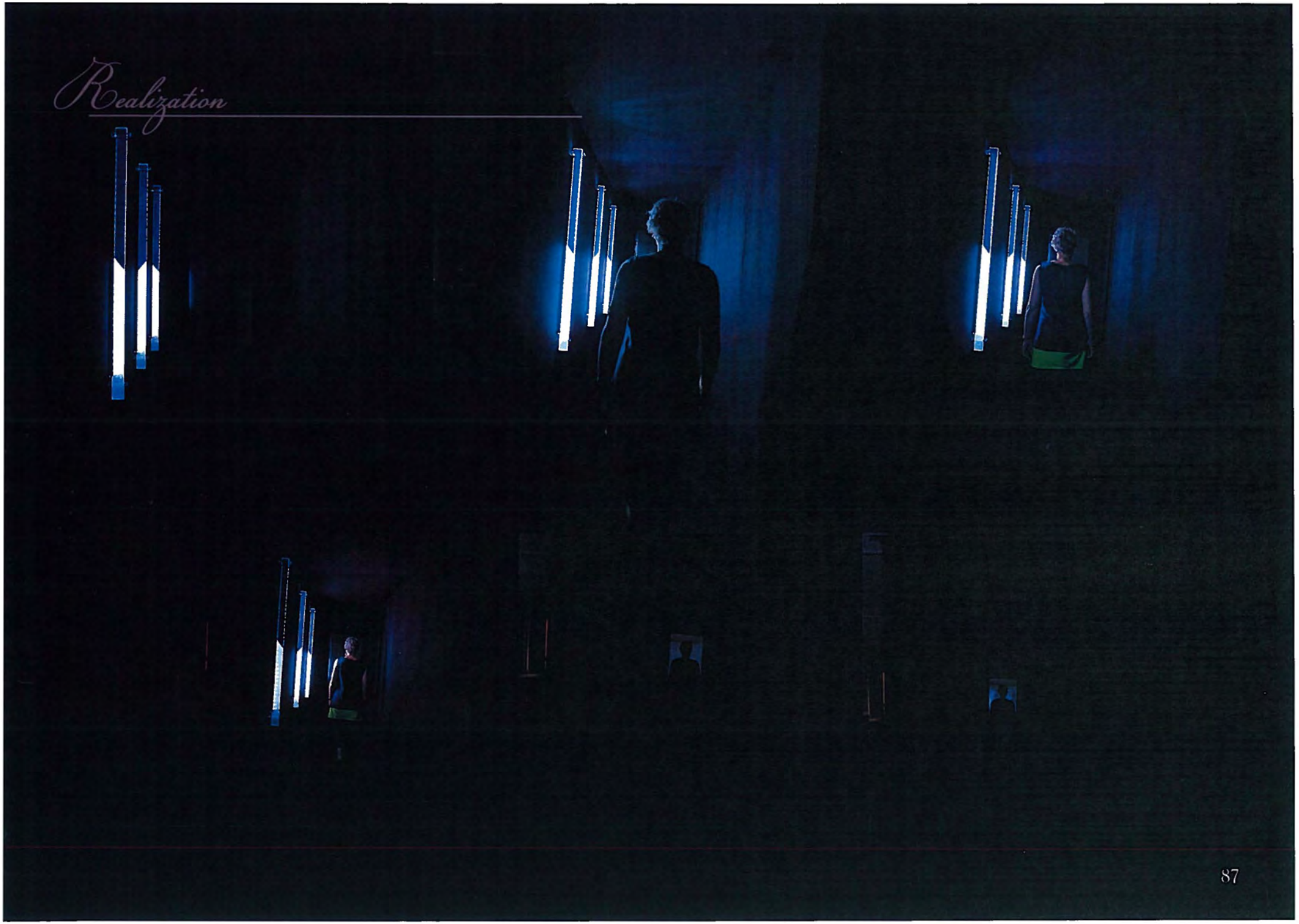
*Following schematic describes all the hidden meaning behind the design of the space and interaction:*


Realization
light
to
darkness
everything is in the front
metaphor of mirror
as death
mirror does not lie
mirror in the end
is emphasis on the end point
(passage of)
time
reality
truth
entering the space
is concurrent with
seeing yourself immediately in the end
is
life
towards
death
is
the end
(of life)
corridor
with an evident end
moving in the space
=
moving towards the end
is
is
the end
(of materiality)
transition
no reflection
(in the mirror)
inevitable
what remains (that image)
has the same quality of the soul
(religious perspective)
playing movie
transformation of the mirror
into transparent glass
"another transition"
entering the space
where is inevitable not to see yourself in the mirror
we all create an image in this world
which remains even after our death
having no control on the past
(the image which has been created)
watching the movie
while standing behind the glass window

# Realization







## DESIGN ARGUMENTATIONS

The project's title is "path of life in mixed reality" it is worth noting what is mixed reality. This description clarifies why this installation fits to this title.

### What is Mixed Reality (MR)?

Milgram and Kishino (1994) defined Mixed Reality as "*the merging of real and virtual worlds somewhere along the virtuality continuum.*"[149] In other words, Mixed Reality connects entirely real environments to totally virtual ones while encompasses both augmented reality and augmented virtuality.

### i. Using a metaphor

The concept of life and death are ambiguous. Therefore, a good way of addressing the context of life and death is acknowledging the fact that both cases require *metaphor*. By using metaphor definitions are addressed more critically extensive compared to objective reference.

Generally, death can be considered either real or not real. If it is real, life terminates by death. If it is not real, death is not the end of embodied life, yet it is a portal to another form of life. Common metaphors for describing death are:
- A *blank wall*, for those who consider death real
- A *door* (to another life), for those who consider it not real

*"Having no content, we must speak of death metaphorically and we cannot avoid using one metaphor or another."*[150]
However, this design does not aim to show neither the reality nor unreality of the concept of death. Hence, a different metaphor (mirror) has been used.

### ii. Psychological arguments

From the very beginning the question that "why we need to encounter with our mortality" was a main concern. Following paragraphs describes the answer to this question:

### Mortality salience - MS

Mortality salience describes awareness about *one's eventual death*. This hypothesis indicates that if cultural worldview or self-esteem serves a death-denying function, threatening these constructs results in psychological calmness.

Sheldon Solomon describes: "*A large body of evidence shows that momentarily making death salient, typically by asking people to think about themselves dying, intensifies people's strivings to protect and bolster aspects of their worldviews, and to bolster their self-esteem. The most common finding is that MS increases positive reactions to those who share cherished aspects of one's cultural worldview, and negative reactions toward those who violate cherished cultural values or are merely different.*"[151]

### Existential psychotherapy[i]

*"It is one of life's most self-evident truths that everything fades, that we fear the fading, and that we must live, nonetheless, in the face of the fading, in the face of fear."*
Irvin Yalom, Existential Psychotherapy (p. 30).

I also found existential psychotherapy considers significance of death on human's life. To the existentialist, it is important to be aware of death. Existential psychology considers six basic dimensions for the human condition. The 6th proposition is "*awareness of death and nonbeing*"

i. A Philosophical approach to therapy which emphasizes the freedom to choose what to make of our circumstances; we are free & therefore responsible for our choices & actions

# Realization

The existentialist view on death is not negative; it considers awareness of death as a "*basic human condition which gives significance to living*". The fear of death and the fear of life are related. In order for living life without fear, accepting inevitability of death is important; death should not cause fear in life, but a motive to live life in the very best way.

## iii. Philosophical argument

*"This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world around me I can feel, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction."*
Albert Camus

*"If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life - and only then will I be free to become myself."*
Martin Heidegger

The philosophical argument which forms the foundation of my concept comes from Heidegger's Being and Time. As Critchley (2009) asserted "*being is time and time is finite. For human beings, time comes to an end with our death*".

Heidegger's philosophy "being-towards-death" suggests, being an authentic and reliable human being, we need to project our life towards death. In this case mortality has to be confronted and meaning of death has to be defined. Four criteria are important in Heidegger's philosophy, which include non-relational, certain, indefinite and not to be outstripped.

- Non-relational (is experienced by one person, when all relations are cut off)
- Certain (happens definitely)
- Indefinite (the occurrence time is unknown)
- Not to be outstripped (is an important issue which cannot be left behind).

## iv. Designing for emotions

According to Carl Jung, objects invoke emotions which are natural and essential for human survival. Curiosity and fear are a few emotions humans may experience when approaching an unknown. By giving a name to an unknown, meaning is assigned to it. And through this process emotions become attached to every object in the universe. Emotions toward the newly named object can be as simple as ambivalence, like, or dislike. Through the naming process, nothing is ever meaningless.

Considering emotions allow individuals to feel that the external world (beyond body) matters. Likes and dislikes are how we make choices and indicate what we value in life. These are all examples of emotional attachment.

By considering this fact that, each object in the universe carries a meaning, it was tried to avoid any distinct object in this installation. It was important that visitors enter the installation with a neutral emotion.

### Appraisal theory

Another influential factor which was also considered in designing this space was the emotional responses towards the interacting with the space. It was tried to keep the design as simple as possible. Furthermore, while it looks big from outside, it is simple inside; it is dark from outside, and light inside. This form of design roots it reasoning in appraisal theory to avoid any mixed emotion.

*"We live in designed environment and to design an environment is to create a context for emotion."*[152]
According to this theory, emotions lead to specific reactions in individuals which are extracted from evaluations (appraisals) of events. Essentially, our appraisal of a situation causes an emotional, or affective, response.

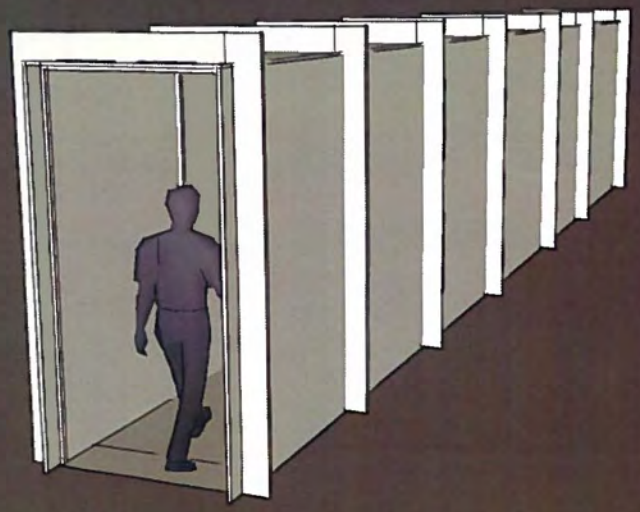
# Realization

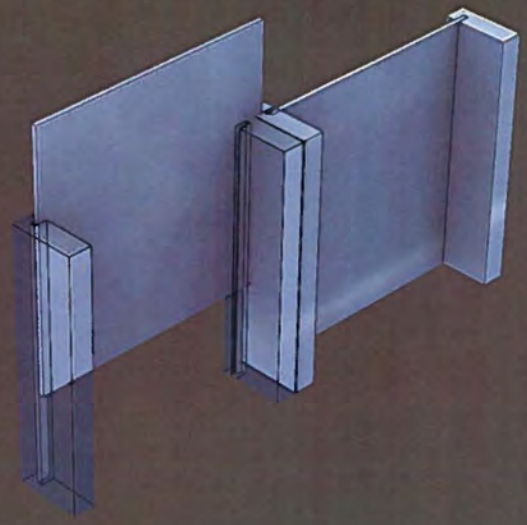
## A brief description about the construction

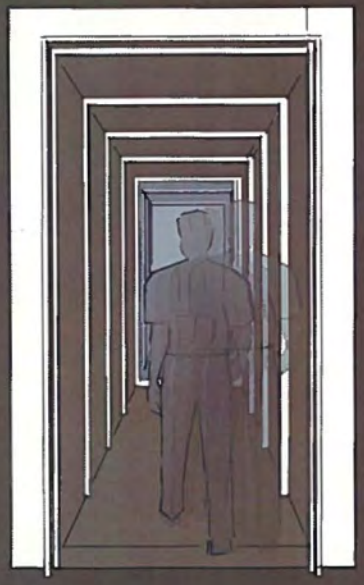
### Designing the space

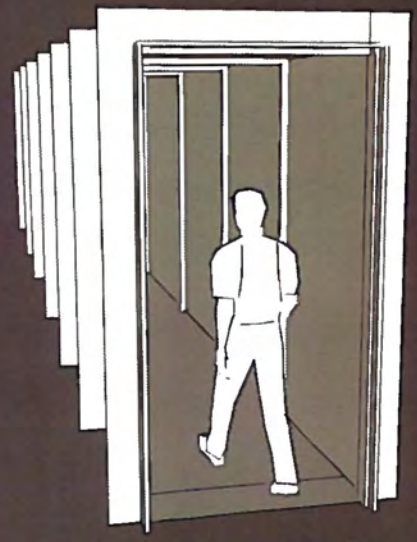
As mentioned earlier, this project is part of a bigger project which might be exhibited at a different place. By considering this fact, two requirements were considered in designing the installation: a design which can be *assembled and disassembled* easily and *light weight*.

The solution for the first requirement was a *modular system* which can be co nected easily. Following design was an initial design which changed later.









# Realization

And for the second part I got inspiration from Shoji, traditional Japanese door and window.

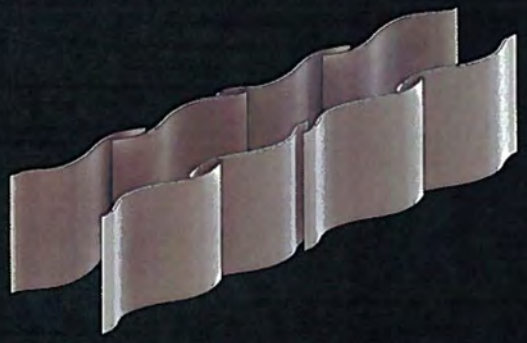
Another factor which was also considered in designing the space was cost reduction.

Following page contains some of the primary models which were designed for the space. These models were inspired by architecture of Nieuwe kerk in Amsterdam.

Shoji consists of translucent paper over a frame of wood which holds together a lattice of wood or bamboo.

In making this model instead of using paper, fabric was used. Usage of fabric had two advantages: firstly, it is light and secondly it does not scratch in transportation.

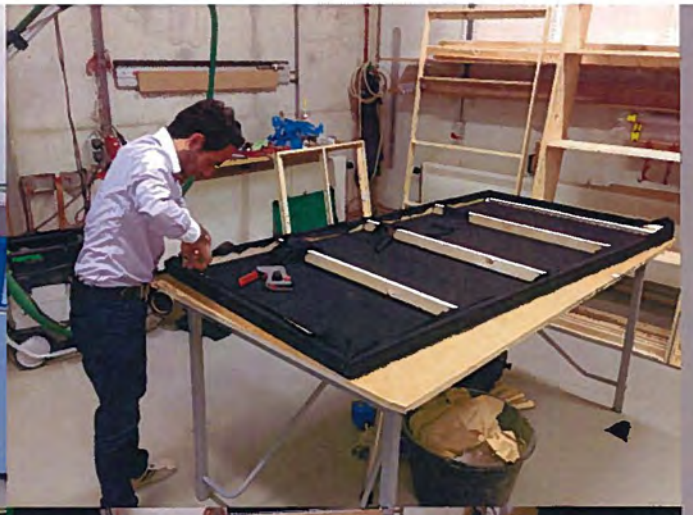
# Realization

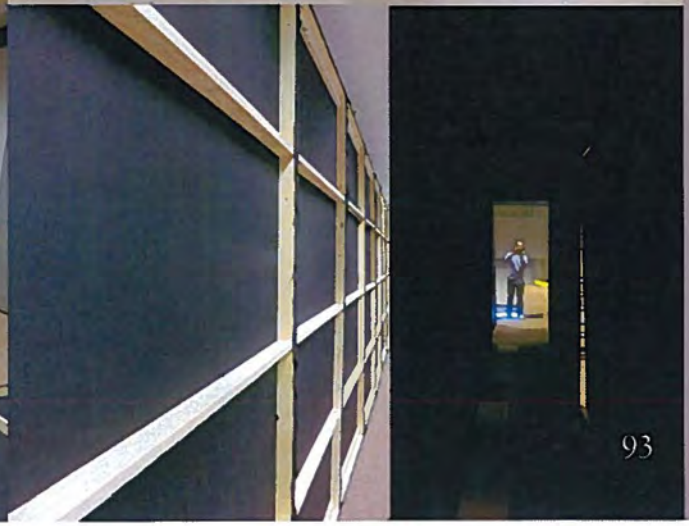


Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam

Next page contains some pictures of the construction process

# Realization



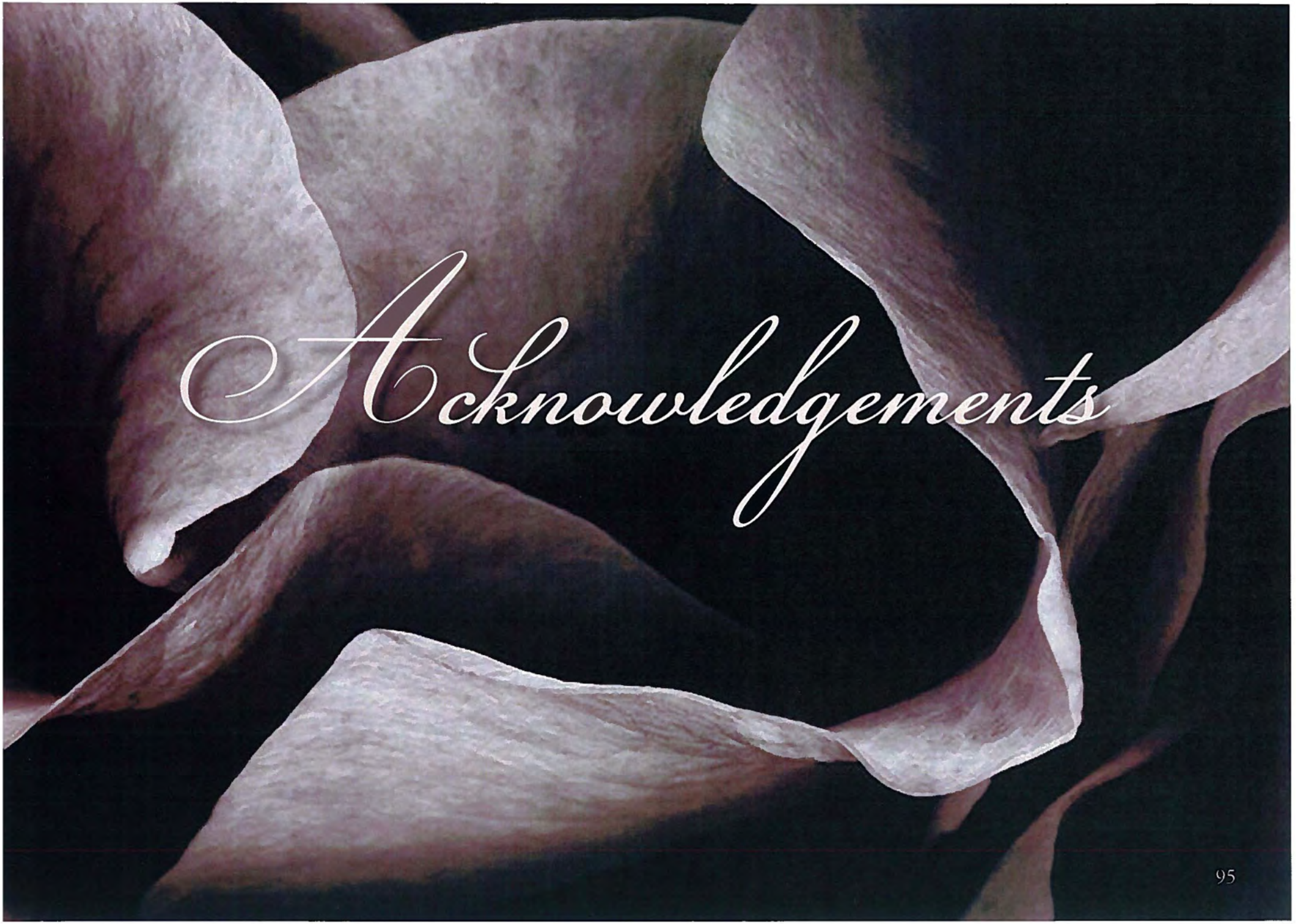


# Realization

## Designing the lights

Some preliminary ideas for lights;
the first one, the rose, was made of two layers: a sheet of mdf on top of a layer of light diffuser. By increasing a distance between two layers it was possible to fade the rose pattern. The idea was to fade the light in a different way.

The two other models were inspired by the reflection of light from stained glass in the church. Since, it was important not to use specific symbolic language (usage of any element that visitors can relate it to other objects) these ideas were not used.



# Acknowledgements

# Acknowledgements

I started this project with my enthusiasm for complexity of human culture and its relation to design, thank to Prof. dr. Rauterberg who offered me this opportunity.

First of all, I would like to express my great appreciation to my coach, Mr. Reindl, who patiently supported and guided me through each step of this project; I was always motivated and inspired by you and learned a lot from your knowledge and experiences.

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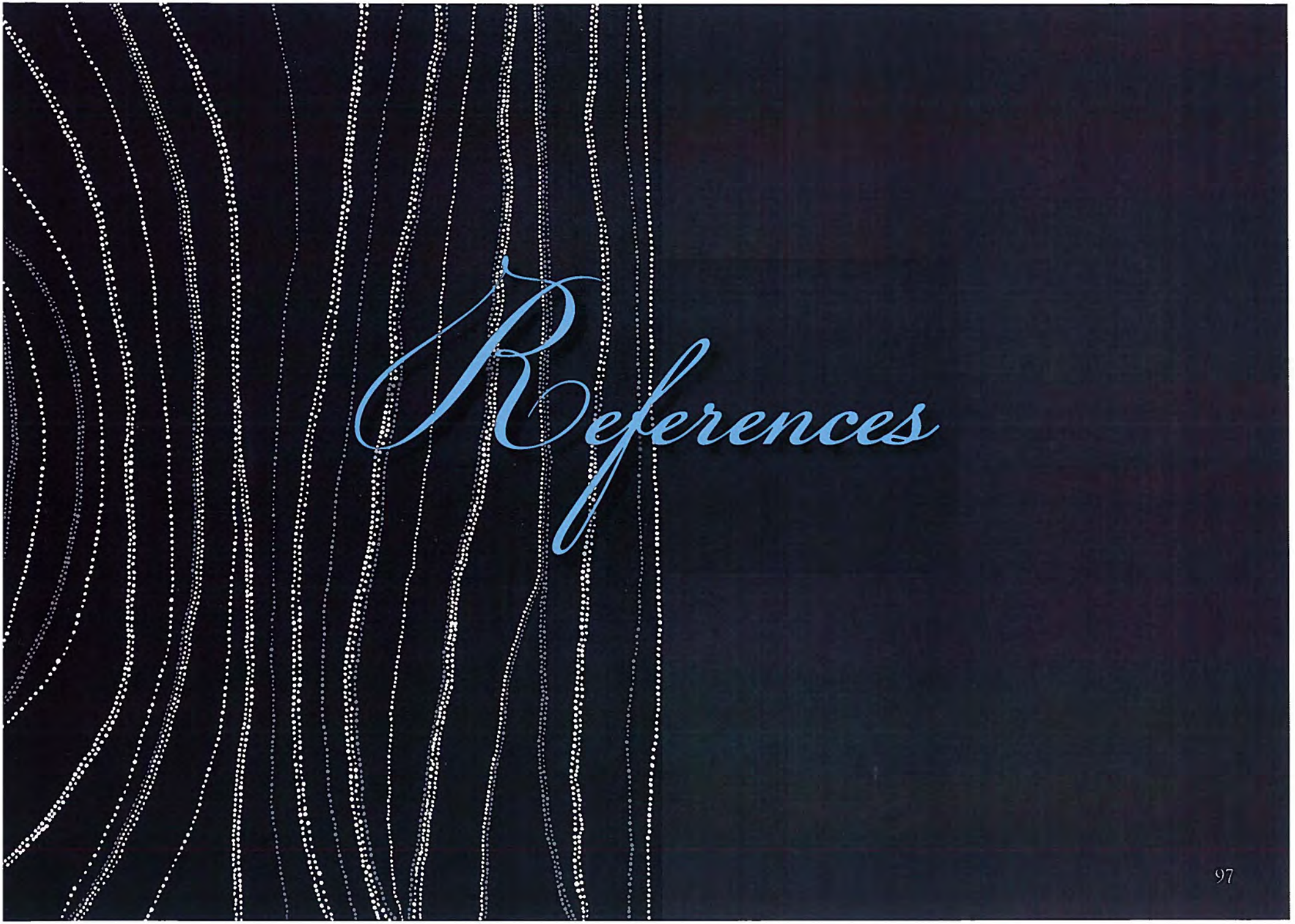
I am very thankful to Ehsan Baha who introduced me this project and dedicated his time to discuss this project with me.

Finally, I would like to express my special gratitude to my parents that without their help and support I was not able to continue my study. I AM ALWAYS GRATEFUL TO YOU.



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