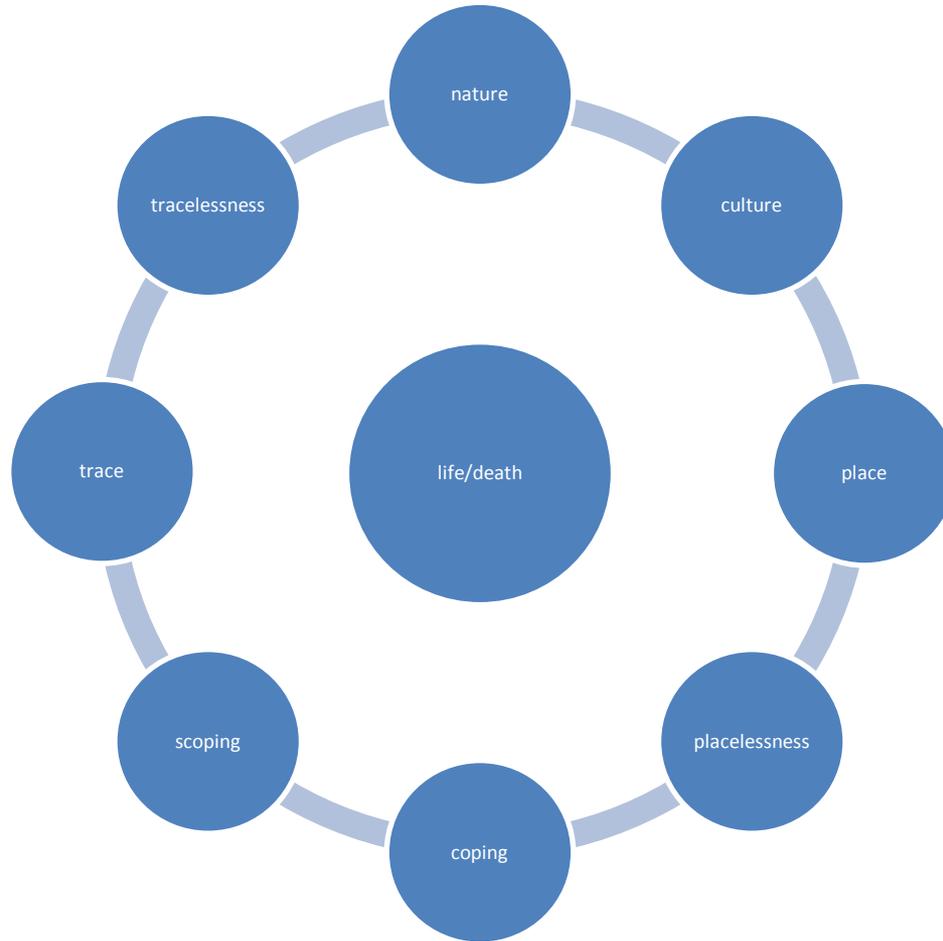




# Grief and consolation: ambiguities or creative tensions?



# Landscapes that save, seascapes that soothe:

Places, traces and intended oblivion

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- “One of our most powerful yearnings: the craving to find in nature a consolation for our mortality”

(Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* 1995: 15)





# The organic growth of a research design

- In sequences:
  - (1) Rituals around sacred trees in India →
  - (2) Deforestation in spite of sacrality →
  - (3) Traditional open air cremation pyre needing 500 to 800 kilos of dry wood →
  - (4) What disposal rites do Hindus have in the Netherlands? →
  - (5) Crematorium: values of sanitized neatness and tidiness →
  - (6) Alternatives to the Western death industry: green/natural burial places →
  - (7) Applicable from landscapes to seascapes/tidescapes?

# basic parallels in green/blue disposal practices

- **disposal** (cremation fire or rapid decomposition through shallow burial) as preferable to keeping bodyforms intact
- **dispersal** (ashes to be dispersed tracelessly over flowing water or favoured landscapes) as preferable to bounded places and traces
- **dissolution** (into the elements) as preferable to name-keeping and place-keeping

# Basic references

## Natural burial/green death movement:

- Sarah McFarland Taylor, 'Green Death Movement' in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London/New York: Continuum 2005), 722-723.
- [www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/database.html](http://www.naturalburialresearchproject.group.shef.ac.uk/database.html)
- Robert Feagan, 'Death to Life: Towards My Green Burial' in *Ethics, Place, and Environment* 10/2 (2007), 157-175.

## Oblivion/names and namelessness:

- Marc Augé, *Les formes d'oubli* (1998), trsl. *Oblivion* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press 2004).
- Gabriele vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn (eds.), *The Anthropology of Names and Naming* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2006).

## Post-cremation disposal of ashes, scattering, ritualization outdoors:

- David Prendergast, Jenny Hockey, Leonie Kellaheer, 'Blowing in the wind? Identity, materiality, and the destinations of human ashes' in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12/4 (dec. 2006), 881-898.

# Natural burial/green death movement

- Three catalysts for the greening of disposal practices:
  - (1) Environmental consequences of contemporary death industries
  - (2) Congruence lifestyle-deathstyle: vaguely romantic getting/giving 'back to nature' → transitive decay
  - (3) Rejection of religiously ingrained divides between body and soul or humans and nature: soberly physical, earthy, biotic instead





**“One day I wrote her name upon the s(tr)and,  
but came the waves and washed it away ...”**

Edmund Spenser  
(1552-1599)

# Sense of **place**, sense of **scope**

- Tidal landscapes: creative tensions between dynamic and static factors, between 'pure' nature and centuries of human intervention, **between place-making and placelessness/tracelessness/namelessness**
- Making sense of death: **coping and scoping**

# Against death or along with death?

- “art, architecture, music, literature and religions have used copious words **against** death” → placing loss within a frame of hope by transcending the physical realities of death, and by using culture-specific images of the afterlife
- Natural burial: thinking and acting **along with** death: bio-centric surrender to the earth story
- **Water, wind, sand, tides, horizon, vast expanses, iridescent play of light and shade: disposal rites as surrender to aquatic amniotic dissolution**

# Ways of grief, trajectories of consolation

Today's 'selfie' culture

Today's predicament





## Seascapes and sand-writing

- Building dams **against death, against nothingness, against absence**
- Playing a name **against the tide**
- Writing hope/belief/trust/eternity **against the tide**
- Is there a way to go **along with the tide?** Nothing fixed, nothing stable
- But not in my backyard ...
- Creative tension between place-making/meaning-making/symbol-making and rolling **along with the tide**
- Being effaced, erased, wiped out, **obliterated**: zero is just zero, nothingness as the still point between positive and negative



# Geographies of death, disposal, dispersal

Therapeutic landscapes/seascapes/tidescapes:  
**affinity spaces**, symbolic density

- Rituals of remembrance, rituals of **displacement**, rituals of scattering ashes and letting go
- Commodification of **liminal/sacred spaces?**
- And yet: such places may double as a valuable, market-oriented land/area **conservation tool**
- Our **final (environmental) footprint?**

