AUTOBODYOGRAPHIES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF THE ENTANGLEMENTS BETWEEN BODIES, TIME, AND (IM)MORTALITY WITHIN A CONSUMER CULTURE

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Abstract

Throughout this thesis, I explore the entanglements between bodies, time, (im)mortality, and consumption activities within the primary context of tattoo consumption. Three key research questions are addressed: First, how might bodily modifications relate in contrasting ways to cultural notions of time and lived temporality? Second, how and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities? Third, why might the consumption of temporal permanence still be sought in an ‘accelerating’ cultural context? And how and why might people endeavour to attain a sense of temporal permanence for themselves and/others through modifying the impermanent body? To answer these questions, an iterative ethnographic research design was employed. This comprised participant observation at three tattoo studios, two tattoo conventions, and three art/museum exhibitions (Body Worlds, Amsterdam; death: the human experience, Bristol; and Time: Tattoo Art Today, London); multiple biographical and elicitation style interviews with 18 tattoo consumers; and photography. An iterative hermeneutic style of analysis was adopted, including both thematic and narrative approaches, to analyse and interpret the data attained.

The findings revolve around the temporality of bodily modifications, with a particular focus on the temporality of tattoo consumption. Namely, how this form of consumption relates to cultural notions of time and lived temporality. Three key temporal themes are identified in the data. In the first theme- Autobodyographies: Inscribing, revising, and hiding temporality- the concept of ‘autobodyographies’ being introduced in this thesis is unpacked. Here, I explore participants’ ongoing processes of inscribing, revising, and hiding multiple marks of time, including tattoos, through and upon their bodies. The second theme- Broken beings: Repairing temporal ruptures- explores how time has frequently become foregrounded within participants’ lives following biographical disruption, and tattoos have helped them to construct a sense of temporal order out of this temporal disorientation. The final theme- Inking immortality: Transcending temporal boundaries- discusses how participants typically hold a finite conception of time and regularly fear death. It revolves around participants’ construction of symbolic legacies for deceased loved ones through inscribing memorial tattoos into their skin, and three overlapping functions of memorial tattoos identified in the data are discussed.

This thesis contributes to extant consumer research concerning bodies and/or time in three key ways. First, by introducing and unpacking the account of autobodyographies, it brings literature regarding bodies and time into more direct conversation. I offer more nuanced understandings of body-time entanglements by considering people’s (re)negotiations of multiple temporal inscriptions, including tattoos, through and upon their bodies. By exploring how both intentional and unintentional temporal inscriptions intermingle on the body’s surface in narrating temporalised identities, I also bring greater attention to pre-reflective consumption behaviours and retrospective meaning-making. Moreover, I enrich my insights in light of cultural notions and experiences of time and bodies, alongside the Western history of tattooing. More culturally-informed understandings of body-time relations are thereby also provided. Second, my findings build upon, and contrast with, the concept of ‘liquid consumption’. I indicate how, in the backdrop of a seemingly accelerating and transient consumer culture, people might be actively seeking a sense of stability, continuity, and durability in practices of (re)solidification such as tattoo consumption. I also demonstrate how, on a broader existential level, persons have never turned their back on the pursuit of immortality for themselves and others, and hence the ultimate form of ‘solidity’. Third, I contribute to the slowly growing literature surrounding death and consumption by providing insights into why the body might sometimes paradoxically be considered as a secure site on which to build a sense of immortality. Finally, this thesis is a tale of vulnerability, and I suggest how and why marketers could help persons to venerate their vulnerability, rather than profiting from its vilification.
Declaration

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Chapter 1: Prologue

“In the consumer package, there is one object finer, more precious and more dazzling than any other... That object is the BODY” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 129).

“...Man alone measures time. Man alone chimes the hour. And, because of this, man alone suffers a paralyzing fear that no other creature endures. A fear of time running out” (Albom, 2012, pp. 2-3).

At the heart of this thesis, lies an ethnographic exploration of the entanglements between bodies, time, and (im)mortality within a consumer culture. I have been preoccupied with perfecting my body for as long as I can remember. I recently discovered an old Jacqueline Wilson diary I wrote in sporadically around the age of 12 or 13. Within it were a series of questions for the diarist to answer and revisit in 10 years’ time. One of these questions was: ‘What do you want to look like?’ My answer: ‘A flawless skinned girl’. And so my obsession with skin began. I have modified my body, including my skin, hair, and contours, in countless ways ad infinitum over the years. I have shampooed; conditioned; cut; straightened; curled; crimped; tied-up; bleached; backcombed; sprayed; texturised; clipped extensions into; applied oil to; and squeezed lemon over my hair. In a bid to lose weight, tone my contours, and maintain a healthy body, I have restricted and monitored my diet; crunched my abdominals; lifted weights; and engaged in numerous cardio, sports, and exercise classes. And finally, as part of my endless, yet quixotic, endeavour to render it ‘flawless’, I have bathed; cleansed; toned; moisturised; massaged; exfoliated; tanned; applied masks, acne treatment, bio-oil, and make-up to; removed moles and hair from; prodded; pierced; tattooed; and spent many hours gazing into the mirror inspecting my skin for perceived imperfections.

As Turner (2008, p. 33) observes, “...the most obvious fact of human existence, [is] that human beings have, and to some extent are, bodies”. This indicates the centrality of embodiment to our lives. In addition to being preoccupied with my own body, as reflected in Baudrillard’s observation above, Western consumer culture is also obsessed with the body (Featherstone, 1991; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010). Indeed, during my frequent strolls through Manchester city centre, I am regularly confronted by swathes of consumers’ shopping bodies; body modification studios; mannequins; shops selling body-related products; and idealised representations of bodies on billboards and in-store advertisements (Figure 1). Western consumer culture presents the body as being malleable ‘plastic’ (Featherstone, 1991; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010; Synnott, 1993), and persons are viewing the body as increasingly central to the self (Shilling, 2012). Thus, whilst
humans have long modified their bodies to express individual and collective identities (Caplan, 2000; Haiken, 1997), we are witnessing the expansion of numerous body modification industries, from make-up to tattooing (Featherstone, 2000; Velliquette, Murray, and Evers, 2006). Furthermore, the body is becoming increasingly foregrounded within our lives owing to ageing Western populations; ongoing developments in genetic engineering and stem cell research; and the threat of global health epidemics, for example the 2014-2016 Ebola ‘crisis’ (Howson and Inglis, 2001; Shilling, 2012; Turner, 2012; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). The importance of the body to societal issues is captured in Turner’s (1992, p. 12) claim that we are living in a ‘somatic society’. Subsequently, despite being neglected in sociology and consumer research until the mid 1980s/1990s (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Shilling, 2012), due to its centrality to Western consumer culture and human existence, we arguably require enhanced understandings of human embodiment. The body is, therefore, central to this thesis.

**Figure 1: Bodies in Manchester city centre**

Like the body, I have long been concerned about time. One of my earliest memories is asking my teacher on the first day of primary school, shortly following the morning assembly, whether it was break time yet. I have felt stressed about being late for meetings, annoyed my family on long car journeys by asking ‘are we nearly there yet?’ on repeat, and worried about time ultimately running out for myself and loved ones. Indeed, as I am writing this, I am becoming increasingly aware of the clock ticking on the wall behind my desk. Each ominous
tick reminds me I am one second closer to death, followed by a tock which brings to mind an image of my future crumbling before my eyes. A wave of anxiety washes over my body as I return my attention to writing.

Human existence is flooded by time. Whilst time has always been at the forefront of my life, I have never been so cognisant of the human obsession with time as when undertaking this PhD project. Almost every time I turn on the radio, the word time reverberates in my ears, as I become aware of somebody crooning yet again about the time elapsed since they were last with their love. Countless references to time are found in popular culture, including songs (e.g. Muse’s Time is Running out; Coldplay’s Clocks; and Linkin Park’s In The End); novels (e.g. The Time Traveller’s Wife; The Time Keeper; and Night Watch); films (e.g. Collateral Beauty; Back to the Future; and In Time); and television programmes (e.g. Timeless; Bernard’s Watch; and Doctor Who). Moreover, it has been observed that persons in Western cultures are increasingly viewing their lives as ‘accelerated’ (Bauman, 2000; Elliott and Hsu, 2016; Rosa, 2003), and their time as ‘squeezed’ (Agger, 2011; Shove, Trentmann, and Wilk, 2009; Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005). We thus often hear of time-related maladies, such as being stressed and harried, ‘burnout’, ‘brownout’, and time poverty (Rigby, 2015; Shove et al., 2009; Southerton, 2009; Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005; Thompson, 1996).

Marketers contribute to this perceived acceleration by fostering ‘want-now-consumerism’ (Elliott, 2008), for example by instilling fear in consumers that they will miss out on dazzling sales discounts if they do not hurry (Figure 2). Furthermore, companies frequently build obsolescence into goods, such as clothing in the fast fashion markets (Appadurai, 1996; Harvey, 1989; Samsioe and Bardhi, 2014), and technological products like phones and computers (Bloom, 2017; Elliott, 2008; Graham and Thrift, 2007). However, marketers also promise that consumers can either save time through investing in offerings such as fast food, express delivery services, and instant tan, or decelerate time by using anti-ageing cosmetics (Coupland, 2009) and engaging in the ‘slow food’ (Allatt, 2016; Parkins, 2004; Shove et al., 2009) and ‘slow living’ (Williams, 2015) movements. Due to being so integral to our lives, it is thus arguably important to foster greater understandings of human temporality. Time and lived temporality are, therefore, also central to this thesis.

Bodies and time are irrevocably intertwined, as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. Our embodied lives are mediated by earthly cycles of light/darkness (Birth, 2012; Hoffman, 2009), alongside culturally constructed notions of time, such as linear clock time (Adam, 1995; Birth, 2012). Our bodies also undergo internal temporally-defined cycles and rhythms,
including the beating heart and hormone production (Hoffman, 2009; Lefebvre, 2004), and we carry time on our bodies when wearing watches, charm bracelets, and vintage clothing. Multiple temporal inscriptions are also captured upon the surface of our bodies, including intentional temporal markers (e.g. tattoos), alongside more unintentional etchings of temporality (e.g. wrinkles). The body’s surface can, therefore, narrate partial accounts of the past, present, and anticipated future. I introduce and develop an account of body-time entanglements termed *autobodyographies* within the findings chapter to illustrate this.

**Figure 2: Time in consumer culture**

Owing to our embodied and temporal existence, however, we are ‘beings-towards-death’ (Heidegger, 1927 [2010]). Indeed, as Turley (2005, p. 68) eloquently observes, “...all consumers are on death row”. The temporal body is thus ultimately uncontrollable, despite marketers promising consumers that they can master time in various ways through the body, from scar reduction treatments to anti-ageing technologies. Death has cast a shadow over my life since I lost my mum when I was 11 years old. Over the next decade, several of the other most important people in my life proceeded to pass away, including my grandparents (with whom I was very close) and childhood pet cat, Nike (who was never far from my side when I was at home). As I write, I look ahead to the various photo frames standing on my desk, and I can see their smiling faces looking back at me. Tears begin to fill my eyes, and a dull ache sears through my chest as I am reminded of how much I miss them. After several lingering seconds, I return my attention to writing.
A discernible theme in consumer research is that persons are experiencing increasingly ephemeral relationships with possessions and people within what has been termed a ‘liquid’ (i.e. transient) consumer culture (Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould, 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012, 2017; Figueiredo and Uncles, 2015; also see Bauman, 1992a; 2000, 2003). However, the longstanding human pursuit of immortality, and thus ‘solidity’ on an existential level, whether through placing faith in religious belief systems or investing in cryonics, endures (Cave, 2012). Indeed, when planning this project, I was in the midst of dreaming about a memorial tattoo to create symbolic legacies for my mum, grandparents, and cat, which I subsequently acquired as my first tattoo and reflect upon in this thesis. As the study progressed, therefore, (im)mortality emerged as a third key research construct being explored in relation to body-time entanglements.

Within sociology, the relations between time and bodies have been investigated in the context of ill/injured bodies (Seymour, 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2003) and sporting bodies (Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes, 2007); yet, consumer culture is not foregrounded in such work. Furthermore, there are sociological studies of ageing bodies (e.g. Tulle, 2008; Twigg, 2004), alongside the consumption of anti-ageing technologies (e.g. Brooks, 2010; Kinnunen, 2010), and the tattooing of life events (e.g. Oksanen and Turtiaten, 2005; Sweetman, 1999). Yet, echoing the work of classic social theorists concerning embodiment (e.g. Foucault and Elias), time remains relatively implicit in this literature (for exceptions see Cooke, 2008; Coupland, 2009; Katz and Marshall, 2003). Likewise, in consumer research there are discussions of ageing consumers (e.g. Catterall and Maclaran, 2001; Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001, 2006), and explorations into the consumption of cosmetic surgery (Sayre, 1999; Schouten, 1991) and tattooing (Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Velliquette et al., 2006) following significant life events. Time, however, usually remains implicit in such work (for an exception see Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001). Finally, echoing philosophical discussions of time (e.g. Heidegger, 1927 [2010]; Husserl, 1964; Ricoeur, 1984), investigations into time within marketing and consumer research typically pay limited explicit attention to the body (e.g. Baker and Cameron, 1996; Robinson, 2015; Russell and Levy, 2012; for exceptions see Toyoki, Schwob, Hietanen, and Johnsen, 2013; Woermann and Rokka, 2015).

Subsequently, this thesis seeks to bring conversations concerning bodies and time into more direct conversation. It responds to calls in consumer research for more embodied understandings of time (Toyoki et al., 2013), a more ‘contextualised’ appreciation of temporality (Robinson, 2015), and further explorations into skin and consumption (Patterson...
and Schroeder, 2010). The three following research questions are explored within the primary context of tattoo consumption:

1. How might bodily modifications relate in contrasting ways to cultural notions of time and lived temporality?

2. How and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities?

3a. Why might the consumption of temporal permanence still be sought in an ‘accelerating’ cultural context?

And;

3b. How and why might people endeavour to attain a sense of temporal permanence for themselves and/or others through modifying the _impermanent_ body?

In answering these questions, this thesis makes three key contributions to the existing literature concerning bodies and time in consumer research. First, by exploring how _multiple_ marks of temporality are inscribed, revised, and hidden through and upon the body’s surface, I offer more nuanced understandings of the relations between bodies and time. Furthermore, by contextualising my findings in relation to broader cultural conceptions and experiences of time and embodiment, I also provide more culturally-informed insights into body-time entanglements. By considering how the body’s surface might also sometimes unintentionally, or retrospectively, narrate times within a person’s past, present, and anticipated future, I also bring greater attention to pre-reflective consumption behaviours and processes of retrospective meaning-making, which are underexplored (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010).

Second, I build upon the theory of liquid consumption (Bardhi _et al._, 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017; _forthcoming_) by demonstrating how, in the backdrop of an apparently accelerating and transient consumer culture, persons are seemingly seeking comfort in practices of ‘(re)solidification’ (e.g. tattoo consumption). Third, I contribute to the slowly growing literature surrounding death and consumption (e.g. Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Dobscha, 2016; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017; Turley, 2005; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012, 2016) by illustrating how consumers might sometimes consider the body a more secure and stable means through which to construct symbolic legacies for themselves and/or others than their possessions.

Finally, indicating the marketing and societal implications of the thesis, I urge multiple social actors, including marketers and the government, to help bring death out of the shadows and venerate vulnerability rather than vilifying it. This thesis is, above all, a narrative about
human vulnerability, which represents an emergent theme as it became evident in the latter stages of study that vulnerability is a common thread cutting across the constructs of bodies, time, and (im)mortality. Indeed, experiences of vulnerability arguably unite every one of us (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg, 2005; Baker, LaBarge, and Baker, 2016; Hamilton, Dunnett, and Piacentini, 2016; Shildrick, 2002). In the thesis epilogue, I discuss this emergent theme and argue that vulnerability should not be considered as a wholly negative shortcoming to be avoided, transcended, or hidden, as is often the case in Western cultures (Baker et al., 2016; Shildrick, 2002). To paraphrase Descartes, ‘I am vulnerable, therefore I am’.

The thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature concerning the body, time, and their interrelations across a range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The first half of the chapter concerns the human body, wherein I discuss why the body was traditionally neglected in sociology and consumer research, but is now being more thoroughly explored; the contrasting natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological views of the body; the temporalised view of the body taken in this thesis; the centrality of the body to Western consumer culture; the Western history of tattooing; and finally, the links between tattooing and the self. The second half revolves around time/temporality, wherein I discuss the notion of linear clock time and contrast it with natural ideas of cyclical time; the temporal acceleration and fragmentation experienced in contemporary Western cultures; philosophical theorisations of time; the embodied view of time/temporality taken in this thesis; the entanglements between time and bodies within consumer culture; and finally, the human pursuit of immortality through various paths. I conclude the chapter by outlining the literature gaps being addressed and remind readers of my three key research questions.

In Chapter 3, I detail the iterative ethnographic research design employed. I first discuss interpretive consumer research, and my hermeneutic assumptions concerning ontology and epistemology. Second, I explicate why the primary context of tattoo consumption was adopted to study body-time interrelations. I then proceed to detail and justify why the data collection and analysis/interpretation methods adopted were chosen, including discussions of (participant) observation and the eight fieldwork sites visited; the biographical and elicitation style interviews conducted with 18 tattoo consumers, alongside how participants were recruited; visual methods; and the iterative hermeneutic data analysis/interpretation approach taken. Next, I elucidate the importance of researcher reflexivity and transparency, before outlining the ethical considerations upheld throughout the project.
In Chapter 4, I explore the study’s key findings, which revolve around the temporality of bodily modifications, with a particular focus on the temporality of tattoo consumption; namely, how this mode of consumption relates to cultural notions of time and lived temporality. I first detail the emergent theoretical ‘framework’ drawn upon to interpret the data, before exploring the three key temporal themes identified. In each theme, I provide readers with interview, fieldnote, and research diary extracts, and compare and contrast my findings with extant research to demonstrate the theoretical contributions being developed.

Within the first theme- *Autobodyographies: Inscribing, revising, and hiding temporality*- I discuss the centrality of skin to expressing human temporality, and unpack the account of autobodyographies being introduced in this thesis. I explore participants’ (re)negotiation of multiple temporal inscriptions, including wrinkles, scars, hair transformations, and weight loss/gain, alongside tattoos, within ongoing processes of inscribing, revising, and hiding time through and upon their bodies. The second theme- *Broken beings: Repairing temporal ruptures*- discusses how, following significant life turning points, participants’ temporal perceptions/orientations ordinarily shifted alongside their sense of self, with time thus becoming foregrounded within their lives. I then explore how participants often tattoo their bodies following biographical disruption to construct a sense of temporal order and continuity out of temporal disorientation. The final theme- *Inking immortality: Transcending temporal boundaries*- revolves around participants’ perceptions of time and death, alongside their construction of symbolic legacies for themselves and/or others through tattooing their impermanent bodies. Here I discuss three ways in which memorial tattoos helped participants to immortalise loved ones, and their attempts to prolong the permanence of their tattoos.

In Chapter 5, I first introduce the chapter by reminding readers of the study’s key research questions and providing an overview of each chapter of the thesis. Second, I offer a critical discussion of the intricate dialectic of control running through the three key themes identified and discussed in the findings chapter. Next, I unpack the study’s key contributions to theory, methodology, practice, and society, before detailing its three main limitations, and suggesting several potential avenues for future research.

Finally, in the thesis epilogue I offer my concluding reflections about the key lessons I have learned about academic research and life’s fragility through undertaking this PhD thesis. Above all, I have learned that we need a sense of a temporally finite life to inspire action and make our lives more meaningful. I hope that any readers of this thesis might also regard death with less trepidation once they arrive at its conclusion.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Chapter introduction

To provide the thesis with a theoretical foundation, in addition to illustrating how it builds upon, and addresses gaps within, the existing body of literature, in this chapter I explore the extant literature concerning human bodies, time/temporality, and how they interrelate. In doing so, I draw upon literature spanning a wide range of disciplines, including consumer research; marketing; sociology; anthropology; feminist theory; philosophy; cultural/social gerontology; psychology; and geography (Figure 3). Since some of the literature surrounding bodies and time is intricate, taking inspiration from existing work (e.g. Bardhi et al., 2012; Cherrier and Murray, 2007; McCarron, 2000) I also refer to films, novels, and television programmes in the chapter to develop a clearer understanding of theoretical ideas. I also draw upon news articles to illustrate how academic concepts can apply to a ‘real-world’ context.

The chapter is structured in two interrelated halves. First, I explore literature regarding the human body, including why the body was traditionally neglected in consumer research and sociology; natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological views of bodies; the centrality of the body to Western consumer culture; the Western history of tattooing; and the relations between tattooing and the self. Second, I discuss literature concerning time/temporality, including contrasting natural cyclical and modern linear notions of time; temporal acceleration and fragmentation; philosophical discussions of time; the relations between bodies, time, and consumer culture; and finally, the human desire for immortality and how it relates to the body, time, and consumption activities.

Figure 3: Selection of the literature explored
2.2. Human bodies

“As consumers, we are routinely preoccupied with skin. We clothe it, we expose it to the sun, we depilate it, we moisturize it, we beautify it with cosmetics, we cleanse it, we tattoo it, we pierce it and we scar it... Skin reflects the dynamic relationship between inside and outside, self and society, between personal identity projects and marketplace cultures”

(Patterson and Schroeder, 2010, p. 254).

We live a thoroughly embodied existence; both living as bodies every day, yet we can also consider the body as an object to be modified (Turner, 2008). Indicative of the body’s complexity, it has historically been represented through a range of metaphors, including the body as a tomb enslaving the soul, a machine requiring continuous maintenance, and plastic to be moulded in line with bodily ideals (Synnott, 1993). It is also entangled with constructed dualisms, such as mind/body; culture/nature; subject/object; structure/agency; and male/female; which influence how the body is theorised and experienced (ibid; Patterson and Elliott, 2002; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995). Following his radical process of doubting everything, including that his body existed, Descartes concluded that a substantial distinction exists between mind and body. He thus argued that the body is a machine, whereas the superior mind constitutes the essence of the self, as encapsulated in his statement cogito ergo sum, namely ‘I think, therefore I am’ (Kirk, 2003; Turner, 2008). The mind/body dualism still permeates our lives, as reflected in the saying ‘mind over matter’, which is often drawn upon to inspire people to power through diets and workouts (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Pure Gym mind/body poster
Furthermore, it has impacted the way in which human beings have been conceptualised in academic thought. Anthropology has been explicitly interested in bodily matters since the 19th Century, owing to its focus on bodily differences across cultures, the nature/culture dualism, and the marking of bodies during social rituals (Patterson and Elliott, 2002; Synnott, 1993; Turner, 1991a; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Sociology and consumer research, however, have been slower to follow. The body implicitly featured in the work of classic social theorists, for example Marx’s attention to working class bodies and Weber’s interest in the modern rationalisation of bodies (Shilling, 2012). Yet, as influenced by the nature/culture dualism (see Canniford and Shankar, 2013), the body was once seen as a natural rather than social/cultural entity. Hence, the body was considered as a topic of study for the natural sciences, from which sociology sought to distinguish itself. Coupled with the longstanding notion of people being minds rather than bodies, as shaped by the aforementioned mind/body opposition, the body was traditionally neglected in sociology (Shilling, 2012; Synnott, 1993; Turner, 1991a, 2008; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Similarly, before the ‘interpretive turn’ of the late 1980s, in consumer research consumers were largely conceptualised as computers, and thus as rational information processors rather than affective embodied beings (Belk, 1995; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Ostergaard and Jantzen, 2002; Patterson and Elliott, 2002).

Yet, accompanying the Western societal shifts detailed in the prologue, such as the growth in body modification industries, ageing populations, and the threat of global health epidemics, since the 1980s there has been rising sociological interest in embodiment (Featherstone, 2000; Shilling, 2005, 2012; Turner, 2008, 2012; Williams and Bendelow, 1998), much of which is found in the journal *Body & Society*. Likewise, since the mid 1990s, there has been a slowly growing consumer research stream explicitly studying the body, which is referred to in this chapter. As Shildrick (2000, p. 79) contends, “Contra Descartes, we are obsessed with our bodies”. Subsequently, human bodies lie at the heart of this thesis and I will now explore the contrasting natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological perspectives of the body.

2.2.1. The natural body

The natural view of the body refers to its biological materiality (Williams, 2006); however, the fields of biology and medicine are beyond the remits of this thesis, and thus I will mainly refer to social science literature. Faircloth (2003) observes that the medicalised body, which focuses on the body’s biological aspects rather than its social/cultural ones, is a dominant representation of the body in Western cultures. As surgeon and writer Gawande (2014) explains, the body ages biologically over time, hair becomes grey due to a reduction in hair
pigment cells, and age spots manifest owing to a break-down in skin cells. We are thereby encouraged by social actors such as the government, healthcare professionals, and marketers, to adopt ‘healthy lifestyles’ to ward off bodily decay, as further discussed in Section 2.3.6.3.

The natural view of bodies is nicely expressed by Bakhtin’s (1984) concept of the grotesque body, which he argues is found in medieval carnivals. According to Bakhtin (1984, pp. 317-318), the grotesque body is “...never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body...The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body...” Hence, unlike the classical body which is sealed, civilised, and, finished, the grotesque body is processual and displays gaping orifices and bodily fluids, such as blood, spit, and urine (ibid). In her exploration of scarification, namely the process of cutting designs (typically with a scalpel) into the skin, Pitts (1998) conceptualises scarified bodies as grotesque. This is because scarification involves the flesh being perforated and inner bodily fluids (i.e. blood) being displayed (ibid). Similarly, Immergut (2011) theorises that hairy male bodies are considered grotesque in Western cultures, as hair is often perceived to be dirty, wild, and unruly; pushing beyond the skin and propelling bodily odours outwards. Men are thereby increasingly encouraged to engage in ‘manscaping’ practices, such as waxing and shaving hair below the head (ibid). Finally, Goulding, Saren, and Follett (2003) observe how grotesque bodies are depicted in contemporary art exhibitions, for example Tracey Emin’s 1998 piece My Bed (which displayed bodily secretions), in addition to films such as Silence of the Lambs (which involves scenes of cannibalism). Indeed, the grotesque body, and its emphasis on the body’s biological qualities, is also notably depicted in the drug-related films Trainspotting and Requiem for a Dream, wherein drug addicts’ flesh is often pierced with needles and scenes of bodily fluids are commonplace.

Notwithstanding consumer culture’s promise that the body is infinitely malleable, owing to its obdurate biological nature it does not always obey our efforts to transform it (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010; Shilling, 2012). This is clear in Parmentier and Fischer’s (2011) exploration of fashion models, in which several models had to ‘abandon’ desired embodied identities. Their bodies no longer represented, or could be moulded into, the culturally celebrated ‘look’, for example due to putting on weight or their appearance being considered as passé following shifting aesthetic standards (ibid). Likewise, Valtonen’s (2012) discussion of how being small sometimes constrains her actions, and Cooke’s (2008) exploration of the eventual ‘rewriting’ of time on the skin following Botox®, also demonstrate the body’s obdurate biological quality. Indeed, studies of bodily pain, injury, and illness especially draw
attention to the body’s fragility and our vulnerability (Frank, 1995; Seymour, 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2003; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2016). The body represents the locus of our physical mortality (Becker, 1973; Cave, 2012; Section 2.3.6), and hence the body’s biology represents our ultimate constraint.

However, the natural view of the body has often been drawn upon to construct and naturalise differences between people, and thus can pose problems concerning the justification of social inequalities (Shilling, 2012; Williams, 2006). Given longstanding binary oppositions ordering our experiences of the world (e.g. the mind/body dualism) are gendered, women have traditionally been linked with an ‘inferior’ irrational female body and men with a ‘superior’ rational male mind (Charles, 2002; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Shilling, 2012; Synnott, 1993). This is despite widespread evidence that men are becoming increasingly concerned with bodily appearance, for example meeting the muscular Western male bodily ideal (Atkinson, 2008; Frith and Gleeson, 2004; Gill, Henwood, and McLean, 2005; Grogan, 2008; Holliday and Cairnie, 2007; Patterson and Elliott, 2002; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004; Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Thus, the body’s biological properties have historically been drawn upon to present certain social groups as superior to others, and hence to naturalise inequalities between the sexes, as well as races, ages, religions, and sexualities (Shilling, 2012). Indeed, Hitler famously introduced Nazi eugenics to argue for, and strive towards, an Aryan master race. Subsequently, whilst the biological quality of bodies is being paid increasing attention in the sociology of health and illness, constructionist approaches have typically been more popular in the social sciences (Shilling, 2012; Williams, 2006), to now be explored.

2.2.2. The sociocultural body

As MacCormack (2006) notes, there are tensions surrounding flesh and discourse, which alludes to ongoing debates concerning whether bodies are natural, cultural, or indeed both. Contrasting with the natural view of the body, several of the most influential theorists who take a more sociocultural approach towards embodiment will now be detailed (although they differ with regards to where they situate persons with regards to structure and agency).

2.2.2.1. Foucault, Butler, and discursive bodies

Foucault has had a significant impact on how the body has been considered across the social sciences, especially in sociology and feminist theory (e.g. Davis, 1995; Frost, 2005; Scott, 2010; Turner, 1991b). He argues that, rather than there being an essential autonomous self, persons are discursively produced as subjects within fields of power relations, outside of which they cannot exist (Charles, 2002; Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford, 2006; Sullivan,
power and discourse are central themes in his work, with the latter being disseminated in society by those holding the power, and related, but not wholly reducible to, written and spoken language (Barad, 2003; Shankar et al., 2006; Shilling, 2012). As Barad (2003, p. 819) explains, “...discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said”. Subsequently, Foucault largely regards the body as a somewhat passive surface onto which external power struggles and discourses are inscribed (Crossley, 1995a, 1996; McNay, 1991, 1994; Shilling, 2012; Turner, 2008, 2012). For example, his concept of **bio-power** encapsulates the observation that from the 18th Century, European states became concerned with using technologies to control the bodies of populations within various social intuitions, such as schools and armies (Synnott, 1993). Moreover, Foucault argued that, in contrast to pre-modern societies (wherein bodies were controlled with physical force via executions and torture), modern societies are structured akin to Bentham’s panopticon (Foucault, 1979). Namely, a circular design of prison in which prisoners are observed via a single watchtower, yet cannot tell when they are being watched, and thereby act as though they always are (*ibid*). Subsequently, he introduces the concept of the **disciplinary gaze** to contend that persons in contemporary societies self-police their bodies in relation to internalised and insidious societal norms (*ibid*).

In consumer research, Thompson and Hirschman (1995) draw upon the disciplinary gaze to demonstrate how persons in Western cultures continuously monitor their bodies in relation to culturally constructed bodily ideals. Furthermore, Kristensen, Askegaard, and Jeppesen (2013) utilise Foucault’s notion of governmentality to illustrate how the way in which consumers govern their diets, and perceive certain foods (e.g. fat and carbs), is shaped by health discourses. In sociology, Scott (2010) explores how swimmers’ bodies are disciplined via training regimes and lessons in which they learn how to most effectively move their bodies, alongside how swimmers self-discipline their bodily behaviours based on the imagined gaze of the lifeguard.

Foucault’s social constructionist approach to bodies, however, has been critiqued for neglecting the body’s biology. This is given he views the body as wholly constituted by discourse, and hence it has been suggested he slips into discursive essentialism (Shilling, 2012; Weinberg, 2012). Moreover, although as Shankar *et al.* (2006, p. 1019) observe, in Foucault’s later work concerning technologies of the self he recognises that “...wherever there is power, there is also resistance”, his work has been challenged for denying people agency. Foucault has thus been criticised for presenting bodies as ‘docile’ passive surfaces on
which discourses and power is inscribed, rather than embodied beings having the capacity to create, resist, or change these discourses (McNay, 1991, 1994; Shilling, 2012; Turner, 2012). Nevertheless, Foucault’s work has notably shaped the ideas of prominent feminist theorist Butler regarding bodies, sex(uality), and gender. Butler (1990, 1993) challenges essentialist views of sex and gender and arguably in turn the body’s non-discursive material reality. She introduces the concept of performativity to convey how “…what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts posited through the gendered stylisation of the body” (Butler, 1990, p. xv). Butler thus contends that, rather than being essential and natural, sex and gender are constructed through the repetitive and compelled (bodily) performance of normative sexed and gendered discourses (ibid). Indeed, Butler (1993, p. 2) argues that “regulatory norms of sex work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies”. Hence, akin to Foucault, for Butler bodies are never pre or non-discursive, since she believes that “… discourses do actually live in bodies. They lodge in bodies... And nobody can survive without, in some sense, being carried by discourse” (cited in Meijer and Prins, 1998, p. 282). Within consumer research, Goulding and Saren (2009) have drawn upon Butler’s notion of performativity to theorise how Goths often engage in gender ‘play’ through adopting various costumes and make-up looks. However, like Foucault, Butler has been critiqued for largely denying embodied persons any agency, despite some acknowledgement that there can be (non-conscious) ‘slippages’ in the performance of discourses (Nelson, 1999).

2.2.2.2. Goffman’s interacting bodies

Goffman’s (1959, 1963, 1983) symbolic interactionist work concerning bodily (inter)action in social spaces has also influenced how the body has been considered within the social sciences (e.g. Frost, 2005; Sassatelli, 2000). According to Goffman (1983), humans are social beings who during their daily lives are often involved in face-to-face interactions with other embodied beings, which he terms the interaction order. Drawing upon a dramaturgical metaphor (thus sharing some similarities with Butler’s concept of performativity), Goffman contends that the interaction order provides a theatre in which bodily displays are enacted and ‘read’ by others (ibid). He introduces the notion of shared vocabularies of body idiom to convey how we internalise social standards, customs, and norms about how to express and move our bodies in public spaces (Goffman, 1963). This is crucial for smooth social interaction and impression management; namely, for learning how to manage our bodies in socially normative ways and to classify others’ bodies (Goffman, 1959; Shilling, 2012;
Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Sassatelli (2000), for example, has drawn on Goffman to study how gym spaces are organised via a set of socially shared expectations about how the body should be moved/displayed, and where gym members’ gazes should be directed.

For Goffman, our bodily expressions and movements are read by others as indicators of moral worth, and they are thus central to the maintenance of social identities (Crossley, 1995b). When ‘normal’ appearances are read off people’s bodies, persons feel safe to continue as normal in their daily lives (Goffman, 1963). However, if people’s behaviour is deemed to deviate from shared vocabularies of body idiom, they can be stigmatised by others (ibid). This can thereby result in a spoiled social identity and feelings of shame and embarrassment (ibid). As Goffman (ibid, p. 11) explains, “The Greeks... originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier”, and stigma is hence another central concept in his work. Frost (2005) has utilised Goffman’s theories concerning stigma to explore how young women can experience body shame when their bodies contrast with culturally constructed beauty ideals, such as being thin and tall with flawless skin. Similarly, Larsen, Patterson, and Markham (2014) have drawn upon Goffman’s notion of stigma to explore the stigma management processes involved in contemporary tattoo consumption.

Subsequently, Goffman’s work sensitises us to the centrality of the body to our everyday social interactions and relationships. By noting physical responses to embarrassment, such as blushing and sweating, unlike Foucault and Butler, Goffman seems to somewhat acknowledge the biological aspect of bodies. Yet, his work has been critiqued for focusing on individual bodies in the micro social order, rather than explaining where shared vocabularies of body idiom arise from and how they might change (Shilling, 2012). Furthermore, although he stresses the importance of the body to social interactions, he focuses on how the mind internalises social norms, and thus provides a more cognitive view of embodiment (ibid).

2.2.2.3. Mauss, Bourdieu, Elias, and bodily dispositions

Mauss has also been an important figure in bringing bodily matters back into sociology with his concept of techniques of the body, i.e. “...the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies” (Mauss, 1973, p. 70). He observed how each society has an embodied habitus which governs how we learn to use and express our bodies, for example in terms of eating; drinking; walking; running; dancing; jumping; climbing; swimming; and marching (ibid; also see Crossley, 1995b, 2005, 2007; Williams and Bendelow, 1998):

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We laugh at the 'goose-step'. It is the way the German Army can obtain the maximum extension of the leg, given in particular that all Northerners, high on their legs, like to make steps as long as possible. In the absence of these exercises, we Frenchmen remain more or less knock-kneed. Here is one of those idiosyncrasies which are simultaneously matters of race, of individual mentality and of collective mentality. Techniques such as those of the about-turn are among the most curious. The about-turn 'on principle' English-style is so different from our own that it takes considerable study to master it (Mauss, 1973, p. 82).

Crossley (2005) has taken inspiration from Mauss’s theory of body techniques, which he challenges for neglecting their more agentic nature, to introduce his concept of Reflexive Body Techniques (henceforth RBT). He defines RBT as “…those body techniques whose primary purpose is to work back upon the body, so as to modify, maintain or thematize it in some way” (ibid, p. 9). He contends that each society or social group has an array of RBTs, some of which are undertaken more often, and are more socially acceptable, than others (e.g. teeth brushing). He also explains how RBTs can cluster together, for example teeth brushing, showering, and putting on make-up as part of a daily routine. He thus offers a more reflexive account of body techniques than Mauss, in addition to providing a non-dualistic approach to embodiment by recognising that we both have and are bodies.

Likewise, Bourdieu has made significant contributions to how the body has been considered by social theorists (e.g. Entwistle, 2000; Monaghan, 2000; Parmentier and Fischer, 2011; Simpson, 2014; Tulle, 2007; Wacquant, 1995a). Akin to Mauss, the habitus (which stems from Aristotle) is also a central concept in Bourdieu’s (1984) work concerning distinction, (embodied) class, and taste. In contrast to habit, which denotes more mechanistic stimulus-response behaviour (Crossley, 2013), as conceptualised by Bourdieu the habitus denotes a system of durable, transposable dispositions, which are a product of class upbringing, and are largely enacted unthinkingly, in turn reproducing class distinctions revolving around taste (Adams, 2006; Entwistle, 2000; Sweetman, 2003). Indeed, as Bourdieu (1984, p. 6) asserts, “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier”. Furthermore, for Bourdieu “…the body is the most indisputable materialisation of class taste…” (ibid, p. 190). That is, class and taste are embodied, since persons from different social classes learn to use their bodies in different ways, for example regarding practices of eating which can in turn change bodily contours.

Bourdieu (1986, p. 46) also introduces the concept of capital, which he defines as “...accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy...” According to Bourdieu, there are three main convertible types of capital: economic (e.g. money), cultural (e.g. educational qualifications), and social
(e.g. social connections), all of which can be embodied (ibid). Hence, his notion of capital has been used to theorise how bodies might encompass more or less physical capital depending on the social field. For example, Wacquant (1995a) found that boxers have a ‘pugilistic’ habitus. That is, they learn how to read their own and others’ bodies, with some bodies (e.g. Muhammad Ali’s hard jaw, muscular physique, and tough skin), considered as comprising higher levels of bodily capital (ibid). Furthermore, since older bodies are often denigrated in Western cultures, old/ageing bodies are often perceived to be accompanied by a reduction in (physical) capital (Gullette, 2004; Simpson, 2014).

Bourdieu’s theories help us to understand how the body (which is shaped by an internalised classed habitus) can express people’s social positions. Although Bourdieu adopted the concept of habitus to transcend the structure/agency duality (Entwistle, 2000; Sweetman, 2003), and embodied “…dispositions are durable but not eternal” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 344), he has been critiqued for painting an overly structured picture of persons (Adams, 2006; Shilling, 2012; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). He has also been challenged for focusing on class at the expense of other aspects of subjectivity, such as gender and race (Shilling, 2012).

Finally, Elias (1978), like Mauss and Bourdieu, also draws upon the concept of habitus. He offers an historical investigation of how we have been socialised into different forms of bodily deportment over time. According to Elias, we are social beings entangled in dynamic social figurations, namely intricate webs of social relationships (ibid; Atkinson, 2003, 2012). Within these social figurations, we learn how to view, use, and transform our bodies, and the body thus expresses marks of social processes, norms, and expectations (Elias, 1978). Elias observes that within medieval European societies, people’s bodies were uncivilised and bodily expressions of emotion and desires were unregulated (ibid; Atkinson, 2012; Shilling, 2012). This resonates with Bakhtin’s (1984) aforementioned concept of the grotesque body. However, from the Renaissance period onwards, following the development of court societies bodies were perceived as indicators of social status, and thus integral to the acquisition of distinction and symbolic power (Elias, 1978). Bodies, therefore, became more civilised over time through being disciplined via the internalisation of societal codes of conduct demanding greater control over bodily desires and emotions (ibid; Atkinson, 2012; Shilling, 2012).

Subsequently, Elias takes a dialectical approach to human embodiment by conceptualising the body as a dynamic biological and social entity (Shilling, 2012). His work has been drawn upon in studies of diet (Mennell, 1987), tattooing (Atkinson, 2003, 2004), and cosmetic surgery (Atkinson, 2008). Atkinson (2008), discusses how in response to perceived
challenges to hegemonic masculinity in Western cultures (e.g. in the workplace), men sometimes seek to control their bodies (and careers) by engaging in cosmetic surgery. Similarly, he theorises how tattooed persons are entangled in dynamic social figurations which influence their tattooing projects (Atkinson, 2003, 2004). He notes how people might tattoo the body as a means of coping with and expressing their emotions, in a more controlled way (ibid). Elias’s work concerning the civilising of bodies has, however, been problematised for neglecting how the internalisation of behavioural codes might depend on the context (i.e. private vs. public spaces), and how decivilising processes also exist (Shilling, 2012).

2.2.3. The lived body

As Shilling (2005) observes, social constructionist approaches to the body have been challenged for neglecting people’s lived experiences of embodiment. Subsequently, phenomenological accounts of embodiment have become increasingly influential. They focus on “…the body’s own experience of its embodiment…” (ibid, p. 17), and seek to blur subject/object and mind/body dualities. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological theories about embodied perception and Leder’s discussion of bodily dys-appearance will now be explored.

2.2.3.1. Merleau-Ponty’s perceiving bodies

As Crossley (1996) explains, while Foucault provides an inscribed approach to the body, Merleau-Ponty offers a lived account. Merleau-Ponty (1962) sought to provide a non-dualistic theory of human embodiment, and he hence challenges Descartes’s aforementioned mind/body dualism. He contends that our bodies are central to our ‘being-in-the-world’ given we perceive the world from the perspective of our body (ibid). He thus argues that mind and body are entangled, rather than consciousness and perception being connected to only our minds; the mind is in the body and the body in the mind (ibid; Bendelow and Williams, 1995; Crossley, 1995a; 1996, 2012; Howson and Inglis, 2001; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Alongside blurring the mind/body dualism, Merleau-Ponty (1962) challenges the subject/object opposition. He contends that body and self are intertwined, with the body being the basis of our lived experiences (ibid). Hence, for Merleau-Ponty we both have and are bodies; the body is the subject, and the subject is the body, meaning that human beings are body-subjects (ibid; Aho, 2005; Bendelow and Williams, 1995; Crossley, 1995a, 2012; Howson and Inglis, 2001). Furthermore, akin to Mauss, Bourdieu, and Elias, the habitus features in Merleau-Ponty’s work. He asserts that we have a practical involvement with the world, whereby embodied subjects engage in pre-reflective habitual actions based on internalised corporeal schemas. For example, we can sense our left from the right from the
standpoint of our bodies, and can usually habitually walk and talk without having to think about it very much due to having an intuitive understanding of our body and how it is positioned in space (Aho, 2005; Crossley, 1995a, 1996, 2012; Howson and Inglis, 2001).

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological notions of embodiment have, however, been critiqued for providing an overly individualistic view of embodied subjects (Crossley, 1996; Howson and Inglis, 2001). Indeed, phenomenological approaches to consumer research more generally have been challenged for neglecting the ‘context of context’, and hence the wider historically-situated and dynamic sociocultural context into which persons are entangled (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), which in turn also influences our embodied experiences.

2.2.3.2. Leder’s dys-appearing bodies

Leder (1990) also provides a phenomenological conception of embodiment. He details three key ways in which the body functions, and shifts between presence and absence, in our everyday lives. The first he terms the ecstatic body, which encapsulates the perceptive and sensational aspects of the body’s surface. Reflecting Merleau-Ponty, he argues that we often engage in pre-reflective and habitual bodily movements in our everyday lives without too much consideration (e.g. walking), unless these habitual processes are disrupted (e.g. we trip over). The second he terms the recessive body, which concerns the body’s involuntary internal cycles and rhythms. He notes how these internal bodily processes are usually taken-for-granted unless something goes wrong, for example we struggle to breathe. To bolster these ideas, he provides the example of the digestion process:

“I have a slight sense of the apple piece sliding down the back of my throat. Past a certain point this fades away… There is a sense of fullness in the midsection… over the next hour… the sensation of fullness disappears, leaving my middle in vague neutrality. Some time later this is punctuated by a mild crampy sensation that pulls my attention downwards… Throughout most of this time my awareness of the digestive process has been virtually non-existent” (Leder, 1990, pp. 38-39).

Subsequently, Leder (1990) argues that the body ordinarily fades into the background of our daily lives. He uses the term disappearance to denote this tendency for both the body’s surface (ecstatic body) and involuntary internal cycles/rhythms (recessive body) to be taken-for-granted. However, drawing upon the prefix dys, which means bad/ill, Leder introduces a third notion of the body he labels the dys-appearing body. He asserts that when we experience pain, illness, or dysfunction, the body dys-appears and hence comes into the forefront of our lives (ibid). Indeed, DuBose (1997) uses Leder’s concept of bodily dys-appearance to theorise how emotional pain following bereavement often brings the body into focus. Leder (1990) offers the following example to further illustrate the dys-appearing body:
“A man is playing tennis. His attention dwells upon the ball flying toward him, the movements of his opponent, the corner of the court toward which he aims his return… But as he swings he feels a sudden pain in the chest… His attention now shifts to the expanding focus of pain… A background region, the chest is now thematized” (ibid, p. 71).

Whilst Leder’s (1990) concept of bodily dys-appearance relates to the body unintentionally coming into focus when in physical/emotional pain, Chandler (2013) observes how through self-injury persons can invite their bodies to dys-appear. Moreover, Leder (1990) observes how women are expected to regularly monitor the surface of their bodies. Yet, in agreement with Williams (1998), he arguably underplays the attention both women and men direct towards meeting bodily ideals within ‘body-obsessed’ consumer culture (Patterson and Elliott, 2002; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). Indeed, we are socialised into constantly monitoring our bodies for perceived imperfections, meaning that they are arguably never far from the vanguard of our thoughts. Gimlin (2006), however, contends that, whilst Leder’s work seems to neglect how persons regularly engage in ongoing body projects today, these two apparently contrasting observations can be reconciled. Namely, in her study of cosmetic surgery, she observes how people often acquire surgical procedures to make their bodies seem ‘normal’, and hence fade into the background of their lives (ibid).

2.2.4. Corporeal realism

Thus far I have explored the contrasting natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological views of the body. Sociologist of the body, Chris Shilling, introduced an approach towards the body he terms corporeal realism, which integrates natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological conceptions of embodiment (Shilling, 2005, 2012). It has been referred to in sociological discussions of ageing bodies (Tulle, 2008), obese bodies (Monaghan, Hollands, and Pritchard, 2010), and ill/injured bodies (Sparkes and Smith, 2011; Williams, 2006). Shilling (2005, 2012) is critical of reducing the body to either biology or discourse, and instead considers the body and society as ‘real’ emergent entities which interact. Indeed, the body-society relationship lies at the centre of corporeal realism (ibid). He views bodies as to some extent material; but that bodies and our embodied actions are also shaped by society (e.g. constructed bodily norms and ideals), which we in turn have the capacity as embodied agents to either maintain or transform (ibid). Shilling thus strives to provide a non-reductionist, critical, and more holistic approach towards human embodiment, which iterates between biology/society, subject/object, and structure/agency (ibid). He considers the body as:
“...A multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society: a location for the attempted transmission of socially approved techniques, habits, and norms; possessed of emergent properties and capacities... that also make it a lived vehicle for the varied experience and mediation of these societal phenomenon; and an active recreator/re-creator of society” (Shilling, 2012, p. 250).

Shilling’s notion of corporeal realism also explicitly considers the temporal dimensions of body-society relations by considering how these occur and shift over time:

“...If we want to understand the relationship between embodied actors and society, it is necessary not only a) to identify how the body may be generatively associated with the emergence of social structures; but also trace over time b) how established structures form a context for embodied action and have the potential to shape people’s bodily actions and habits; and c) how the generative capacities of embodied subjects actually interact with these structures and either reproduce or transform them...” (Shilling, 2005, p. 14; my emphasis).

Considering the theorists discussed in the literature review thus far, Merleau-Ponty explicitly considers subjects as both embodied and temporal beings. Indeed, he contends we must understand “time as the subject and the subject as time” (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 444, cited in Robinson, 2015). Yet, as Aho (2005) notes, Merleau-Ponty is primarily concerned with pre-conscious bodily behaviour in the present moment, rather than also considering how perceptions of the past and future shape embodied action. For Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 427), “it is always in the present that we are centred” (cited in Aho, 2005). Whereas, in notable social/literary theorists’ explorations of embodiment, as previously detailed, time ordinarily remains implicit, for example Bakhtin’s (1984) conceptualisation of grotesque bodies as being in process; Foucault’s (1979) observation of how the way in which bodies are governed has changed over time; and Elias’s (1978) theories concerning how we learn to use our bodies within dynamic social figurations. Despite explicitly recognising the temporal dimensions of embodiment, Shilling (2005) arguably pays them somewhat limited attention. Indeed, he notes how the temporal aspects of body-society relations “…can be summarised much more briefly” (ibid, p. 14). Nor does he contextualise embodied behaviours (e.g. body modification activities) in relation to broader macro constructions of time.

Subsequently, taking inspiration from Shilling, throughout this thesis I conceptualise the body as a dynamic biological and sociocultural entity which both shapes, and is shaped by, sociocultural discourses concerning bodies and time, people’s biographies, technologies, and consumption activities. However, I place further emphasis upon how the body is also a temporal entity by developing a temporalised understanding of embodiment in this thesis, to be further discussed in Section 2.3.5 and developed in my findings chapter (Chapter 4).
2.2.5. The body in consumer culture

Graeber (2011, p. 491; original italics) explains how, “The English ‘to consume’ derives from the Latin verb consumere, meaning ‘to seize or take over completely’ and hence, by extension, to ‘eat up, devour, waste, destroy, or spend’”. Warde (2017) observes how consumption is a slippery concept discussed in multiple disciplines, meaning that there is no one agreed upon academic definition. He defines it, however, as “…a process whereby agents engage in appropriation of a good, service, performance, information or ambience, and which is a product of human work” (ibid, p. 66). In agreement about the difficulties of defining consumption, Campbell (1995, p. 100) considers it as any activity involving “…the selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair and disposal of any product or service”. Hence, taking inspiration from their definitions, I consider consumption as a temporal process involving embodied persons dreaming about, selecting, acquiring, using, maintaining/repairing, and potentially disposing of an idea, experience, product, or service.

Consumer culture denotes “…a culture of consumption... it is the dominant mode of culture reproduction developed in the west over the course of modernity” (Slater, 1997, p. 8; original italics). It is believed to have developed in the west from the 18th century industrial revolution and the advent of mass production increasingly focused on the creation of consumer goods (ibid). Trentmann (2004) warns, however, that a more nuanced understanding of the development of consumer culture is needed, rather than presenting a broad-brush staged view. Indeed, Karababa and Ger (2011) illustrate how active consumers and a culture of consumption might have originated in the Ottoman coffee house culture before the typical narrative presented above. Nevertheless, it has been observed that a large proportion of the population in both developed and developing cultures now organise their lives around consumer goods as objects of desire rather than necessities (Graeber, 2011).

Despite Warde’s (1994, 2005) caution that not all consumption practices are engaged in to express identity, it has been argued that consumption is central to identity construction today (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Featherstone, 2007). Indeed, consumer identity projects are a key topic studied in the field of Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Influenced by the expansion of the advertising industry in the 1920s, the body has become an increasingly central aspect of Western consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Patterson and Elliott, 2002). In Western consumer culture, the body is presented as ‘plastic’ (e.g. in advertisements), and hence as a highly malleable entity which both men and women are encouraged to (re)shape in line with constructed bodily ideals.
(Featherstone, 1991; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010; Synnott, 1993; Thompson and Hirschman, 1998). As demonstrated in Section 2.2.1, however, owing to the body’s obdurate materiality it cannot always be bent at will. Furthermore, Patterson and Schroeder (2010) refer to heavily tattooed women’s experiences to illustrate how persons do not have an equal level of financial resources, or cultural knowledge, with which to modify their bodies. Nevertheless, marketers encourage consumers to cut; pierce; stretch; moisturise; exfoliate; wax; burn; starve; exercise; tone; pleasure; and paint their bodies *ad infinitum*. The notion of the outer body representing inner character stems back to Plato who believed that a ‘beautiful’ body symbolised moral goodness, which inspired Lavater’s later physiognomic work (Synnott, 1993; Twine, 2002). Physiognomic assumptions are embedded in marketing discourses and influence our perceptions of others, whereby to deviate from constructed beauty ideals, for example slimness for women and muscularity for men (Grogan, 2008), is framed as indicating a flawed self (Featherstone, 1991, 2010; Gimlin, 2006). Disney princesses, for example, are usually depicted as conventionally beautiful and villains as what culture considers ugly. Moreover, tattooed bodies have long been associated with deviance in the west (Atkinson, 2003; Fisher, 2002; Kosut, 2006a).

Beauty ideals, however, are fluid and change over time and space. Regarding female Western bodily ideals, Grogan (2008) observes that, whilst from the Middle Ages a curvaceous female body was considered as desirable owing to symbolising fertility, since the 1920s slimness has been idealised, as influenced by models such as Twiggy and Kate Moss. Given the popularity of the Kardashian clan, large bottoms and lips have now also been incorporated into this (unrealistic) Western female beauty standard. Within a non-Western context, gold teeth are sometimes seen as favourable in Brazil due to connotations of higher social status (Machado-Borges, 2009), and the Brazilian female beauty ideal includes a small waist, with large hips, thighs, and buttocks (Edmonds, 2007). Furthermore, Grogan (2008) notes how poorer countries have historically considered larger bodies as more desirable owing to associations between plumpness and wealth, although this may now be shifting due to Western bodily ideals seeping into other cultures via the globalised mass media. After World War II, for example, increasing numbers of Asian consumers sought to ‘Westernise’ their eyes by investing in eyelid surgeries; and likewise, there is evidence of African American and Brazilian consumers seeking to ‘Westernise’ their noses by undergoing rhinoplasty procedures (Edmonds, 2007; Haiken, 1997).
The body has been modified for thousands of years across all cultures as a means of personal and social identity expression; however, Shilling (2012) contends that the body is being viewed as increasingly central to the self in Western cultures. As Lasch (1984) asserts, the ‘surface’ is central to the management of self-impressions in consumer culture, and indeed skin, as our largest organ, is highly visible within our daily lives (Connor, 2004). It has numerous functions, such as supporting; containing; shielding; individuating; connecting; sexualising; recharging; signifying; and destroying (ibid, p. 49). The body’s surface, including skin, thus represents the locus of much consumption activity (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010). Subsequently, over recent decades we have witnessed the expansion of body modification industries, including the tattooing; piercing; cosmetic surgery; skincare and cosmetics; diet and healthy food; and exercise markets (Featherstone, 2000). To illustrate, between 2003-2013 the number of tattoo studios in the UK grew in number by 173% (The Economist, 2014); reported cosmetic surgical procedures in the UK rose by 37% between 2009-2013 (Mintel, 2014a); and the UK beauty and personal care market was estimated to be worth almost £9.8 billion in 2016 (Mintel, 2017).

Body modification practices are wide-ranging and thus include both regular practices like teeth brushing and more infrequent procedures like breast augmentation. They thus vary with regards to their social acceptability and how they relate to different aspects of subjectivity (Crossley, 2005). Taking cosmetic surgery and tattooing as examples (given both have become increasingly popular in the west over recent decades), they have traditionally been gendered and classed in opposite directions. Cosmetic surgery has typically been associated with femininity (Atkinson, 2008; Haiken, 1997) and the upper/middle classes (Elliott, 2008; Haiken, 1997). Whereas, tattooing has long been linked with masculinity (Atkinson, 2003; Mifflin, 1997) and the working classes (Atkinson, 2003). Yet, with men increasingly undergoing cosmetic surgery (Atkinson, 2008; Elliott, 2008) and more women and middle classes becoming tattooed following the ‘tattoo renaissance’ (Atkinson, 2003), how body modification practices relate to different vectors of subjectivity evidently changes over time. Given tattoo consumption is the primary context employed in this thesis, it will be considered in more depth in the following section.

Reflecting the growth in body modification industries, Shilling (2012) introduces the concept of body project to convey how persons reflexively work on their bodies as individualistic projects of identity today. This arguably overly agentic and undersocialised notion resonates with Giddens’s (1991) contention that, within late modernity, the self is reflexively made
through the maintenance of coherent biographical narratives, of which the body is a central aspect. Atkinson (2003, pp. 25-27) further demarcates the concept of body project by providing a typology comprising: camouflaging body projects which hide/aesthetically enhance the body (e.g. make-up); extending body projects which compensate for biological flaws (e.g. contact lenses); adapting body projects whereby body parts are removed/repaired to maintain the body (e.g. hair removal); and redesigning body projects which involves more permanent bodily reconstruction (e.g. tattooing).

Bradshaw and Chatzidakis (2016) urge us to consider the skin, not just as a canvas to be modified in identity construction, but also the sensory world as representing a second skin impacting our biological skin and embodied lives. However, reflecting trends in Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), the largest area of consumer research concerning the body relates to consumers’ identity projects. Indeed, Patterson and Schroeder (2010) draw upon the metaphor of skin as projection surface to explain how consumer researchers typically consider the body’s surface as expressive of identity. Bengtsson, Ostberg, and Kjeldgaard (2005), for example, investigate how brand logo tattoos are sometimes personalised as a form of individual self-expression, such as a reverse Nike tick. Moreover, Askegaard, Gertsen, and Langer (2002) draw upon Giddens’s work concerning the self in late modernity to explore the part cosmetic surgery plays in consumers’ reflexive identity projects. These authors, however, take a more socialised view of identity projects than Giddens, as they also consider how the social environment shapes people’s engagement in cosmetic surgery to construct their identities, for example Western ideals of youthful bodies. Likewise, Joy, Sherry, Troilo, and Deschenes (2010) explore beautification practices, alongside the work of Levinas, to foster a more socialised view of the embodied self. They illustrate how the ‘Other’ impacts how persons engage in these bodily practices, in addition to how we are never fully in control of how others gaze upon and ‘read’ our bodies (ibid).

Considering studies into more specific aspects of subjectivity, the greatest number of embodiment-focused explorations in consumer research concern gender. Demonstrating how gendered expectations shape body modification practices, both Goulding and Follett (2002) and Patterson and Elliott (2003) found that, given tattooing was traditionally considered a ‘masculine’ practice, tattooed women sometimes try to balance their looks, for example by wearing more overtly ‘feminine’ clothing. Regarding men’s embodied experiences, Patterson and Elliott (2002) observe how there has been an inversion of the ‘male gaze’ in recent years, since men are frequently encouraged to monitor their bodies in light of constructed male
bodily ideals. Similarly, Schroeder and Zwick (2004) explore how the male body is represented in and constructed by advertising images. Instead of an inversion of the male gaze, they argue that it has perhaps *expanded*, with men and women gazing upon their own and each other’s bodies (*ibid*). I will now turn my attention to tattoo consumption.

### 2.2.6. Western history of tattooing

Given I agree with Atkinson’s (2003, p. 8) contention that “…we can only understand a given social behaviour if it is contextually embedded within long-term social processes”, I will now explore the Western history of tattooing, since tattoo consumption is my primary research context. Tattooing is a longstanding body modification practice with evidence of tattooed Egyptian mummies from around 2000 BC (Jones, 2000; Turner, 2000). Furthermore, in 1991 in the Italian Ötztal Alps, 5000-year-old mummified body ‘Ötzi the iceman’ was famously discovered with 61 tattoos inscribed into his skin. These have since been traced to various illnesses and bodily pains (Engelking, 2015; Jones, 2000).

Demonstrating longstanding links between tattooing and deviance, the Ancient Greeks and Romans marked the bodies of slaves and criminals with tattoos, which were referred to as ‘stigma’ (Atkinson, 2003; Back, 2007; Fisher, 2002; Gustafson, 2000; Jones, 2000; Larsen et al., 2014). The permanent marks inscribed onto criminals’ bodies would usually indicate the crime committed, the ruler offended by the crime, or the punishment suffered for the crime (Gustafson, 2000). Whilst there is evidence that early Christians in Roman territories marked their bodies to illustrate commitment to Christ (Back, 2007), the Catholic Church banned tattoos in the year 787 until the 10th Century. As Fleming (2000, p. 78) explains, in the Bible the following Leviticus 19:28 passage is found prohibiting tattooing: “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you”. Permanent markings were seen as disfiguring the body created in God’s image (Falk, 1995; Sanders, 1989). This further indicates how tattooing has long been viewed as taboo in Western cultures.

While there is evidence of people permanently marking their bodies for magical purposes in 16th and 17th Century England (Rosecrans, 2000), it is widely held that European tattooing (re)emerged from Captain James Cook’s expeditions to the South Pacific in the 1760s. He discovered tattooed ‘savages’, and thereby introduced the Tahitian word ‘ta-tu’ meaning to strike/mark into Western societies, which later became the word ‘tattoo’ (Atkinson, 2003; Back, 2007; Benson 2000; Fisher, 2002; Fleming, 2000; Sanders, 1989). Demonstrating the raced history of tattooing, tattooed tribal members were shipped to Europe and placed under the gaze of the British upper classes, beginning with Cook who returned to England from his
voyage of 1774 with a tattooed Tahitian prince named Omai (Back, 2007; Fleming, 2000; Sanders, 1989). Their heavily tattooed bodies were a wondrous symbol of pre-modern primitivism and foreign exotica (Atkinson, 2003). Sailors in this period also began to return home from their travels with exotic symbols tattooed on their bodies (ibid; Fisher, 2002; Sanders, 1989). This in turn inspired a tattooing craze in 1880s-1890s Europe within the aristocracy and upper classes who acquired tattoos as marks of social status (Bradley, 2000; Fisher, 2002). Indeed, there is evidence that Queen Victoria, Edward VII, and George V had tattoos (Bradley, 2000), illustrating the complex classed history of tattooing.

Meanwhile, 1880-1920 the heavily tattooed bodies of these tribal members were paraded for visual consumption in carnivals and freak shows as a popular form of public entertainment (Atkinson, 2003). This evoked contrasts between ‘uncivilised’ pre-modern cultures and ‘civilised’ modernity (ibid). To tantalise male audiences, and incorporate a pornographic flavour, heavily tattooed women were also displayed in these shows, and they would often wear little clothing, perform stripteases, and profess tales of ‘tattoo rape’, i.e. that they had been tattooed involuntarily by savage tribes (ibid; Braunberger, 2000; Fisher, 2002).

From the 1920s, due to the introduction of electric tattooing machines and tattoo parlours becoming more commonplace in downtown areas of cities like New York, tattoos became more widely available and less exotic (Atkinson, 2003; Braunberger, 2000). In contrast to being marked as criminals by others in earlier epochs, tattooing became more widely and intentionally undertaken by criminals (Atkinson, 2002, 2003; Kosut, 2006a; Larsen et al., 2014), biker gangs (Atkinson, 2002, 2003; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson, 2005), and the military (Atkinson, 2002; Kosut, 2006a) to indicate social membership. Indeed, in an ethnographic study of a tattooed Chicano gang member, Phillips (2001) found that tattooing is important for gang members as a mark of social identity in violent and unfamiliar institutionalised spaces, such as prisons. Indicating its classed and gendered associations, tattooing thereby developed strong links with masculinity, deviance, and the working classes (Atkinson, 2003).

Western cultures, however, have experienced a ‘tattoo renaissance’ since the 1960/70s owing to technical innovations in tattooing guns and inks; tattooists with artistic backgrounds entering the profession; the development of specialist magazines, websites, and conventions; and the influence of tattooed celebrities, for example David Beckham. Tattoos, therefore, are now acquired by a more diverse mix of people (Atkinson, 2003; Benson, 2000; Fleming, 2000; Hewitt, 1997; Kosut, 2006b; Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Rubin, 1988; Sanders, 1989; Velliquette, Murray, and Creyer, 1998; Velliquette et al., 2006). Customisable tattoos,
unlike the standardised ‘flash’ designs of the past, are now widely available (Atkinson, 2003; Benson, 2000). The tattoo removal market is also growing in response to more people becoming tattooed (Fisher, 2002; Mintel, 2016a), temporary fashion tattoos can be found in high street stores like Topshop, and semi-permanent tattooed make-up (e.g. eyebrows and lip liner) is also rising in popularity. Moreover, it has been observed that tattoos are increasingly being used to sell products, for example by using tattooed models in advertisements (Bengtsson et al., 2005; Bjerrisgaard, Kjeldgaard, and Bengtsson, 2012; Kosut 2006b; Figure 5), and growing numbers of people are acquiring brand logo tattoos, for example Nike ticks (Bengtsson et al., 2005; Orend and Gagne, 2009). These industry developments, therefore, illustrate how tattooing is becoming increasingly mainstream in Western consumer culture.

Perhaps in response to tattooing become more popular, rising numbers of people who might ordinarily have used tattooing to push against societal norms are now engaging in less typical body modification practices, such as branding, scarification, and sub-dermal implants (Myers, 1992; Sweetman, 2012). This is evident in the online Channel 4 series Body Mods, in which consumers are seen undergoing procedures such as tongue splitting, branding, and ear stretching. Indeed, Larsen et al. (2014) introduce the term commodity stigma to note how in-group stigmatisation is becoming more common in the tattooed population, as some tattoo consumers are stigmatised for adhering too closely to mainstream social standards.

Although tattooing is becoming more widespread, however, it is not entirely socially accepted, particularly for heavily tattooed persons or those with facial tattoos (Atkinson, 2003; Gustafson, 2000; Fisher, 2002; Hewitt, 1997; Kosut 2006a; Vail, 1999; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010; Sanders, 1988, 1989). Advertisements still play on associations between tattooing and deviance (Bjerrisgaard et al., 2012), and media discourses concerning body modification often present practices such as tattooing as a form of self-mutilation (Pitts, 1999). Furthermore, psychological and health research literature often pathologise tattooed people (Atkinson, 2003; Vail, 1999). To illustrate, studies concerning tattooing within these disciplines (which typically administer surveys to adolescent and college-aged populations) have reported links between tattooing and risk-taking behaviours (Armstrong and Murphy, 1997; Carroll et al., 2002; Dhossche, Snell, and Larder, 2000; Greif et al., 1999); mental health issues (Dhossche et al., 2000; Romans, Martin, Morris, and Harrison, 1998; Stirn, Hinz, and Brähler, 2006); and sexual abuse (Romans et al., 1998). The framing of tattoo consumers as being plagued by troubled minds is reflected in Jacqueline Wilson’s (1999) novel The Illustrated Mum. The protagonist’s mum, Marigold, is heavily tattooed and is
depicted as having mental health issues, a drinking problem, and at one point paints her whole body white with toxic paint:

“I pulled the light cord and stared at the white figure before me. ‘Marigold?’ I couldn’t believe what I saw. She was white all over. Even part of her hair. Her neck, her arms, her bare body, her legs. She’d painted herself white with the gloss paint. There were frantic white splodges all over her body, covering each and every tattoo... I put out my hand to touch her, to see if it was real. ‘No. Don’t. Not dry yet,’ said Marigold. ‘Not dry. Wet. So I can’t sit down. I can’t lie down. I can’t. But that’s OK. It will dry and so will I. And then I’ll be right. I’ll be white. I’ll be a good mother’...” (Wilson, 1999, p. 206).

Indeed, heavily tattooed women are often viewed particularly negatively (Braunberger, 2000; Patterson and Elliott, 2003), which is an issue to which I turn in the next section.

Figure 5: Tattooed model in property advertisement

2.2.7. Tattooing (and) the self
Tattoos are highly polysemic body marks that have been used for a wide range of purposes throughout history, including bodily adornment; individual and collective identity expression; marking social status transitions; punitive reasons; and as a form of healing (Gustafson, 2000). As previously noted, people have used tattoos to mark others as having a particular identity, thereby taking control of their bodies, for example slaves and criminals (Atkinson, 2003; Fisher, 2002). Indeed, the Nazis notably etched numbers into the skin of their prisoners (Back, 2007; Falk, 1995). Yet, people also acquire tattoos to voluntarily express personal identity and group membership, for example ‘primitive’ tribes (Douglas, 2005; Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Sanders, 1989; Smeaton, 1898); ‘deviant’ gangs (Atkinson, 2002, 2003;
Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson, 2005; Phillips, 2001); the military (Atkinson, 2002; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson, 2005; Kosut, 2006a), football clubs and other brand communities (Back, 2007; Bengtsson et al., 2005; Orend and Gagne, 2009); and kinship/friendship groups (Back, 2007; Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Velliquette et al., 2006). I will now explore two evident tensions in the literature concerning tattooing and identity.

2.2.7.1. Inked women: Resistance and/or reproduction?

The concept of intersectionality sensitises us to how the self is comprised of multiple intersecting vectors of subjectivity, including sex, gender, class, age, sexuality, and race (Crenshaw, 1991; Nash, 2008). As explored in Section 2.2.6, tattooing has a longstanding gendered, classed, and raced history, and here I will focus on gender. In Ancient Egypt, it was primarily women who were tattooed (Goulding and Follett, 2002); yet, owing to historical associations between tattooing and masculinity/men in the West, and given increasing numbers of women are now acquiring tattoos, there is an ample literature base exploring women’s tattooing experiences. A tension in this work concerns whether women’s involvement with tattooing represents a means of resisting gender ideals, or reproduces them.

While other forms of body modification (e.g. cosmetic surgery and dieting) usually bring women’s bodies closer towards female bodily ideals, it has been suggested that tattooing potentially reconstructs women’s bodies in subversive and non-normative ways (Braunberger, 2000; Hardin, 1999). This is conceivably especially the case for heavily tattooed women or those inscribing culturally recognised symbols of masculinity into their skin (e.g. skulls, daggers, and tribal designs), which Atkinson (2002) asserts can challenge constructed associations between weakness and femininity. Indeed, it has been suggested that by becoming tattooed women can attain control over their bodies, in turn destabilising culturally constructed ideas of passive/docile femininity (Craighead, 2011; Pitts, 1998). Yet, whilst tattoos might enable women to attain some control over the aesthetics of their bodies, the artists tattooing them will ordinarily be men, although more women are now entering the profession (Roux, 2014). Furthermore, we are never fully in control over how our bodies are interpreted by others (Joy et al., 2010; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010); indeed, women’s tattooed bodies are sometimes viewed as being grotesque or monstrous in Western cultures (Braunberger, 2000; Patterson and Elliott, 2003; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010).

Alternatively, it has been argued that tattooed women frequently reproduce dominant gender discourses, rather than actively endeavouring to resist them. To demonstrate, women often tattoo small culturally recognised symbols of femininity into their skin, such as flowers,
butterflies, and fairies, thereby reflecting notions of delicate femininity (Atkinson, 2002; Braunberger, 2000; Craighead, 2011). They also at times use tattoos to aesthetically enhance the body (Atkinson, 2002; Goulding and Follett, 2002). Moreover, on the front covers of tattooing magazines (e.g. *Skin Deep* magazine) heavily tattooed women are often found posed seductively in their underwear (Mifflin, 1997; Figure 6). Likewise, at tattoo conventions tattooed women regularly parade in high heels and revealing clothing (Braunberger, 2000; Mifflin, 1997), reminiscent of the freak shows of the early 20th century. Finally, as Francis (2012) contends, bodies are heteroglossic and convey shifting indications of both femininity and masculinity. Hence, as women are still interpreted by others through the non-inked sections of their bodies, this potentially dilutes the subversive potential of their tattoos. Indeed, as aforementioned, women sometimes actively construct overtly ‘feminine’ appearances, for example through their clothing choices, to compensate for the marks of ‘masculinity’ inked on their flesh (Goulding and Follett, 2002; Patterson and Elliott, 2003). Consequently, tattooed women differ with regards to how heavily tattooed they are, their chosen tattoo imagery, and the size and bodily placements of these tattoos. Tattoos intermingle with the non-inked aspects of their bodies in producing shifting expressions of masculinity and/or femininity. Thus, the question of whether tattooed women resist or reproduce gender expectations should perhaps be considered as more of a dynamic dialectic.

![Figure 6: Skin Deep magazine front cover](image)

### 2.2.7.2. Inking identity: Meaningful and/or meaningless?

A second apparent tension within the literature concerns whether a tattoo represents a meaningless fashion trend or a meaningful marker of personal identity. Regarding the former,
as tattooing is often considered as art today (Kosut, 2006b), it has been observed that tattoos are being sold in consumer culture as a part of an aesthetic lifestyle. In a rather disembodied conceptual discussion of tattooing, Turner (2000) for example contrasts traditional tattooing with postmodern tattooing. He argues that in traditional societies, which he characterises as involving ‘thick solidarities’ and ‘hot loyalties’, tattoos are used as a compulsory means of marking collective identities. Whereas, he asserts that in contemporary societies, which comprise ‘thin solidarities’ and ‘cool loyalties’, tattoos are “…optional, decorative, impermanent and narcissistic” (ibid, p. 42). Indeed, several explorations of tattooing have found that some persons do acquire tattoos to aesthetically enhance the body (Atkinson, 2002; Goulding and Follett, 2002; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson, 2005; Sweetman, 1999).

However, people also regularly acquire tattoos to mark significant life events and social relationships, and/or have tattoos removed or covered as their sense of self changes (Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Shorten, 2014; Sweetman, 1999; Velliquette et al., 2006; Weller, 2014). Television programmes such as Miami Ink often involve tattooed consumers telling the emotional and meaningful stories attached to their tattoos. Technological advancements in tattooing enable people to cover older tattoos with newer ones, or remove tattoos via laser surgery. Yet, these methods involve financial expense and pain, and laser removal can leave permanent scars (Shelton and Peters, 2006). Hence, a tattoo arguably remains a permanent mark etched into an impermanent surface, and thus tattoos have been conceptualised as the ultimate ‘anti-fashion’ (Polhemus, 1995, cited in Sweetman, 1999). Furthermore, we should also consider the processes involved in tattooing, rather than just the end product, as is typical in Western cultures (Gell, 1993, cited in Sweetman, 1999). Thus, as Sweetman (1999) argues, due to the physicality and pain involved in acquiring/removing tattoos, they can never be considered as completely meaningless.

Subsequently, whilst it would be mistaken to view tattoos as unmediated windows into an individual’s ‘inner self’, it would arguably be equally as erroneous to view tattoos as just meaningless fads. As skin communicates multiple aspects of subjectivity, tattoos etch meaning into something already so meaningful, whilst also creating the body as, in Foucault’s terms, a ‘work of art’. The second half of the literature review will now consider time and temporality, alongside exploring the entanglements between bodies and time.
2.3. Time and temporality

“As mankind grew obsessed with its hours, the sorrow of lost time became a permanent hole in the human heart. People fretted over missed chances, over inefficient days: they worried constantly about how long they would live, because counting life’s moments had led, inevitably, to counting them down” (Albom, 2012, p. 62).

The second half of the literature review concerns time (i.e. earthly cycles and culturally constructed notions of time) and temporality (i.e. subjective lived experiences of time; see Hoy, 2009). Time is central to human existence. Our embodied lives are structured temporally by the Earth’s rotations and related cycles of light/darkness (Birth, 2012; Hoffman 2009; May and Thrift, 2001). Human temporality is also influenced by cultural ideas of time, such as linear clock time, alongside constructed temporal boundaries, for example between the past, present, and future (Adam, 1995; Birth, 2012). As Albom (2012, p. 18) notes, we use countless temporal expressions in our daily lives, such as “...Pass time. Waste time. Kill time. Lose time. In good time. Take your time. Save time. A long time. Right on time. Out of time. Mind the time. Be on time. Spare time. Keep time. Stall for time...”

As observed in the thesis prologue, in Western cultures people are increasingly viewing their lives as accelerated (Bauman, 2000; Elliott and Hsu, 2016; Rosa, 2003) and their time as squeezed (Agger, 2011; Southerton, 2009; Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005). Thompson (1996), for example, found that women juggling working lives and motherhood often feel hurried and pressured to maximise their time and keep to schedules. Accordingly, advice concerning how to strike a better work-life balance is becoming more widespread in organisations and is also found in news articles (Seager, 2016). Moreover, numerous products and services are offered in consumer culture which promise to save consumers’ time, for example fast food, high-speed broadband, and instant tan. Gyms are also offering faster ways to get fit, such as ‘HIIT’ workouts and power plate machines to accelerate workouts (Figure 7). Alternatively, slow food, living, and cities movements have also been created to ‘decelerate’ people’s lives (Parkins, 2004; Shove et al., 2009; Williams, 2015), and mindfulness meditation is becoming prevalent in Western cultures (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

May and Thrift (2001) argue that time and space cannot be considered in isolation. In this section, I explore the relations between time and bodies which, considering Roux’s (2014) theorisation of the body as a space, could be interpreted as an investigation of the links between time and space. Furthermore, I observe how earthly cycles influence our biological rhythms, the ways in which one’s environment (i.e. retail/service spaces) can influence
temporal perceptions, and the changing relations between time and space. I am, however, aware of the vast literature surrounding space/place in fields such as geography (e.g. Thrift, 1996), marketing (e.g. Medway and Warnaby, 2014), and interpretive consumer research (e.g. Peñaloza, 1998). Yet, in favour of a more thorough exploration of bodies and time, I will not be delving into it here. Moreover, whilst I acknowledge that time is studied in disciplines like physics (e.g. Einstein’s theory of relativity), this is also beyond the remits of this thesis.

Figure 7: Power plate machine at Pure Gym, Manchester

Subsequently, I will first explicate the dominant Western constructs and experiences of time, including linear clock time and accelerated fragmented time. I also explain how these macro cultural conceptions of time shape lived temporality, alongside individuals’ more meso and micro-level contexts. Second, I detail the views of three key philosophers concerning time, namely Husserl, Heidegger, and Ricoeur. Third, I explore the relations between bodies, time, and consumption activities, including a discussion of those activities which either enable consumers to hide or inscribe time through and upon their bodies. Fourth, I investigate the human pursuit of immortality, including the role time, the body, and consumption play in this longstanding quest. Finally, I provide a chapter conclusion, in which I identify the literature gaps I am addressing, and the three key research questions underpinning the thesis.
2.3.1. Linear clock time

Time is an elusive construct, and is often taken-for-granted due to being so ubiquitous in our everyday lives (Adam, 1995; Brockmeier, 2000; Grosz, 1999). Indeed, regarding the transient and immaterial nature of time, Grosz (1999, p. 1) observes:

“Time has a quality of intangibility, a fleeting half-life, emitting its duration-particles only in the passing or transformation of objects and events, thus erasing itself as such while it opens itself to movement and change. It has an evanescence, a fleeting or shimmering, highly precarious “identity” that resists concretisation, indication, or direct representation. Time is more intangible than any other “thing”, less able to be grasped conceptually or psychically”.

There is a longstanding academic debate concerning whether time is objective and physical, namely as something persisting independently of human action, or is subjective and phenomenological (Cunliffe, Luhman, and Boje, 2004; Ricoeur, 1984; Robinson, 2015; Schatzki 2009). Yet, as Weiss (1999) contends, these two accounts of time intertwine. For example, clocks are related to the Earth’s rotations, which in turn influence our embodied movements and rhythms (ibid). Many theorists do agree, however, that notions of time are socially shared and historically-situated constructions (e.g. Adam, 1995; Ancona, Goodman, and Lawrence, 2001; Birth, 2012; Davies, 1994; Nowotny, 1994; Robinson, 2015). Multiple conceptions of time operate in any given culture. However, in traditional pre-modern cultures time is typically associated with natural cycles and patterns, for example of the rising and setting of the sun and moon, and/or the movement of stars, sand, and water (Adam, 1995; Birth, 2012; Graham, 1981; Seymour, 2002). As Birth (2012) observes, in rural Trinidad time is still often gauged through observations of nature, such as the behaviour of animals and the blooming of certain trees. Arnould and Price’s (1993) study of river rafting found that these trips draw upon romantic notions of natural time, such as organising days around the rising/setting sun and ‘river time’, to construct an extraordinary hedonic service experience.

The following extract from Mitch Albom’s novel *The Time Keeper*, which tells the story of Dor, the man who first began measuring time, further illustrates this natural view of time:

“And before the days, you measure the moon. Dor had done this in exile, charting its stages- full moon, half moon, quarter moon, moonless. Unlike the sun, which looked the same every day, the changing moon gave Dor something to count, and he gouged holes on clay tablets until he noticed a pattern. The pattern was what the Greeks would later call months” (Albom, 2012, p. 33).

In the Middle Ages, bells and religious doctrine functioned as social clocks signalling the hours to be dedicated to prayer and the days on which to celebrate certain saints (May and Thrift, 2001). Yet, with the advent of modernity, namely the social order associated with industrialisation, the Enlightenment, and scientific progress (Giddens, 1991, 1998), time
and space were significantly intertwined. Time needed to become submissive in its use as a tool in the spatial navigation of the globe and the subsequent conquering of space (Bauman, 2000). Hence, to attain greater perceived control over time, it was routinised, standardised, and associated with mechanical clocks (Birth, 2012; Hoffman, 2009). This linear conception of time continued to be important during and following the Industrial Revolution to foster speed, efficiency, and mass production, and thus to more effectively discipline (working) bodies (Davies, 1994; Inglis and Holmes, 2000). Indeed, Taylor famously conducted time-and-motion studies, whereby the time taken to perform certain tasks was measured. Workers’ bodily movements were thereby disciplined in accordance with the most time-efficient way to perform certain tasks (Hoffman, 2009).

Subsequently, modern time is conceptualised as linear, episodic, and is sliced into the separable temporal modes of past, present, and future (Adam, 1995; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Davies, 1994; Graham, 1981; Inglis and Holmes, 2000). Time is thereby usually conceived as forwards-flowing and irreversible (Baudrillard, 1990), and is likened to a stretching road/ribbon (Graham, 1981), a forwards-facing arrow (Bauman, 1992a; Brockmeier, 2000; Hoffman, 2009), and limited economic resources like money (Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick, 2004; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Darian and Cohen, 1995; Davies, 1994; Graham, 1981; Hornik and Zakay, 1996; Inglis and Holmes, 2000). The link between time and money remains influential, which is well-captured in the 2011 film *In Time*, which depicts a futuristic society wherein the time left in one’s life is used as form of payment (e.g. for food and transport) until the person eventually dies. This economic notion of time has also influenced marketing studies, whereby time has been viewed as a scarce resource to be sliced up between various activities, products, and services (e.g. Darian and Cohen, 1995; Feldman and Hornik, 1981; Holbrook and Lehmann, 1981; Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning, 1976; Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube, 1995). Szmigin and Carrigan (2001), for example, found that ‘cognitively young’ older consumers (aged 51-73) regularly view time as finite, which in turn inspires the maximising of their (consumption) activities in the present.

Various objects have been used by societies to think about time across human history, such as bells, sundials, candles, and stones (Birth, 2012; May and Thrift, 2001). To render time less disorderly, the modern notion of linear time is regulated by clocks and calendars (Adam, 1995; Birth, 2012; Brockmeier, 2000; Chernus, 2011; Davies, 1994; Seymour, 2002). Our regular reference to these temporal artefacts shapes our thoughts about what time is (Birth, 2012). In Western cultures, we are socialised into adhering to clock time in childhood. We
are taught by our parents to tell the time in relation to mechanical or digital clocks and the
date with regards to the Gregorian calendar. The school day is also ordered temporally via a
mixture of clocks, bells, timetables, and calendars (Adam, 1995). Following Turkey’s
decision to delay the 2015 daylight savings clock change until political polls were completed,
many people in Turkey became confused about what the time was given many clocks change
automatically (BBC News, 2015a). Furthermore, to mark the 70-year anniversary of their
independence from Japan, North Korea recently turned back their clocks by 30 minutes and
entered a new (or rather their old) time zone ‘Pyongyang Time’, thus using time as a means
of political expression (BBC News, 2015b). These examples illustrate how dominant the idea
of linear clock time remains across vast areas of the globe, not only in Western cultures.

As Bash (2000, p. 187) asserts, “In social life, we do not interact with our surrounding world
immediately, but instead through a mediating conceptual sphere”. Thus, cultural notions of
time shape people’s perceptions and experiences of time, their identities, and embodied lives.
The idea of linear clock time, and related modern tenet of progress, fits with the notion of
identity/body projects (Bauman, 1992a). Hence, rather than being a given, the embodied self
is seen as something which should be reflexively created and enhanced over time (Giddens
1991; Shiling 2012). The linear understanding of living a finite lifespan from birth to death
also makes our actions more meaningful (Cave, 2012).

2.3.2. Temporal acceleration and fragmentation

Although Hsu (2014, p. 213) cautions how arguments concerning Western social acceleration
are often “...based on conjecture and hyperbole instead of actual empirical evidence”, there is
much discussion of temporal acceleration within academia and the popular media. It has been
observed that persons within contemporary Western cultures regularly perceive time as
accelerated (Bauman, 1992a, 2000; Chernus, 2011; Elliott and Hsu, 2016; Giddens, 1999;
Rosa, 2003). As Bauman (1992a, p. 174) remarks, today “…only the transience itself is
durable”. It has been suggested that Western perceptions of temporal acceleration originally
stemmed from developments beginning in the 19th Century in transport (i.e. the expansion of
stage coach and railway networks) and communication technologies (i.e. improvements in
postal and telegraph systems) (May and Thrift, 2001). Although, as May and Thrift (2001)
caution, the effects of these advances was dependent on social class and geographical
location (i.e. if living in a city or the countryside), and thus this speed was initially not
experienced by all. Likewise, even today not all social groups accelerate at the same pace, for
example some groups (e.g. the sick and elderly) might evidence unintentional deceleration
To demonstrate, Szmigin and Carrigan (2001) found that bodily ailments can lead to older consumers moving at a slower perceived tempo than in the past, with some activities (e.g. gardening) taking longer to complete. Yet, widespread perceptions of temporal acceleration have continued alongside more recent technological developments, for example in high-speed broadband for those with access to it.

Alongside marketplace ‘solutions’ to perceived temporal acceleration, such as the slow food movement (Parkins, 2004; Shove et al., 2009), yoga (Rosa, 2003), and the Alexander Technique (Thrift, 2000), marketers also engender perceptions of acceleration and transience by encouraging ‘want-now-consumerism’ (Elliott, 2008), and creating shorter shelf lives for technological products (Graham and Thrift, 2007) and clothing/fashions (Appadurai, 1996; Harvey, 1989; Samsioe and Bardhi, 2014). Moreover, links between the ‘good life’ and busily accumulating new leisure experiences as a form of cultural capital also leads to perceptions of temporal acceleration (Rosa, 2003; Southerton, 2009; Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005).

Finally, although people are not necessarily working more hours in paid work than in prior decades (Southerton, 2009; Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005), or sleeping for fewer hours than in the past (Hsu, 2014), shifts from a ‘9-5 Monday to Friday’ working culture, to a ‘24-hour society’ involving more irregular and individualised working hours have been identified as fragmenting collective temporalities, and leading to feelings of a time-pressed life (Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005). This is because this apparent fracturing of social temporalities has led to difficulties in coordinating time with others (i.e. friends) with different working hours (ibid). Moreover, it has been found that, with more women entering the workforce, they often face the burden of juggling work and childcare, thereby viewing their time as squeezed and their lives as hurried (ibid; Thompson, 1996).

It has been observed that technological developments (e.g. the internet) have also changed the relationship between time and space. We are apparently experiencing ‘time-space compression’ in an increasingly globalised world (Harvey, 1989); namely, it has been contended that time has shortened and space has contracted (or been annihilated), since we can now traverse space more instantaneously, for example in the online world (ibid; Bauman, 2000; Hoffman, 2009; Marcus, 1995; Rosa, 2003; Tsatsou, 2009). As Stein (2001) explains, this sense of a ‘shrinking world’ began in the 19th Century with developments in railways, steam ships, and telegraph networks. Owing to further developments in transport and communication technologies, it has been suggested that temporal experience has ‘flattened out’, and the present has become the most significant temporal mode in people’s lives.
(Agger, 2011; Bauman, 1992a, 2000; Higson, 2013; Nowotny, 1994; Rosa, 2003). Indeed, Thrift (2000) contends that the rising popularity of contemplative practices, such as the Alexander technique, has resulted in an expanded awareness of the present. Furthermore, Katz (1995) observes that in youth-obsessed Western cultures, people are encouraged to prevent/hide bodily signs of old age, which thereby gives the impression that the present is stretched and persons are living in an extended middle age. Likewise, Goulding and Shankar (2004) contend that constructed chronological age boundaries are blurring today, whereby persons are increasingly extending their youth.

However, we are arguably always shaped by both the (re)interpreted past and imagined or desired future. Regarding the continuing importance of the past, people often actively trace their life histories, for example through photographs (Belk, 2013; Holbrook, 2005); music collections (Shankar, Elliott, and Fitchett, 2009); online via Facebook timelines, blog posts and YouTube ‘vlogs’ (Belk, 2013); scrapbooks (Phillips, 2016); and through tattooing their bodies (Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Shorten, 2014; Sweetman, 1999; Velliquette et al., 2006; Weller, 2014). Furthermore, in Cherrier and Murray’s (2007) exploration of downshifting practices, they found that people can encounter difficulties when trying to shed past identities by disposing of material possessions. Concerning the ongoing significance of the future, we require a sense of future to inspire action and live meaningfully (Heidegger, 1927 [2010]; Robinson, 2015; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017). Moreover, the longstanding practice of people trying to extend themselves and/or others into the future to attain immortality (to be explored further in Section 2.3.6), also challenges the notion that the future is no longer as important to persons.

Subsequently, there are leaky boundaries between the past, present, and future in our lived temporal experiences, and it has thus been observed that time also seems fragmented today (Agger, 2011), including the future being perceived as increasingly fractured (Robinson, 2015). The intermingling of past, present, and future is demonstrated in Russell and Levy’s (2012, p. 341) study of ‘reconsumption’ practices, i.e. consumption experiences which consumers actively seek to experience again. Their participants would sometimes reinterpret their current sense of self through the lens of their past experiences with films, places, and/or novels, and likewise regularly reinterpreted the past from their current standpoint (ibid).

Similarly, the women in Thompson’s (1996) study of working mothers often drew on their memories of their childhood past to shape their adherence to schedules in the present. These present-day attempts to control time were in turn geared towards trying to create future
positive memories for their children, and avoid future regrets of not adequately balancing time between work and motherhood \(\textit{ibid}\). Furthermore, in Western consumer culture we witness the constant recycling of styles and images from different eras, and once seasonal food is now available all year round (Desmond, 2003). Indeed, to inspire a sense of nostalgia and the past, new objects are often made to look worn/old, such as ‘shabby chic’ furniture and worn denim jeans (Miller, 2009). The idea of fragmented time is well-captured in the novel \textit{The Time Traveller’s Wife}, which tells the complicated love story of Clare and her husband Henry, who involuntarily travels back and forth in time (Niffenegger, 2003).

Postmodern notions of fragmented time, and disrupted borders between past, present, and future and work/leisure time, relate to ideas of unstable fragmented identities (Bauman, 1992a; Brockmeier 2000). In such situations, persons are seen as incessantly constructing and re/deconstructing multiple selves (Ahuvia 2005; Firat and Venkat 1995). As Bauman (2000, p. 83) contends, “…Identities are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set”. The ‘plastic’ body is depicted in consumer culture as central to achieving this incessant identity (trans)formation (Featherstone 1991; Patterson and Schroeder 2010).

2.3.3. Shifting temporal perceptions

Broader macro-level constructs of time can shape a person’s temporal experiences, perceptions, and sense of self, as explored above. Furthermore, Cotte \textit{et al.} (2004) identified five \textit{timestyles}, i.e. habitual ways of perceiving/using time, in US consumers’ lives. This includes time as a pressure cooker (feeling time is squeezed); time as a map (directed towards the future); time as a mirror (assessing self in light of the past); time as a river (enjoying the present moment); and finally, time as a feast (maximising time in the present) \(\textit{ibid}\).

Likewise, Bergadaa (1990) observes how a person’s temporal focus (i.e. whether orientated towards the past, present, or future) can impact consumer behaviour. Russell and Levy (2012), for example, found that reconsumption activities tend to be orientated towards the past (regressive reconsumption) or future (progressive reconsumption). Moreover, Gibbs (1998) studies how consumers’ temporal perceptions can impact the consumption of financial products (e.g. pensions), and suggests that marketers should take people’s imagined/desired futures into account when promoting these time-loaded products. Temporal perceptions, however, are fluid and can shift depending upon meso or micro-level factors. Due to space constraints, I will focus on retail/service environments, emotional state, and life-stage.
Regarding the former, there are many studies in retail and services marketing investigating consumers’ temporal perceptions within waiting situations. These studies typically take a psychological approach to explore how people’s perceptions of time might be impacted by different aspects of retail/service environments, and music in particular (see Baker and Cameron, 1996). For example, Hui, Dube, and Chebat (1997) found that perceived wait duration was longer when positively valenced music was played in a simulated banking environment. Likewise, Kellaris and Kent (1992) discovered that perceived duration was longer for persons exposed to positively valenced (major key) music. Whereas, Yalch and Spangenberg (2000) found that when exposed to familiar music, people in a simulated shopping environment perceived a longer shopping duration than when exposed to unfamiliar music. Taking a more interpretive approach, Goulding, Shankar and Elliott (2002) observe how in rave clubs, the DJ can alter the pace of people’s dancing and thereby their experiences of time with the shifting tempo of music. Finally, consumption environments such as The Whitby Goth Festival have been theorised as liminal spaces (see Turner, 1964, 1974) wherein persons are temporarily suspended in an extended present (Goulding and Saren, 2009, 2016).

Concerning a person’s emotional state (which is typically a mediating factor investigated in the psychological studies above), Woermann and Rokka (2015, p. 1487) introduce the concept of timeflow, namely “…a practice’s ability to induce a certain pattern of experienced temporality in those performing the practice”. They draw upon the context of sporting practices to demonstrate how practices can be perceived by the individuals performing them either in terms of ‘drag’ (slowness) or ‘rush’ (fastness), which in turn typically involves emotions such as boredom in instances of drag and stress during perceptions of rush (ibid). Moreover, for somebody experiencing depression time can seem static and the future non-existent (Hoffman, 2009). In his 2006 documentary The Secret Life of the Manic Depressive, Stephen Fry notes how during his depressive episodes he perceives the future as ‘futureless’, i.e. a black void of nothingness. This reflects Matt Haig’s (2015) experiences with depression, whereby he perceived time as moving slowly and could not imagine his future. His anxiety, however, leads to perceptions of time moving rapidly and incessant worries about the future (ibid). Indeed, following traumatic life events a sense of foreshortened future can ensue, whereby time is no longer experienced as flowing forwards and the future seems unstructured and uncertain (Ratcliffe, Ruddell, and Smith, 2014). This relates to the finding that sometimes people’s lives can be overshadowed by a sense of narrative foreclosure, whereby life’s meaning seems to live in the past and the future to be meaningless (Bohlmeijer
et al., 2011; Freeman, 2000). Finally, Turley and O’Donohoe (2012) found that during bereavement people often have a non-linear experience of time. Time can sometimes seem to stand still, and objects related to their past relationships with the dead person can bring a sense of past into the present (ibid).

Finally, despite temporal perceptions sometimes discernibly shifting with fluctuating emotions irrespective of one’s age, life stage has also been found to influence temporal orientation. For example, it has been discovered that for those nearer the end of life, concerns for future legacy regularly flood the present (Gawande, 2014; Kates, 2001; Price, Arnould, and Curasi, 2000). In Price et al.’s (2000) exploration of older people’s dispossession practices, participants would sometimes pass on possessions to family members to attain a lasting legacy. Similarly, in Kates’s (2001) study of the families and friends of people who had died from AIDS, he found that before their deaths, the people suffering from this disease would sometimes negotiate disposing their possessions to loved ones to construct a future legacy, for example by creating wills. Whereas, young athletes regularly seek to maximise their present activities due to envisaging time being squeezed in middle age, and bodily decline in old age (Phoenix et al., 2007; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2008). Likewise, Szmigin and Carrigan (2001) found that, due to perceptions of time as a finite resource, ‘cognitively young’ older consumers often seek to maximise their (consumption) activities in the present, despite bodily ailments sometimes constraining these desires.

2.3.4. Philosophers and time
Philosophers have pondered time as far back as Aristotle. Given I explored a range of classic social theorists’ ideas concerning the body, I will now detail three philosophers’ theories regarding time; namely, Husserl, Heidegger, and Ricoeur. These three theorists were chosen as they have been drawn upon in discussions of temporality in consumer research, and their ideas also proved to be most insightful during data analysis/interpretation.

2.3.4.1. Husserl’s temporal ‘thickness’
Edmund Husserl, the frequently heralded founding father of phenomenology (Goulding, 1999; Laverty, 2003; Toyoki et al., 2013), develops insights into the consciousness of lived time in the Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness (Husserl, 1964). Husserl challenges the modern idea of linear clock time, and the constructed separable boundaries between past, present, and future (see Adam, 1995), and in turn the notion that “perception is reduced to the grasping of a mere now-point...” (Zahavi, 2010, p. 322). As Zahavi (2010, p. 319) explains, for Husserl “…a perception of a temporal object, as well as the perception of
succession and change, would be impossible if perception had only been conscious of that which exists right now”. He instead offers a tripartite theorisation of the temporal structure of consciousness and employs three key terms to do so: the first **primal impression** (perception of the ‘now’), the second **retention** (consciousness of what has just been), and the third **protention** (anticipation of what is just about to happen) (*ibid*). Husserl thereby contends that the perception, or primal impression, of any present moment comprises consciousness of that which has just been (retention), and anticipation of that which is just about to occur (protention) (*ibid*; Hoffman, 2009; Ratcliffe *et al*., 2014; Toyoki *et al*., 2013). Husserl, therefore, views lived experiences as comprising a sense of temporal ‘thickness’ (Toyoki *et al*., 2013, p. 234), or ‘width of presence’ (Zahavi, 2010, p. 320).

Phenomenology has been regularly drawn upon by consumer researchers as inspiration for a methodological approach towards exploring consumers’ lived experiences (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Goulding, 2005; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio, 1989, 1990; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander, 1994), including in investigations of consumers’ temporal experiences more specifically (e.g. Cotte *et al*., 2004; Bergadaa, 1990; Toyoki *et al*., 2013). Husserl’s concepts surrounding inner time consciousness more specifically, however, have thus far been discussed in only a couple of consumer research papers regarding temporality (Robinson, 2015; Toyoki *et al*., 2013).

### 2.3.4.2. Heidegger and finite temporality

Martin Heidegger’s (1927 [2010]) theories concerning temporality are developed throughout his work *Being and Time*, which is notoriously esoteric. Reflecting Merleau-Ponty’s aforementioned claim (Section 2.2.4), for Heidegger the subject (or in his terms ‘Dasein’) *is* time, and temporality is thus integral to human existence (*ibid*). He conceptualises humans as ‘beings-towards-death’, and argues that the temporarily-bounded stretch between birth and death, or our unavoidable finite temporality, is central to the human condition (*ibid*; Carel, 2006; Collins and Selina, 2010; Critchley, 2009; Jocson, 2015; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017). For Heidegger, we are always ‘projecting’ towards this future end limit to our possibilities, anticipation of which inspires action (*ibid*; Robinson, 2015). Hence, Heidegger observes how there are blurred boundaries between life and death, since awareness of finitude shapes our perceptions and behaviours during everyday life (Carel, 2006). He argues that the denial of death is ‘inauthentic’, and that to live an ‘authentic’ existence we must instead seek to create meaning in the backdrop of our mortality (*ibid*; Critchley, 2009). According to Heidegger, however, although we temporally unfold forwards towards our death, Dasein is
also characterised by historicity. Namely, our present-day actions and interpretations of the world are always shaped by our personal histories and the historically-situated cultural world into which we are ‘thrown’ at birth (ibid; Aho, 2005; Collins and Selina, 2010; Robinson, 2015). Subsequently, to capture the experience of being influenced by both the past and the imagined future towards which we unfold, Heidegger conceptualises Dasein as ‘thrown projection’ (Critchley, 2009). Like his teacher, Husserl, he thus seems to view existence as comprising a temporal ‘thickness’.

Despite his work being convoluted, Heidegger has been drawn upon by several consumer researchers when investigating time. Robinson (2015), for example, refers to Heidegger’s ideas concerning how an anticipated future influences (consumer) action when arguing for a more contextualised approach to time in consumer research. He further draws upon this concept of ‘projection’, alongside Heidegger’s notion that we are ‘beings-towards-death’, when building an existential account of sustainability aiming to bridge gaps between the individual time of the consumer and social time of sustainability (Robinson and Chelekis, 2017). Finally, Toyoki et al., (2013) briefly invoke Heidegger’s ideas regarding how our mortal nature provokes action in their calls for consumer researchers to take a more embodied appreciation of temporality.

2.3.4.3. Ricoeur, time, and narrative (identity)

Paul Ricoeur (1984) draws upon Augustine’s ideas concerning time, alongside Aristotle’s notion of ‘plot’, to develop insights into the tight relations between time and narrative, which he discusses throughout his three volume work Time and Narrative. Like Heidegger, he conceptualises humans as historical and temporal beings, and he argues that we make sense of our temporalised experiences through a narrative mode:

“...Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 52).

Ricoeur (1984, 1992) explains how ‘the plot’, which brings together fragmented events into a coherent story, is a central component within any narrative. It mediates tensions between objective and subjective time, concordance and discordance, and stasis and change (ibid; Marion and Nairn, 2011; Robinson, 2015). Ricoeur (1992) observes that, rather than being fixed, the plot is fluid and open to change as new life events are experienced, and past experiences are reinterpreted in light of these. He argues that fictional and historical narratives intertwine, since they both relate to temporal experiences; for Ricoeur history is
quasi-fictional and open to ongoing reinterpretation (Jocson, 2015; Thompson 1981). Hence, instead of being indicative of a stable core self, Ricoeur (1992) notes that emplotment is a creative process. Within any narrative there is an ‘illusion of sequence’, whereby order is created out of a more discontinuous flux of temporal experiences (ibid; McNay, 2000). For Ricoeur (1992), however, we do not just tell narratives about our lives, but in constructing them we can actually change our lives (Ezzy, 1998; Widdershoven, 1993).

He further builds upon the close links between time and narrative by introducing the concept of narrative identity, which he explores most thoroughly in Oneself as Another (Ricoeur, 1992). Narrative identity expresses how, to construct a coherent sense of self out of life’s temporal flux, persons actively interpret and thread together key times from their past, present, and anticipated future into a dynamic plot (ibid). He contends that narrative identity iterates between two central components: identity as permanence in time (idem; sameness) and identity as changing over time (ipse; selfhood) (ibid; Ezzy, 1998; Marion and Nairn, 2011; McNay, 2000). According to Ricoeur, this dialectical interplay between fixity and fluidity explains how a person can change over time, yet remain the same person:

“...We say of an oak tree that it is the same from the acorn to the fully developed tree; in the same way, we speak of one animal, from birth to death; so, too we speak of a man or of a woman...” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 117).

Despite narrative identity being an important conceptualisation of the self in consumer research following the ‘narrative turn’ in the social sciences (Ahuvia, 2005), perhaps owing to his arguably esoteric writing, Ricoeur’s theories have been paid somewhat limited attention in the field. Nevertheless, Ricoeur’s (1984, 1992) concept of narrative identity has been drawn upon in consumer research studies into teenage girls’ fashion choices and identity negotiation (Marion and Nairn, 2011) and compensatory consumption practices (Woodruff-Burton and Elliott, 2005). Furthermore, Robinson (2015) utilises Ricoeur’s ideas surrounding how narrative mediates tensions between Chronos (quantitative clock time) and Kairos (subjective time) to indicate how and why consumer researchers should consider both micro and macro conceptions of temporality.

All three philosophers, however, arguably neglect the human body in their theorisations of temporality. As Aho (2005, p. 9) notes, “Heidegger’s analysis in Being and Time completely overlooks the role that the body plays in our everyday acts and practices”. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty sought to address this neglect in his phenomenological conception of embodiment (Section 2.2.3.1). This seems strange given the body is the locus of our physical mortality and hence the end of our lived time (Bauman, 1992a; Becker, 1973; Cave, 2012), which forms a
central component of Heidegger’s work. My notions of temporality have been influenced by the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Ricoeur, which is illustrated by my use of their concepts to interpret my findings in Chapter 4. However, I see time and bodies as being inextricably intertwined, and thus seek to bring literature concerning bodies and time into more direct conversation to develop a more temporalised understanding of bodies, and in turn embodied appreciation of temporality. Body and time interrelations will now be explored.

2.3.5. Time and bodies

Psychological studies of consumer waiting time perceptions (see Baker and Cameron, 1996), and more interpretive explorations of time and consumer behaviour (e.g. Cotte et al., 2004; Robinson, 2015; Russell and Levy, 2012) within marketing and consumer research largely neglect the role of the body in people’s temporal experiences. Whereas, in studies of the consumption of tattoos (e.g. Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Velliquette et al., 2006) and cosmetic surgeries (e.g. Sayre, 1999; Schouten, 1991) following significant life events, time usually remains implicit. Two recent consumer research papers, however, do somewhat respond to calls for a more embodied appreciation of time (Toyoki et al., 2013). In Woermann and Rokka’s (2015) exploration of timeflow with freeskiiers and paintballers, a Bodily Routines and Skills component is included in their timeflow framework, which explicates how habitual bodily routines are integral to performing practices. Similarly, Figueiredo and Uncles (2015) discuss how globally mobile professionals engage in habitual bodily routines to negotiate shifting temporal frameworks as they traverse the globe. Yet, the relations between bodies and time do not represent the central focus of either paper.

As Adam (1995, p. 30) observes, “...time is curiously invisible...” However, as well as our embodied lives being mediated by earthly cycles and cultural notions of time, the human body comprises multiple meaningful layers of temporality. We experience internal temporally-defined cycles and rhythms, such as the beating heart, expanding/contracting lungs, and hormone production (Adam, 1995; Hoffman, 2009; Lefebvre, 2004). There is, however, sometimes a disjuncture between cultural notions of time and our body’s ongoing biological rhythms, such as hormone production, which are influenced by earthly cycles of light/darkness (Birth, 2012; Hoffman, 2009; May and Thrift, 2001). This is exemplified by the exhausting and disorientating experience of jet lag. Indeed, bodies need to undergo daily cycles of sleep to remain healthy, further indicating how bodies are shaped by ‘biological clocks’ (Hoffman, 2009), alongside culturally constructed ones.
Time is also captured on the surface of our bodies. As Bradshaw and Chatzidakis (2016, p. 349) contend, “...we ought to speak of skin as a temporal site of congealed and disparate influences of the past, present, and future”. We carry time on our bodies when we wear watches, charm bracelets, wedding rings, and clothing which can hold memories of past life events/ phases, such as work suits and wedding dresses (Buse and Twigg, 2015). Bodies are also aged through biological processes and our culturally-mediated understandings of these (Gullette, 2004). Hence, culturally recognised symbols of old age, for example wrinkles, are typically understood as indicating time’s passage and function as memento mori, as do scars and stretch marks. People also often modify the body following temporally-defined life turning points, typically through make-up, hair, and fashion makeovers; weight loss/muscle building (Wacquant, 1995b); piercings; cosmetic surgery (Sayre, 1999; Schouten, 1991; Kinnunen, 2010); tattooing (Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Shorten, 2014; Velliquette et al., 2006; Weller, 2014); and less often in the West scarification and branding (Pitts, 1998). The body can thus narrate accounts of a person’s past, present, and anticipated future. The ways in which persons might actively attempt to hide or inscribe time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities will now be explored.

2.3.5.1. Ageing bodies and hiding temporality

Age is an important demographic for marketers to consider in their segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies (Catterall and Maclaran 2001; Gullette, 2004; Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001). This is perhaps becoming even more so given that Western populations are said to be ‘ageing’ (Andrews, 1999; Dumas, 2012; Katz and Marshall, 2003; Marhankova, 2011; Powell and Hendricks, 2009). Age, however, is not a simple essential element of our subjectivity, but is rather constructed and multi-faceted. This is illustrated by Goulding and Shankar (2004), who identified that people often view their cognitive (felt) age as being inconsistent with their chronological (numeric) age. Similarly, Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) propose the Mask of Ageing concept, which contends that older people often feel that their younger ‘inner’ self is hidden underneath an ageing and incompliant ‘outer’ body. Indeed, Holliday and Cairnie (2007) found that men sometimes engage in anti-ageing surgeries to realign their older looking body with their younger perceived sense of self.

As influenced by the dominant medicalised machine metaphor of the body (Featherstone, 1991; Synnott, 1993), in Western cultures ageing is often understood as a set of biological processes resulting in the wear and tear of the body and mind (Barnhart and Peñaloza, 2013; Faircloth, 2003; Gawande, 2014; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2008; Powell and Hendricks, 2009;
Vincent, 2006). Surgeon and writer Gawande (2014) explains that a person’s hair grows grey over time due to a reduction in pigment cells which give hair its colour; our eyes lose their elasticity with age; and our skin develops age spots owing to the skin cells which clear waste products breaking down. Yet, given bodies are both natural and cultural (Shilling, 2005, 2012), many theorists agree that bodies are aged over time by both biology and culture (Catterall and Maclaran, 2001; Featherstone and Wernick, 1995; Gullette, 2004; Pauldon, 2008; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2008). Namely, our bodies age over time via a set of biological processes alongside our culturally-mediated understandings of these (ibid).

In Eastern cultures, ageing is typically positively associated with enhanced maturity and wisdom (Catterall and Maclaran, 2001; Powell and Hendricks, 2009; Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006; Wada, 1995). In contrast, within Western cultures youthful bodies are idealised, and there are longstanding links between ageing (bodies), decline, and loss of ‘physical capital’ (Barnhart and Peñaloza, 2013; Brooks, 2010; Catterall and Maclaran 2001; Chrisler, 2007; Coupland, 2007; Dumas, 2012; Elliott, 2008; Featherstone, 1991; Gullette, 2004; Phoenix et al., 2007; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006, 2008; Shilling, 2012; Tulle-Winton, 2000, 2008). As Gullette (2004, p. 11) eloquently observes, “Decline is a metaphor as hard to contain as dye...” Thus, unlike patina found on antiques which signals that something is special, marks social status (Appadurai, 1996; Thompson et al., 1994), or engenders a sense of authenticity (Dee, 2011), symbols of time captured on bodies, such as wrinkles, are not usually as revered in Western consumer culture.

It has been argued, however, that discourses surrounding ageing (bodies) in Western cultures might be shifting away from the narrative of decline, towards a ‘successful’ or ‘active’ ageing paradigm. Within these discourses, old age is positioned as a time in which people should be engaging in physical activity, in addition to preventing/concealing visible signs of ageing to achieve a desired state of ‘agelessness’ (Andrews, 1999; Brooks, 2010; Dumas, 2012; Katz and Marshall, 2003; Kinnunen, 2010; Marhankova, 2011). This narrative of old age is reflected by the 2013 Channel 4 documentary Fabulous Fashionistas, which followed the lives of six older women (average age 80) who are shown having fun and still caring about creating glamorous appearances. However, it has been observed that this seemingly more positive representation of old age might apply to the so-called ‘third age’ (i.e. people past retirement age but not yet in deep old age). Whereas, associations between old age, decline, and decay still apply to those in deep old age or the ‘fourth age’ (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Gillear and Higgs, 2011). As Gillear and Higgs (2011) explain, this is owing to death now
being linked to ever older chronological ages, coupled with expanding body-focused industries which enable persons to hide culturally-recognised indications of old age (e.g. anti-ageing surgeries). Furthermore, the notion of successful or active ageing is still conceivably driven by an underlying belief that old bodies are undesirable, and hence something to be prevented and/or hidden. As Gulette (2004, p. 22; original italics) remarks, “Because decline has such sharp teeth, “positive aging” increasingly sports a capped smile”.

In youth-obsessed consumer culture, persons are encouraged to take personal responsibility for attaining this bodily ideal by preventing, concealing, and/or removing bodily markers of old age (e.g. wrinkles, grey hair, and sagging skin), which are framed as signs of ‘moral laxitude’ (Coupland, 2007, 2009; Featherstone, 1991). This is especially true for women since a ‘double standard of ageing’ exists, whereby visibly aged female bodies are often considered and represented as being more undesirable than older male bodies (Coupland, 2007; Dumas, 2012; Powell and Hendricks, 2009; Tulle, 2007). Furthermore, marketers are pushing concerns about ageing onto increasingly younger consumers; encouraging them to take pre-emptive measures to deflect corporeal signs of getting older (Elliott, 2008; Gulette, 2004). Advertisements for anti-ageing cosmetics regularly provoke anxieties about time’s passage, and thereby concerns about mortality, to persuade people to purchase them (Coupland, 2009; Figure 8). Links between clocks and bodily ageing, as captured in the phrase ‘biological ticking clock’, relate to the aforementioned concept of linear clock time. Yet, as connected to the postmodern idea of fragmented time, marketers promise consumers that by using anti-ageing products/services the clock can be turned back a decade, stopped, or slowed down (Coupland, 2009; Elliott, 2008). Western consumer culture, therefore, plays on the postmodern fantasy of people living outside of time (Katz, 1995).

**Figure 8: Liz Earle anti-ageing serum shop advertising**
As inspired by celebrities such as Cara Delevingne, there has been a growing trend for younger women (and men) to dye their hair grey in the UK and USA, which has prompted the Twitter hashtag #GrannyHair (Alexander, 2015; Greenway, 2015). This trend, however, may just be fleeting rather than indicating an enduring embrace of old age and associated bodily markers. Although the quest for youth is longstanding, as reflected in the ancient idea of the ‘fountain of youth’, anti-ageing industries are expanding in Western cultures, including the health/diet, exercise, cosmetics, and cosmetic surgery markets (Coupland, 2007; Dumas, 2012). As Thompson and Hirschman (1995) observe, much consumption activity revolves around people’s desires to control natural forces, such as ageing processes. To demonstrate this market growth, cosmetic surgeons registered with the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (henceforth BAAPS) performed around 50,000 procedures in 2013 (Mintel, 2014a). Furthermore, the UK facial skincare market was estimated to be worth £1.16 billion in 2013, with a growth in anti-ageing skincare product sales (Mintel, 2014b). Finally, the UK hair colourants market was worth £332 million in 2013 (Mintel, 2016b).

Although not typically exploring time explicitly (for exceptions see Cooke, 2008; Elliott, 2008), studies have found that people buy into anti-ageing industries to remove marks of time from their bodies, or prevent time from ‘writing’ those marks upon them (Askegaard et al., 2002; Brooks, 2010; Clarke and Griffin, 2007; Cooke, 2008; Elliott, 2008; Gimlin, 2002, 2006; Holliday and Cairnie, 2007; Kinnunen, 2010; Sayre, 1999; Schouten, 1991). Akin to the transience of life, however, these cosmetics and technologies such as Botox® injections (i.e. the process by which Botulinum toxin is injected into the skin to temporarily prevent muscle contractions; see BAAPS, 2017) are ephemeral. If they are not continually consumed, time will eventually ‘rewrite’ itself onto the skin (Cooke, 2008). This resonates with the 2009 film (and Oscar Wilde novel) Dorian Grey, wherein after years of not visibly ageing after selling his soul to remain looking youthful, the hedonistic years Dorian Grey has lived reappear on his decaying body. As Cooke (2008, p. 35) observes about Botox®:

“Botox exists, on the surface, at first sight, to destroy the archive of the face; to delete it, to wipe it clean. Simultaneously, its purpose it to empty out the future, to stop the recording, to project the blank face into the future. And yet, beneath the surface, at second sight, unconscious forces have been put to work; the face fights back, re-surfaces, forces its writing to begin again”.

People also sometimes undergo anti-ageing cosmetic procedures following significant life turning points (Kinnunen, 2010; Schouten, 1991). Two participants in Kinnunen’s (2010) exploration of cosmetic surgery acquired facelifts after the death of their husbands; another underwent a total body transformation following divorce and depression; and a final woman
had a facelift and upper eyelid surgery after health issues to remove these worrying years from her face. Similarly, a participant in Schouten’s (1991) study of cosmetic surgery and identity (re)construction acquired a facelift owing to unexpectedly becoming a widow aged 40. Their surgically transformed bodies, therefore, narrate the challenging times in their lives when the procedures were acquired. Paradoxically, therefore, by removing time from the body (e.g. wrinkles and sagging skin), these procedures might inadvertently also inscribe temporality into the body, thus indicating the complexity of body-time interrelations.

2.3.5.2. Inscribing temporality

In contrast to hiding/removing/preventing marks of temporality through anti-ageing practices, various body modification activities enable persons to reflexively inscribe their life histories, and hence time’s passage, into their skin; most evidently through tattooing and scarification. To demonstrate, Pitts’s (1998) participants used scarification practices (i.e. the process of cutting designs, typically with a scalpel, into the skin) to reclaim control over their bodies following abusive experiences. This resonates with Stieg Larsson’s novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, in which protagonist Lisbeth Salander attempts to reclaim her body by tattooing it after being raped:

> On Friday, a week after the second rape, she walked from her apartment to a tattoo parlour in the Hornstull district. She had made an appointment, and there were no other customers in the shop. The owner nodded, recognising her. She chose a simple little tattoo depicting a narrow band and asked to have it put on her ankle. She pointed. “The skin is very thin there. It’s going to hurt a lot,” said the tattoo artist. “That’s O.K.,” Salander said, taking off her jeans and putting her leg up. “O.K., a band. You already have loads of tattoos. Are you sure you want another one?” “It’s a reminder” (Larsson, 2008, p. 195).

Thus, people also regularly engage in tattooing to mark past events on their bodies, or acquire tattoo cover-ups and/or removals to erase certain life events and relationships from their skin as their life changes (Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Shorten, 2014; Sweetman, 1999; Velliquette *et al.*, 2006; Weller, 2014). To illustrate, participants in Velliquette *et al.*’s (2006) investigation of the tattooing of personal myths acquired tattoos following deaths of loved ones, to signify group membership, and to symbolise identity crises. Furthermore, in their study of dispossession practices and tattooing, Shelton and Peters (2006, 2008) found that people often remove tattoos to cut ties with past life stages, events, and relationships. Finally, the 61 tattoos found inscribed into the 5000-year-old mummified body of worldwide sensation Ötzi the iceman, who was famously discovered in 1991 in the Ötztal Alps in Italy, have since been traced to various illnesses and pains, with his tattoos
potentially marking therapeutic treatment (Engelking, 2015; Jones, 2000). He had layered intentional marks of time (i.e. tattoos) upon unintentional temporal indicators (i.e. injuries).

Time’s passage regularly provokes anxiety in human beings, who have historically striven to transcend their time-bound fleshy casing by attaining immortality through various means (Bauman, 1992a; Cave 2012), which I explore in the next section. By enabling persons to negotiate temporality through and upon their bodies, body-related modes of consumption such as anti-ageing cosmetics, tattooing, and scar reduction provide an illusion of control over time (and the body). The body’s temporality, however, ultimately lies outside of our control. This is evident in studies of bodily illness and injury which can disrupt time’s frequent taken-for-granted flow, in turn throwing life into chaos (Becker 1997; Frank, 1995). Seymour (2002) observes how bodily illness and injury disrupts the relationship between bodies, time, and our lives; indicating human fragility and bringing time into focus. Likewise, Sparkes and Smith’s (2003) exploration of narrative time and male spinal cord injury identified that shifts in embodied context are accompanied by changes in temporal perceptions. Following injury, time can be experienced as static, with spinal injuries becoming involuntary temporal markers (ibid). Finally, Inglis and Holmes (2000) illustrate how the body’s involuntary cycles, such as digestion and defecation, sometimes rebel against the temporal structures found in society, for example when it is socially acceptable to defecate. This further indicates how temporal bodies are ultimately outside of our control.

2.3.6. The quest for immortality
Owing to living an embodied and temporalised existence, as Heidegger (1927 [2010]) notes we are ‘beings-towards-death’. Indeed, Bauman (1992b, p.1) candidly observes how “the prospect of life is death; the ultimate cause of death is birth…” Although it touches everybody, death is considered differently across time and place. To demonstrate, Bonsu and Belk (2003) identified that, within the Asante tribe in Ghana death is not typically feared. This is since widespread ideas about the deceased being enduringly powerful ancestors help to shield against existential anxieties. Similarly, several countries regularly and publicly celebrate the dead, such as Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in Mexico, Qingming Festival (Tomb-Sweeping Festival) in China, and Zaduszki (All Souls Day) in Poland. On these annual holidays, family and friends gather to pray for and remember deceased loved ones. Furthermore, Elias (1985) observes that during the Middle Ages, death was a pervasive feature of everyday life in Europe due to life expectancy being lower, more communal living arrangements, and the Black Death wiping out large sectors of the population. Yet, it has
been argued that in Western cultures death has moved from being a pervasive, public, and accepted feature of everyday life, to becoming increasingly individualised, privatised, and sequestered from public view, with dying bodies often hidden in institutions like hospitals and hospices (ibid; Bauman, 1992a; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 2012; Willmott, 2000). As Elias (1985, p. 85) remarks, “Never before have people died as noiselessly and hygienically... and never in social conditions so much fostering solitude”.

However, the extent to which death is sequestered in contemporary Western cultures has been debated. Walter (1991) observes how Western societies comprise a linear conception of time, meaning that whilst individuals living within them try to deny their death, culture itself accepts it. Furthermore, Stone and Sharpley (2008) use the term ‘absent-present paradox of death’ to indicate how death is not completely concealed in Western cultures given it is a pervasive feature of television programmes, films, video games, and news stories (also see Lee, 2008). For example, there is widespread media coverage of terrorist attacks (e.g. the 2015 Paris attacks), and the host of high profile celebrities dying in 2016 (e.g. George Michael, David Bowie, and Alan Rickman). Moreover, thanatourism or ‘dark’ tourism, namely tourist destinations revolving around death and tragedy, is an increasingly popular means by which the living and dead can intermingle (Stone, 2011; Stone and Sharpley, 2008). To illustrate, Body Worlds exhibitions display preserved human corpses often in an artistic manner, thereby transforming dead bodies into a public spectacle and encouraging visitors to reflect upon their mortality (Drummon and Krszjzanek, 2016; Goulding, Saren, and Lindridge, 2013; Stone, 2011). Furthermore, exhibitions such as death: the human experience held October 2015- March 2016 at Bristol Museum (see Bristol Museums, 2017), and online grief websites enabling persons to share memories of a deceased person (Gabel, 2016), are helping to bring death out of the shadows. Yet, whilst the deaths of abstracted others are visible in the public realm, arguably persons in Western cultures still find it uncomfortable contemplating and facing their own deaths and that of loved ones.

Due to being the only known animal conscious of our finite nature, we experience an existential contradiction, as we are aware of our mortal condition but unable to conceive of what death would actually be like (Bauman, 1992a; Becker, 1973; Cave, 2012; Giddens, 1991; Mellor and Shilling, 1993). Subsequently, exacerbated by the typical sequestration of death in contemporary Western cultures, anxieties surrounding death, and hence time’s passage, are widespread (ibid). Terror Management Theory (henceforth TMT) stems from Becker’s (1973) work regarding the denial of death, and proposes that due to awareness of
mortality, investment in cultural worldviews and self-esteem enhancing practices is required to avoid living in an unbearable state of anxiety (Arndt, Schimel, and Goldenberg, 2003; Arndt and Solomon, 2003; Burke, Martens, and Faucher, 2010; Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon, 2000; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 1986; Greenberg and Arndt, 2012). Indeed, the pursuit of immortality is longstanding and ongoing, as captured in the Ancient ideas of the ‘elixir of life’ and ‘fountain of youth’ (Cave, 2012; Elias, 1985).

According to Bauman, however, whereas the opposite was once the case with culture functioning as a “…huge and never stopping factory of permanence” (Bauman 1992a, p. 4), transience is now favoured by persons over durability. Throughout his work Liquid Modernity, Bauman (2000) contends that Western cultures have transitioned from ‘solid’ modernity comprising more stable social structures and identities, to ‘liquid’ modernity which is characterised by “…the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty” (p. viii; original italics). As reflected in Bauman’s (2003) related concept of ‘liquid love’ (Figure 9), it has been observed that relationships are regularly more transient in late modernity (also see Rosa, 2003; Turner, 2000). Sennett (1994) draws upon the metaphor of an airport departure lounge to express his assertion that individuals today have increasingly fleeting ties to one another and represent a lonely crowd (cited in Turner, 2000). Indeed, inspired by Maffesoli’s (1996) work concerning postmodern tribalism, in marketing there is an established area of literature dedicated to consumer tribes, i.e. ephemeral groupings of people temporarily held together through shared emotions and ambience (e.g. Cova and Cova, 2001; Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar, 2007; Goulding, Shankar, and Canniford, 2013).

Consumer culture is driven by transience. According to Turley (2005, p. 76; original emphasis), the marketplace with its “hegemony of the disposable... is the locus classicus where [this] ephemerality is played out to perfection...” Inspired by Bauman’s (2000) work regarding liquid modernity, in consumer research there is a growing literature stream concerning liquid consumption; namely, the notion that consumers have increasingly transient identities and relationships with their possessions in a globalised and fluid consumer culture (Bardhi et al., 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012, 2017; Figuerido and Uncles, 2015; Samsioe and Bardhi, 2014; Ulver and Ostberg, 2014). Concerning the (fast) fashion industry, for example, Appadurai (1996) observes how consumer culture valorises ephemerality over duration by introducing shorter product shelf lives, and replacing more stable sumptuary laws with faster changing fashions. Indeed, during the 2016 London Fashion Week, Burberry
introduced a ‘see-now, buy-now’ model enabling consumers to buy clothing straight from the catwalk, rather than having to wait for new styles to enter the stores at a later date (Armstrong, 2016).

**Figure 9: Liquid love in Manchester city centre**

Whilst freezers and microwaves give food a longer shelf life (Southerton, 2009), many products, including clothing, phones, and computers, are being engineered as increasingly ephemeral today to engender more frequent purchases (Graham and Thrift, 2007; Harvey, 1989; Turley, 2005). Moreover, the UK bed company *Dreams* introduced a ‘Replace every 8’ campaign in 2016 that encourages consumers to replace their mattresses every eight years, and hence more regularly (see Dreams, 2016). Thus, since everyday life in ‘liquid modernity’ seems so transient, Bauman suggests that immortality is no longer as highly desired:

“...Throughout human history the work of culture consisted in sifting and sedimenting hard kernels of perpetuity out of transient human lives and fleeting human actions, in conjuring up duration out of transience, continuity out of discontinuity... demand for this kind of work is nowadays shrinking” (Bauman, 2000, p. 126).

However, many people spanning all cultures and historical epochs have desired to transcend their temporal boundaries by striving to attain immortality for themselves and/or others (Cave, 2012). Indeed, a key tenet of TMT is that the (unconscious) fear of death motivates much human action (Greenberg and Arndt, 2012). As Becker (1973, p. xvii) notes:

“...The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity- activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man”.

Hence, in opposition to Bauman’s claims, despite (or perhaps in response to) perceptions of societal acceleration and transience, the desire for immortality has seemingly not diminished.
Given the body is seen as increasingly central to self-identity, concerns surrounding physical mortality could even be exacerbated today (Shilling, 2012). Indeed, TMT contends that the body is seen as problematic due to reminding us of our vulnerability, which thereby incites beautification practices to hide its animalistic properties (Goldenberg et al., 2000). There are many references to the ongoing quest for immortality found within contemporary popular culture. For example, in the *Harry Potter* series of books and films, Harry Potter’s nemesis, Lord Voldemort, splits his soul in a bid to live forever. Some people decide to end their lives; however, discussions of suicide and euthanasia are beyond the scope of this thesis. In this section, I explore four key ways in which human beings endeavour to master time, the body, and achieve (a sense of) immortality for themselves and/or others: religion, technologies, maintaining healthy bodies, and the creation of symbolic legacies.

### 2.3.6.1. Bodies and religion

The secularisation thesis relates to Weber’s belief in the disenchantment of modernity and contends that, due to rising faith in scientific knowledge, religion is losing its power in modern Western societies (Becker, 1973; Elias, 1985; Mellor and Shilling, 1993; Shilling, 2012). Religious belief systems, however, remain important to billions of people worldwide (Pew Research Centre, 2012; Shilling, 2012), and we are witnessing ongoing religious wars around the globe. Indeed, it has been observed that we may be witnessing a contemporary resurgence of religion and enchantment (Lee, 2008; Shilling, 2012). Consumer culture provides some of this purported re-enchantment, including themed consumption spaces (e.g. Disneyland), which have been termed ‘cathedrals of consumption’ (Ritzer, 2005), Apple products associated with magical properties (Muniz and Schau, 2005), and watching Roger Federer play tennis has been likened to a ‘religious experience’ (Wallace, 2006).

According to TMT, belief in cultural worldviews provides an important shield against anxieties about death (Arndt and Solomon, 2003; Greenberg *et al*., 1986; Greenberg and Arndt, 2012). Thus, a key function of multiple religions is to provide persons with a ‘sacred canopy’ (Berger, 1967) against existential anxieties by offering eschatological narratives concerning how people can transcend their inevitable bodily death (Cave, 2012; Giddens, 1991; Hoffman, 2009; Mellor and Shilling, 1993; Shilling, 2012). Taking Christianity as an example, the doctrine of resurrection is one of its central components. It promotes the idea that, akin to flowers which are part of a natural cycle of death and rebirth, we can achieve personal immortality by rising again after our physical death (Cave, 2012; Turner, 2008). This core belief challenges the notion of linear clock time and the related idea of a linear
progression from birth to death. As Cave (2012) explains, early Christianity required a belief in death being the end for Jesus’s resurrection to be important. Yet, despite continuing rituals such as water submersion baptisms linking to the idea of resurrection, Cave (2012) notes that most Christians today believe in a transcendent soul and immortal afterlife.

According to Plato, persons can be split into the mortal decaying material body and the immaterial immortal soul, with the latter constituting the superior aspect of the self (Cave, 2012; Synnott, 1993). A second key principle of Christianity which also buffers against anxieties surrounding death, is the notion that after physical death the immortal soul, and thus the person, endures in the eternal afterlife of Heaven or Hell (Bauman, 1992a; Cave, 2012; Mellor and Shilling, 1993; Shilling, 2012; Turner, 2008). Indeed, a traditional Christian practice is for followers to engage in ascetic regimes (e.g. a restrained diet) to discipline the ‘sinful’ flesh and attain higher spiritual ends (Featherstone, 1991; Turner, 1991b). This idea of an immortal soul and enduring afterlife also challenges the notion of irreversible clock time, whereby a person’s life is seen as flowing linearly from birth to death (Miller, 2009). For those not identifying with these religious belief systems, however, technology provides secular versions of both the resurrection and soul narratives, to now be discussed.

2.3.6.2. Bodies and technologies

The boundaries between bodies and technology are blurring due to advancements in and rising popularity of nanotechnologies; genetic engineering; cosmetic surgeries; wearable technologies (e.g. heart rate trackers); human prosthetics (e.g. bionic limbs); and the use of digital avatars in the online world (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Shilling, 2012). The concept of a cyborg, which stems from Donna Haraway, captures this fusion between culture and technology; human and machine (Balsamo, 1995; Buchanan-Oliver, Cruz, and Schroeder, 2010; Featherstone and Burrows, 1995). In everyday life, we live as cyborgs when wearing contact lenses/glasses, pace makers, and prosthetic limbs. Further illustrating the blurred boundaries between bodies and technologies, performance artists Orlan and Stelarc have notably modified their bodies in various ways via technology. For example, Stelarc famously made use of a bionic arm and has an extra ear implanted into his non-bionic arm (Farnell, 2000; Stelarc, 2000; Zurbrugg, 2000). Meanwhile, Orlan underwent a series of surgical performances called The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan, during which she surgically transformed her body in line with classic bodily ideals found in Western art, such as Botticelli’s Venus (Ayers, 2000; Clarke, 2000).
These technological developments have prompted discussions of obsolete bodies, transhumanism, and posthumanism (Campbell, 2010; Campbell, O’Driscol, and Saren, 2006, 2010; Farnell, 2000; Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Zurbrugg, 2000). The terms posthumanism and transhumanism encapsulate the idea that, through technological and scientific advancements there might be a giant leap in human evolution in terms of intelligence and physiological capabilities (Campbell et al., 2006). This is well-captured in Dan Brown’s 2013 novel Inferno, which tells the story of Harvard Professor Robert Langdon who is on a mission to prevent a sterility virus created by Bertrand Zobrist (a transhumanist scientist) which will wipe out a third of the world’s population to pave the way for superhuman races. Indeed, it has been envisaged that in the future we might be able to build ‘designer babies’ by choosing their genetic attributes via genetic engineering, which could in turn create a race of super humans (Oliver, 2000). Moreover, as Shilling (2012) explains, future developments in nanotechnology might result in the potential for micro machines to be injected into people’s veins to repair damaged arteries. This would provide humans with greater control over their mortal nature, thereby bringing us closer to immortality.

The use of advanced technologies to attain immortality, however, has not yet been achieved. Representing a technological version of resurrection, cryonics is becoming increasingly popular, although imaginably only for those with ample financial resources (Cave; 2012; Hoffman, 2009; Weiss, 1999). Cryonics is the process through which people’s bodies are frozen at extremely low temperatures at the moment of death, to be preserved until certain diseases have been cured, upon which the person will be unfrozen and imaginably live again (ibid). It links to the idea of time being frozen, although Weiss (1999) argues that it should perhaps be considered a form of ‘suspended animation’, as the concept of time is associated with processes of becoming. In 2015 a two-year-old girl from Thailand became the youngest person to be cryogenically frozen (BBC News, 2015c). The belief in the power of cryonics to resurrect persons is also depicted in the novel The Time Keeper, wherein Victor Delamonte (a wealthy dying man) wishes to freeze himself upon death to attain immortality (Albom, 2012).

Alternatively, related to the religious notion of the transcendent soul, discussions are arising concerning the idea that in the future a form of digital immortality might be achievable. Namely, it is anticipated that it might be possible to upload a person’s cognitive information onto a computer system, in turn replacing one’s mortal material body with a more durable digital avatar (Cave, 2012). This imagined route to immortality is thus seemingly motivated by, and strengthens, the longstanding mind/body and soul/body dualisms. The idea of
uploading one’s immortal consciousness in the face of a decaying body is reflected in the 2014 Sci-Fi film Transcendence. It tells the story of renowned scientist Dr. Will Castor who, upon learning he is dying, uploads his consciousness onto an advanced computer system. For many individuals today, however, these technological innovations perhaps seem unattainable or unrealistic. Hence, the continual maintenance of a healthy body remains a significant route to personal immortality, or prolonging life, to now be explored.

2.3.6.3. Healthy bodies

The medicalised body, as represented through the prevalent body-as-machine metaphor, constitutes a dominant representation of the body in Western cultures (Faircloth, 2003). As Gawande (2014, p. 69) explains, following numerous medical breakthroughs in the 20th Century (e.g. the discovery of penicillin) doctors became seen as heroes and hospitals as sites of hope. The fundamental goal of medicine is to fight death and disease by sacrificing a person’s time and quality of life now, in order to hopefully gain time later by extending their life (ibid). In contemporary medicine, death is usually deconstructed into its ‘avoidable’ specific causes, for example heart disease and type-two diabetes (Bauman, 1992a, 1992b; Cave, 2012; Shilling, 2012; Turley, 2005). As aforementioned, the Christian tradition holds that the ‘sinful’ flesh should be controlled via ascetic bodily conduct to attain greater spirituality. Indeed, diseases such as leprosy were once seen as indicating human sinfulness (Turner, 1991b, 2008). Today we are encouraged by doctors, the government, marketers, and increasingly on social media to take individual responsibility for maintaining a healthy body (Featherstone, 1991; Turley, 2005). As Bauman (1992a, p. 130) notes:

“Keeping fit, taking exercise, ‘balancing the diet’, eating fibres and not eating fat, avoiding smokers or fighting the pollution of drinking water are all feasible tasks, tasks that can be performed and that redefine the unmanageable problem of death as a series of utterly manageable problems”.

Indeed, we are apparently living in an era of enhanced health consciousness, whereby discourses surrounding healthy bodies and eating are widespread (Askegaard, Jensen, and Holt, 1999; Cave, 2012; Featherstone, 1991; Kristensen et al., 2013). To illustrate, there are myriad UK news articles and government initiatives promoting the health benefits of, for example, consuming more fruit and vegetables (Stephens, 2014; Gallagher, 2017), undertaking regular exercise (Roberts, 2011), and not smoking (BBC News, 2003). Discourses surrounding healthy bodies are further bolstered by celebrities such as Jamie Oliver, who has created the Jamie Oliver Food Foundation which aims to “…shape the health and well-being of current and future generations by providing better access to food
education” (Jamie Oliver Food Foundation, 2014). Moreover, there is a wave of social media stars who regularly post ‘What I eat in a day’ videos on YouTube, which thereby influence the way in which their audiences consider and consume food. A key duality transmitted by various social actors such as these, is the idea that (particularly for women) a thin body is good and healthy, whereas a fat body is bad and unhealthy (Featherstone, 1991; Wykes and Gunter, 2005). As Askegaard et al. (1999) observe, the notion that ‘fat is bad’ represents one of the central tenets of consumer culture. Indeed, Western cultures are found to be ‘lipophobic’, i.e. they hold a widespread fear of fat (ibid). This resonates with the religious idea that gluttony represents one of the seven deadly human sins, as depicted in the film Seven which revolves around the hunt for a serial killer who draws on the seven deadly sins as inspiration for his murders, including killing a significantly overweight man.

Subsequently, many health-based industries in the UK are expanding. To illustrate, the UK health and fitness clubs market was worth over £2,600 million in 2014 (Mintel, 2014c); the UK vitamins and supplements market had an estimated value of £400 million in 2014 (Mintel, 2014d); and the UK diet/weight control foods market was worth over £1,700 in 2013 (Mintel, 2013). There is also several recent consumer health ‘crazes’, such as the soaring demand for green juices (Chittock, 2013), protein powders (Salter, 2013), and ‘clean’ eating (Rayner, 2014). Likewise, an expanding variety of personal technologies are now available which encourage consumers to maintain a healthy body, for example Smartphone apps like My Fitness Pal, Hydro, and Sleep Time, and wearable technologies to prompt people to move their bodies more frequently, for example Fitbit watches. Thus, for many people maintaining a healthy body is an important means of prolonging their lifespan, in the hope of potentially achieving immortality (Bauman, 1992a, 1992b; Cave, 2012; Shilling, 2012; Turner, 2008).

Yet, as eloquently noted by Cave (2012, p. 74), “to try to keep us indefinitely healthy is like trying to hold together a statue that is turning to dust”. Given the body’s obdurate materiality, therefore, the maintenance of a healthy body cannot yet guarantee personal immortality. Many persons thus strive to achieve symbolic immortality instead, to now be explored.

2.3.6.4. Symbolic legacies

Many of the world’s population strive to form biological legacies via the production of offspring, or increasingly today by freezing their sperm/eggs (Cave, 2012). However, persons spanning all cultures often strive to extend themselves and/or others beyond physical death via creating symbolic legacies (ibid). This resonates with Baudrillard’s (1993) contention that death can be reversed in the realm of the symbolic. Accordingly, this path to immortality
relates to the notion that, in contrast to the mortal decaying body, the symbolic/cultural realm is ongoing, and hence provides a space to ensure that the memory of a person or group endures (Bauman, 1992a; Cave, 2012; Turley, 2005). As Cave (2012, p. 224) remarks:

“The symbolic realm enables the projection of ourselves beyond the biological with all its shortcomings, and so we scramble towards it, proliferating images and artworks as we compete for ground in cultural space”.

The creation of symbolic legacies stems back to the Ancient Greeks, who held the dualistic belief that culture did not suffer the same decay as nature (Cave, 2012). Historically, it was those who held the most power in society (e.g. royalty and warlords) who could assemble a lasting cultural legacy (Bauman, 1992a). For example, the Ancient Egyptians famously built elaborate pyramids as tombs to commemorate dead pharaohs and queens. People’s personal legacies have long been maintained by their families, for example through their memories, narratives, gravestones, and family photograph albums. However, larger numbers of people today have the opportunity to develop a personal symbolic legacy (ibid). The online world, for example, is accessible to a growing proportion of the world’s population, and provides a platform for people to craft a lasting legacy by continuously documenting their lives on social media accounts like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram (Belk, 2013).

Furthermore, objects and possessions can hold memories of past events, people, and places (Belk, 1988, 1990; Buse and Twigg, 2015; Curasi, Price, and Arnould, 2004; Epp and Price, 2010; O’Donohoe, 2016; Parkin, 1999; Price et al., 2000; Türe and Ger, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Indeed, it has been found that following human displacement, people frequently choose objects to take along with them which will help to carry forwards their personal and cultural identities into their new cultural context (Parkin, 1999). Marks of patina on old objects can signal time’s passage and a past way of life (Appadurai, 1996). However, decaying objects and possessions can also function as memento mori, thereby reminding us of our own impending curtain call (Buse and Twigg, 2015; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Thus, objects do not just hold memories of the past, but can also signal an imagined future. To demonstrate, Valtonen (2016) observes that teddy bears, which are susceptible to wear and tear, signal human vulnerability. Alternatively, Bauman (2000) observes how durable objects can symbolise the idea of eternity. It has thus been found that people sometimes strive to extend themselves into the future beyond death via transferring some of their possessions to loved ones in the hope of building a lasting personal legacy (Curasi et al., 2004; Curasi, 2011; Kates, 2001; Price et al., 2000). Likewise, Phillips (2016) found that scrapbook
consumers often seek to attain an enduring legacy by capturing their creative identities and memories in scrapbooks, which may then be passed onto (grand)children.

Given other people form an important part of our ‘extended selves’ (Belk, 1988), the loss of somebody close to us can change the way we perceive our world, time, and sense of self (DuBose, 1995; Bochner, 1997; Gawande, 2014; O’Donohoe, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Thus, persons also use objects/possessions, the online world, and narratives to create symbolic legacies for others. To illustrate, Bonsu and Belk (2003) found that, within the Asante tribe in Ghana, living tribal members negotiate identities of dead relatives by expressing their material and symbolic wealth during funerals, for example by clothing the deceased in expensive clothing and using beautiful caskets. Likewise, online grief websites are becoming increasingly popular means through which to craft a post-mortem identity for a deceased friend or family member through sharing photographs, memories, and stories about them with others (Gabel, 2016). Furthermore, following requests from users, Facebook has introduced a memorialisation service. People can nominate a ‘legacy contact’ who cannot delete any of the dead person’s previous posts, but is able to create new content following the account holder’s death (Newsbeat, 2015). Technological developments are also transforming gravestones, as QR codes can now be attached to people’s graves which transport those scanning the code with smart devices to an online biography of the dead person (BBC News, 2014). Finally, tattoo consumers sometimes acquire memorial tattoos to commemorate lost loved ones (Back, 2007; Velliquette et al., 2006), although they remain underexplored.

As well as seeking to memorialise deceased loved ones, persons can also build continuing bonds with them, which is sometimes facilitated through consumption objects. Stemming from attachment theory in psychology, continuing bonds expresses how, unlike traditional notions of positive grief processes eventually culminating in detachment from deceased loved ones (as influenced by Freud’s work), continuing relationships with them are not necessarily pathological and are actually quite common (Field, 2006; Klass, 2006; Neimeyer, Baldwin, and Gillies, 2006; O’Donohoe, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Indeed, Shilling (2012) suggests that the boundaries between living and dead bodies are blurred, as dead people are still in the memories of, and can influence the actions of, living persons. In the Ghanaian Asante tribe, for example, it is commonly held that ancestors are still a part of living family members’ lives, thereby influencing their actions and perceptions of death (Bonsu and Belk, 2003). Moreover, Rumble et al., (2014) note how eco-friendly burial practices enable the decaying bodies of the dead to nourish the earth for future generations (cited in Lai, 2016).
Indeed, Robinson and Chelekis (2017) suggest that the promotion of sustainability should be re-framed as a means of attaining a lasting personal legacy by helping future generations, and hence a ‘good death’. Furthermore, possessions and objects linked to a person who has passed away can sometimes be used to, not only memorialise them and the past, but to enable continuing bonds with that person (O’Donohoe, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Similarly, Baker, Baker, and Gentry (2016) found those left behind sometimes felt guided by dead persons and talk to them via urns containing their ashes, akin to how people might also talk to gravestones marking the deceased (Klass, 2006; Woodthorpe, 2011a).

Consequently, in answer to Freddie Mercury’s question- who wants to live forever?- it seems that the majority of people spanning cultures and historical periods would like to, whether spiritually, physically, or symbolically. All the roads to immortality explored in this section, however, are ultimately futile. Mortality still represents the ‘ultimate failure of modernity’ with its central aim of control over nature (Bauman, 1992a; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Vincent, 2006). Yet, if we were created immortal and lived outside of constructed temporal boundaries between birth and death, life could imaginably become boring and flooded with apathy (Cave, 2012; Hoffman, 2009; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017; Turner, 2008; Vincent, 2006). We thus need a temporally finite existence to provide our lives with meaning and inspire action, as reflected in the ending of the novel *The Time Keeper*, in which Dor arrives at this same conclusion after living for countless years alone in a cave:

“Do you understand now?” he asked. “With endless time, nothing is special. With no loss or sacrifice, we can’t appreciate what we have”.

He studied the teardrop. He thought back to the cave. And he knew, finally, why he had been chosen for this journey. He had lived an eternity. Victor wanted an eternity. It had taken Dor all these centuries to comprehend the last thing the old man had told him, the thing he shared with Victor now.

“There is a reason God limits our days”
“Why?”
“To make each one precious”


**2.4. Chapter conclusions**

To conclude, in the first half of this chapter I explored the extant literature surrounding the human body. I first considered the centrality of embodiment to our lives, and explained how and why the body was largely neglected in sociology and consumer research until the 1990s, but a growing literature base has now emerged in both fields. Second, I outlined three contrasting views of the body by drawing upon the work of key social theorists taking these perspectives, including the natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological accounts. Third, I
discussed the notion of corporeal realism which integrates these perspectives, and detailed the
temporalised understanding of the body taken in this thesis. Fourth, I explored the centrality
of the body to Western consumer culture, including the influence of constructed beauty ideals
and the growth in body modification industries, before focusing upon tattoo consumption. I
discussed the Western history of tattooing, and the links between tattooing and identity.

The second half of this chapter concerned time and temporality. First, I discussed the modern
notion of linear clock time and contrasted it with the natural idea of cyclical time. Second, I
explored the temporal acceleration and fragmentation perceived and experienced in
contemporary Western cultures. Third, I explained how these macro cultural conceptions of
time can shape lived human temporality, alongside more meso and micro-level factors, such
as retail/service environments, emotional state, and life-stage. Fourth, I detailed three key
philosophers’ theories concerning time; namely, Husserl, Heidegger, and Ricoeur. Fifth, I
threaded the two halves of the literature review together by exploring the entanglements
between bodies and time. Here I considered how consumption activities either enable people
to hide or inscribe marks of temporality through and upon the body. However, I cautioned
that we are never fully in control of the body’s temporality. Finally, I discussed the
longstanding human quest for immortality and contrasted it with theories concerning liquid
modernity and consumption. This involved considerations of how religion, technologies,
maintaining healthy bodies, and symbolic legacies represent four key paths to immortality.

Whilst critically reviewing this literature, three key literature gaps became evident, which this
thesis aims to address. First, echoing notable social theorists’ discussions of embodiment,
alongside much contemporary sociological work regarding bodily modifications (for
exceptions see Cooke, 2008; Seymour 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2003), time typically
remains implicit within consumer research studies into the body. For example, in explorations
of the consumption of tattooing (e.g. Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Velliquette et al., 2006)
and cosmetic surgeries (e.g. Sayre, 1999; Schouten, 1991) following significant life events, in
addition to studies of ageing and consumption (e.g. Goulding and Shankar, 2004; Szmigin
and Carrigan, 2006; for an exception see Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001). Moreover, reflecting
philosophical discussions of time (e.g. Heidegger, 1927 [2010]; Husserl, 1964; Ricoeur,
1984), studies regarding time in consumer research/marketing usually pay limited explicit
attention to the body (e.g. Baker and Cameron, 1996; Cotte et al., 2004; Kellaris and Kent,
1992; Robinson, 2015; Russell and Levy, 2012). Despite being tightly linked, therefore, the
entanglements between bodies and time remain underexplored, particularly from a
consumption angle. This thesis aims to bring discussions surrounding bodies and time into more direct conversation, as called for by Toyoki et al., (2013), whilst also seeking to provide more nuanced, holistic, and culturally-informed insights into their complex interrelations.

Second, whilst there is much discussion of transience in marketing and consumer research, for example in literature concerning liquid consumption (e.g. Bardhi et al., 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012, 2017; Figueiredo and Uncles, 2015), ephemeral postmodern identities (e.g. Bardhi et al., 2012; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), and consumer tribes (e.g. Cova and Cova, 2001; Cova et al., 2007; Goulding et al., 2013), less attention is paid to consumers’ potential quests for durability. As Rosa (2003) contends, to better understand social acceleration, to which ephemerality is linked, processes of deceleration, which are undertheorised, should also be considered. Thus, I aim to explore how persons could be seeking a sense of permanence in light of an ‘accelerating’ and seemingly transient Western cultural context.

Third, there is a slowly growing literature stream concerning death and consumption in marketing and consumer research (e.g. Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Dobscha, 2016; Robinson and Cheleakis, 2017; Turley, 2005; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Consumer researchers have explored how persons use possessions (e.g. Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Kates, 2001; Price et al., 2000; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012) and the online world (e.g. Belk, 2013; Gabel, 2016) to create lasting legacies for themselves and loved ones. However, less is known about how and why consumers might engage in body-related modes of consumption (e.g. memorial tattoos) to attain immortality for themselves or others, which is surprising given the rising centrality of the body to Western consumer culture and people’s sense of self (Shilling, 2012). By developing understandings of this, it would thereby enrich the expanding literature base regarding death and consumption by providing fresh insights from an embodied perspective. Subsequently, there are three key research questions underpinning this thesis, and the next chapter will outline the research design employed to explore them:

1. How might bodily modifications relate in contrasting ways to cultural notions of time and lived temporality?
2. How and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities?
3a. Why might the consumption of temporal permanence still be sought in an ‘accelerating’ cultural context? And:
3b. How and why might people endeavour to attain a sense of temporal permanence for themselves and/or others through modifying the impermanent body?
Chapter 3: Research Design

“...He [sic] cannot learn to forget but always remains attached to the past: however far and fast he runs, the chain runs with him” (Nietzsche, 1874 [1980], p. 8).

3.1. Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I will detail the inductive, emergent, and iterative research design employed to answer the following key research questions:

1. How might bodily modifications relate in contrasting ways to cultural notions of time and lived temporality?
2. How and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities?
3a. Why might the consumption of temporal permanence still be sought in an ‘accelerating’ cultural context?
   And;
3b. How and why might people endeavour to attain a sense of temporal permanence for themselves and/or others through modifying the impermanent body?

As Goulding (1999) suggests, methodology should complement a researcher’s personal values, beliefs, and interests. I will thus first detail the philosophical assumptions underpinning this thesis, with a focus on interpretive (consumer) research and hermeneutics. Next, I will elucidate the data collection methods I adopted, including a discussion of ethnography, (participant) observation, biographical/elicitation interviews, researcher introspection, and visual methods. I will proceed by outlining the hermeneutic style of data analysis and interpretation employed, before discussing how reflexivity was enacted throughout the project. I will conclude by explicating my ethical considerations.

3.2. Philosophical underpinning

3.2.1. Interpretive (consumer) research

Interpretivism was inspired by Wilhelm Dilthey, who contended that human beings cannot be studied using the same methodologies as the natural sciences, as we are not natural objects. He thus argued that the appropriate methodology for the human sciences was interpretation with the goal of understanding, as opposed to empirical observation and explanation as found in the natural sciences (Hazzard, 2000; Schmidt, 2006; Thompson, 1981). In seeking a ‘respectable’ methodology for the human sciences, Dilthey proposed that interpretations could be valid and objective understandings of phenomena were possible (Hazzard, 2000;
Thompson, 1981). Contemporary interpretivism is still associated with the central notion of verstehen and the goal of understanding. However, it has become less concerned with the validity and empirical verification of interpretations (Crotty, 1998).

In consumer research, beginning in the late 1960s, the dominant metaphor of the consumer was a computer, and hence persons were largely conceptualised as rational information processors (Belk, 1995; Ostergaard and Jantzen, 2002; Shankar and Patterson, 2001). However, as inspired by the so-called ‘consumer behaviour odyssey’ (Shankar and Patterson, 2001), in addition to more sociologists and anthropologists joining marketing departments, in the 1980s an ‘interpretive turn’ was witnessed in the field. Thus, positivistic approaches, which are characterised by the ontological belief in a single objective reality, an epistemological concern with nomothetic knowledge, and the axiological goal of explanation, were questioned. Consumption was reconsidered as comprising acquisition, usage, and disposal, and consumers were reconceptualised as social and emotional beings influenced by other people and wider cultural issues (Belk, 1995; Goulding, 1999; Ostergaard and Jantzen, 2002; Shankar and Goulding, 2001; Shankar and Patterson, 2001; Sherry, 1991). Whilst there has not been a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense, since positivistic approaches are still prevalent in consumer research (Levy, 2005; Shankar and Patterson, 2001), a ‘spirited debate’ has thereby been engendered concerning the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the field (Hunt, 1991). This has resulted in more interpretivist work being conducted in consumer research, which is broadly associated with the ontological assumption that multiple socially constructed realities exist, contextual idiographic knowledge of consumers is attainable, and the axiological goal of understanding (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Shankar and Patterson, 2001; Szmigin and Foxall, 2000; Table 1).

Furthermore, a sub-field of Consumer Culture Theory (henceforth CCT) has emerged comprising researchers who take a more interpretive and culturally-informed view of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, 2007), and this thesis is reflective of this research tradition. Although it was later conceded that, to better capture its diverse and heteroglossic nature it should perhaps instead be termed Consumer Culture Theoretics (Arnould and Thompson, 2007), as Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 868) explain, researchers identifying with CCT attend to the “…sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption”. They detail four main areas of work in CCT: the socio-historic patterning of consumption, consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies (ibid).
Table 1: Philosophical assumptions of interpretivism and positivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Interpretive</th>
<th>Positivist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontological</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nature of reality</td>
<td>Socially constructed</td>
<td>Objective, tangible</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Single</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Fragmentable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Divisible</td>
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<td>Nature of social beings</td>
<td>Voluntaristic</td>
<td>Deterministic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
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<td><strong>Axiological</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overriding goal</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
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<td><strong>Epistemological</strong></td>
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<td>Knowledge generated</td>
<td>Idiographic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Time-bound</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
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<tr>
<td>View of causality</td>
<td>Multiple, simultaneous shaping</td>
<td>Real causes exist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research relationship</td>
<td>Interactive, co-operative</td>
<td>Dualism, separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No privileged point of observation</td>
<td>Privileged point of observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: Shankar and Patterson, 2001, p. 484; adapted from Hudson and Ozanne, 1988]

3.2.2. Contemporary hermeneutics

I identify more specifically with some of the key tenets of contemporary hermeneutics. The Latin translation of the Greek word for hermeneutics is *interpretatio*, from which the English word interpretation stems (Schmidt, 2006, p. 6). Thus, hermeneutics and interpretivism are conceivably intertwined. The term hermeneutics stems from Hermes the Greek Messenger God, whose job was to confer understandable messages from the Gods to the mortals (Arnold and Fisher, 1994; Schmidt, 2006). Hermeneutics was originally concerned with ‘correct’ textual interpretation, particularly of Biblical texts (Arnold and Fisher, 1994; Geanellos, 2000; Hazzard, 2000). Yet, as influenced by the work of notable hermeneutic philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, hermeneutics became more concerned with ontological issues, for example the person doing the interpreting (Arnold and Fisher, 1994; Geanellos, 2000; Schmidt, 2006; Thompson, 1981).

A key concept underpinning hermeneutics is *historicity* (Laverty, 2003; J. Thompson, 1981; C. Thompson, 1998; Wachterhauser, 1986); namely, the ontological notion that “...we make history, that we are immersed in history, that we are historical beings” (Thompson, 1981, p. 274). Indeed, Heidegger argued that our pre-understandings, as arising from being situated in (or ‘thrown’ into) particular historical, social, and temporal contexts, are central to our
‘being-in-the-world’ and how we interpret our lived experiences (Laverty, 2003; Schmidt, 2006; Thompson, 1996; Wachterhauser, 1986). Similarly, Gadamer (1975 [2013]) contended that our understandings are historically-situated, whereby human beings are entangled in ever-evolving contexts, which in turn shape their epistemological understandings of the world. He explained how we make interpretations from within our ‘horizon’, which denotes “…the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular standpoint” (ibid, p. 311). Subsequently, he introduced the concept fusion of horizons to elucidate how understandings of a text/the world are attained when the horizons of interpreter and text/the world come into dialogue (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Thompson et al., 1994; Vessey, 2009; Widdershoven, 1993). For Gadamer, our horizons are dynamic and expand as we gain new experiences and reinterpret the past in light of these, as a horizon is “…something into which we move and that moves with us” (Gadamer, 1975 [2013], p. 313).

Thus, the idea that a person’s interpretations are always unavoidably shaped by his/her ongoing biography and the historically-situated context in which he/she is entangled is central to hermeneutics, which I wholly agree with. This contrasts with phenomenology, which has been critiqued for sometimes providing ahistorical and individualistic accounts of behaviour (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Thompson, 1996). Furthermore, unlike phenomenology which encourages interpreters to ‘bracket out’ their prior assumptions (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Laverty, 2003), from a hermeneutic perspective this can never be achieved. This is since we cannot remove ourselves from the contexts in which we are situated, nor from our past. Hence, from a hermeneutic standpoint our pre-understandings are vital to our interpretations of phenomena (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Laverty, 2003; Schmidt, 2006; Wachterhauser, 1986), meaning that reflexivity is also important for hermeneutic researchers.

### 3.3. Research context: Tattoo consumption

To explore my aforementioned research questions, the primary context of tattoo consumption was adopted. By tattooing I refer to the practice of puncturing the skin by a needle or other sharp instrument, and the insertion of a permanent pigment into these perforations (Jones, 2000, p. 255). Whilst in Western cultures emphasis is placed on tattoos as finished products (Gell, 1993, cited in Sweetman, 1999), reflecting my understanding of consumption more broadly (Section 2.2.5), I am considering tattoo consumption as a set of activities which occur over time, including dreaming about; planning; waiting for; acquiring; caring for; reflecting/gazing upon; and possible removal of tattoos. As tattooing is a diverse practice, I focused on tattoos planned and acquired to mark important times in people’s lives, in addition
to the process of older tattoos being covered up with new tattoos, or removed via laser surgeries, as a person’s sense of self/life changes over time and the initial tattoo is reflected upon. As the project unfolded, and new theoretical areas emerged as being potentially important, I expanded my focus to tattoos planned and acquired to memorialise others after their death, alongside semicolon and ‘Do Not Revive’ tattoos. Furthermore, as interviews and interactions with participants progressed, there also evolved a discussion of other bodily modifications engaged in to negotiate time through the body, such as anti-ageing procedures/cosmetics and hair transformations, in addition to how participants’ bodies sometimes underwent involuntary changes in response to significant life events, including bodily injuries/scars and weight loss/gain. Thus, these additional bodily modifications helped to further enrich my understandings of body-time entanglements, and they are referred to in the findings chapter alongside participants’ tattoos.

The primary context of tattoo consumption was chosen for several key reasons. First, this research context helps to develop a better understanding of how time is (re)negotiated through the body via consumption activities, and thus helps to answer my first two research questions. This is because tattoos are often acquired to mark significant life events (e.g. Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Velliquette et al., 2006), or are covered up/removed as a person’s sense of self and life changes over time (e.g. Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008) which, as explained, was one of my main focuses.

Second, tattooing centres on the skin which arguably constitutes the most visible site of the body’s temporality, since multiple marks of time can interact upon on it, for example tattoos, scars, and wrinkles. This again helps to answer my first and second research questions. As Lasch (1984) contends, the ‘surface’ is central to the management of self-impressions in consumer culture. Indeed, the skin represents a focal site of much consumption activity, despite remaining underexplored by consumer researchers (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010).

Finally, it has been observed that ‘accelerating’ Western consumer culture is driven by transience (Bauman, 2000; Graeber, 2011; Slater, 1997; Turley, 2005), and the concept of consumption ordinarily revolves around the idea of something being devoured completely (Graeber, 2011). However, as a tattoo represents a permanent mark etched into an ultimately impermanent surface, tattoos differ from more ephemeral consumer goods (Sweetman, 1999; Velliquette et al., 2006). Indeed, although laser removal surgeries are becoming more widely available and the tattoo removal market is hence expanding (Mintel, 2016a), these procedures
can still leave permanent scars (Shelton and Peters, 2006). Coupled with the rising popularity of memorial tattoos, this context thus also helps to explore my third key research question.

3.4. Data collection

3.4.1. Ethnographic approach

A processual ethnographic style of research was employed in this study. Ethnography is a research approach which involves the researcher participating in the everyday lives of a particular culture over an extended period of time. The aim is attaining an understanding of the culture through the eyes of its members, alongside developing a “thick description” of the culture (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007; Brewer, 2004; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Marcus, 1995; Tedlock, 2000). I immersed myself in my research concepts and context of tattooing by watching relevant television programmes and documentaries (e.g. Body Shockers; Tattoos after Dark; Tattoo Fixers; Body Mods; and Fabulous Fashionistas); countless YouTube videos of people acquiring and talking about their tattoos; reading online news articles regarding tattooing; time; body modification; ageing; and immortality, in addition to the audience discussions; reading related novels/books like The Time Keeper (Albom, 2012) and Reasons to Stay Alive (Haig, 2015), alongside numerous academic books and journals; acquiring a six month subscription to Skin Deep tattooing magazine; and chatting to a tattoo studio manager, four tattoo artists, and one scarification expert. In addition to these more “informal” methods, I adopted (participant) observation, biographical/elicitation interviews, and visual methods, to be further discussed below.

Although ethnography can be expensive and time-consuming (Banister and Booth, 2005; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Sanders, 1987), it was employed in this thesis for several important reasons. First, since the body is being explored, by interacting first-hand in the world of tattooed persons this helps to capture a sense of others’ embodiment, as well as my own body being affected by others. This is especially given participant observation and face-to-face interviews are usually involved in ethnography. This was further bolstered by the incorporation of an autoethnographic element into the research design (see Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Gould, 2012; Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993), as I also acquired my second tattoo during the study, which I actively reflected upon in a research diary (Section 3.6).

Furthermore, it is difficult to capture and represent time within research projects, despite it being central to our lived experiences. This is in part due to institutional reasons, for example the short time periods given by universities/funding bodies to complete research projects which limits the use of longitudinal approaches (Ancona et al., 2001). Moreover, this is
owing to commonplace research methods, such as questionnaires and single shot semi-structured interviews, often presenting more static and ahistorical pictures of a shifting social world (Avital, 2000; Bash, 2000; Conle, 1999). As Law (2004, p. 2) notes:

“...Things that slip and slide, or appear and disappear, change shape or don’t have much form at all, unpredictabilities, these are just a few of the phenomena that are hardly caught by social science methods”.

Hence, given time is a key construct being explored throughout the thesis, the fluid, emergent, and often more longitudinal nature of ethnographic research is sensitive to my focus on human temporality by enabling me to better capture the dynamism of human beings and their social reality.

Finally, the body and time are both intricate concepts. Thus, as ethnography usually comprises multiple complementary data collection methods, such as interviews, participant observation, photography, and film (Brewer, 2004; Ekström, 2006; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003), this research style is arguably useful for developing more holistic insights into a phenomenon by shedding light on it from multiple angles (Peñaloza and Cayla, 2006), as well as capturing both structure and agency, and micro and macro level influences (Rooke, 2009). I will now turn my attention to these data collection methods lying at the heart of ethnographic approaches.

3.4.2. (Participant) observation

Traditional ethnography was typically conducted in a single exotic land some distance away from the researcher’s home country over a long period of time (Ekström, 2006; Hannerz, 2003; Kjeldgaard, Csaba, and Ger, 2006; Marcus, 1995; Rooke, 2009), as exemplified by the ethnographic work of anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead in distant tribal societies. However, in part influenced by globalisation, contemporary ethnography is often conducted in the researcher’s home country, as reflected by the notable urban ethnographies conducted by the Chicago School sociologists from the 1920s, such as Ernest Burgess and Robert Park (Jaynes et al., 2009). Furthermore, ethnography today is often undertaken across multiple sites rather than within a single locale. This enables the ethnographer to follow the movement of people, things, metaphor, plot, biography, and conflict, and is termed multi-sited ethnography (Ekström, 2006; Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995; Kjeldgaard et al., 2006).

Reflecting these general trends, I conducted (participant) observation at eight ethnographic sites. This also resonates with facet methodology, whereby a researcher draws upon multiple
methods and sites to shine light on a phenomenon from various angles, akin to when light is refracted by a cut gemstone (Mason, 2011). More specifically, I undertook (participant) observation for a total of just over 30 hours at the following fieldwork sites: two UK-based tattoo conventions (Manchester Tattoo Show; Liverpool Tattoo Convention); three UK-based tattoo studios (Alfie’s Tattoos; North West Tattooing; M1 Tattoos); and three art/museum exhibitions (Time: Tattoo Art Today, London; Body Worlds, Amsterdam; death: the human experience, Bristol; Figure 10). I visited a range of sites given tattooed people do not represent a static and homogenous population, and my research concepts are complex. I thus felt that one fieldwork site would have provided limited insight into my research concepts, context, and questions. Each site was chosen due to its relation to bodies, time, tattooing, and/or (im)mortality. Given the emergent nature of ethnography, several sites were decided upon towards the beginning of my research project, whereas others were chosen as more academic literature was digested, data collection had begun, and serendipitous chances arose. Fieldwork was conducted until ‘theoretical saturation’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) had been reached, and hence when it was felt that no fresh empirical insights could be captured.

Figure 10: Fieldwork sites visited

Gold (1958) created a continuum of four different roles a researcher engaged in observation might take: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and finally, complete observer (cited in Adler and Adler, 1994). Rather than being a pure observer or
participant, I iterated between participant/observer, insider/outsider, and familiar/distant within these fieldwork sites. Detailed fieldnotes were taken at each space, and they included those aspects suggested as important by Spradley (1980): space; actor; activity; object; event; time; goal; and feeling. On-site fieldnotes, taken as unobtrusively as possible, tended to be written in shorter bullet-point form due to time constraints (Figure 11). However, after leaving the sites, fieldnotes were expanded into a more extended narrative form (Figure 12). Since time lies at the heart of the thesis, I focused on the tense I was writing my fieldnotes in. Whilst I began writing my fieldnotes in the past tense, I later decided to write them in the first person present tense, since I am more emotionally engaged when reading other ethnographic work using this approach (e.g. Kozinets, 2002; Woermann and Rokka, 2015). Thus, given the body is also central to my thesis, I felt it was important to also affect the bodies of the thesis readers (e.g. when using illustrative fieldnotes in my findings).

**Figure 11: Example of bullet-point fieldnotes**

![Example of bullet-point fieldnotes](image1.png)

**Figure 12: Example of narrative fieldnotes**

![Example of narrative fieldnotes](image2.png)

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Photographs and film have long been in the arsenal of ethnographers, although visual methods were once critiqued for being overly subjective (Pink, 2007). Following challenges to realist ethnographic accounts, however, they have become more acceptable for use in ethnographic research (ibid). Accordingly, to capture the visual nature of embodiment and tattooing, photographs were also taken at each site where permitted. As Myers (1992, p. 272) asserts, “The richest written description of a tattoo… when compared to a photograph can only pale”. Moreover, given photographs are mnemonic (Holbrook, 2005), they also functioned as aide memoires when analysing my data and writing the thesis. Yet, as Back (2007, p. 17) observes: “Making the social world hold still for its portrait can seem like a gross violence, reducing its mutable flow to frozen moments”. Due to technological innovations and the more widespread availability of video recording devices, ethnography now often comprises more contemporary visual methods, such as videography, i.e. the use of video in ethnography (Belk and Kozinets, 2005; Merchant, 2011). Thus, given my focus on temporality, where feasible videos were also taken at some of the sites. These captured the processual nature of lived experience, and overcame the static ‘snapshot’ nature of photographs (Avital, 2000). Videos can also capture pre-reflective bodily movements and multiple senses (Belk and Kozinets, 2005; Merchant, 2011), thus complementing my focus on embodiment. However, due to concerns about anonymity and obtrusiveness, I took far more photographs than videos. Finally, material items were collected at the sites which also functioned as useful aide memoires, including maps; tickets/wristbands; tattoo studio business cards; price lists; and information booklets (Figure 13).

**Figure 13:** Example material items collected during fieldwork
(Participant) observation was undertaken for several key reasons. First, it is consistent with my focus on the body, as it involves the body of the researcher interacting in the same space as those of study participants (Adler and Adler, 1994; Bamberg, 2010). Indeed, it has been contended that much sociological work concerning the body tends to be paradoxically somewhat disembodied (Atkinson, 2002, 2003; Sparkes, 1999). Thus, this approach addresses Sparkes’s (1999, p. 18) claim that “…much recent theorising about the body has tended to be cerebral, esoteric, and ultimately a disembodied activity that has operated to distance us from the everyday embodied experiences of ordinary people”. Second, it complements my concern with time, since it represents a processual, flexible, and emergent method, and hence gives insights into people’s lived temporalised experiences. Third, given the leaky boundaries between participant observation and interviews, the former enriches and helps to contextualise the verbal narratives emerging from the latter.

However, spending short periods of time within research sites as I did can result in a lack of rapport and awkwardness between the researcher and the people being observed (Brockmann, 2011). Moreover, whilst (participant) observation helps to capture lived embodied experiences, when used in isolation it can provide de-contextualised insights (ibid). As Adam (1995) notes, the past and future flood into any observational moment, meaning that it always expands temporally beyond the present. Hence, as Goulding et al. (2002) observe, observational methods alone cannot fully tap into the meanings people might assign to their lived experiences. Thus, biographical/elicitation interviews were also conducted with 18 tattoo consumers, to which I turn in Section 3.4.3. First, to be more transparent about the activities I undertook at the fieldwork sites, I will now provide a detailed table (Table 2), in addition to an extended narrative and photograph montage for one of these sites (for narratives and photograph montages of other fieldwork sites see Appendices 1-7).
### Table 2: Fieldwork activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When?</th>
<th>Where?</th>
<th>Duration?</th>
<th>What did I do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| August 2014 | **Manchester Tattoo Show**  
GMEX Centre  
Manchester | 4 hours   | - Observation of the goings-on, including the tattooing process  
- Chatted to a tattoo artist (*Lenny*) and several tattoo consumers (including *Alyssa* and *Red Devil*)  
- Arranged future interview (*Alyssa*)  
- Took detailed fieldnotes, photos, and a couple of videos  
- Collection of materials (e.g. tattoo studio business cards and leaflets) |
| October 2014 | **Time: Tattoo Art Today**  
Somerset House  
London | 2 hours   | - Observation of the goings-on  
- Looked around all art exhibits  
- Took detailed fieldnotes and photos  
- Collection of materials (e.g. informative leaflets) |
| April 2015 | **North West Tattooing**  
Manchester | **First visit** 4 hours | - Observation of the goings-on, including the tattooing process  
- Looked around the tattoo studio  
- Chatted to tattoo artist (*Lenny*)  
- Conducted three semi-structured interviews (*Ufobaby*; *Tom*; and *Bob*)  
- Attended tattoo consultation meeting and chatted to tattoo consumer (*Keith*)  
- Arranged future fieldwork  
- Took detailed fieldnotes and photos |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td><strong>North West Tattooing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Second visit</strong></td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>Observed <em>Keith</em> getting his first tattoo, chatted to him, and arranged interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chatted to tattoo artist (<em>Lenny</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Took detailed fieldnotes and photos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td><strong>Liverpool Tattoo Convention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Observed the goings-on, including the tattooing process and musical acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britannia Adelphi Hotel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tried out tattooing on a banana skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chatted to tattoo museum owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collected materials (e.g. map, leaflets, and entrance wristband)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Took detailed fieldnotes, photos, and a couple of videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td><strong>Body Worlds</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>Observation of the goings-on, including the informational videos being played and other visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Looked around whole exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Took part in activities, such as checking my blood pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Took detailed fieldnotes and photos where permitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collected materials (e.g. leaflets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td><strong>Alfie’s Tattoos</strong></td>
<td><strong>First visit</strong></td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>Observed the goings-on and looked around the tattoo studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chatted to the tattoo artist (<em>Alfie</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organised my second tattoo design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observed two people being tattooed (including <em>Rusty</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Took detailed fieldnotes, photos, and videoed <em>Rusty’s</em> tattooing process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| November 2015 | **M1 Tattoos**  
*Manchester* | 2hr 45 mins | - Observed the goings-on and looked around the tattoo studio  
- Chatted to two tattoo artists  
- Chatted to Sarah and observed her being tattooed  
- Took detailed fieldnotes |
| December 2015 | **Alfie’s Tattoos**  
*Shropshire* | **Second visit**  
1hr 30 mins | - Acquired my second tattoo  
- Chatted to tattoo artist (Alfie)  
- Took detailed fieldnotes and photos  
- Had my tattooing process filmed |
| December 2015 | **death: the human experience**  
*Bristol Museum & Art Gallery* | 2hr 45 mins | - Observed the goings-on, including other visitors and the informational videos being played  
- Looked around whole exhibit  
- Took detailed fieldnotes and photos  
- Participated in reflections activity  
- Collected materials (e.g. leaflet and map) |

### 3.4.2.1. Alfie’s Tattoos extended narrative

As with my master’s thesis, *Alfie* again proved to be an invaluable contact throughout this research project by allowing me access into his tattoo studio and helping with interview recruitment. *Alfie’s Tattoos* (pseudonym used) is a family-run tattoo studio found in the English county of Shropshire. It is headed by Alfie, a calm and friendly guy with a broad Midlands accent. The tattooing aspect of the studio is supported by two of his children: *Bella* who is an aspiring tattoo artist and helps with drawing the tattoo designs, and *Sam* who mainly deals with payments and bookings. Since I had last visited for my master’s project, Alfie had incorporated a specialist balloon shop in the front of the studio, in addition to two hairdressing stations, a nail bar, exercise bike, and massage area in the back room for family and friends. These are run by his wife and eldest daughter and give the tattoo studio a very eclectic feel.
Alfie’s Tattoos is situated on a busy road next to a gym, and has a welcoming homely feel with a modern aesthetic (Figure 14). The studio is spacious, and as you walk through the front door into the first entrance room to your right Alfie’s prized hand-built motorbike can be found cornered off by blue rope, akin to treasure being displayed in a museum. Slightly further along also on the right-hand-side is the payment desk, behind which Sam can usually be found. To the left, several racks of balloons stand amongst example balloons blown up. There is also a selection of ornaments and several mugs for sale in this entrance room. Towards the back of the room is the main desk, behind which Alfie and Bella can sometimes be found drawing up designs, taking a break, or chatting to family members. On the walls you can find Alfie’s artwork, framed photos of his travels with his motorbike in the USA, and a framed football shirt.

As you exit this room, straight ahead a wooden staircase can be found which leads up to the tattooing room, and to the left of this staircase some portfolios lie on a table, alongside framed images of his tattoo work. Even further ahead is a spacious back room, which now comprises two hairdressing stations; an exercise bike surrounded by bright red and white balloons; a small nail bar; and a red massage bed surrounded by white drapes. This surprised me as it used to be a client sitting room with images of his tattoo work and design books.

At the top of the wooden staircase is the main tattooing room. It is extremely clean and has a clinical feel, with white walls and tiles. It comprises a black leather tattooing bed; stainless steel tables holding his tattoo guns, colourful inks, and antiseptic sprays; stainless steel wastage bins for used needles; a full length black mirror in front of which his clients can be found admiring their finished tattoos; several fans and heaters; and a black sofa, behind which the word relax is spelled out in stainless steel letters on a windowsill. Aftercare instructions are also found on the walls recommending customers to use Bepanthen cream.

My first visit to Alfie’s Tattoos for my PhD project (the fifth in total) lasted for six hours. I had arranged with Alfie and one of his clients (interview participant Rusty) to come in to observe Rusty getting a new tattoo. Alfie, however, said I could spend the day there and also watch his first client of the day being tattooed. Thus, I spent the first hour of my visit observing Alfie’s first client getting a Japanese-style ‘sleeve’, and chatting to him and Alfie. I asked the guy about his tattoos and he took me through his collection, albeit not in much depth as he was rather monosyllabic (conceivably due to him being in pain!) As I sat observing the tattooing process, I was bombarded by the all too familiar repetitive buzzing sound of the tattooing gun, and pungent smell of antiseptic, which made me feel drowsy.
Once Alfie had finished tattooing his first client, he had cleared up, and I had taken a few fieldnotes, I followed him back down to the entrance room. I took several photographs of the studio, and chatted to Alfie about his studio and his plans to acquire a memorial tattoo to commemorate the granddaughter he had recently lost. I also explained to him the type of font I wanted for my second tattoo, which I was booked in for at the studio. Alfie advised me to go onto his computer to look, and I spent a while looking for an appropriate font online. Soon after saving my desired tattoo font onto Alfie’s computer, Rusty arrived at the tattoo studio. After greeting each other, I followed him and Alfie back upstairs to the main tattooing room. I spent three hours observing Rusty getting his new tattoo, filmed some of the tattooing process and took several photographs (with his permission), and chatted to him and Alfie.

It was a quiet day in Alfie’s Tattoos. Apart from the two people booked months in advance to be tattooed (and who I observed), one guy who came in to enquire about a tattoo, and copious family members who were chatting downstairs for most of my visit, there was no one else in the studio. On the way home from the fieldwork visit I recorded detailed fieldnotes.

~

My second PhD project visit to Alfie’s Tattoos (and sixth overall) lasted for around an hour and a half, and revolved around me acquiring my second tattoo. I went to the tattoo studio with my stepmum, who was there for moral support and to aid with filming and photographing the tattooing process. I began my visit by signing a disclaimer form given to me by Sam, and paying £70 in advance for my tattoo. In the upstairs tattooing room, Alfie had already set up for my tattoo and had laid out several different stencil sizes. I decided upon the smallest design, with the advice of Alfie and my stepmum. We spent the first 15-20 minutes working as a team to work out where the best placement for my new tattoo would be:

“I take my top off and tell him that I’d like the tattoo on my ribs... He puts some Vaseline onto the paper stencil and sticks it onto my rib for me to take a look at. I go towards the mirror and take a look. It looks a bit low down. I ask my stepmum for her opinion and they both look at the design on my rib intently... She remarks that she thinks it should be positioned a bit further up. Alfie grabs a black marker pen and proceeds to make a few marks on my skin to work out the best new positioning of the stencil. I feel like I’m a piece of wood being marked up or a picture he’s hanging onto the wall. We all work as a team for what feels around 15-20 minutes, with Alfie moving the stencil around and making black markings on my skin with a pen until we are all happy...” [Fieldnotes: Alfie’s Tattoos].

I then proceeded to lie down on the tattoo bed and was tattooed for about 30 minutes, squeezing my stepmum’s hand at times to help with the pain. Throughout the tattooing
process I chatted to my stepmum and Alfie about his studio and the tattooing industry, and my stepmum filmed some of the tattooing process and took several photographs. Once the tattoo was complete, and I had admired it in the full-length black mirror, Alfie took a couple of photographs of it for his personal portfolio (I explicitly asked him not to put it online). I left the studio feeling very happy with my new tattoo, and in search of Bepanthen cream.

Figure 14: Alfie’s Tattoos photograph montage
3.4.3. Biographical/elicitation interviews

Interviewing has long been the most commonly employed data collection method in the social sciences (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013; Denzin, 2001; Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour, 2014). To attain the narratives of people’s experiences with their bodies, time, death, and tattooing (and the meaning more reflexively attached to these), I conducted biographical and elicitation style interviews with 18 tattoo consumers. Generating narratives was important given the capacity for narratives to capture and make sense of how the self, a person’s life, and the context in which they live, unfolds over time (Ezzy, 1998; Phoenix et al., 2007; Rankin, 2002; Ricoeur, 1980, 1984, 1992; Sparkes and Smith, 2003).

The 18 tattoo consumers varied in terms of sex, age, and class, and were from the UK (all were White British) with the exception of one participant who was Italian (Table 3). They were recruited with the aid of tattoo artists and personal contacts via a mixture of purposive sampling, whereby a person is chosen due to having characteristics related to the study’s focus (Coyne, 1997; Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam, 2003); snowball sampling, where a sample is built through participant referrals (Ritchie et al., 2003); and theoretical sampling, whereby informants are chosen in accordance with emergent themes and to further develop theory (Coyne, 1997; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Thus, I interviewed tattoo consumers since my primary research context is tattoo consumption, and I initially recruited people who had planned and acquired tattoos to mark important times in their lives, had removed tattoos due to changes in their life or sense of self, and/or had memorial tattoos. Reflecting emergent insights from data collection/analysis, over time I also sought to recruit somebody with a semicolon tattoo (Kate) and a ‘DNR’ tattoo (Chris). Moreover, to ensure that my sample was more varied in terms of age, an older participant (Hamlet, 75) was also actively recruited.

In sociology, interest in life narrative research was ignited by the 1918-1920 publication of Thomas and Znaniecki’s The Polish Peasant, thereby becoming popular until around the 1930s (Brannen, 2013; Goodson, 2001; Plummer, 1983). However, it then lost popularity to more statistical approaches, or more situational observational methods, before undergoing a resurgence in the 1980s (Goodson, 2001). Likewise, in consumer research biographical methodologies have historically paled in comparison to more positivistic approaches, although several consumer researchers have fruitfully used life history methods or historical approaches more recently (e.g. Ahuvia, 2005; Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Epp and Price, 2010; Karababa and Ger, 2011; Marion and Nairn, 2011; Shankar et al., 2009; Türe and Ger, 2016). I thus took inspiration from these researchers when planning the interviews.
Table 3: Interview participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of tattoos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Trainee psychotherapist</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>12 (inc. full sleeve, 3 cover-ups &amp; laser surgery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilbo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Environmental communications and events officer</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 small tattoos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Electrical engineer</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Full back piece; chest piece; and 2 half sleeves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Homeless support worker</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>15+ (inc. 2 full sleeves, cover-ups &amp; laser surgery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaws</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>5 (inc. full sleeve &amp; calf piece)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Supply teacher</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 (inc. half sleeve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Full sleeve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natedog</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>DJ</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>28+ (inc. 2 half sleeves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Masters student</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>5 small tattoos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Devil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>PhD student</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>4 (inc. full sleeve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusty</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>8 (inc. 2 half sleeves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Civil servant</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>13 (inc. eyebrow tattooing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>2 full sleeves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ufobaby</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Full sleeve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Masters student</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3 small tattoos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I also took inspiration from biographical-narrative interpretive method interviews (henceforth BNIM). BNIM interviews are lightly structured depth interviews, which usually comprise three interrelated sub-sessions, ordinarily spanning multiple interview sessions. The first sub-session enables the informant to tell an uninterrupted story of their life as engendered via the use of a ‘SQUIN’ (single question aimed at inducing narrative), which is like a ‘grand tour’ question (McCracken, 1988). The researcher functions as a non-directive story facilitator (Wengraf, 2000, 2001). The second sub-session is usually conducted on the same day, and involves the researcher probing for narratives about various life events narrated in the initial story (ibid). Finally, the third sub-session, ordinarily conducted at a later date, is often semi-structured and usually comprises questions concerning the phenomenon of interest (ibid).

However, I find the method to be overly prescriptive, such as the non-interventionist interviewer role; the inability to console emotional informants; the prohibition of returning to earlier topics once covered or combining topics; being forbidden to reveal anything about your own life history; and the complex related analysis approach (Wengraf, 2001). Thus, since I desired more flexibility to attend to the differences between participants, for example concerning how comfortable or emotional they might be when narrating their life story, I did not follow BNIM methodology to the rule. Instead, I took inspiration from the idea of conducting multiple interviews with each participant: the first a life history focused interview and the second a semi-structured consumption-based interview. This was to attain a more contextual understanding of their lived experiences and (consumption) behaviours.

Furthermore, I incorporated an elicitation component in the interviews (see Johnson and Weller, 2001). This approach relates to projective techniques, which stem from the Freudian concept of projection, i.e. the notion that persons attribute their negative traits onto others as a defence mechanism (Boddy, 2005; Donoghue, 2000). I asked participants to bring along one or more objects related to important times in their lives to the life history interview (via the participant information sheet and/or directly; Appendix 8). I imagined that their tattooed bodies would function as elicitation devices in the second tattooing-based interview.

Interviews were conducted over a one-year period beginning in February 2015. They were initially arranged via text or email (where some initial rapport was built) and were conducted in cafes, my University office, participants’ homes, hotel sitting areas, or tattoo studios, depending on participants’ preferences or unexpected opportunities sometimes arising. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes (two serendipitous interviews) and just under two hours and culminated in 30 recorded interviews (Table 4). The majority of participants were
interviewed in accordance with my original plans. These one-on-one interviews comprised the three aforementioned sub-sessions found within BNIM approaches, and were either conducted on the same day or on two separate occasions, depending on the participant’s preference/availability. The first interview involved the participant telling an uninterrupted story of their life, engendered by the following ‘grand tour’ (McCracken, 1988) question:

“Please could you tell me the story of your life, including the events you feel have been most important to shaping who you are as a person today?”

I actively listened to their story, provided reassuring body language and guidance when needed, and took brief notes (Figure 15). I then spent several minutes going through my notes to pick out their key life events and turning points, which I then probed for further narratives about. Despite being asked to bring special objects along with them to this life history interview, ultimately only eight participants did, perhaps due to forgetting, not possessing any, and/or preferring not to.

The second interview largely involved the participants telling me the story of their tattoos, as elicited by their tattooed bodies and the following grand tour question:

“Please could you tell me the story of your tattoos? So which one did you get first, and do they relate to any events or times in your life?”

Subsequent questions concerned tattooing the past, permanence, future tattooing plans, ageing (tattoos), and other body modification activities. Again I actively listened, probed for further information, and took notes. Interview guides were referred to (Appendices 9 and 10) but not rigidly adhered to, since informants were also free to set the dialogue.

Owing to serendipitous interviewing opportunities arising (e.g. when conducting fieldwork at tattoo studios), or the limited availability of participants, five participants were instead interviewed on one occasion using a semi-structured approach (see Wengraf, 2001). Furthermore, due to geographical distance, one of these semi-structured interviews was conducted via Skype rather than in person. I felt that this was preferable over a phone interview, as the video mode on Skype offers access to embodied cues (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013; Janghorban et al., 2014), thus completing the study’s focus on embodiment.

In these instances, I referred to my second interview guide and interviews largely concerned participants’ tattoos and how they related (or not) to life events. All of the interviews were audio-recorded with each participant’s permission and later transcribed verbatim. Photographs of participants’ tattoos and/or special objects were also taken or later obtained via email (again with their permission).
Table 4: Interview and recruitment details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>How recruited</th>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th>Number of occasions met</th>
<th>Duration of recorded interview(s)</th>
<th>Brought along elicitation object(s)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 50 mins&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilbo</td>
<td>Referred to via Victoria</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interview 1: 40 mins&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 40 mins</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>Serendipitous semi-structured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>Semi-structured via Skype</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>Semi-structured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Alfie’s client</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 45 mins</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaws</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 hour 30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour 30&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 35 mins</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natedog</td>
<td>Alfie’s client</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour 15&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Referred to via personal contact</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour 10&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour 45</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly</td>
<td>Referred to via Victoria</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 40 mins&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Devil</td>
<td>Lenny’s client/personal contact</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour 30&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour 30</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusty</td>
<td>Alfie’s client</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour 30&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Referred to via Kate</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 1 hour&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour 10</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>Serendipitous semi-structured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ufobaby</td>
<td>Lenny’s client</td>
<td>Serendipitous semi-structured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Referred to via personal contact</td>
<td>BNIM-inspired</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 1: 35 mins&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: 1 hour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Life history approaches can be time consuming (Musson, 2004; Wengraf, 2001), and people do not have the same capacity to narrate in detail about their lives (Atkinson, 2001; Byrne, 2003; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2004). Moreover, narratives can be ambiguous and inconsistent, thereby making them challenging to analyse/interpret (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2004). A biographical style of interview, however, offers several crucial benefits. First, it complements the study’s focus on temporality, since life history methods are sensitive to process and thus capture how a person (and culture) develops over time (Atkinson, 2001; Plummer, 1983; Sparkes and Smith, 2003). Second, the past arguably shapes the person we are today and present behaviours, as linked to the aforementioned hermeneutic notion of historicity. Thus, by generating an account of a person’s life history, biographical approaches are retrospective techniques that offer insights into, and help to contextualise, people’s present-day behaviours and their interpretations of these in light of past events and vice versa (Otnes, Ruth, Lowrey, and Commuri, 2006; Wengraf, 2000, 2001). Finally, life history methods can also shed light on the historical context in which a person lives, since they can capture both micro and macro-level influences (Brannen, 2013; Chaitin, 2004; Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf, 2000; Goodson, 2001; Musson, 2004; Plummer, 1983; Josselson and Lieblich, 1993).

Moreover, special objects/photos can capture a sense of past and are mnemonic (Belk, 1988, 1990; Buse and Twigg, 2015; Epp and Price, 2010; Holbrook, 2005; O’Donohoe, 2016; Price et al., 2000; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012; Woodward, 2015). Hence, elicitation approaches
are useful for aiding recollection and provoking life narratives, as evidenced by Woodward’s (2015) exploration of people’s lived experiences with their jeans. Elicitation is also beneficial for studying emotional and intricate topics (Johnson and Weller, 2001), as this thesis does.

3.5. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation are interconnected, yet not synonymous. During data analysis, data is categorised, manipulated, and patterns are identified, whilst in data interpretation data and these patterns are made sense of somewhat more creatively (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013; Spiggle, 1994, 1998). To analyse and interpret the interview transcriptions, fieldnotes, and research diary, I adopted an iterative hermeneutic approach (Figure 16). Hermeneutic approaches revolve around the concept of the hermeneutic circle. That is, the idea that the whole can be understood only in light of the parts; and likewise, the parts can be understood only with reference to the whole (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Geanellos, 2000; McAuley, 2004; Thompson, 1997; Thompson et al., 1990; Thompson et al., 1994; Schmidt, 2006). It involves iterations between the part and whole, intratext (single case) and intertext (across cases) interpretations, and an individual’s narrative and the broader cultural context (Thompson, 1997). Moreover, continuous dialogue with the data is needed to prevent ‘premature interpretive closure’ of the hermeneutic circle (Geanellos, 2000).

**Figure 16: The iterative analysis and interpretation process**

- **Fusion of horizons**
  - My informants’ lived experiences; my own historically mediated frame of reference; and the historically situated sociocultural context
- **Findings contextualised with reference to the wider sociocultural context**
- **Emplotted narratives of my fieldwork visits and my informants’ intertwining life and tattoo histories written**
- **Intracase and intercase interpretations made; relationships between themes identified; themes moving from descriptive to more abstract over time**
- **Fieldnotes and each interview transcription read once through, and initial interpretations and themes jotted onto paper**
- **Fieldnotes and interviews uploaded onto NVivo and categorised into inductively generated themes**
- **MY LIFE HISTORY**
- **INFORMANTS’ LIFE HISTORIES**
- **HISTORICALLY SITUATED SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT**
Since the boundaries between data collection and analysis/interpretation are blurry, this hermeneutic process started during data collection, and continued until I had finished writing and editing the thesis. I began more explicitly analysing and interpreting my data by printing off my interview transcriptions and fieldnotes. I took pen to paper and read each set of fieldnotes/interview transcription in its entirety; inductively noting down my initial emergent interpretations, themes, and patterns (Figure 17). During these early stages, I tried to use *emic* language (i.e. that used by interview participants), rather than more abstract academic (or *etic*) terminology (Belk *et al*., 2013; Ekström, 2006; Kjeldgaard *et al*., 2006).

**Figure 17: Example of initial analysis/interpretation**

Next, I uploaded the transcriptions, fieldnotes, and research diary onto NVivo computer software to help to manage and visualise the data. I again read through the data and inductively categorised it into themes. This reflects thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Gibbs, 2007), and paradigmatic narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sparkes, 1999), whereby the analyst looks for common patterns and ideas in the data/narratives, and classifies particular sections as belonging to a category or concept (i.e. a theme). I focused on the unique aspects of each interview/fieldwork account, in addition to patterns *across* the data set by creating separate NVivo folders for individual participants and the entire sample. This was to aid with intracase and intercase interpretations (Figure 18; Appendices 11 and 12). Earlier fieldnotes/interviews influenced the coding of later ones and vice versa. I iterated between a single sentence and the whole text; a single interview participant’s narrative and the whole set of narratives; and the text and the wider cultural context. This was aided by
reference to historical understandings and experiences of bodies, time, ageing, death, and
tattooing in Western cultures (as explored in Chapter 2). Over time, I sought relationships
between the themes and they became more theoretical, yet still loyal to participants’ lived
experiences and their interpretations of these; thus, theme labels became more *etic* over time.

**Figure 18: Example of NVivo analysis**

Thematic/paradigmatic analysis is a flexible approach which enables new insights and
theories to emerge from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, it can fragment and
decontextualise narratives, in turn neglecting *idiosyncrasies* (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman,
1993, 2001; Smith and Sparkes, 2002; Sparkes, 1999). Hence, to avoid this and to give
participants a voice, three participants’ intertwining life and tattoo (hi)stories were written as
longer ‘emplotted’ narratives (Section 4.2.2). Fieldwork visits were also written in narrative
form. This reflects a *story teller* approach to narrative analysis, whereby the story itself is
taken as theoretical and a product of analysis (Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes, 2010). This is
important given academic accounts can sometimes be detached from people’s lives (Bochner, 1997; Miles, 2001), and to make my thesis more engaging. Furthermore, the narrative features found in participants’ narratives were also identified, such as: plot, sequence, characters, life events, and turning points (Sparkes, 1999), in addition to the temporal modes of past, present, and future. This mirrors a story analyst approach, wherein a narrative’s structural elements are recognised (Phoenix et al., 2010). Moreover, as Spiggle (1994, 1998) notes, metaphor operates through the notion of similarity and involves selecting a near source domain to represent a more distant target domain (also see Arnould, Price, and Moisio, 2006; Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander, 2006). Thus, to further enrich my understandings of the data, I also identified metaphors of time and the body evident within in.

Finally, a hierarchy is frequently constructed between text and image, whereby it is often thought that images need textual reinforcement to convey meaning (Gullette, 2004; Pink, 2007; Plummer, 1983). Thus, to remedy this I also created several photograph montages of fieldwork sites to give the photographs taken during the study more autonomy, as suggested by Pink (2007) (see Appendices 1-7).

3.6. Introspection, reflexivity, and transparency

Ethnography was traditionally steeped in a realist paradigm, meaning that ethnographic accounts were viewed as being (or ought to be) ‘true’ and direct windows into an objective reality (Clifford, 1986; Pink, 2007). However, since the late 1980s realist approaches have been challenged, as have positivistic ideals of the ‘detached scientist’, especially by feminist theorists who have emphasised the importance of laying bare the researcher’s assumptions and positionality (Woodthorpe, 2009). Thus, the subjective, co-constructed, and partial nature of (ethnographic) knowledge has been acknowledged, and researcher reflexivity considered to be important (Clifford, 1986; Pink, 2007; Tedlock, 2000). Indeed, Woodthorpe (2011b) observes that we have witnessed a ‘reflexive turn’ in the social sciences and a growth in ‘intellectual honesty’. As Pink (2007, p. 22) explains:

“...Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture, and individuals) that is based on ethnographers’ own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations, and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced”.

Subsequently, although not entirely fictional, narratives are performed and co-constructed between the researcher and participant within the interview context/research site. They thus
represent a socially constructed product of a particular time and space (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Brannen, 2013; Crichton and Koch, 2007; Cunliffe et al., 2004; Denzin, 2001a; Fontana and Frey, 2000; Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000; Riessman, 2001; Wengraf, 2001). Furthermore, personal narratives intertwine with broader cultural narratives, alongside socially normative ways of delivering self-narratives (Brannen, 2013; Byrne, 2003; Gullette, 2004; Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006; Phoenix et al., 2007, 2010; Sparkes, 1999). Self-narratives are also partial and create coherence out of more fragmented life events (Becker, 1997; Riessman, 2001). Finally, they are fluid and reconstructed and edited over time in the face of new life experiences (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000; Phoenix et al., 2007; Ricoeur, 1992; Riessman, 2001). Likewise, any observational moment is a co-constructed product of a particular time, space, and group; as Clifford (1986, p. 10) observes “Cultures do not hold still for their portraits”.

The ‘value’ of research findings has long been legitimised with regards to positivistic criteria, such as reliability, validity, and objectivity. However, as fuelled by the ‘criteriology debate’, whereby it was felt that these concepts were not as useful for qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1982) proposed the parallel quasi-positivistic criteria of credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) (also see Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Yet, arguably this criteria (imaginably driven by insecurities over being viewed as ‘unscientific’) can be restrictive and place limits on researchers’ creativities (Bochner, 2000). Indeed, given we are temporal beings, our self-interpretations and narratives inevitably change over time, arguably rendering reliability and parallel criteria defective for studying human beings. Moreover, we are not objective and lifeless objects of study to be ‘measured’ by detached researchers, meaning that validity, objectivity, and related criteria are also arguably unconstructive. I argue that transparency (being open and honest about the choices made during research) and researcher reflexivity, are more conducive when conducting research with and about human beings.

Reflexivity relates to Socrates’s claim that “…An unexamined life is not worth living” (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 20). It involves the researcher engaging in a continuous process of subjective self-awareness of how their self and life experiences have shaped their research (Finlay, 2002a, 2002b; Joy, Sherry, Troilo, and Deschenes, 2006; Malacrida, 2007; Pillow, 2003; Salzman, 2002). Reflexivity represents an aspect of introspection, which is a research approach comprising techniques such as researcher introspection, subjective personal introspection (SPI), autoethnography, narrative introspection, and reflexivity (Gould, 2012).
Introspection has been used by consumer researchers to reflect about their experiences with energy (Gould, 1991), plastic surgery (Sayre, 1999), being a fan (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2012), music/identity (Shankar, 2000), and a photograph collection (Holbrook, 2005). However, researcher introspection (or SPI/autoethnography) has been challenged for being ‘self-indulgent’ (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Phoenix et al., 2010; Shankar and Patterson, 2001; Woodthorpe, 2009), and potential issues regarding memory, retrospection, and attaining analytical distance from oneself (Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993). Yet, as Gould (2006) observes, we are naturally introspective in our everyday lives anyway.

There are permeable boundaries between academic and personal selves (Bochner, 1997, Broom, Hand, and Tovey, 2009; Conle, 1999; Shankar and Patterson, 2001). Rather than seeking to maintain complete scholarly detachment, I ensured to remain reflexive and transparent during the study about how my pre-understandings and life history might be influencing my project, including data interpretations. Given diaries can provide invaluable spaces to undertake reflexivity (Cutcliffe, 2003; Nadin and Cassell, 2006), I captured my thoughts and feelings relating to the project and my personal tattooing experiences into a research diary. To exemplify, I reflected upon how my personal tattooing experiences (including the importance of control) had perhaps influenced how I interpreted my participants’ narratives and decided to present my findings:

“I am such a private person that I think I will really struggle with other people being able to regularly see something so important to me. I still love this tattoo design idea and it’s something very important and meaningful to me but... I think I need the opportunity to be able to hide it if needed and to have much more control over who I let see my tattoo and reveal its highly personal meaning to. I just Googled ‘rib script tattoos’, which I also like the look of. Although on my ribs would also be less regularly visible to me as well as others, I think by painfully getting the word reinterpreted etched into my flesh, I will be reminded to do this more regularly than when written on a piece of paper... I feel much less anxious about getting this on my ribs than on my wrist and so I think it is a better plan for me. I need more control over who can see it...” [Research diary].

Furthermore, I frequently reflected upon my methodological decisions. This aided with transparency when writing my research design chapter and helped me to think through the pros and cons of certain methodological choices:

“I have recently read a new JCR article concerning time... At the beginning of the article the author included an excerpt from his fieldnotes which were written in the first person. This really helped to capture my attention and interest in the paper and almost transported me to the situation he was narrating in these notes. This has prompted me to write my fieldnotes in first person and the present tense to help capture my readers’ attentions more effectively and to catapult them into the
situations I have faced during my fieldwork, akin to when reading a novel and escaping into the characters’ worlds” [Research diary].

I also often reflected on whether I felt like an insider or outsider during fieldwork visits and when conducting interviews (as further discussed in the epilogue), echoing Jafari, Dunnett, Hamilton, and Downey’s (2013) reflections of experiences with researcher vulnerability. By considering my shifting feelings of being an insider/outsider, I was more sensitive to iterating between familiarity and distance when interpreting the data, and acknowledging similarities or differences between myself and the participants concerning sex, age, class, and life or consumption experiences. This was useful for building rapport by sometimes sharing common life and tattooing experiences (e.g. disclosing about my memorial tattoo to those with memorial tattoos), whilst also remaining non-judgemental regarding our differences.

Finally, alongside being reflexive, I also used narrative introspection which involves somebody telling their own story (Gould, 2006, 2012). Hence, my research diary became part of the empirical data, meaning that my experiences were interpreted and feature alongside my participants’ in the findings chapter. This helped to further render transparent how my tattooing experiences might have influenced my interpretations of others. As Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 738) assert, “…with understanding yourself comes understanding others”.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The principles of the Data Protection Act, 1998 (Information Commissioner’s Office, 2017) the ESRC’s Framework for Research Ethics (ESRC, 2017), and Alliance Manchester Business School ethics guidelines for postgraduate students (AMBS, 2017) were upheld throughout the thesis. Hence, information was processed fairly and lawfully; information standards were adhered to; and data was held securely, with password protected files used for fieldnotes, interview transcriptions, photographs of participants’ tattoos and special objects, and participants’ personal details. Participation was voluntary and informants were free to leave the study. Each interviewee was provided with a participant information sheet detailing the purpose of the study, what their participation would involve, and how data would be used. They were also given a consent form to sign before, or at the point of interview, alongside this information sheet (Appendix 8), and the opportunity to ask questions at any time.

Furthermore, there are often power imbalances between the researcher and the researched. Thus, to address this and ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, interviewees were given the opportunity choose their own pseudonyms (Nespor and Barber, 1995; Stern, 1998), which have been employed throughout the thesis. I also provided the tattoo studios visited
with pseudonyms to reduce the likelihood of readers identifying the clients interviewed. Photographs of the ethnographic sites and participants’ tattoos have been included in this thesis. However, care was taken to include photographs in which individuals cannot be identified (i.e. no close-ups of faces), and informed consent was gained from the interview participants and tattoo artists to use them. I also at times disclosed aspects of my life and/or tattooing history to participants (e.g. that I have a memorial tattoo), as sharing commonalities can help to build rapport and reduce power imbalances (Broom et al., 2009; Turley, 2016).

Power imbalances also frequently arise concerning research dissemination (Stern, 1998); indeed, Denzin (2001b, p. 324) observes that “…writing is not an innocent practice”. Thus, a life narrative methodology was used since this approach gives voices to those who might otherwise be excluded from research or society more generally (Essers, 2009; Goodson, 2001; Plummer, 1983; Wengraf, 2000). I also tried to give each participant a voice in the thesis by providing detailed interview extracts and narratives in the findings chapter.

Furthermore, each tattoo artist I spoke to for my research was aware who I was and about my project. Hence, (participant) observation conducted at the tattoo studios was overt and verbal permission was obtained for taking any photographs of the studios. However, given it was impractical to announce myself as a researcher to everyone present at the tattoo conventions and art/museum exhibitions, covert observation was undertaken at these sites. Yet, these were all open public events where photography was for the most part permitted (where it was forbidden photographs were not taken). Moreover, only very general and unobtrusive observations/notes were made regarding these sites, further minimising any ethical issues.

Although life history interviews can provoke considerable self-reflection and emotional responses, participants were made aware that I would be discussing life events beforehand, and care was taken to be empathetic towards them. I tried not to probe too much about certain topics if they seemed emotional for participants (i.e. a recent death), and they were given the opportunity not to discuss them if desired. Thus, ‘processual consent’ was negotiated, which is important given a researcher cannot always predict every emotional reaction from participants and researchers that might arise beforehand (Jafari et al., 2013; Turley, 2016; Woodthorpe, 2009). I also regularly tried to end interviews on less emotionally-charged topics, which further helped with upholding ‘beneficence’, i.e. ensuring that participants gained more positive outcomes than harm from the study (Turley, 2016).
Finally, I also considered my own safety and emotional well-being during the project, which Jafari et al. (2013) emphasise the importance of in their discussion of researcher vulnerability. When visiting the fieldwork sites, or on several occasions participants’ homes for interviews, a personal contact was made aware of where I was and when the location was exited. Furthermore, research studies can also be emotional for researchers, as will be reflected upon in Section 6.1.3. This can be the case when studying sensitive and emotional topics and/or ones that resonate with difficulties faced in one’s own life (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn, and Kemmer, 2001; Jafari et al., 2013; Malacrida, 2007; Turley, 2016; Woodthorpe, 2009). Hence, by writing an ongoing reflexive diary, talking through any issues with my PhD supervisors/personal contacts, and moving onto less emotionally-charged PhD tasks, or non-academic activities if necessary, helped to protect my own emotional well-being.

3.8. Chapter conclusions

This chapter began by reminding readers of my three key research questions. I then noted my personal philosophical assumptions concerning ontology and epistemology, with a particular focus on interpretive (consumer) research and contemporary hermeneutics. Next, I explained and justified the primary context of tattoo consumption being drawn upon in the thesis, before moving onto detailing and defending the iterative and emergent ethnographic research approach used. A discussion of (participant) observation followed, including the fieldwork sites visited and the activities conducted at each site, and an extended narrative account and photograph montage was provided for one of these. I then outlined my purposive, snowball, and theoretical sampling approach, and the biographical and elicitation style of interviews conducted with 18 tattoo consumers. The iterative hermeneutic approach used to analyse and interpret my interviews, fieldnotes, and research diary was next discussed, before addressing researcher introspection and the importance of transparency and reflexivity during the thesis. Finally, the ethical considerations upheld throughout the thesis were outlined.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. Chapter introduction and theoretical underpinning

Given multiple data collection methods were employed in this project, coupled with the complexity of people’s life histories and my key research constructs, a rich data set was accumulated during the course of study. These data cover numerous themes, spanning relationships and belonging to emotions and physical pain (Appendix 11). However, to provide a coherent account, I focus on broad thematic areas concerning temporality, the body, and (im)mortality. The findings presented and discussed in this chapter, therefore, answer my aforementioned research questions:

1. How might bodily modifications relate in contrasting ways to cultural notions of time and lived temporality?
2. How and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities?
3a. Why might the consumption of temporal permanence still be sought in an ‘accelerating’ cultural context?

And;

3b. How and why might people endeavour to attain a sense of temporal permanence for themselves and/or others through modifying the impermanent body?

As tattoo consumption was the primary research context drawn upon, the findings centre on the temporality of this mode of consumption, i.e. how tattoo consumption relates to cultural notions of time and lived temporality. However, as interviews and interactions with participants progressed, there also evolved a discussion of other bodily modifications, such as anti-ageing procedures/cosmetics and hair transformations, in addition to how participants’ bodies sometimes underwent involuntary changes, including bodily injuries/scars and weight loss/gain. Accordingly, to better understand the intricate relations between bodies and time, I also discuss these other bodily changes alongside those resulting from tattooing when developing my account of autobodyographies within the first key theme.

This chapter begins with some initial observations of how the tempo of tattoo consumption might have decelerated over recent decades, in contrast with ‘accelerating’ Western cultures. The discussion is then broadened out by exploring the three key temporal themes identified in the data; these are: Autobodyographies: Inscribing, revising, and hiding temporality; Broken beings: Repairing temporal ruptures; and finally, Inking immortality: Transcending temporal
boundaries. These thematic areas are then drawn together with a critical discussion of ‘promises’ within consumer culture that persons can master time, the body, and death.

As Shankar and Patterson (2001, p. 491; original emphasis) note, “...as interpretive researchers all we are able to offer is an interpretation not the interpretation”. However, a rigorous data analysis/interpretation process was undertaken (Section 3.5), and care was taken to balance emic and etic perspectives. Thus, any interpretations provided are firmly grounded in participants’ (and my own) lived experiences. Moreover, to enrich the findings theoretically, and hence to move beyond ‘common-sense’ interpretations of the world (Miles, 2001), I draw upon some of the vast literature surrounding bodies, time, and death reviewed in Chapter 2, alongside the work of several theorists which represent the key ‘enabling theories’ used, such as Ricoeur, Heidegger, Bauman, Leder, and Turner, as captured in the diagram below (Figure 19). The findings presented below thus represent a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer, 1975 [2013]) between participants’, my own, and various authors’ lived and interpreted experiences, in addition to the cultural contexts in which we all live(d).

Instead of constituting an a priori theoretical framework, however, any theoretical concepts drawn upon in this chapter were identified as being useful during data interpretation. Furthermore, since theories should be used creatively rather than representing a ‘straight jacket’ (Miles, 2001), the mix of concepts drawn upon to interpret the data were chosen as they generated the most insight into participants’ (and my own) experiences.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the view of the body taken in this thesis is inspired by Shilling’s (2005, 2012) concept of corporeal realism. His approach integrates natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological notions of embodiment, and thus iterates between biology/society, subject/object, and structure/agency (ibid). I thereby consider the body as a temporalised biological and sociocultural entity which both shapes, and over time is shaped by, fluid discourses regarding bodies and time, people’s ongoing life histories, consumption activities, and technologies (Section 2.2.4). However, to develop a more temporalised view of the body than Shilling, and thus to further my understandings of how bodies and time intertwine, I also draw on theories surrounding time, most notably Ricoeur’s (1984, 1992) work concerning time and narrative and Heidegger’s (1927 [2010]) ideas about time and death (Section 2.3.4). Whilst both Heidegger and Ricoeur arguably neglect the body (Aho, 2005), and Shilling gives limited attention to the importance of temporality to our embodied lives, when taken together their accounts provide valuable insights into the relations between bodies and time.
I understand time as being an intricate, multi-faceted, and slippery concept, which is difficult to provide a neat fixed definition of, but is related to both earthly cycles of light/darkness and culturally constructed notions of time (e.g. linear clock time). Alongside micro and meso-level factors (e.g. retail environment, emotional state, and life stage), I see these macro temporal constructs and earthly rotations as influencing lived embodied experiences and perceptions of temporality (Sections 2.3.1-2.3.3). Furthermore, given I consider bodies and time as being intertwined (Section 2.3.5), I view bodies as comprising multiple layers of temporality, such as internal bodily cycles (e.g. the beating heart) and multiple marks of time captured upon the body’s surface (e.g. wrinkles), as will be further developed in this chapter. Yet, taking inspiration from Ricoeur and Heidegger, I also consider temporality as being expressed and made sense of through fluid narratives, including those expressed corporeally via the body’s dynamic surface, and ideas of finite temporality, which are linked to our physical mortality, as influencing human perceptions and (consumption) behaviours.

Alongside this theoretical underpinning to how I conceptualise the key constructs of bodies and time being explored, during data interpretation certain theories proved especially useful for understanding the findings presented in the three key themes identified in the data. In the first theme, I draw upon Ricoeur’s (1984, 1992, 2004) theories concerning time, narrative, and memory as the key ‘enabling theory’. In the second theme, I refer most heavily to Leder’s (1990) work regarding bodily dys-appearance and Turner’s (1964, 1974) ideas surrounding liminality. Finally, in the third theme, I especially draw upon Bauman’s (1992a, 2000) work concerning liquid modernity, in addition to Heidegger’s (1927 [2010]) notions regarding temporality and death. However, as well as these central enabling theories, I also contrast my findings in each theme with other relevant studies/papers in the existing literature concerning time, bodies, and death, alongside several additional key concepts to further enrich my interpretations. In theme one, for instance, as well as Ricoeur’s work concerning time, narrative, and memory, I also draw upon Thrift’s (2000, 2007) notion of ‘bare life’. In the second theme, I refer to the concept of ‘repair work’ (Denis and Pontille, 2014; Graham and Thrift, 2007) and Cherrier and Murray’s (2007) processual idea of identity, alongside Leder’s theory of bodily dys-appearance and Turner’s work surrounding liminality. Finally, in the third theme, alongside Bauman’s theories regarding liquid modernity and immortality, and Heidegger’s work concerning time and death, I draw on the notion of ‘continuing bonds’ (Klass, 2006; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012) and Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986). This emergent theoretical ‘framework’ is depicted in the figure below.
Figure 19: Theoretical underpinning

EXISTING LITERATURE SURROUNDING BODIES, TIME, AND DEATH

PAST PRESENT FUTURE

RICOEUR’S TEMPORALISED NARRATIVES

SHILLING’S CORPOREAL REALISM

HEIDEGGER’S FINITE TEMPORALITY

Key enabling theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Autobodysographies: Inscribing, revising, and hiding temporality</th>
<th>Theme 2: Broken beings: Repairing temporal ruptures</th>
<th>Theme 3: Inking immortality: Transcending temporal boundaries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RICOEUR</td>
<td>LEDER &amp; TURNER</td>
<td>BAUMAN &amp; HEIDEGGER</td>
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4.2. Body and time entanglements

Adam (1995) observes how our body’s physiological processes are temporally and rhythmically orchestrated. Moreover, although I do not adopt the practice theory approach of Woermann and Rokka (2015), I acknowledge their contention that (consumption) practices have differing perceived tempos and rhythms, and can be considered in terms of ‘drag’ (slowness) or ‘rush’ (fastness). I further suggest that bodily modifications involve different perceived tempos, rhythms, and relationships to temporal constructs and lived temporality, as will be demonstrated within this chapter with a particular focus on the temporality of tattoo consumption. Tattooing is a diverse and longstanding practice (Atkinson, 2003; Caplan, 2000; Section 2.2.6), and is thus evidently not used and experienced in the same way by everybody. Yet, the data indicates how tattoo consumption in Western cultures may regularly be experienced by people as having a slower tempo than in the past. Reputable tattoo studios, for example, often have lengthy waiting lists meaning that tattoos cannot be acquired as impulsively as previously. Indeed, tattoo artist Lenny from North West Tattooing is usually booked up months in advance. His client (and interview participant) Red Devil remarked how “… he’s six to nine months booked in advance so you have to wait a long time”. Likewise, Alfie’s Tattoos (from which I acquired my two tattoos) has a three month waiting list:

...A guy comes in with a piece of paper presumably with a tattoo design upon it to ask Alfie about possibly booking in for a design. Alfie tells him that there aren’t any tattooing spaces now until February (in three months’ time). The guy looks disappointed and says it’s too long to wait and exits the studio. Alfie exits with him for a few minutes and when he comes back in he moans to his son about people coming in and expecting a tattoo on the day [Fieldnotes: Alfie’s Tattoos].

As indicated above, the waiting list at Alfie’s Tattoos constrains people’s capacities to acquire tattoos quickly and impulsively, thus slowing their perceived and experienced pace of tattoo consumption. This led to disappointment for the potential customer in the extract above, who apparently imagined a more instant process. His expected temporality of tattooing might have been a result of the ‘want-now’ consumerism found in Western consumer culture (Elliott, 2008), and/or popular tattooing-based television programmes, such as Miami Ink, which present tattoo acquisition as a speedy process.

Some people do indeed still acquire tattoos more impulsively (e.g. whilst drunk on holiday), as depicted in television programmes like Channel 4’s Tattoo Fixers. Several participants, for example, spoke about more ‘meaningless’ tattoos they had acquired in the past, with some now regretting these impulsive decisions. Yet, many people now opt for larger more artistic tattoo designs (as had 14 interview participants), which they can spend years planning. This is
illustrated by popular UK tattooing magazine *Skin Deep*, in which tattooed bodies depicted as artistic canvases grace the pages. Akin to Sweetman’s (1999) tattooing study, participants in this project regularly discussed spending long periods of time researching and planning their tattoos before committing to tattoo acquisition. Keith, for example, explains how he engaged in a lengthy tattoo planning process, which involved collating images/special possessions and having a face-to-face consultation meeting with his tattoo artist, Lenny:

“...But I think that’s where a lot of people go wrong with tattoos; they walk into a shop and go, “I want a tattoo, I’ll have number 51 out the book”... Quite often they’re drunk. There’s a girl in the office; she woke up one morning and she had a tattoo and it was a symbol on her wrist... I’d done my research and, you know, looked at thousands of images online... There was lots of consultation. It wasn’t just turn up, oh you want a picture of that let’s get on with it...” [Keith].

Keith makes a moral contrast between himself (presented positively for spending time planning meaningful tattoos) and other people including his colleague (portrayed negatively for spontaneously consuming meaningless tattoos). In studies of consumer queuing, imposed waiting is usually considered a negative aspect of the retail/service situation to be remedied (Baker and Cameron, 1996; Kellaris and Kent, 1992). Yet, the extract above suggests that choosing to wait for tattoos can be viewed positively. These findings reflect developments in Western tattooing. From the 1920s, small standardised ‘flash’ designs were popular for walk-in customers (Atkinson, 2003), as echoed in Keith’s phrase “number 51 out the book”. However, since the 1960s/70s a tattoo ‘renaissance’ has been in motion driven by technological advancements in tattoo guns and an influx of tattooists with artistic backgrounds (ibid). Customisable tattoos are now widely available (ibid), as is larger artistic tattoo work such as ‘full sleeves’ (i.e. a whole arm of tattoos), which has been popularised by celebrities like David Beckham. Indeed, during my visit to M1 Tattoos one tattoo artist remarked how “coverage is now the big thing”. Moreover, consumers are expected by others in society to have a meaningful narrative attached to their tattoos (Larsen et al., 2014), which might explain Keith’s moral contrasts between himself and his colleague. Subsequently, the tattoo acquisition process itself is also becoming longer in duration for many people:

“...The main part of the composition is the front of your arm on your bicep area. It’s the biggest part of the tattoo as well so this is important to get right. Get the composition right, get the size of it right, and then once you’re happy with it, look in the mirror, and then we get to work. So that’s what happened; we went exactly through that process: shave, Vaseline, stencil, make sure it looks good, make sure it’s in the right place, and then lie down for four hours...” [Red Devil].

Red Devil frames his tattooing sessions as involving a systematic process comprising several sequential steps, and culminating in lying down for four hours being tattooed. I witnessed the
time-consuming tattoo acquisition process first-hand during fieldwork visits to *Manchester Tattoo Show* and *Liverpool Tattoo Convention*. I often noticed the same people being tattooed at the beginning of my visit still being tattooed several hours later (including participant Alyssa). This was also witnessed when observing people being tattooed in tattoo studios:

I asked Keith a few times whether he was in any pain, or whether it was as painful as he expected, as he seemed so happy and relaxed when being tattooed and was hardly taking any breaks in the three-hour period I was observing him at the studio. Even though I could hear the repetitive drilling noise of the tattoo gun, I actually forgot a few times myself that he was actually being tattooed, since it just looked as though Lenny was painting onto a canvas rather than etching ink into somebody’s skin… [Fieldnotes: *North West Tattooing*].

This slower tempo of tattoo consumption contrasts with observations that persons in Western cultures are increasingly perceiving their lives as accelerated and their time as squeezed (Agger, 2011; Elliott and Hsu, 2016; Rosa, 2003). Mirroring the women in Thompson’s (1996) study into the ‘juggling lifestyle’, four participants spoke about the pressures they experience trying to balance their time between work and family, which resonates with the commonplace metaphor of time as a pressure cooker (Cotte et al., 2004). Patricia, for example, spoke of the challenges she faces splitting her time between working as a DJ in Rome, and spending time with her children in England:

“But when we moved here, initially I basically cut about 80% of my gigs because otherwise I would never be here. And there were always jobs, travelling up and down, up and down, here and there. But I was feeling frustrated basically and sad because I was feeling I was not spending enough time with my children; but at the same time I was feeling that I was losing what I just started having” [Patricia].

Similarly, Red Devil uses the terms ‘pressure’ and ‘balance’ when describing the difficulties he experienced balancing his time between family and working long hours in his prior senior banking role. This led to the demise of his marriage once the time pressures “got too much at a certain point”:

“…Obviously they are big changes too, having to sort of run a high profile job under significant pressure. And then having to deal with home life, and family life, and children… I was often accused of not being at home enough and the pressures that happen around that. But of course the family life, and the money, and the fancy holidays, and nice cars are the things that sort of come along with having a really good job. It’s a matter of trying to balance these things out and trying to work through some of the pressures, which obviously got too much at a certain point” [Red Devil].

The decelerating tempo of the tattoo consumption process might, therefore, conceivably provide temporary relief and a semblance of control over the overwhelming pace of daily life, akin to the slow food (Parkins, 2004), and living movements (Williams, 2015), as well as
body-focused practices such as yoga (Rosa, 2003) and the Alexander Technique (Thrift, 2000). The growth in the tattooing industry (Featherstone, 2000; Velliquette et al., 2006) might thus indicate how persons in Western cultures are actively seeking practices of deceleration, such as tattoo consumption, in the backdrop of perceived temporal acceleration (Rosa, 2003). These findings, however, also raise the question of whether we can ever really tame time (or indeed the temporal body), which is an issue I consider further in Section 5.2. I now explore the three temporal themes identified in the data to further unravel the temporality of bodily modifications, and especially tattoo consumption.
4.2.1. Autobodyographies: Inscribing, revising, and hiding temporality

“Our bodies are apt to be our autobiographies”

(Frank Gelett Burgess, 1937).

The body has historically been represented through a range of metaphors, including a tomb, a machine, and plastic (Featherstone, 1991; Synnott, 1993). Reminiscent of Gelett Burgess’s quote above, however, the dominant metaphor of the body experienced by this study’s participants was that of the body as an autobodyography. Thus, in this first temporal theme, I will introduce and unpack the account of body-time entanglements I term autobodyographies.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in much extant literature concerning the body in sociology and consumer research, time represents an implicit consideration. Furthermore, experiences of embodiment are typically neglected in investigations of time within consumer research. The notion of autobodyographies I develop in this thesis, however, brings theories concerning bodies and time into more direct conversation by explicitly exploring their interrelations. Narrating one’s life stems back to the Ancient Egyptians who inscribed stories on tombs (Plummer, 1983). Much consumer research is concerned with interpreting consumers’ verbal narratives constructed in interviews (e.g. Ahuvia, 2005; Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Marion and Nairn, 2011), and several consumer researchers have also investigated the narratives expressed by people’s possessions (e.g. Epp and Price, 2010; Shankar et al., 2009; Türe and Ger, 2016), photographs (Belk, 2013; Holbrook, 2005; Phillips, 2016), and online social media accounts (Belk, 2013). Autobodyography, however, expresses how through both intentional body modification activities, and unintentional bodily changes, the body’s surface can narrate partial, processual, and palimpsestic accounts of a person’s past, present, and anticipated future (Figure 20). Despite autobodyography representing an etic concept, it is critically grounded in participants’ emic experiences. Keith, for example, referred to his body as being “the story of my life”; likewise, for Polly her body was her “walking memory book”, and Patricia noted how she uses tattoos to “…write on my body things that I feel, things that have happened, things that are happening, things that I would like to happen”.

Although extant research has discussed the tattooing of life history (e.g. Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson, 2005; Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Sweetman, 1999; Velliquette et al., 2006), time usually remains curiously implicit. Moreover, in this work tattoos are not typically considered in relation to other temporal inscriptions (for exceptions see Back, 2007; Sweetman, 1999). Thus, to foreground time, in this theme I
explore the centrality of the temporal modes of past, present, and future to participants’
experiences of their bodies as autobodyographies. Their embodied and temporal experiences
will also be contextualised with reference to culturally constructed notions of time and
(tattooed) bodies. Furthermore, to enrich the findings theoretically and to help unpack their
complexity, multiple theorists will be referred to in this theme. Yet, I will especially be
drawing upon Ricoeur’s (1984, 1992, 2004) work surrounding time, narrative (identity), and
memory given his theories relate to the insights discussed below particularly well.

**Figure 20: Bodies as autobodyographies**
4.2.1.1. Inscribing temporality

During the course of fieldwork, the centrality of the body’s surface to capturing and expressing temporality became evident, including when gazing upon the various bodily displays at the *Body Worlds* exhibition (Figure 21):

I find myself looking at a display concerning blood vessels trying to educate myself about this… I realise how difficult it is to comprehend that I have these things inside my own body functioning right this second. It is seemingly the less frequently seen elements of the human body both inside my own and other people’s bodies, such as these blood vessels, that I find most difficult to conceive of as representing a person. I am so used to seeing the body’s surface every day—both in the mirror and when observing others, and in turn recognising this aspect of the body as representing a human being [Fieldnotes: *Body Worlds*].

The medicalised body-as-machine metaphor, which revolves around maintaining the body’s inner workings, is a dominant representation of the body in Western cultures (Faircloth, 2003). Yet, as indicated in my fieldnotes above, I felt uneasy when gazing upon the bodily insides, such as blood vessels, on display at Body Worlds. This is since I am rarely exposed to the inner body in everyday life given the body’s surface ordinarily takes centre stage. Indeed, skin is central to our everyday lives (Connor, 2004) and ‘the surface’ to managing self-impressions in consumer culture (Lasch, 1984). Much consumption activity is, therefore, geared around modifying and adorning skin (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010). Considering I was “…trying to educate myself about this” exhibit, I evidently experienced detachment between the blood vessels and my own embodied sense of self. This echoes Goulding *et al.*’s (2013, p. 325) experiences at Body Worlds, whereby they observe how “the blood, bone, and sinew dissolve the human from the body”.

*Figure 21: Example of a Body Worlds cadaver*

The importance of the body’s surface in communicating a person’s temporalised identity was further bolstered when viewing the human cadavers whose skin and hair had been removed:
…My eyes are instantly drawn towards two interacting whole human corpses, and I’m feeling a mixture of excitement and intrigue as I walk towards the cabinet to take a closer look. I realise that it is an artistic representation of a man holding up a woman in an action pose… These corpses do seem more lifelike than the body parts I have seen… Yet, it remains so difficult to comprehend that these static and skinless corpses were once living, breathing human bodies just like me… [Fieldnotes: Body Worlds].

As the corpses depicted a whole body, they seemed more resonant of a human being than the body parts displayed. However, owing to having their skin removed, it remained difficult to view them as “…once living, breathing human bodies just like me”. Given that time is central to the human condition (Heidegger, 1927 [2010]; Ricoeur, 1984, 1992) and our passage through time is visibly captured on our skin, it is arguably its expression of temporality which makes it so integral in the recognition of identity. This idea is further inspired and strengthened by my observations of a Body Worlds display about skin and time:

…I am excited as I see an exhibit of a female corpse being launched from a rock, with her skin being torn off the body in the process. This final exhibit on the first floor concerns the human skin and time, and has an informative plaque regarding the way in which the human skin bears witness to our journey through time and processes of ageing. This display illustrates the significance of the relations between the body’s surface and human temporality… [Fieldnotes: Body Worlds].

Accordingly, the experience of the body as an autobodyography involves the inscribing, revising, and hiding of various intentional and unintentional marks of temporality through and upon it. I will first explore how time becomes inscribed upon the surface of participants’ bodies. The modern construct of clock time, as dominant in Western societies, is associated with the idea that time flows forwards from the past to the future, through the fleeting present (Adam, 1995). Hence, time is ordinarily perceived as being sliced into the temporal modes of past, present, and future (ibid). In this section, I will thus refer to these temporal modalities when discussing the inscribing of temporality through the body, beginning with the past.

Much of participants’ discourse related to the past, which was in part engendered by the life history style of interviews conducted; yet, they would also often refer to the past unprovoked by me. Indeed, according to Heidegger, although we temporally unfold forwards, we are always shaped by our personal histories and the historically-situated cultural world into which we are ‘thrown’ at birth (Aho, 2005; Carel, 2006). This contrasts with contentions that temporal experience has ‘flattened out’ in Western cultures, meaning that the present is now the most significant temporal mode for persons (Agger, 2011; Bauman, 1992a, 2000; Nowotny, 1994). As well as participants’ tattoos marking the moment when their skin was pierced and ink injected into it, they frequently acquired tattoos to reflexively narrate select
accounts of past life events, including: birthdays; beginning/finishing university; children’s births; the death(s) of loved ones; and going/getting through difficult times. As participants’ tattoos ordinarily expressed more significant past life events and turning points, rather than symbolising more everyday mundane activities such as grocery shopping, chatting to friends, and watching television, this reveals the partial nature of autobodyographies. To illustrate, when I first met Keith (during his tattoo consultation with tattoo artist Lenny) he was in the process of planning a ‘full sleeve’ (i.e. arm of tattoos) to tell the story of his life. He brought along several mnemonic objects and photographs which conveyed narratives about various times in his life, and from which he was drawing inspiration for his tattoos (Figure 22).

**Figure 22: Photographs and objects inspiring Keith’s sleeve**

By our fourth meeting (the second interview) he was now enjoying gazing upon his finished sleeve (Figure 23), which incorporates several of these objects and photographs, and narrates his younger years working with horses, time spent surfing, getting involved with music, meeting and marrying his wife, and recovering from a recent emotional breakdown:

Keith: “… It gradually all pulled together and it literally is the story of my life. And it combines horses and the time I spent working with race horses and horses generally, through to my love of the sea… through meeting my wife who’s my definite soul mate in life… And because we got married in Thailand as well, as soon as Lenny saw the images of the Royal Palace he went, “Yes we can do something with that”. And then, you know, with the love of guitars and all things music, it ties that in as well…”

Researcher: “And then the wise mind, does that relate to kind of…”

Keith: “…That was the breakdown and life’s been much better since that… I think back to the wise mind; it’s probably the most significant tool I was given when I had my therapy… Basically you have the logical mind and the emotional mind and in the middle you have what’s the wise mind… and that’s what you should
live your life with. You shouldn’t totally live it on emotion. You shouldn’t totally live on the logic. There’s a happy middle…”

**Figure 23: Keith’s life story sleeve**

These findings can be enriched theoretically with reference to Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity, as outlined in Section 2.3.4.3. According to Ricoeur (1984, 1992), humans are historical and temporal beings. He argues that there are tight links between time and narrative, whereby our temporal existence is made sense of through a narrative mode:

“…Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 3).

He subsequently introduces the concept of narrative identity, which links to the claim that human beings can be considered as *Homo Narrans*, i.e. storytelling creatures (Shankar and Goulding, 2001). It conveys that, to construct a coherent sense of self in the face of life’s temporal flux, persons actively interpret and thread together key times from their past, present, and imagined future into a dynamic plot (Ricoeur, 1992). Providing the concept of narrative identity with an embodied dimension, participants constructed and expressed temporalised narratives *corporeally* through their (tattooed) skin, as well as verbally and via their possessions (if any were brought along) during interviews. As Harvey (1989) observes, it is difficult to assemble historical continuity in a seemingly accelerated and ephemeral Western cultural climate. However, akin to Russell and Levy’s (2012) participants who engaged in ‘reconsumption’ activities to attain a sense of stability, by reflexively inscribing the past on their skin, participants were able to attain some feelings of temporal continuity.
Importantly, however, much (consumption) behaviour is pre-reflective (Leder, 1990; Merchant, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Thrift, 2000; 2004, 2007); and thus participants did not always reflexively inscribe the past into their bodies. Rather, sometimes temporality would inadvertently become inscribed upon, and expressed through, the surface of participants’ bodies. This contrasts with Ricoeur’s more agentic and creative conception of narrative identity (McNay, 2000), and instead resonates with Thrift’s (2000, 2004) notion of ‘bare life’, which represents that fleeting moment of experience before conscious awareness. As Thrift (2000, p. 36) contends, “Probably 95 percent of embodied thought is non-cognitive, yet probably 95 percent of academic thought has concentrated on the cognitive dimension of the conscious ‘I’”. He further observes how companies are increasingly tapping into bare life, for example in the experience economy when stimulating consumers’ senses (ibid). To demonstrate, alongside more actively planning and acquiring tattoos as inscriptions of the past, participants’ tattoos sometimes unintentionally (or retrospectively) conveyed past life stages, alongside how they felt during those times. For example, at the beginning of my second interview with Alyssa she remarked how her first few tribal tattoos acquired as a teenager “…had absolutely no real meaning to them”. Yet, later in the interview, stemming from processes of retrospective meaning-making, she interpreted the style of these tattoos as expressing her sense of self and emotions during this challenging past time in her life:

“…I think the design wasn’t related to what was going on. But I think it was very telling that it was all black, quite hard sharp edges… at the time it wasn’t a conscious thing of this means this. I think looking back, it was very much an almost, keep out, keep away, it had sharp points to it, it was very black, dense… If nobody gets in, then they can’t hurt you. I don’t think it was as thought out as that but I think, looking back, that’s what it was… I think doing the nature of the courses that I’ve done, there’s a lot of self-reflection and they encourage you to look back at your past… So, I’ve had a lot of time to reflect on the unconscious messages I was sending at the time… I think the designs I picked were unconscious messages of like, I might be dangerous keep away. Because I felt quite dangerous and I felt like the people who get close to me get hurt…” [Alyssa].

As indicated by Alyssa’s repetitive usage of phrases such as “at the time it wasn’t a conscious thing”, “the unconscious messages I was sending”, and “I think looking back”, she did not reflexively acquire her tribal tattoos to symbolise her difficult younger years (which involved a violent dad). However, from reflecting on her past during our interview and her psychotherapy degree, she retrospectively interprets the dark, dense, and sharp style of these tattoos as indicating how she felt vulnerable to both getting hurt, and hurting others, at the time they were etched into her autobodyography (Figure 24).
Similarly, beginning in 2010, Rusty went through a period of depression which he has since recovered from. He did not reflexively acquire his cross tattoo (Figure 25) to mark this ‘dark time’ in his life, as demonstrated by his remarks below, such as “probably hadn’t associated it”, “at the time I wasn’t really thinking”, and “I think looking back”. Yet, during the interview he retrospectively interpreted the style of cross chosen (i.e. ‘not a pretty cross’) as communicating this past time in his life and his emotional state during it. Hence, although Rusty did not reflexively acquire his cross tattoo to do so, it symbolises the past stage in his life during which he was struggling with depression:

Rusty: “…When I had the cross I think that was when I was really coming through the back end of the depression. I probably hadn’t associated it, but looking back at it now I probably have. Probably at the time I wasn’t really thinking. I think looking back at the times I’d had them done, it relates to times when I was feeling good or feeling bad”

Researcher: “Was the cross when you were feeling bad?”

Rusty: “Yeah. When you see it, it’s not pretty. It’s not a pretty cross. There’s thorns on it. You see some crosses that look nice. But this is not. It’s not pretty… I didn’t want it pretty…”

Figure 25: Rusty’s cross tattoo
Although much research into tattoo consumption fails to consider how tattoos intermingle alongside other temporal etchings found on the body, tattoos were not the only inscriptions of temporality functioning within participants’ autobodyographies. They discussed other means through which their bodies had changed in response to significant past life events, including hair transformations. To demonstrate, during Polly’s second year at university in London she was raped. Following this experience, she left her university course and moved back home. Whilst before this event her hair had been long and dark, shortly after this traumatic experience she bleached her hair, dyed it lilac, and eventually cut it shorter (Figure 26):

Polly: “When I came back from London it used to be about this long [indicating long hair] and really dark. And then I decided I wanted it to be lilac. So I bleached it lots and it died (laughs) so I had to cut it off to about here [indicating shorter hair]… But it changes how your face looks when you have a different colour to what you’ve always had… I had to dye it brown again because I went for a job…”

Researcher: “Yeah. Is that the first time you’d coloured your hair? Or did you have it before?”

Polly: “When I was sort of at school, I remember it was red for a while. And then it was a dark kind of Ribena colour. It’s dark brown but it’s got purple in it so it looks sort of purple in the light. It was like that for a long time. And then I did a normal dark brown for ages. And then it was the lilac and then dark brown again”

Researcher: “Was the dying your hair so different anything to do with what happened in London?”

Polly: “I think it was (laughs). Probably I think it was. I dunno; I just think I needed a change and it seemed like a good time to change. And I’d always really liked that colour and I thought do it. Why not? Yeah, I think it did have an impact because when I’d sort of settled back down again it went back brown”.

Figure 26: Polly’s hair transformation
Although Polly had experimented with different tones of brown in the past, her shorter lilac hair represented her most significant hair transformation, reflecting the magnitude of the life event it followed. Her bodily modification resonates with Pitts’s (1998) participants who engaged in scarification practices to reclaim control over their bodies following abusive experiences. Whilst it was shorter and lilac, Polly’s hair narrated the time she was raped and the change in identity she desired shortly after this life turning point. Yet, although she had consciously chosen to modify her hair, as indicated by the remarks ‘I think’ and ‘I dunno’, she did not change her hair to intentionally express this past event through her body. Unlike the permanence of tattoos and scars, however, hair transformations are usually transient, as illustrated by Polly’s shifting hair colour over the years, and eventual return to dark brown hair. Hence, the stories narrated by a person’s hair are often temporary and can become ‘unwritten’ over time owing to its dynamic materiality causing hair dye to eventually fade and hair to grow, thin, and/or fall out over time. This thus demonstrates the processual quality of autobodyographies and how bodily modifications relate in differing ways to temporality.

Moreover, Alyssa was bullied during her school years which led to her acquiring a scar on her lip following one physical attack. Her scar has since faded meaning that it is now more of a background feature of her autobodyography, in contrast with her foregrounded tattoos. Yet, for a few years after attaining it, her scar was more noticeable. Given bodily injuries represent mementos of the instant the body was damaged (Seymour; 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2003), during this time it would transport her back to the time she was bullied/attacked, and thus unintentionally narrated this difficult past time in her life:

Researcher: “…You said you’d got a scar. Whenever you see that, like catch a glimpse of it, does it ever transport you back to when it happened?”

Alyssa: “No, not really. It used to. As time’s gone on it’s shrunk a lot and, to be honest, I don’t ever notice that it’s there. But, for a good few years after it happened, it was really quite obvious. So every time that I put lipstick on, the lipstick wouldn’t quite catch on that in the same way, and you could see it. It made me quite self-conscious. But now it’s so faded that I don’t ever really notice it”

Researcher: “When you could see it, did it ever bring back the memories of what was happening?”

Alyssa: “It did at first; like I looked awful and it was quite obvious… Because it happened in primary school, after high school not really, but during high school yeah. And if anyone else noticed it, it made me feel very afraid that maybe it would happen again”.

Similarly, Sarah was in an abusive relationship with her ex-partner, with one attack resulting in a scar on her arm. It reminded her of this abusive relationship, and thus involuntarily
narrated this difficult past period in her life, including the moment she was attacked. To attain control over this corporeal narrative (contrasting with how she was not in control within the relationship), she would often verbally construct an alternative story whenever people asked about her scar. She has since covered it with a rose tattoo (Figure 27), again illustrating the processual quality of autobodystories. Akin to Alyssa’s faded scar, Sarah’s scar is thus now a background feature of her autobodistory, with her rose tattoo cast centre stage in narrating this time in her life in a more positive way:

Researcher: “Before you had the rose on the scar, did it used to bring back bad memories?”

Sarah: “It did… A couple of people said, “What have you done to your arm?” And I would say, “Oh I’ve scuffed it on a wall”. Which hadn’t happened, but they didn’t need to know. But for me it was almost like a dirty secret having it there. So like, sticking a rose over it… because it’s a vibrant tattoo… I guess it removes the whole pain that was attached to it when you're talking about it in a positive way… Having that scar there it was like, I knew it was there and a couple of people had commented, but whenever I was around my parents I would make sure I had a t-shirt to cover it just in case…It felt like a bit of a burden, like a dirty secret…”

Figure 27: Sarah’s rose tattoo covering her scar

Sarah and Alyssa’s scars demonstrate how the temporal mode of the present was also involved in participants’ autobodystories, since their scars captured the moment their bodies were injured. Augustine questioned whether the present exists, as it is so fleeting and instantaneous (Hoy, 2009; Ricoeur, 1984). This links to the aforementioned modern notion of time flowing forwards, meaning that each present moment instantly seems to become the past (Adam, 1995). Alternatively, as noted in Section 2.3.4.1, Husserl argued for a sense of ‘temporal thickness’ stemming from his observations that the perception of any present moment comprises a lingering sense of what just happened (retention) and the anticipation of what is about to occur (protention) (Ratcliffe et al., 2014; Toyoki et al., 2013; Zahavi, 2010).
Whilst most participants seemed to be orientated towards the past and/or future, several spoke about how they tried to ‘live in the present moment’:

“...The problem that I have experienced is that... you’re living either in the past or in the future... You know the glass with the sand that goes down. The timer with the sand. If you think about every little piece of sand... it’s either up or down; it’s never stuck in the middle. And every second in your life, it’s either the past or the future and you’re always compromising between your memories, the pain in the past, the happiness in the past, the things that you regret that you haven’t done, or regret having done, or your hopes in the future, things that you hope you will be doing. And there’s never a moment where it is that very moment in your life... The only moment where I feel the present is sometimes when I’m on the dancefloor as a dancer not a DJ. There are some times, I don’t know why it happens... I call it the perfect moment. One moment where everything stops and there are no more desires somehow... Nothing to want... And that's probably the only way I can feel like present. Anyway, I try to live as much as I can in the present...” [Patricia].

Patricia observes how for most of her life she lived in the past and/or future; continuously iterating between past memories and regret, and future hopes and desires. She evokes the image of a sand timer- which links to the idea of time flowing forwards (Seymour, 2002)- to explain how she views the present as ephemeral. Yet, she now tries to extend and live in the present moment. This is aided by dancing, during which she sometimes perceives time to have stopped, which she calls her ‘perfect moment’. Indeed, mindfulness meditation (which is becoming increasingly popular in the UK) is proposed as an anxiety remedy by helping persons to exist in the present (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), which dancing helps Patricia to achieve.

Akin to bodily injuries/scars, each tattoo marks the instant the skin was broken and indelible ink injected into it. Given the aforementioned slowing tempo of tattoo consumption, the reflexive tattooing of present moments (or the very recent past) might have become more difficult to achieve within the contemporary Western tattooing context. Patricia has, however, tattooed emotions and events from her present, or very recent past, into her autopsyography. In contrast with other participants, for Patricia time lags between experiencing a significant life event and inscribing it into her skin are minimised owing to her close friendships with tattoo artists. Her capacity to avoid tattoo studio waiting lists conceivably enables her to experience a quicker pace of tattoo consumption. To illustrate, she acquired a dagger tattoo with the quote ‘shiver when you see me’ (Figure 28) to represent the anger she felt towards a man whilst she was dreaming about, briefly planning, and acquiring the tattoo:

“I just follow a feeling. It’s like one day I wake up and a tattoo is in my mind. I think 90% of what is on my body is not to remember something. It’s something that represents me in that moment... Most of the things are things that are
happening there and then. Like ‘shiver when you see me’ and I was really furious in that very moment” [Patricia].

**Figure 28: Patricia’s tattooing of anger**

Moreover, Bilbo (who identifies with Buddhism, from which notions of mindfulness and living in the present originate) has several Buddhist symbols tattooed on her body, including a lotus flower acquired on her 19th birthday (Figure 29). Since she acquired this tattoo on her birthday, it captured this present moment in her life and the happiness she felt on this day:

Researcher: “Do you have a favourite tattoo or do they all mean as much to you?

Bilbo: “Erm, I really like the lotus flower. Just because it’s a little bit bigger and it’s got a little bit more detail… The Buddha is the same. But when I got this I wanted something different and something bigger. Obviously it’s not huge but I think I like that… I just had a really good experience that day because it was my birthday as well, so I really liked that”.

**Figure 29: Bilbo’s lotus flower tattoo**

However, although Patricia and Bilbo had both acquired tattoos to mark present moments and feelings, given we unfold forwards over time (Heidegger, 1927 [2010]) their tattoos have since become mementos of their past, thus further indicating the processual nature of autobodiesographies, and how the body and time lie outside of our control. Indeed, several participants noted how they would sometimes unintentionally lose/gain weight in response to significant life events. Their shifting bodily contours, therefore, temporarily and inadvertently narrate their present or recent past. Alyssa, for example, lost her son Walter shortly after his birth. The weight gained on her stomach from this pregnancy was once a painful (and
unwelcome) reminder of his death. Yet, she now also associates her stomach with her two living children, indicating the shifting and layered narratives expressed via her contours:

“To be honest, initially my stomach, after having Walter when he died, it took a long time for my stomach to go back to the way it was before. That was quite distressing because he wasn’t here but the shape still looked like he should be… And then when it changed again it was because I was carrying Ian. So now it’s associated with all my children, so it doesn’t quite take me back the way it used to…” [Alyssa].

Furthermore, Sarah discussed losing/gaining weight depending on her love life and hence emotional state, reminiscent of the phrase ‘the heartbreak diet’. When happy in a relationship she usually puts weight on; whereas, whilst in an abusive relationship or going through heartbreak (and thus feeling more negative) she typically experiences unintended weight loss. Subsequently, her shifting bodily contours temporarily convey the present emotions she is feeling, or has recently undergone owing to the time lags involved in experiencing an emotional event and a weight change in response to it:

“I’d always teetered around a certain weight, and it was only really when we broke up that I realised that I’d put quite a bit on. I mean I weighed myself, but I didn’t really connect the two too much. I was happy and felt good about myself because I was in a happy relationship… When I was in that abusive relationship, I lost completely unintentionally over two stone and I was really, really, really skinny…I think your emotions play more to it than you realise really. I don’t think my eating habits particularly changed that much. Maybe they did. Yeah, when I broke up with Simon with the weight loss I felt better in myself once we’d broken up… I was aware of it but it wasn’t a massively conscious choice” [Sarah].

In addition to the past and present, much of participants’ discourse related to an uncertain, desired, planned, imagined, or at times unimaginable future. This was in part engendered by asking whether they had any future tattoo plans; yet, as with the past, they also often referred to the future unprovoked by me. Indeed, humans require a sense of future to inspire action and live meaningfully (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Carel, 2006; Robinson, 2015); hence why periods of depression, during which the future can seem non-existent, can be so debilitating (Hoffman, 2009). Participants had often left space on their bodies in anticipation of future significant life events and temporally-defined turning points, which they imaged they would want to thereby inscribe into their skin. Moreover, eight participants had acquired memorial tattoos to symbolically extend loved ones beyond their death into the future, which is explored in the third temporal theme (Section 4.2.3). Several participants had also directly tattooed their desired future on their bodies. Tom, for example, had tattooed a man in shackles being carried by an angel on his arm to symbolise how he hoped his brother (who
had been in jail) would “sort his life out” (Figure 30). Whereas, Patricia had tattooed the word ‘more’ on her arm to indicate how she wanted more from life (Figure 28).

**Figure 30: Tom’s sleeve of hope**

Participants also sometimes acquired tattoos as reminders of lessons to live by, and in turn to transform future actions and emotions. To exemplify, Chris fell “pretty head over heels” for a girl; yet, upon learning that she had been disloyal to him, he acquired a skull tattoo to remind him to be more cautious about love in the future:

“...That’s a blood covered skull because yeah, an ex of mine, yeah I guess pretty head over heels. Discovered she’d lied to me for a year, and when I finished it because of the lies she started fucking my best friend. And she even told me that it was to get back at me. Yeah, I kind of figured that I’d keep a reminder to be a bit more cautious in future I suppose… I think it was cathartic as well …” [Chris].

Ricoeur (1992) observes how narratives are not just about lives but can also change them. As Ezzy (1998, p. 244) further explains, for Ricoeur “lived experience precedes a narrative, and narrative shapes practical action”. Thus, as well as ‘writing’ this past life event and relationship into his autobodyography as a reminder, Chris’s tattoo also encourages him to change his future actions. This indicates the permeable boundaries between past, present, and future in lived experiences (Adam, 1995; Russell and Levy, 2012). Chris also observes above how acquiring this tattoo was ‘cathartic’, and indeed several participants had acquired tattoos to generate more positive future emotions. To illustrate, during the past few years I have experienced challenges with social anxiety and self-esteem, as triggered by several difficult times in my life, including a turbulent childhood, bereavement, isolation, and heartbreak. The word ‘reinterpret’ has been crucial in helping me to interpret myself and social situations in alternative (more positive) ways, and thus to recovering over recent years. Subsequently, I
inscribed this word into my skin as my second tattoo to symbolise how I am able to get through difficult times, and to remind me to reinterpret social situations to thereby engender more positive future emotions:

I think that, were the word ‘reinterpret’ written in a visible place on my skin, it could in turn result in me actively trying to reinterpret my life under a more positive light more often and calm me down… Having this permanent reminder on my skin to stop, calm down, and reassess the situation I am agonising over might help to calm me down more quickly and help me to live a more positive life in the future [Research diary].

Participants often viewed the future as uncertain, despite also having future plans, hopes, and anticipated future selves. Indeed, it has been observed that the future seems increasingly fractured and uncertain in late modernity (Robinson, 2015). Perceptions of an uncertain future had thus influenced the life events participants had chosen to inscribe into/omit from their autobodiesographies, and the bodily placement of their tattoos. Regarding the latter, owing to uncertainties about future careers, coupled with the Western societal stigmatisation of tattoos (Atkinson, 2003; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010), participants had sometimes inscribed tattoos on areas of their bodies which could easily be hidden with clothing. For instance, when planning my second tattoo I flitted between several bodily placements, including my wrist, inner elbow, and ribs. I would regularly draw the planned tattoo on my wrist with a biro pen to see if I liked it, alongside trying on watches to see if I could hide it from others in the future, for example in the workplace (Figure 31). Indeed, humans are social creatures whose identities have to be recognised by others to be validated (Goulding et al., 2002; Shankar et al., 2009; Velliquette et al., 2006), and thus my chosen tattoo placements were partly shaped by imagined societal perceptions of tattooing. This supports existing research (e.g. Atkinson, 2002, 2003; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010; Shelton and Peters, 2006; Vail, 1999; Velliquette et al., 2006), whilst contrasting with Sweetman’s (1999) more individualistic account of tattooing. Subsequently, due to being a private person and desiring control over who could gaze upon my tattoo, I decided to inscribe it into my ribs:

Figure 31: Trying out tattoo placements

I rubbed the word off my wrist again before I fell asleep. I just feel too much anxiety about having a tattoo in such a visible place on my body. The word and its meaning is very important to me; however, it is such a private thing that it feels wrong to have it so visible to others with a lack of control over who can gaze upon it… I think the ribs is a much less anxiety provoking tattoo location for me… Although on my ribs would also be less regularly visible to me as well as others, I think by painfully getting the word reinterpret etched into my flesh, I will be reminded to do this more regularly than when written on a piece of paper [Research diary].
Likewise, Polly ensured that her ankle tattoos (Figure 32) were ‘written’ in places which could be easily covered with clothing. This decision was made to ensure that her future career aspirations would not be negatively impacted by her tattoos:

Researcher: “…You said before you didn’t want your ankle tattoos too low. Is it important for you to be able to hide them from like future employers?”
Polly: “Yeah. As much as I don’t think it’s right that they should affect your employability, they do… I don’t mind them being higher up. It’s not like it was a hardship for me. But I do think it’s important because you don’t know what’s gonna’ happen in the future. You don’t know what job you’re going to get and I don’t want to limit my options at a young age…”

Figure 32: Polly’s ankle tattoos

Furthermore, participants had sometimes chosen to omit significant times and/or people in their lives from their bodies, further illustrating the partial nature of autobodyographies. This sometimes appeared to be driven by a desire for temporal/thematic coherence within tattoos obtained, which will be discussed in the second temporal theme (Section 4.2.2). Whilst regret as a motivation for tattoo removal has been investigated (Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008), times and/or people were also omitted from participants’ bodies to avoid attaining enduring symbols of regret. Namely, due to viewing tattoos as permanent, and the future as uncertain, participants would frequently not acquire a tattoo unless they felt its symbolism would remain important in the future. This reflects the experiences of scrapbook consumers who often agonise over which memories to capture on the pages of their scrapbooks and plan pages in advance, which they are in turn ordinarily reluctant to remove (Phillips, 2016). To demonstrate, I had initially booked in to acquire two tattoos at Alfie’s Tattoos. The first an infinity symbol to memorialise several family members (Figure 33), and the second to symbolise my gap year travels in Ecuador. Like many participants, I had been planning these tattoos over a long period of time to avoid regrets over their permanence:
I have been planning my first tattoo for about a year and a half now. I have chosen to get an infinity symbol which I have fixed on for several months. I am not scared that the tattoo is permanent, since my love for these family members is likewise infinite [Research diary].

Figure 33: My infinity symbol tattoo

In anticipation of continuing to love and miss these family members in the future, there was harmony between the perceived permanence of the tattoo and my enduring love for the people it represented. Yet, whilst the infinity symbol was acquired as my first tattoo, the tattoo to represent my Ecuadorian travels was cancelled:

I am worrying about how long after the event I am getting the tattoo because my friend said to me a few weeks ago that I had to get this Ecuadorian-related tattoo sooner rather than later or “it’ll be old news”. Now about a year and a half after the event I think that it would seem to other people a bit weird that I was getting the tattoo now... This confuses me because my other planned tattoo is about ten years after my mum died, four or five since my nana, and two or three since my granddad... These three life-shattering events have shaped who I am today significantly more than going to Ecuador for ten weeks ever did [Research diary].

A considerable amount of time had passed between experiencing the significant life events (i.e. the deaths of loved ones and travelling), and booking in to acquire tattoos to symbolise them. I felt, however, that the deaths of close family members had shaped my identity more than living in Ecuador had, and that this would remain so in the future. Hence, my friend’s warning that Ecuador was ‘old news’ influenced my subsequent decision to acquire a tattoo representing only the former. I have many objects, items of clothing, photographs, and a journal which capture narratives and memories about my time in Ecuador (Figure 34). Moreover, my body once bore marks of my Ecuadorian travels, including countless mosquito bites and a temporary design drawn on my arm with impermanent ink courtesy of the tribal members I lived with (Figure 35). Yet, as these bodily markers were transient, by not acquiring a tattoo to symbolise my time in Ecuador I rendered my autobodyography partial.
During the tattoo planning process, I was evidently making iterations between permanence and change. To interpret these findings, I will return to Ricoeur’s (1992) concept of narrative identity. He asserts that narrative identity comprises iterations between two central components: identity as permanence in time (idem) and identity as changing over time (ipse) (ibid). He thus contends that narrative identity, and its dialectic of permanence and change, can help us to understand how a person can change over time, yet remain the same person:

“...We say of an oak tree that it is the same from the acorn to the fully developed tree; in the same way, we speak of one animal, from birth to death; so, too we speak of a man or of a woman...” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 117).
Further reflecting this permanence/change dialectic, although Keith had acquired a tattoo to represent his partner Natasha for example, many participants had intentionally avoided inscribing romantic partners into their autobodyographies via tattoos. These findings echo Bauman’s (2003) idea of ‘liquid love’, whereby he argues that (late)modern societies involve more transient bonds between people. This omission was owing to tensions between the permanence of tattoos and perceived impermanence of romantic relationships. To illustrate, Harry has several tattoos to represent his children (Figure 36), and Natedog would acquire tattoos to symbolise his children were he to have any in the future. This is due to harmony between the permanence of tattoos and enduring relationships between parents and children. Yet, neither would acquire tattoos to symbolise romantic partners, as they viewed romantic relationships as being potentially ephemeral, thus rendering their autobodyographies partial:

“...I wouldn’t have a girl’s name I don’t think. I’d have kids but I wouldn’t have a girl’s name... I want a portrait of all my kids. If I get it, I’m going to get it across my chest...I wouldn’t get a partner’s no... because you could end up splitting up and having to have it removed” [Harry].

“...My dad always said to me, “Never get your wife’s name tattooed on your body” ...Don’t get me wrong I love my wife; I’d take a bullet for her... I’d have to think long and hard. I really would... Don’t get me wrong, I would never go out and do anything untoward but it’s one of them. I don’t know if tomorrow she’s going to be like, “Oh I’m going to be in love with someone else”’” [Natedog].

Figure 36: Harry’s tattoos for his children

4.2.1.2. Revising temporality

Akin to how possessions can hold memories of past events, people, and places (Belk, 1990; Epp and Price, 2010; Shankar et al., 2009), participants’ bodies had a mnemonic quality. Ricoeur (2004, p. 21) explains how “...we have no other resource, concerning our reference to
the past, except memory itself”. Like the human body, however, our memories are fragile. Indeed, families of people with dementia sometimes use verbal stories or possessions to maintain temporal continuity for that person (Buse and Twigg, 2015; Crichton and Koch, 2007). As such, Ricoeur (2004) argues that our memories cannot offer direct windows into our lived experiences; rather, the past is reinterpreted, represented, and is at risk of being forgotten. During interviews, for example, several heavily tattooed participants temporarily forgot about certain tattoos they had acquired due to them being hidden under clothing.

Further indicating the fragility of memory, Jaws’s life narrative revolves around being dominated by an unrelenting brain tumour. It resulted in him losing the majority of the memories he had formed before being diagnosed with the illness in his early 20s, for example where he used to work and meeting his now ex-wife. Some of the most significant life events before getting the tumour, therefore, are missing from his autobodyography, thus rendering it partial. As Frank (1995) contends, through telling narratives about one’s experiences with an illness, a person can (re)attain a sense of agency over it, and thereby restore a sense of order in the backdrop of life’s disorder. Thus, Jaws’s tattoo ‘sleeve’, which tells the story of fighting against his tumour and his subsequent memory loss (Figure 37), reflects the control he desires to have over his fragile body and mind. His tattoos help to protect his more recently formed memories in case they are also lost in the future.

**Figure 37: Jaws’s sleeve repairing lost memories**

In order to inscribe the past, and hence memories, into their autobodyographies, participants had evidently reinterpreted past life events in light of their ever-shifting cultural contexts and new life experiences, for example during the tattoo planning process. This is consistent with Ricoeur’s (1992) fluid conception of narrative identity, whereby he observes how the plot within one’s life narrative is continuously revised as new life events are experienced over time, and the past is reinterpreted in light of these. Alyssa, for example, had a turbulent childhood which involved being bullied at school and a violent dad. Yet, in light of her more positive present and anticipated future, she has reinterpreted her past as being an important prerequisite to achieving her positive life today, alongside her capacity to help others in her psychotherapy role. This again indicates the slippery boundaries between past, present, and future in lived temporal experiences (Husserl, 1964; Russell and Levy, 2012). Alyssa has
thereby inscribed this reinterpreted narrative of her past into her skin by acquiring tattoos of diamonds and a string of pearls to symbolise how she got through difficult times (Figure 38):

Figure 38: Alyssa’s string of pearls and diamond tattoos

“I’ve got a string of pearls which goes all the way around my arm because I remember reading once that diamonds are created by dirt that irritates, and then it becomes something precious. So I kind of felt like, all the shitty stuff I went through when I was younger, something positive has come out of it. So I got a string of pearls to represent that. Especially with my client work, sometimes I see how the things I’ve been through can help them. So I feel like they’re moments of pearls from a crappy past” [Alyssa].

Alyssa’s reinterpretation of the past when dreaming about and planning these tattoos thus supports the contention that any narrative, whether written, verbal, expressed by objects, or corporeal, is partial, (re)constructed, and does not offer a direct window into our temporal experiences (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Phoenix et al., 2010; Ricoeur, 1992). Indeed, for Ricoeur (1992) narrative identities comprise a fusion of history and fiction, as both narrative forms refer to lived and interpreted time. History is quasi-fictional and fiction quasi-historical, with interpretive creativity involved in narrating temporality (ibid; Ezzy, 1998; McNay, 2000; White, 1991).

Moreover, participants were involved in not only inscribing a reinterpreted past into their autobodyographies, and hence engaging in processes of reinterpretation when dreaming about and planning their tattoos; but they would also regularly revise the narratives attached to existing temporal inscriptions when gazing upon them after acquisition. Participants were, therefore, not just marking (reinterpreted) memories but also (re)negotiating them over time, thus reminding readers of the processual quality of autobodyographies. Indeed, as Smith and Sparkes (2002, p. 156) note, “…people are not narratively ‘frozen’ as authors of the texts they compose, but rather are editors who constantly monitor, manage, modify, and revise the emergent story”. This was evident with Alyssa’s aforementioned bodily changes stemming from her pregnancies, whereby the weight gained on her stomach once reminded her of the son she lost. Yet, she now (re)interprets her stomach as telling the story of her two living children. Likewise, as previously noted, whilst Sarah’s scar previously reminded her of her past abusive relationship, since she has now covered it with a more vibrant rose tattoo, it helps her to construct a more positive verbal narrative about how she was able to bravely survive this difficult time.
To further illustrate the revising of temporality, Victoria is Catholic and this is central to her sense of self. All of her tattoos thereby relate to being a religious person, including two religious phrases she inscribed into her skin (Figure 39). The first of these on her wrist was intentionally acquired to mark her birthday and the time she was becoming a religious person, and the second on her foot was originally acquired to commemorate her grandfather. However, since acquiring these tattoos she has experienced crippling ‘crises of faith’ during which she questions whether she is ‘a good Catholic’ and if God exists. The worst of these resulted in a day of debilitating panic attacks. Now during these sporadic ‘crises of faith’, she ensures to look at these tattoos to calm her down. She has in turn revised the narrative attached to these tattoos, as it now incorporates how she uses her tattoos to remind her that, although God cannot be seen, she needs to have more faith that he exists, alongside her grandfather, birthday, and turn to religion:

“...The two writing ones; they always come up when I’m worried about something. Like when I was saying I was having panic attacks. After I had that big one when I was thinking that I don’t believe in God anymore, my friend Amy came up to me and she said, “Victoria, if you get like that again, just read your foot”. And then I looked at it, and I was like, “Oh yeah”. Whenever you’re stressed about something, there’s literally nothing else you can do but hope... So that I look at a lot when I’m stressing out and that calms me down. And then, it was when I was thinking that God isn’t real and I was like praying, and I just looked down at my wrist and I was like, oh what I should’ve been thinking of was written on me the whole time because I’m never really going to know if he’s actually there so I have to take it on faith...” [Victoria].

**Figure 39: Victoria’s reminders of faith**

Furthermore, Bilbo crafts different verbal stories about her tattoos depending on the social audience. Indeed, given we are social creatures narratives are always constructed in line with culturally-recognised notions of what makes an acceptable story, and are directed towards an audience (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000; Phoenix et al., 2007). Bilbo has several tattoos representing when she was becoming a spiritual person, such as the Buddhist symbol of ‘om’ (Figure 40). Whilst Bilbo was happy to tell her parents about this important time in her life, she often constructs a different verbal narrative to people she is not as close with as a
form of protection. As opposed to a more ‘solid’ written narrative, she remarks how a symbol comprises greater fluidity, and thus greater opportunities to offer revised narratives:

“…I feel like if people know too much about me they might be able to use that against me some way in the future… The day I told mum and dad about my tattoo, I told them everything because it was quite important to me… Then maybe to someone else I’ll be like, this was the day I found out about the sound that was made at the beginning of the universe… And in yoga and stuff we do ‘om’ and it like vibrates the room… So I’d like say that to someone else. I think it is important that I have that like range of ideas (laughs)… Symbols and drawings and things like that can have quite a lot of interpretations. Whereas, if it’s writing it’s quite solid…” [Bilbo].

Figure 40: Bilbo’s Buddhist ‘om’ tattoo

Bilbo’s experiences further demonstrate how, although the tattoo mark might be relatively permanent, the narratives and meanings attached to tattoos often comprise greater fluidity (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010), which challenges contentions that tattoos can freeze people into fixed narratives (Phillips, 2001; Sweetman, 1999). To further illustrate, Alyssa observed how the meanings attached to her candle tattoo, which she acquired to symbolise her dad’s new partner Helen, have changed in line with their transforming relationship:

“…Like with the candle, as I get to know Helen more, it means more. Initially… she seemed quite unassuming but she brought light into my dad’s relationship. But as time’s gone on, there’s been really tough times and she’s been the only person who’s been like, “You can do it”. So it [the meaning of the tattoo] now changes. It’s still the same to a degree, but as she’s changed, and our relationship has changed, [so has] my attachment to that [the tattoo]” [Alyssa].

Hence, sometimes new memories and narratives would be layered on top of existing ones. This echoes Türe and Ger’s (2016) finding that, in opposition to notions that family heirlooms freeze an unmalleable past, they can acquire new memories and narratives over time, whilst still maintaining the family’s legacy. Polly, for example, acquired an Egyptian ankh tattoo following an exciting trip to Egypt (Figure 41). When she looks at her tattoo, it reminds her of the fun she had on this trip and the friends she spent time with there, which she originally acquired the tattoo to symbolise. However, stemming from reinterpreting her
past since acquiring this tattoo, she now retrospectively feels that she perhaps enjoyed Egypt so much due to it enabling her to escape from her challenging home life. Hence, her tattoo now also reminds her of her more difficult teenage years during which her parents were getting divorced. New memories and narratives have thus been layered upon her tattoo over time, as her past has been reinterpreted and taken on new meaning:

“But I see it and I think of when I went to Egypt and then I sort of think of how I felt when I was there and the experience as a whole. But then that also does remind me of why I enjoyed it there because I wasn’t enjoying being at home... And I think the memories change over time I suppose... you know when I got it I think I associated it with my friends... Whereas now it’s sort of more associated with, oh that’s why I was having a great time because I wasn’t in a situation I wasn’t enjoying” [Polly].

**Figure 41: Polly’s Egyptian ankh tattoo**

### 4.2.1.3. Hiding temporality

Bodies comprise interweaving and shifting layers of temporality, whereby multiple temporal inscriptions and processes can be layered on top of others, such as internal cycles like the beating heart with ever-ageing skin, old tattoos with new ones, and skin with vintage clothing. Thus, in addition to temporality being intentionally and/or inadvertently inscribed into their autobodyographies, and the narratives attached to their dynamic temporal inscriptions being revised over time, participants would also regularly hide time through and upon their bodies. For example, they sometimes used tattoos to cover scars, covered older tattoos with new ones, underwent tattoo laser removal surgery, and used anti-ageing products and procedures to prevent, freeze, and/or remove time ‘written’ into their autobodyographies.

Concerning the former, and reflecting findings that women sometimes acquire beautiful tattoos to cover/adorn scarring following mastectomies (Davies, 2016), Sarah acquired a rose tattoo to cover a scar acquired from her abusive ex-boyfriend, as aforementioned. Similarly, during my visit to a body modification studio to chat to the owner (Holly), she told me about how her colleague (tattoo artist Mark) had covered up a small initial tribal tattoo with two
subsequent tattoos. He further planned to have scarification work inscribed into the last of these ‘cover-ups’; etching a further layer of temporality into his skin:

At one point she grabs Mark to show me his arm. She explains that he originally had a small piece of tribal art done, which was covered by a larger tribal piece. However, he has since covered both of these older pieces (which he didn’t like or feel represented who he was as a person) with a half sleeve of black work, which he is then going to have bees scarred over in a few weeks by Holly to symbolise that he comes from Manchester… [Fieldnotes: Body modification studio].

Furthermore, although much tattooing research focuses on tattoo acquisition (for exceptions see Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008), akin to CCT research more generally (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), two participants had covered older tattoos with new ones, and two further participants planned to potentially do so in the future. The finding that only two participants had acquired tattoo cover-ups might be partly explained by the slowing tempo of Western tattoo consumption (Section 4.2). Namely, as previously discussed, participants often spent long periods of time waiting for and planning tattoos, anticipating the future, and making permanence/change iterations to avoid tattoo regrets. Nevertheless, Alyssa (aged 35) acquired several tribal tattoos as a teenager which unintentionally narrated her difficult younger years, as previously detailed. Yet, several years after acquiring them, she covered up some of these tattoos with what she considered as being “more artistic and meaningful” designs (Figure 42):

“And then about 18 I decided I wanted to get, not better work, but more artistic and meaningful. So that took me a while but at 21 I had these covered up [referring to wrist tattoos]… To cover these up they said it’d be better if it was coloured. So I got the peacock feather…” [Alyssa].

Figure 42: Alyssa’s peacock feather cover-up

Likewise, Harry (aged 40) impulsively acquired a British bulldog tattoo as a teenager. In support of extant research (Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008), and given the processual nature
of identity (Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Ricoeur, 1992), due to perceiving that he had changed since its acquisition he no longer felt that it expressed his sense of self. He has thus covered this tattoo, in addition to several tribal designs, as part of a lengthy and ongoing project on his left arm involving cover-ups and laser removal surgeries (Figure 43):

“I’ve had laser, so there’s a lot of tribal that’s been removed. So you see that tribal there, that’s the British bulldog that’s underneath there; that’s the first. You can still see slight bits under that flame if you look very closely. You can see where I’ve had laser on some of it. Underneath that dragon there’s tribal tattoo… And you can see that a lot of tribal is underneath that elephant… You can see the bulldog underneath the tribal… I think tribal is awful now I hate tribal tattoos. So I went in and this dragon was put in first. You can see part of the tribal and you can see where it’s been lasered off around there and little bits at the top... It’s actually scarred me a little bit that laser. I can see it. You can slightly see the scarring in the clouds there…” [Harry].

In addition to indicating the processual nature of autobodyographies, therefore, the technique of covering scars with tattoos, and older tattoos with new ones, demonstrates their palimpsestic quality. This concept denotes “a piece of writing on which letter writing has been written over the effaced original writing” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1996). Giving the notion a contemporary and embodied twist, however, with these consumption activities the original temporal inscription (i.e. the scar or original tattoo) is never completely erased, but is rather hidden under the new temporal inscription (i.e. the new tattoo). Indeed, Harry remarks how he is still able to see remnants of his bulldog tattoo and tribal work underneath his new tattoos. Ironically, as well as trying to remove time from his body via laser surgeries, they have also resulted in unintentionally inscribing temporality into his skin through permanent scarring, thus demonstrating the intricate temporal interplays involved in autobodyographies.

Figure 43: Harry’s tattoo cover-ups
Interviews also involved some discussion of ageing bodies. Several participants attempted to prevent and/or remove temporality from their bodies through the consumption of anti-ageing products and procedures. Surprisingly, given marketers encourage people to attain youthful bodily ideals (Coupland, 2007, 2009; Featherstone, 1991), nine participants (six male; three female) expressed acceptance of the ageing process and framed it as being an inevitable fact of life akin to Szmigin and Carrigan’s (2006) participants, despite most admitting to fearing death (Section 4.2.3). Keith (aged 55), for example, remarked how “Every day we’re all one day older and we can’t do anything about it. So just got to get on with it really”. Similarly, Ufobaby (aged 43) commented how “…It’s one of those things that happens to us all. As long as you’re relatively healthy then there’s nothing you can do to prepare really…”.

This can perhaps in part be explained by the demographic mix of the interviewees (Chapter 3; Table 3); for example, I interviewed more male (11) than female (7) participants. Dualisms ordering our experiences of the world (e.g. the mind/body opposition) are gendered, and thus females have traditionally been linked with the body and males with the mind (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Shilling, 2012). Moreover, a ‘double standard of ageing’ exists in Western cultures, meaning that women usually face stronger social sanctions for deviating from youthful bodily ideals than men (Coupland, 2007; Tulle, 2007). Both of these factors might explain some of the male participants’ reluctance to admit to concerns about ageing bodies. Furthermore, of the women interviewed three were in their early 20s, and hence old age perhaps seemed too far into the future to be worried about now. Indeed, two of these women (Victoria and Bilbo) noted how they were unable to imagine themselves as old which reduced and stalled their anxieties about ageing. This is despite marketers also encouraging younger consumers to take preemptive measures to deter bodily ageing (Elliott, 2008; Gullette, 2004).

Finally, as Phoenix and Sparkes (2006) observe, cultural discourses concerning ageing function as ‘narrative maps of ageing’ (i.e. they influence people’s imagined future selves). Thus, given the notion of ‘ageing naturally’ is seen as increasingly positive within Western cultures (Askegaard et al., 2002; Clarke and Griffin, 2007), and indeed has long been the case in Eastern cultures where old age is usually respected (Catterall and Maclean, 2001; Wada, 1995), it may have influenced participants’ responses. Indeed, Bob (aged 47) used the phrase “grow old gracefully”, and Victoria (aged 21) noted “I think I’d just like to age naturally”.

However, despite at times claiming to accept ageing, consistent with the dominant Western ageing narrative of decline (Gullette, 2004; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006, 2008), four participants were worried about losing bodily functionality in old age, and Hamlet (aged 75)
spoke about how he was currently facing mobility issues. Moreover, considering the unintentional corporeal inscriptions of temporality often accompanying ageing (e.g. wrinkles and sagging skin), several participants used anti-ageing creams to prevent time from being ‘written’ upon, or to remove time from, their bodies. In addition, many participants (both male and female) were engaged in ongoing tattoo maintenance regimes to prevent their tattoos from visibly ageing, and thus from being layered with uninvited time, which included regular moisturisation, high factor sun creams, and shielding tattoos from sunlight (to be further discussed in Section 4.2.3.3). Finally, two participants (Harry and Sarah) were involved in simultaneously ‘writing’ time into their autobodigraphies via tattooing, and preventing/freezing/hiding time through Botox® consumption. These behaviours are consistent with two studies of ageing and body modification which have found that, despite viewing ‘natural’ ageing as positive and desirable, participants still engaged in anti-ageing consumption activities (Askegaard et al., 2002; Clarke and Griffin, 2007). Harry (aged 40) noted how he is “a bit paranoid about ageing” and has therefore acquired Botox® and fillers:

Researcher: “Do you ever worry about ageing in general?”
Harry: “My face yeah (laughs). That’s why I’ve had Botox and fillers before now… I had fillers there [pointing to mouth and cheeks]. I’ve had them twice done. I’ve had Botox in my forehead and there [referring to mouth and eyes]. Does it work? Yes it does. And is it good? It’s excellent (laughs). I’m not going to lie to you. Must have taken ten years off me… The fillers have gone pretty much now and the lines are starting to come back… Botox has run out now because the lines are back on the forehead…”

Researcher: “Is that something you're going to continue getting?”
Harry: “Yeah… a bit paranoid about ageing. Face had dropped. A bit paranoid about that as well, yeah”.

As well as conceivably being influenced by the narrative of decline, Harry’s paranoia about ageing, and subsequent decision to acquire Botox® and fillers, might have been driven by fears concerning time’s passage. Advertisements for anti-ageing cosmetics and technologies, for example, regularly provoke anxieties about the passage of time (and thereby concerns about mortality) to persuade people to purchase these marketplace offerings (Coupland, 2009). Such consumption activities defy the modern idea of unstoppable temporal linearity; providing the impression, at least to the consumer, that the effects of time on their bodies can be slowed, frozen, or even reversed (Brooks, 2010; Elliott, 2008); indeed, Harry claims how Botox® has “taken ten years off me [him]”. Yet, as also revealed above, Harry has acquired these procedures on multiple occasions. He observes how “the lines are starting to come back”, and hence how time is now ‘rewriting’ itself on his face. This reveals the transient
nature of these technologies (and life itself), thus echoing observations about the evanescence of Botox® and other cosmetic procedures (Cooke, 2008; Elliott, 2008). Likewise, Sarah has also acquired Botox® injections multiple times and also spoke of its ephemeral quality:

“...I’m worried that it’ll be a bit of a vicious cycle because it doesn’t last long. I found that with getting Botox. I started getting Botox at about 25 because all the girls at work used to get it. I used to work with a load of scouse birds who had all the hair extensions, false eye lashes, always used to get their nails done and all this kind of stuff. And they all started getting Botox and I thought, oh I’ll give it a go because I’ve always had wrinkles around my eyes... I’ve been getting that done about every six months... You notice then when it’s due and you frown and all this kind of stuff. And you notice that your skin looks worse than before... After two to three months you think, oh I could go again. Which isn’t sustainable really is it? To keep doing that for the rest of your life” [Sarah].

Akin to how decaying and damaged objects/possessions can function as memento mori (Buse and Twigg, 2015; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012; Valtonen, 2016), marks of temporality found on the ageing body (e.g. wrinkles, greying hair, and sagging skin), remind us of our vulnerable nature. Thus, the consumption of Botox® could conceivably help consumers such as Harry and Sarah to (temporarily) negate their mortal nature. Yet, their experiences with the transience of Botox® indicates how anti-ageing technologies provide only an illusion of control over time’s passage, to be further discussed later in Section 5.2.

To conclude, as indicated by the data presented and interpreted throughout this theme, I argue that different bodily modifications have contrasting relations to notions of time and lived temporality. A tattoo, for example, represents a more permanent temporal inscription, which can often be dreamed about, planned, and waited for by consumers for a considerable period of time after experiencing the life event for which it was acquired to symbolise. Whether acquired from an unintentional bodily injury (e.g. a physical attack), or through more intentional scarification practices, which typically comprise a waiting and planning process (see Pitts, 1998), scars represent permanent markers of the moment the body was damaged (Seymour, 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2003). Botox® injections, on the other hand, are a transient means of removing time from the body, and are becoming more widely available today for persons to acquire more quickly in response to life events (Cooke, 2008; Elliott, 2008). These ideas concerning the temporality of bodily modifications are captured in the diagram below (Figure 44), in which I have incorporated a range of bodily changes (including those mentioned by participants and discussed in this theme), first in relation to time lags (i.e. whether the body typically has an instant or delayed response to experienced life events), and second concerning how permanent or transient the bodily modification is.
Figure 44: The temporality of bodily modifications

1. SCARS (unintentional)
2. SCARS (scarification)
3. TATTOOS
4. COSMETIC SURGERIES
5. PIERCINGS
6. WEIGHT LOSS/GAIN
7. HAIR DYEING
8. FAKE TAN
9. MAKE-UP
10. BOTOX
4.2.2. Broken beings: Repairing temporal ruptures

And in the end,
we were all just
humans,
drunk on the idea
that love,
only love,
could heal
our brokenness.
- Christopher Poindexter.

Human existence is riddled with disorder, vulnerability, and feelings of being broken. As evidenced within the first theme, participants often acquired tattoos following significant life turning points, including births/deaths; breakups; starting/finishing university; career changes; and getting through emotional difficulties (Table 5). This contrasts with Turner’s (2000) assertion that tattoos signifying life course transitions are particular to traditional tribal societies. Tattoos, therefore, were frequently dreamed about, planned, and acquired following disruption to the taken-for-granted flow of everyday life, and subsequent breaks with how participants had previously viewed time, themselves, and their lifeworld. This finding resonates with research into the marking of life events through tattooing (e.g. Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Sweetman, 1999; Velliquette et al., 2006) and scarification (Pitts, 1998), and the consumption of anti-ageing procedures following significant life turning points and role transitions (e.g. Kinnunen, 2010; Schouten, 1991). Yet time usually remains implicit within such work, whilst here it will importantly be rendered much more explicit.

Cherrier and Murray (2007) offer a processual theory of identity, which relates well to the findings in this theme. Drawing upon the lives of voluntary simplifiers, they identify four phases involved in identity shifts following life turning points. The first- sensitization- expresses how following a ‘triggering event’ the flow of everyday life is disrupted, thereby causing a person to become more reflective about their life. The second- separation- concerns the resulting detachment from a past sense of self, material possessions, and way of life, whilst the third stage- socialization- regards the centrality of others to constructing a new identity. The final phase- striving- discusses the tensions involved in negotiating past, present, and future selves. They are, therefore, sensitive to the temporal unfolding of the self, in addition to the temporal modes of past, present, and future. Yet, they do not explicitly focus on how a person’s temporal perceptions might shift following a triggering event, as they are more concerned with voluntary simplifiers’ attempts to move from ‘having’ to
‘being’ modes of existence. Although people might habitually perceive time in differing ways (Cotte et al., 2004), I will illustrate how participants’ temporal perceptions typically shifted in response to temporally-defined life turning points. Furthermore, Cherrier and Murray (2007) focus on dispossession practices, whereas I discuss how, akin to the repair work required to maintain the stability of signs and the societal order they engender (Denis and Pontille, 2014; Graham and Thrift, 2007), participants frequently acquired tattoos to repair the temporal ruptures engendered by triggering events. This helped them to maintain a veneer of temporal order and continuity via their paradoxically unstable bodies.

Subsequently, in this theme I explore how participants’ temporal perceptions and orientations regularly shifted following life turning points, in addition to how tattoos were often acquired following this temporal disruption to (re)gain a sense of order over time via the body. As with the first temporal theme, I will draw upon multiple theorists to enrich the findings. Yet, I will especially utilise Leder’s (1990) ideas concerning bodily dys-appearance and Turner’s (1964, 1974) notions surrounding liminality given the additional insights they are able to provide.

Table 5: Life turning points and tattoos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Turning points engendering tattoos</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alyssa</strong></td>
<td>- Son’s death</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Changing relationships (e.g. with dad)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bilbo</strong></td>
<td>- Birthday</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Becoming more spiritual</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chris</strong></td>
<td>- Turning life around</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Meeting ‘love of life’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hamlet</strong></td>
<td>- Partner’s death</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jaws</strong></td>
<td>- Fighting brain tumour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kate</strong></td>
<td>- Experiencing and recovering from breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keith</strong></td>
<td>- Experiencing and recovering from breakdown</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Patricia</strong></td>
<td>- The rebirthing and finding love for body</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Red Devil</td>
<td>Divorce, relocating, and changing careers</td>
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<td>Rusty</td>
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4.2.2.1. Shifting temporal perceptions

Although death provides the focus of the final temporal theme (Section 4.2.3), one of the most commonly discussed life turning points for participants was the death of a loved one. The death of somebody close to a person represents one of the most emotionally-charged biographical disruptions (Becker, 1997). As DuBose (1997) explains, bereavement stems from a linguistic lineage that means to be ‘torn up’. Thus, losing somebody typically engenders a break with how a person previously perceived time, the self, and the world (ibid; Bochner, 1997; Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Kates, 2001; O’Donohoe, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012; Turley, 2016). As previously noted, Alyssa lost her son, Walter. Reflecting Bochner’s (1997) observation that the death of loved ones reminds us of life’s fragility, this difficult life turning point reinforced to Alyssa that life is finite. She thus acquired an hourglass tattoo to remind her to value her limited time with family:

“I’m getting an hourglass… to represent to value time and how much time has passed and it’s finite and to make the most of it… I want to appreciate what I’ve got while I’ve got it. I don’t want to get to the end of my life and be like, oh I wish I did this more. I feel like no one ever gets to the end of their life thinking, I wish I’d worked more or I wish I’d done more gardening. But they do say things like, “I wish I’d been with my family more”. To have a bit of a reminder that, with these relationships, to make the most of them because time is short” [Alyssa].

Similarly, Harry lost his stepson to suicide. Like Alyssa, following this ‘triggering event’ (Cherrier and Murray, 2007) his views of life as being temporally finite were bolstered:
“...I wasn’t that close to my stepson because I didn’t see that much of him because I split up with his mum. But it did affect me, yeah. It altered the way I look at things now, yeah. Probably made me a bit more of a nicer person. Depression isn’t it, yeah? Yeah it did have a bit of an affect... Life’s quite short isn’t it?” [Harry].

Biographical disruption is sometimes anticipated during the lifecourse based on ‘social clocks’ (Williams, 2000). Yet, given death is being associated with increasingly older chronological ages in ageing Western cultures (Gilleard and Higgs, 2011; Walter, 1991), the deaths of Alyssa’s and Harry’s children were unexpected. These life events thus disrupted the flow of their everyday lives, and brought time’s finite nature into focus. Leder’s (1990) ideas concerning bodily dys-appearance (outlined in Section 2.2.3.2) can help us to better understand why time typically became foregrounded for participants, and they regularly turned to (tattooing) their bodies following biographical disruption. He contends that our bodies tend to recede into the background of our perceptual field (ibid). Regarding the body’s surface, he provides the following example of gazing across a field to a tree:

“...When looking across an open space toward a tree in the distance, my eyes nowhere appeared within my visual field... I would likely be relatively unaware not only of my eyes but of my legs and feet, the back muscles supporting me, my torso at large... This corporeal background... tends to disappear from explicit awareness” (ibid, p. 25).

Moreover, concerning what lurks under the skin, he draws upon the involuntary and cyclical digestion process to bolster this notion of the body ordinarily fading from awareness:

“I have a slight sense of the apple piece sliding down the back of my throat. Past a certain point this fades away... There is a sense of fullness in the midsection... Over the next hour... the sensation of fullness disappears, leaving my middle in vague neutrality. Some time later this is punctuated by a mild crampy sensation that pulls my attention downwards... Throughout most of this time my awareness of the digestive process has been virtually non-existent” (ibid, pp. 38-39).

Leder (1990) uses the term disappearance to denote this tendency for both the body’s surface (ecstatic body) and involuntary internal cycles/rhythms (recessive body) to fade into the background of our lives. Yet he argues that when the body breaks down, and hence challenges the habitual flow of everyday life, it is transported into the foreground. He draws on the Greek prefix ‘dys’ (which signifies ‘bad’ or ‘ill’) to introduce the concept of bodily dys-appearance. This denotes when the body comes into awareness, for example due to pain, dysfunction, or disease. He gives the example of a tennis player to illustrate this:

“A man is playing tennis. His attention dwells upon the ball flying toward him, the movements of his opponent, the corner of the court toward which he aims his return... But as he swings he feels a sudden pain in the chest... His attention now shifts to the expanding focus of pain... A background region, the chest is now thematicised” (ibid, p. 71).
The death of a loved one typically evokes emotional pain, as can other life turning points such as heartbreak, job loss, and displacement. Hence, strong emotional reactions to significant life periods like bereavement can conceivably result in enhanced bodily awareness (DuBose, 1997; Gimlin, 2006), thereby bringing the body into the foreground of a person’s life. Indeed, Leder (1990, p. 52) observes how “...If I encounter or even think about a distressing scene, my heart beats faster and certain blood vessels constrict”. This might indicate why participants typically planned and acquired tattoos following biographical disruption. Furthermore, it has been observed that time is often a taken-for-granted aspect of our existence (Adam, 1995; Bash, 2000). Thus, like the body, when the habitual flow of everyday life is disrupted, time is arguably also brought into greater awareness, with \textit{temporal} dys-appearance occurring. This resonates with Woermann and Rokka’s (2015) finding that when there are misalignments between the aspects of a practice, timeflow is in turn disrupted and foregrounded. This heightened focus on time, and its finite quality, was evidenced in Alyssa and Harry’s experiences following the deaths of their (step)children.

Although for both Alyssa and Harry modern notions of forwards-moving clock time (Adam, 1995) were reinforced, following his dad’s death Bob’s temporal experiences jolted these dominant cultural concepts of time. For a while after this triggering event, Bob perceived time to have stopped. His dad’s death had thus brought time into greater focus, thereby evoking temporal dys-appearance. He has inscribed a clock without its hands into his skin (Figure 45) to signify these perceptions of time standing still:

“This clock does look good and it can also signify many other things in time. But that’s what I class it as. How time stands still because it doesn’t have the fingers on the clock... Like in Hiroshima, time stopped still. That time and that clock has never moved in the 60-odd-years \textit{[sic]} since it happened. And for anyone, time can stop at any time. Whether it’s emotionally or physically... like when my dad died I felt like time stopped for a long, long time... Everyone goes through things in their lives where they don’t feel like they’re moving on” [Bob].

\textbf{Figure 45: Bob’s clock tattoo}
Bob’s perceptions of frozen time can be further enriched by the concept of *liminality*. Building on Van Gennep’s work surrounding rites of passage in traditional societies, Turner (1964, 1974) discusses liminality. It stems from the Latin for ‘threshold’ and denotes a temporary state of being ‘betwixt and between’ a past and new sense of self and/or social role (*ibid*). This limbo state involves temporal/spatial ambiguity, blurred distinctions, and anti-structure (*ibid*; Goulding and Saren, 2016; Pitts, 1998; Schouten, 1991). Some consumption spaces can be considered as liminal zones wherein consumers can engage in identity play owing to temporarily existing beyond the realms of established social structure, for example the *Whitby Goth Festival* (Goulding and Saren, 2009, 2016), rave clubs (Goulding *et al*., 2002), and the *Burning Man Festival* (Kozinets, 2002). Furthermore, Pitts (1998) theorises the scarified female body as liminal due to being in a process of ‘becoming’, and residing in the margins of social acceptability. Turning points experienced during the lifecourse often alter a person’s sense of self (and time), thereby transporting them into liminal zones before the establishment of a new sense of self. Indeed, participants in Schouten’s (1991) study of changing self-concepts through the lens of cosmetic surgery typically considered surgical procedures during periods of liminality as a way of reintegrating their ambiguous sense of self. Furthermore, Banister and Piacentini (2008) found that alcohol consumption can facilitate university students’ identity play activities in the liminal time period ‘betwixt and between’ leaving high school and entering adulthood. Given other people are an important part of the ‘extended self’ (Belk, 1988), following the death of a loved one, those left behind can often feel as though a part of their self has been ripped away. Like Bob, they can in turn become suspended in an extended and liminal present whilst coming to terms with living their lives without that person physically present (Baker *et al*., 2016; Dobscha, 2016).

Similarly, whilst time in Western cultures is ordinarily understood as flowing linearly from the past into the future via the fleeting present (Adam 1995), when my aforementioned memorial tattoo was being planned and acquired to represent several family members, like Bob I perceived time as static. I felt suspended in a liminal, ambiguous, and extended present due to existing ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner, 1964) various professional identities. This reflects Brockmeier’s (2000) static model of time, whereby a person’s life lacks direction. In contrast with the students in Banister and Piacentini’s (2008) study of alcohol consumption who often perceived liminality positively due to it enabling them to experiment with their identities, I had a more negative and frustrating experience of being suspended in liminality. By marking past relationships on my body to illustrate I had lived through time, I thus
tattooed my body to point the arrow of time forwards again and create temporal continuity:

...Am I choosing to get this tattoo at this point in my life because I am pretty much living an incessant liminal existence at the moment, whereby I am not classed as a proper PhD student, nor a master’s student, nor a working person, and have no real structure to my life at all? Am I trying to tell myself that I am a human being with an identity because I have a life history [tattooed on my body] to prove that I have existed over time? [Research diary].

Also in the pursuit of temporal order to counter the more fragmented temporal backdrop of their lives, whether intentionally or subconsciously/retrospectively, many participants had created temporally and aesthetically coherent tattoo themes on their bodies. Indeed, temporal continuity and narrative chronology is an expectation in Western cultures (Becker, 1997; Frank, 1995; Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, as Bochner (1997, p. 429) suggests, “When the flow of time is disrupted unexpectedly, the absence of a sense of coherence can become a matter of grave concern...” All of Bob’s tattoos, for example, relate to scientific achievement, and Alyssa’s to natural symbols. Whilst, Victoria, Bilbo, and Rusty all have religious tattoos. Likewise, Red Devil’s ‘sleeve’ comprises tattoos relating to symbols of Greek mythology (Figure 46), and he acquired it following his marriage breakdown, moving away from his children, and changing careers; a life period in which his “world turned upside down”:

“...After my marriage breakdown and, you know, the children not being in my life as much as before, and finishing my career, everything changed all at once... Within 12-18 months my world turned upside down. So I thought well, this is something I can start to think about. This was a big turning point, a big crossroads, big decisions, a life changing moment. A brand new chapter... So there are kind of dotted lines to the past but there are definite severs of other things. So I thought it was time to look at the things that have happened to me, the things that have been important in my life, and maybe we can represent this...” [Red Devil].

**Figure 46: Red Devil’s Greek mythology sleeve**

Although it has been suggested that people are habitually orientated towards the past, present, or future (e.g. Cotte et al., 2004), this significant life turning point resulted in Red Devil’s past being foregrounded. Indeed, biographical disruption typically results in a person questioning their sense of self (Becker, 1997), and hence raises questions such as: Who am I and how did I get here? Red Devil chose to represent several important past life stages and leitmotifs through his tattooed arm, including education and being a caring person. Yet, despite having worked as a banker for many years, he decided against tattooing monetary symbols onto his body to symbolise this life stage
due to feeling that it would disrupt the coherence of his Greek mythology tattoo theme. This further indicates the partial nature of autobioographies (as discussed in the first theme), in addition to how coherence and continuity is actively constructed by persons, rather than indicating a stable core self (McNay, 2000; Ricoeur, 1992). This is reflected in Ricoeur’s (1992) contention that within any narrative there is an ‘illusion of sequence’, as order is created out of a discontinuous flux of temporal experiences.

As Becker (1997, p. 136) observes, “Efforts to reorder the world after a disruption begin with the body”. Indeed, Schouten (1991) found that cosmetic surgery is also often undergone by people following disruptive role transitions to reintegrate their self-concept and attain a sense of control over their life. Participants’ attempts to foster perceptions of temporal order through tattooing their bodies could be considered as a type of repair work (Denis and Pontille, 2014; Graham and Thrift, 2007). Namely, those ongoing activities involved in maintaining the illusion that life is orderly, for example the continual repairs of decaying city signage (ibid). By maintaining coherent tattoo themes and temporal linearity on their skin, participants were seemingly involved in trying to repair the temporal ruptures engendered in their lives by significant and disruptive life turning points. The creation of temporal order and continuity through the tattooed body, however, perhaps appears paradoxical, as the temporal body is the locus of our physical mortality (Baudrillard, 1993; Becker, 1973; Cave, 2012), and thus the end of our lived time. Yet, it supports claims that the body might provide a seemingly safe harbour within a predominately uncontrollable and unstable societal context (Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Sweetman, 1999). The issue of control will be returned to in the thesis discussion (Section 5.2). I will now present three in-depth narratives to further unpack these intricate findings in a more nuanced way, engage readers emotionally, and to crucially give participants a voice. The three cases were chosen as they illuminate the insights discussed in this theme particularly effectively, and to ensure that both sexes were included.

4.2.2.2. Keith: Escaping the whirlpool

Keith is 55-years-old, has a slim build, short white hair and a matching goatee. He has a warm, friendly, and open demeanour. I met him four times throughout the project, and on three of these occasions he was dressed sharply in a suit. However, the time I observed him being tattooed he was dressed in a black band tank top, black jeans, and leather boots, and thus had more of a relaxed ‘rocker’ image. He spent his younger years working with horses as a blacksmith and jockey, and engaging in sports such as windsurfing and golf. Following college, after seeing a notice at school, he got a job in insurance (despite plans to become a
farrier’s apprentice) and he is still working in this area today. It was whilst playing golf that he met the love of his life, Natasha, whom he married in Thailand over 20 years ago:

“…When the horses finished I went into golf in a big way. And that’s basically where I met Natasha on a golf course…We ended up winning a pairs competition together. Basically everybody thought we were having an affair. But we weren’t. We were just good mates and we were for 18 months before, you know, anything happened. We’re still really good mates. So that’s a big event in my life… I was actually playing golf with her son, and he just introduced me to her… I suppose the first time I really thought wow about Natasha was, I got invited back to dinner once, and I just thought wow. She’s got a lovely bubbly personality and you know we just hit it off. But basically for 18 months I was teaching her how to play golf… But we just got on as friends. It was really good and it just developed from there. And it was only when her friend said to her one day, “For god sake stop talking about Keith and do something about it”, that anything happened… It was something that crept up on us as opposed to, oh wow I gotta’ go out with you… It was on the 17th green… she said to me “Oh if you weren’t so young, I’d snap you up”. And that was the moment I thought, oh wow she feels the same about me as I do about you” [Keith].

He lit up whilst speaking about Natasha, and the ongoing love between them was obvious when I first met Keith during his tattoo consultation at North West Tattooing, at which Natasha was also present. It was because of Natasha that Keith became passionate about music. He now plays guitar in a band, regularly attends rock and blues gigs with Natasha, helps his granddaughter (with whom he is very close) with her budding musical career, and has also been on stage with his musical hero, Willie Nile:

“… Looking back, I’ve always liked music, rock music, but not consciously. I think my record collection was about five records. I didn’t really have any. But then, oh it might have been ten years ago, twelve years ago, Natasha saw a tiny little advert in the local paper for a blues club… And we went along, and in ten years we’ve probably only missed about ten gigs they’ve put on… We’ve met lots of musicians through that. And eight years ago I just woke up on the Saturday before Christmas and said to Natasha, “What would you say if I said I was going to get a guitar today?” And she said, “Okay”… And really that’s where the music has sort of taken off. As I say, life changing events in music, were Willie Nile. He brought out a new album. He’s the guy that Bruce Springsteen gets on stage with in America… I pledged some money for the release of his album to get on stage with him and I actually did that…” [Keith].

The most significant turning point in Keith’s life, however, was a breakdown he suffered owing to debilitating anxiety and depression triggered by mounting time pressures at work. Indeed, perceptions of time being squeezed (Agger, 2011; Southerton, 2009; Southerton and Tomlinson, 2005), and thus akin to a pressure cooker (Cotte et al., 2004), are increasingly common within Western cultures. One day at work, Keith could no longer handle these time pressures which resulted in an emotional breakdown at his desk. He thus underwent therapy which helped him to escape from this crippling ‘whirlpool’ of worry, negativity, and sadness:
“…I’ve always been worried about things… And I’ve got a very intense job in insurance working to deadlines the whole time. It caught up with me. On the 19th September last year, at quarter past five in the afternoon, I went back and sat at my desk, it’s a Friday afternoon, and I burst out crying and I didn’t stop for 45 minutes. Basically I had a breakdown… I describe it as being in a whirlpool where you’re just on the bit that’s going over, and everything’s trying to pull you down in. You’re just about keeping up. But I wasn’t. People always said to me, “Oh you’re so laid back” But it was all a disguise. Underneath I wasn’t… You know, a typical phrase for me if somebody asked me how I was, you know you’re making a cup of tea in the kitchen at work, I’d go “Fantastic”. Because that’s how I programmed myself. If you say it enough, people are expecting that response. And actually I was masking the fact I felt terrible. Negative about everything. And I’d always been an incredibly emotional person anyway. You know, I’m a man who cries… From what I’ve learnt about the way depression works, the limpid system in your brain fires the chemicals and controls anxiety and what have you. If it’s firing little bits then you’re just about able to control it. But when it eventually shuts down that’s it. It can just go bang. It hit me like a sledgehammer. I cried for 45 minutes. Tried to phone Natasha three times but couldn’t speak to her. And in the end I had to put it in a text message. I was just a mess” [Keith].

Before this life-changing breakdown, Keith’s crippling anxiety resulted in him continuously worrying about an anticipated catastrophic future. His orientation towards the future reflects Matt Haig’s (2015) personal account of living with an anxiety disorder. Within ‘accelerating’ and ‘time poor’ Western cultures (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1999; Southerton, 2009) time might be continuously foregrounded in people’s everyday lives, and hence in a constant state of temporal dys-appearance. Yet, the breakdown resulted in Keith taking action to reduce his anxiety, and in turn alter his temporal orientation. Since attending therapy, he worries less about the future and instead tries to focus on the present moment, which the mindfulness he learned about in therapy promotes (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The ‘whirlpool’ in which he found himself represented a liminal zone (Turner, 1964, 1974) and subsequently, as well as his temporal orientation shifting since escaping it, so has his sense of self:

Keith: “And I went to the doctor, was diagnosed with clinical depression, and ended up going to The Priory... I’ve done cognitive behavioural therapy for depression courses. I’ve done a six week course on mindfulness… And the great thing about that is I am now a different person that I have been for at least the last ten years…”

Researcher: “Could you tell me a bit more about who that person was, and the person you are now?”

Keith: “…The old Keith Vermont was somebody who worried about everything. I saw death in everything. You know, if I was walking along the beach there’s a tsunami. If I passed a tree on a windy day, it’s going to fall on top of me… Now having got my head sorted, I don’t have those thoughts anymore. I was a worrier. A huge worrier… I was always trying to predict the future... I don’t try and predict the future now… Whereas before I would go, well if this happens, that happens. Then what if that happens?... Basically I’m enjoying life again…”
Whilst before the breakdown Keith’s body was uninked, to mark this calmer and happier sense of self on his body he has since acquired a ‘full sleeve’ (Figure 23). His arm narrates the story of his life, including working with horses and surfing waves in his younger years; meeting and marrying Natasha; getting involved with music; and his breakdown and subsequent recovery. Yet, his years spent golfing are notably missing from his sleeve, as he felt golf imagery would “look a bit naff” in relation to the other images etched into his skin. By telling a coherent narrative of his life through his tattooed body, he thus uses his skin to reflect the sense of stability he has been able to attain notwithstanding life’s messiness.

4.2.2.3. Chris: Something to live for

Chris is 35-years-old, has close cut brown hair and short stubble, and works as homeless support worker given he was once homeless himself. He is an unassuming and open guy who initially seemed quite nervous and embarrassed about being interviewed. Yet after a while he eased into it, and offered emotionally powerful accounts of the difficult times in his life, which at times brought tears to my eyes. Chris has always been involved in extreme sports, such as BMX riding. His parents, however, were not accepting of these activities and threw him out of the family home because of them when he was 17. This resulted in Chris being homeless for many years, and represents the first significant turning point in his life. Whilst for a long time Keith worried obsessively about an anticipated (catastrophic) future, Chris on the other hand lacked a sense of future whilst he was homeless. During this difficult period, he cut ties with his past family life, and shifted between places with no real sense of belonging. This thus left him suspended in an extended liminal (Turner, 1964, 1974), temporally and spatially unanchored, and ambiguous state of (non)existence. He would subsequently often tempt death by behaving recklessly, as he felt he had nothing to live for:

“…I’d had really bad crashes before and broken most of my bones and things. So I didn't care like. I didn't care. I just kind of for a long time, certainly when I was homeless, I kind of hoped for it… There was a long time when I didn't want to be alive anymore… All the stupid shit, I used to jump off whatever I could find, kind of tempting death” [Chris].

Chris’s inability to imagine a positive future reflects experiences of depression during which the future can seem non-existent (Haig, 2015; Hoffman, 2009). His experiences also relate to the concepts of *foreshortened future*, in which following traumatic events time is often perceived as static and the future uncertain (Ratcliffe *et al.*, 2014), and *narrative foreclosure*, whereby the future is seen as meaningless, resulting in an imagined (and premature) ending to one’s life narrative (Bohlmeijer *et al.*, 2011; Freeman, 2000). Yet, despite living for many
years in limbo, he slowly began to rebuild his life. This was initially engendered by two significant times during his homelessness in which his predicament literally brought him to his knees with despair. The first of these was when he found himself scraping mould off a piece of bread in a cave in order to survive another day:

“...During the homelessness there was a point (sighs) I was living down in Devon in the caves. And there was a day where I was hungry, like I hadn’t eaten in about four or five days, and I was sat out the back of this like restaurant trying to scrape mould off a piece of bread. I just like fucking broke man. I started crying and couldn’t stop and I think that everything that I had held back for a long time, too long, all came flooding out. At school I did well I got straight A’s… I just couldn’t understand how I had ended up there, you know. You get the opportunity to have a good long hard look at yourself and, yeah, I didn't like what I saw” [Chris].

And the second of these occasions was serendipitously meeting a guy at a respite centre (at which he once helped out as a climbing instructor) who felt equally as hopeless as he did:

“...I went up to a respite care centre and was doing like the climbing stuff. One night… they asked me whether I could do the night duty. I was walking up and down the corridors and I could hear this heart wrenching crying… you know when you hear someone crying and they’re a bit upset, but then you hear real desperation crying like right in the pit… And I sat and talked to him for a long time… it was getting light by the time we finished. I came out and again I just dropped on my knees and sobbed. It was heartbreaking. And this guy called Martin came… he’d always given me a bit of a wide birth, and I couldn’t understand why… He was like, “Fucking hell dude you've got a heart”. “What do you mean?” “Up until this point I've seen no emotion from you, I've seen nothing apart from this wall”… I moved in with him like about a week later… It was amazing. No electricity. No running water. We had to get the water off the side of the mountain. It was 50 miles from anywhere. And we broke the TV the night we moved in on purpose like because we figured that we were some awesome people living there and it would be better to talk to each other… And for the next three months I guess we talked. We just talked. We had fires every night and I cried a lot. Talked massively about my past… I left there a different person…” [Chris].

As evidenced by his comment that “everything that I had held back for a long time… came flooding out” whilst in the cave, before this moment Chris had seemingly blocked his past out. These emotionally charged events, however, resulted in him questioning “how I [he] had ended up there” (akin to Red Devil following his ‘world turning upside down’), and talking “massively about my [his] past”. Thus, just as the body can come into greater awareness following (emotional) pain (DuBose, 1997; Gimlin, 2006; Leder, 1990), the past thereby came into greater focus for Chris. He subsequently sought to repair his relationship with his parents (with whom he had not spoken for ten years whilst homeless) to restore a sense of temporal anchorage and continuity. After chatting to his dad about the past during a climbing trip, he came back a “completely different person”, echoing how he left the cottage shared with Martin from the respite centre “a different person”. This suggests a break with his prior
ambiguous sense of self, and represents a second major turning point in Chris’s challenging life. Whilst he was rebuilding his life and reflecting upon his past, he acquired his first tattoo aged 27. It was a ying yang symbol to represent his oft unbalanced life and the stability he craved, which is mirrored by the durability of a tattoo (Velliquette et al., 2006):

“My first was ying yang. It was kept shabby because I believe in balance and finding balance in your life. And I will never quite find it to a certain extent but maybe I should hence the messiness of it… I never really felt like I had a home anywhere. Even growing up, I never felt like I had any kind of home” [Chris].

Given this tattoo was planned and acquired once he had attained a growing sense of stability, whilst its shabbiness (i.e. imperfect and jagged design) reflects his once unbalanced life, his tattooing experiences reflect Velliquette et al.’s (2006, p. 61) observation that tattoos “…attempt to mark the self at the very moment of its disappearance”. Chris soon began inscribing other times in his life into his skin, such as breaking up with an ex-girlfriend and experiencing a serious sporting injury. He thus used tattoos to unfreeze his once ‘prematurely foreclosed’ (Freeman, 2000) self-narrative, and to create a sense of temporal continuity through his body despite his disorderly life. Whilst globally mobile professionals often actively avoid acquiring bulkier and more durable possessions due to moving around a lot (Bardhi et al., 2012; Figueiredo and Uncles, 2015), Chris either could not afford any due to being homeless, or conceivably due to avoiding links to his past until he had repaired his relationship with his family. His tattoo consumption experiences, therefore, resonate with prisoners for whom tattoos often become important conveyors of their past once their possessions have been taken away (Phillips, 2001).

The most significant turning point in Chris’s life came six months ago following meeting his girlfriend, Lizzie. Alongside the past coming into greater focus whilst rebuilding his life and relationships with his parents, falling in love has restored a sense of future for Chris. Despite his future once seeming non-existent, he now feels he has ‘something to live for’:

“… I recently met a young lady… Whilst I’ve never really wanted to die, I never really cared if I did or not. But now since meeting her I want to get old; I want to have kids. But that’s only been in the last six months. That’s changed since I met her… I want to have kids with this woman. I’ve never wanted kids before in my life. It’s never been something that I really looked at because of my upbringing and childhood… But nowadays yeah, I’d like to see what my offspring would look like (laughs)... I’d like to think I have a bit to pass on now… You know, I’m sitting here promising her like a future and kids and marriage, which I never even believed in before I met her… They say that a good woman can kind of turn you around…She gave me something to live for…” [Chris].

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Thus, the future is now foregrounded within Chris’s life; shifting his temporal orientation once again. This indicates how temporal dys-appearance need not be engendered only by pain, but also increasing joy in a person’s life, for example regarding a more positive sense of future like Chris. He subsequently plans to acquire an oak tree tattoo to represent his feelings of being spatially anchored within Lizzie’s arms, akin to when he is at the White Leafed Oak, alongside his desire for greater solidity in the future he now imagines he will share with her:

“I want an oak tree… There’s a place called the White Leafed Oak which is a stunning tree and it’s one of the oldest oaks in the world or in the UK certainly… It’s my favourite place in the world… Because I’m finally with Lizzie… when I’m lying with her in my arms I actually feel like I’m home… Feeling like I belong somewhere finally because I never have before… There’s more stability in what I want. I want something now you know. Like I never cared before. I want solidity… I want to be the best man I can be, and give Lizzie the best partner she could ask for… For that I need to be grounded” [Chris].

4.2.2.4. Patricia: Born again

Patricia is a 44-year-old Italian DJ who seemed intelligent and passionate. She has deep brown eyes, had short bright blue hair at the time of interview, and her curvaceous body is decorated by countless colourful tattoos. She spoke of many significant life turning points in her intricate life in her thick Italian accent, one of the first being when she found out in her 20s that her dad had been having affairs all her life; and the second giving up work to concentrate on her role as a mother to her three children. Yet, having worked all her life in various roles (e.g. at a language school) until having her second child, she soon became restless with being ‘just a mum’ like her own mother had been. Thus, a third major turning point in her life came when she began clubbing with one of her friends in her late 30s, which culminated in her unexpectedly becoming a DJ at 38-years-old:

“…When I’d been clubbing with my friend for, I don’t know, a few months or maybe nearly one year, I remember one night there was a DJ who was DJing in Rome. I remember he was doing this DJ set. I looked at the console, I looked at the music, and I just thought “Shit I want to do this”… I just decided to learn, and I had no idea whatsoever… Everything that is technical, I’m not good at anything. And also I had no music knowledge, like I didn’t know anything about the fundamentals of music. So it was basically like a lost mission from the start (laughs)... I’m restless. I need to keep moving on and I need to make sudden changes in my life constantly… I learned how to do it, and I started practising, and I remember I recorded a mixed tape and I didn’t know anybody in the club scene. Because also entering the club scene at 38 it’s not so easy… But I just remember I went round a few evenings that I liked, a few events that I liked, and I started getting to know people and I started giving this mixed tape around. And I was booked for one gig one night and it was a success. And basically from when I thought I actually want to be a DJ, six months later I was a DJ… That’s something which made me feel alive again… A totally unexpected turn in my life” [Patricia].
As indicated by her remark that she “need(s) to make sudden changes in my [her] life constantly”, like Cherrier and Murray (2007) Patricia holds a processual and temporalised sense of self. This reflects her fluid conception of time, whereby she drew upon imagery of a sand timer when discussing her perceptions of time flowing forwards. Patricia’s sense of self further shifted following her first ‘re-birthing’ (e.g. breathing therapy) session in 2013. She considers this to be the most significant turning point in her life, and hence the experience that irrevocably changed her life forever:

“… There’s been a thing that has changed my life forever. I sort of think of my life before that thing and after. I did my first re-birthing session. Re-birthing is a self-healing practice based on circular breathing… it’s like deep meditation… So what happens to you is that you get into this hyperventilation state where you have a lot of oxygen in your brain and you walk in a kind of trance state where basically what happens is that the ego somehow moves away, and you can actually get in contact with your subconscious… It can be very beautiful. It can be very horrible, painful, like my first re-birthing was probably one of the worst things that has happened in my life. The most painful and scary thing that has happened to me… I spent three days in a kind of limbo where I was sort of scared, tired. And one day I woke up and my life had changed completely. All the things that I had spent years of psychotherapy, or group psychotherapy, trying to solve or put behind me had just gone. Like the sense of guilt towards the rest of the world, the inability to say no to people because I was always afraid people would suffer because of my choices” [Patricia].

During, and for three days after, her first re-birthing session, Patricia became suspended in a temporally ambiguous liminal state (Turner, 1964, 1974), as evidenced by her description of herself being in ‘limbo’. Following this temporary period of liminality, she experienced a break with her prior sense of self. Given Patricia perceives her life as being ‘before and after’ the first rebirthing session, it represents a threshold between two life chapters. This altered sense of self in turn shifted her temporal perceptions and orientation. Whilst Patricia had spent most of her life ruminating about the past, and/or worrying about the future, following this turning point, and the emotional pain it engendered, the present and life’s temporally finite nature became foregrounded within her life. She thus now tries to live, and maximise her time within, the present moment:

“So that’s been the biggest change in my life…One of the things the rebirthing has changed in me, is like detaching from the idea of memory because life is not made for memories, life is made for living. I have spent all of my life having too many memories… now I don’t care because my life is every single moment. I could be dead in 15 minutes and I don’t want to have regrets” [Patricia].

Patricia’s attempts to detach from her past following the temporal dys-appearance (Leder, 1990) of the present within her life, and subsequent change to her sense of self, resonates with the voluntary simplifiers within Cherrier and Murray’s (2007) study. Yet, like these
voluntary simplifiers, Patricia was unable to fully break away from the past that has shaped her. For example, although she intentionally inscribes present moments and feelings into her skin, since both time and the embodied self are processual and in a state of becoming (Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Grosz, 1999), her mnemonic body now ironically narrates her past. The continuing importance of the past was also demonstrated by a plate she brought to the interview as her special possession, and which she owned before her engagement in rebirthing (Figure 47). It depicts a faceless woman and represents her ambiguous sense of self, feelings of being trapped, and desires for change before this significant life turning point:

“…I actually gave it as a birthday gift, a print out of this, to a friend of mine. It was a few days before the rebirthing. When I bought it for her it just spoke to me because somehow it was a graphic representation of how I was feeling in that moment. I felt that there was something in me that was changing… I was still trapped in something that was not 100% what I wanted… I knew that something had to change. But I still couldn’t see my face… and then rebirthing just gave me a new face somehow…. Now I feel that I have a face and I don’t feel trapped anymore” [Patricia].

**Figure 47: Patricia’s faceless woman plate**

In addition to the present and finite time becoming foregrounded for Patricia following her rebirthing sessions, so did her body. One day she got out of the shower, gazed upon her body in the mirror, and realised that for the first time in her life she loved it. Hence, although Leder (1990) theorises that the body comes into greater focus when in a state of dysfunction, for Patricia it came into the foreground due to feeling more positive emotions about it. It was following this newfound love for her body that Patricia first began acquiring tattoos:

“…One day I got out of the shower, and I found myself in front of the mirror, and I looked at myself and I thought you’re beautiful (laughs)… When this happened I suddenly somehow felt so guilty to my body… I mistreated my body so much for probably more than 20 years. Not loving it, finding it ugly, wanting to change it, not wanting to be in there. Whilst in the meanwhile my body had supported me so much and allowed me to have a happy life, to have three beautiful children, to go dancing… And that’s unconsciously probably why I started tattooing because it’s a way to say thank you. I’m sorry. I know you deserve something better… I think I was seeing myself for the first time” [Patricia].
By referring to herself as being ‘in’ her body, Patricia seemingly once viewed it as a prison in which she was trapped, reminiscent of the plate which represents her feelings of once being trapped. She perceives tattooing her body as an apology for hating it throughout her life (Figure 48). Mirroring her temporal focus on the present, Patricia has since covered her body in tattoos over a short space of time; capturing on her skin how she is feeling in the present moment of thinking about, planning, and acquiring these tattoos. Despite Patricia’s desire to make sudden changes in her life, the ongoing inscription of time into her autobodyography conceivably reflects the importance of biographical continuity to her identity, which tattooing helps her to attain whether consciously or not. The next temporal theme revolves around human (im)mortality and potentially the most biographically disruptive event of all: death.

Figure 48: Patricia’s apology to her body
4.2.3. Inking immortality: Transcending temporal boundaries

“Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light”

(Dylan Thomas, 1952).

The dominant modern notion of time flowing linearly from birth to death means that it is typically understood in Western cultures that we have a temporally finite lifespan (Adam, 1995; Bauman, 1992a; Becker, 1973; Cave, 2012). As identified in the prior theme, people’s temporal perceptions can sometimes (temporarily) shift in response to significant life events and turning points. However, participants most commonly perceived time as finite, which was sometimes bolstered by losing loved ones. Indeed, underpinning four of the five ‘timestyles’ (i.e. habitual ways of perceiving/using time) of US consumers identified by Cotte et al., (2004), was the idea of time as a limited resource. To exemplify, Red Devil’s banking career was hampered by the 2008 economic crisis. Following this life turning point, he undertook a PhD due to perceptions of having limited time over which to build a new career:

“…I had this great opportunity finally and then two years later the market crashes… The job that I’d always wanted had gone, and I had started earning really good money, and it was taken away from me… I had all this business experience at a fairly senior level… I didn’t want to kind of start at the bottom of a ladder somewhere without some ability to get up it quite quickly because obviously I’m 20 years older than you guys… I haven’t got that time to climb up the ladder... After speaking to some of my friends, one was a professor here, he said “Why don’t you try doing a PhD?” [Red Devil].

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Likewise, Alyssa’s aforementioned hourglass tattoo, which was acquired following her son’s death to remind her of the limited time she has to spend with family, further indicates the close entanglements between bodies, time, and death. These associations were enriched by my fieldwork visit to the Time: Tattoo Art Today exhibition, which displayed art created by world-renowned tattoo artists concerning the topic of time. The exhibition’s branding (Figure 49) notably included images of sand timers (symbolising time) juxtaposed with grim reapers and skulls (symbolising death).

Figure 49: Branding of Time: Tattoo Art Today exhibition

Indeed, echoing its branding, a key theme running through the artwork displayed at this exhibition concerning time was that of death. Namely, much of the artwork drew upon recognised symbols of death, such as grim reapers, decaying bodies, and skulls (Figure 50). The inextricable relations between time, bodies, and death were also evidenced during my visit to the death: the human experience (henceforth DHE) exhibition. Amongst the numerous objects and videos regarding cultural attitudes towards death being displayed were a couple of clocks (Figure 51). My fieldnotes below demonstrate how, when confronted with these reminders of time’s passage at the exhibition, reminiscent of the thesis prologue, I felt uneasy as they caused me to reflect upon human mortality:
As I approach the end of this narrow corridor, I am confronted with a black wall, upon which a Mark Twain quote is projected, stating: "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it". I turn around the corner and find that next to this quote is a pocket watch image. This makes me think about the links between time and mortality. I feel uneasy as I think about time ticking [Fieldnotes: DHE].

**Figure 50: Artwork illustrating links between bodies, time, and death**

![Artwork illustrating links between bodies, time, and death](image)

**Figure 51: Clock reminding me of time’s passage**

![Clock reminding me of time’s passage](image)

Subsequently, this final temporal theme concerns participants’ attempts to transcend these perceived temporal boundaries by creating a sense of permanence for themselves and/or others via (tattoo) consumption. I will first explore how participants considered death, and how this in turn was shaped by their temporal perceptions. After this initial contextualisation, I will then discuss how participants typically sought to find existential comfort and transcend their/others’ temporal boundaries, including by avoiding thinking about/seeing dying bodies,
religion, and maintaining healthy bodies, before focusing on their consumption of memorial tattoos to create legacies for loved ones. To unpack the complexity of these findings, multiple theorists will be referred to. Yet, I will especially draw upon Bauman’s (1992a, 1992b, 2000) theories regarding (im)mortality and liquid modernity, and Heidegger’s (1927 [2010]) ideas concerning time and death, as their work was particularly useful during data interpretation.

4.2.3.1. Fearing Father Time

Owing to our temporal and embodied existence, as Heidegger (1927 [2010]) contends, we are ultimately ‘beings-towards-death’, and life is thus a process of moving towards the end limit to our possibilities (also see Carel, 2006; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017). It has been observed that the unique human awareness of mortality often provokes fears about death and subsequent desires to deny it (Bauman, 1992a; Becker, 1973; Cave, 2012). Indeed, as Turley (2005, p. 68) notes, “...all consumers are on death row” and awareness of mortality is thus “...a wellspring of much contemporary consumer behaviour”. The deaths of abstracted ‘others’ are regularly witnessed/discussed in the news, television programmes, novels, films, pathographies, social media, and video games (Lee, 2008; O’Donohoe, 2016; Stone and Sharples, 2008; Turley, 2005; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012, 2016). Yet, in contemporary Western cultures the dying/dead bodies of loved ones are frequently hidden in institutions such as hospices and hospitals (Elias, 1985; Mellor and Shilling, 1993; Shilling, 2012; Willmott, 2000). Alongside notions of linear temporality and the body being seen as increasingly central to the self (Shilling, 2012), this regular sequestration of death can thus generate existential angst. This contrasts with Ghanaian culture, in which beliefs about ancestors being enduringly powerful minimise fears about death (Bonsu and Belk, 2003).

Indeed, many countries hold ‘Day of the Dead’ celebrations during which family and friends gather to remember deceased loved ones, as featured in the DHE exhibition (Figure 52).

Figure 52: Global Day of the Dead celebrations
Akin to how two younger participants (early 20s) were unable (or potentially unwilling) to imagine themselves as old (Section 4.2.1.3), two participants spoke about actively avoiding seeing/thinking about death and dying bodies. According to Terror Management Theory (henceforth TMT), suppressing death-related thoughts is a ‘proximal defence’ against existential anxieties (Arndt et al., 2003). Natedog, for example, avoided seeing his nan whilst she was dying in a hospice to prevent contaminating his more positive memories of her:

“…She started getting a bit sick so she went into a home… She was just amazing. She’d make one hell of a brew. She was just mint. When I was little I didn’t get to see her much so when I did time was precious. She lived in this home for a bit getting sicker and sicker, and I was really selfish because… I couldn’t go and see her… Don’t get me wrong, massively close. But I just couldn’t see her in that state. It would devastate me” [Natedog].

For Heidegger, whereas actively seeking to create meaning in the backdrop of one’s temporally finite life represents a more ‘authentic’ approach towards death, this avoidance behaviour represents what he calls an ‘inauthentic’ confrontation with finitude (Carel, 2006). Likewise, in the past Alyssa actively suppressed thoughts about death to avoid (or perhaps subconsciously owing to) worrying about it:

“I don’t know that I was worried about death. It’s something I chose not to think about. I think had I thought about it, I probably would have. But it’s a bit... I dunno what the word is, but I just kind of put off thinking about it” [Alyssa].

The death of somebody close to a person, however, can change the way that he/she perceives the world, time, and self (Bochner, 1997; DuBose, 1997; Kates, 2001; O’Donohoe, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Hence, whilst Alyssa previously seemed to harbor some existential anxieties, after losing her son she realised that she no longer feared death:

“…I had a son named Walter. And he was diagnosed with a chromosome abnormality while I was pregnant. And they offered me a termination but I didn’t take it and carried on with the pregnancy. And he lived for 24 hours before he passed away… It taught me that, it sounds a bit morbid this, but I think if you sit with somebody that dies, it changes you. It like leaves something with you. And for some people that’s devastating but for me I realised that I wasn’t scared of death. So now that’s why I want to work with families and people who are dying…” [Alyssa].

Following Alyssa’s revelation that she did not fear death, she decided to work towards a psychotherapy career involving helping others through the dying/bereavement process. Walter’s death, therefore, transformed her sense of self and desired future. Yet, his death also shaped her temporal perceptions and experiences. As aforementioned, this significant life event resulted in her viewing time as finite, and thus reinforced a linear conception of time.
However, it also led to Alyssa simultaneously identifying with a more cyclical conception of time and grief. This indicates how multiple notions of time can influence human temporality:

“I think my experience with grief is… people think of it as being like a step thing and that’s what you go through. But it’s not like that. It’s like a flow with peaks and troughs and it’s not linear. It’s almost cyclical really, where you come back around to things but at a deeper level…” [Alyssa].

Similarly, Patricia also seemingly found some existential comfort in identifying with a cyclical idea of time engendered by a life-changing conversation with her son:

“…When he was probably about seven… he asked me “Mum, do you know that we are all made of stars means?” And I said, “Well yes, it means we are shining. We are all beautiful”. And he looked at me and said, “No, it means that we are all actually made of stars”…I was totally shocked because I’d always been agnostic basically. But of course there are questions you ask yourself like, where do I come from? Where am I going?... But suddenly for me that was the big answer: That I come from the big bang. And I’m going everywhere. This means actually that there is no birth and there is no death. It’s just a constant transformation. I am made of the same material that is on Jupiter. I am of a supernova. I am made of a black hole. I am made of a toilet. I am made of a mouse. I am made of a tree. And I have probably been all that, or I will be all of that… Your decaying is not actually decaying, it’s just a transformation. And your dying is not a dying, it’s a transformation. You’re just a temporary aggregation. And that for me has made a total difference. I’m not afraid of death anymore” [Patricia].

Patricia explains how this significant conversation with her son destabilised linear notions of life stretching between birth and death, since now for Patricia “there is no birth and there is no death”. She noted how she no longer fears death, and indeed identification with cyclical time can result in an acceptance of death (Walter, 1991). Although she had always been agnostic, her perception of the self being in a constant state of transformation between different life forms is reminiscent of the religious notion of reincarnation. Bilbo, for example, explained how her newfound identification with Buddhism has reduced her fears of death:

Bilbo: “When I was younger, I always used to think I was going to die at the age of 30. I found out about my mum’s sister who died in a car crash, and I thought I’m going to die in a car crash in my late 20s, 30s. So I’ve always thought about that and that was quite a morbid thought; almost like giving up. And this is like not giving up… thinking that I could go on in this life, and I could be happy in the next life so it doesn’t matter”.

Researcher: “So you’re less scared of death now that you’ve found out about Buddhism?”

Bilbo: “Yeah, yeah less scared. Not worried. And also about people that have died. Just thinking that they’re either in Heaven if they’re Christian and they want to believe that, or they’re in a flower, or they’re in the sky or something else”.

Owing to an ageing Western population, death is associated with ever-older chronological ages (Gilleyard and Higgs, 2011; Walter, 1991). Furthermore, within our ‘culture of longevity’
the socially constructed notion of a ‘good death’ is perceived as one transpiring at life’s proper term, i.e. in old age (Lai, 2016). Hence, based on these ‘social clocks’ (Williams, 2000), we ordinarily perceive some deaths as more ‘untimely’ than others, for example the death of children (Kates, 2001). This was demonstrated at the DHE exhibition, which dedicated a section to death’s timing (Figure 53). Furthermore, during my visit to Body Worlds, I felt upset and anxious when viewing the corpses of babies displayed on one of the floors. The ‘untimely’ death of Bilbo’s Aunty in her 30s, however, pushed expectations of her own death back down the life course. Yet, whilst she was previously scared of death because of this, her identification with Buddhist principles (e.g. reincarnation and the cycle of death and rebirth) have soothed the existential anxieties she once held.

![Figure 53: Display about death’s ‘timing’](image)

According to TMT, the investment in cultural worldviews, such as religious belief systems which promise immortality, functions as a *distal defence* against existential anxieties (Arndt *et al.*, 2003; Greenberg *et al.*, 1986; Greenberg and Arndt, 2012). Likewise, drawing upon the work of Bauman concerning (im)mortality, Turley (2005, p. 67) observes how:

> “Knowledge of individual mortality, the passage from ‘is’ to ‘is not’, engenders such vertiginous terror that we turn to culture to furnish a worldview, a ‘survival policy’, that will suppress this haunting realisation and proffer some strategy for immortality to counter it”.

To further illustrate how this works, Rusty’s faith in an afterlife has protected him from worries about death:

Researcher: “Do you ever worry about ageing in general?”

Rusty: “No, not at all. No I have no worry about any of that. I have no worry about dying or anything like that. I’m in a good place because I believe I’m going to go to heaven. Because I’m only here and then I’m going to be with my master, so I have no worry about dying”.

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However, whilst the participants above spoke about being unafraid of death, either owing to a transformative life experience (e.g. the death of Alyssa’s son and Patricia’s conversation with hers), or the ‘sacred canopy’ of religion (Berger, 1967), most confessed to fearing death. Bob, for example, noted how he is scared of death due to being an atheist, coupled with his conception of irreversible temporality as hinted by his observations below of how “past 40 you’re on the downwards slope” and he is “not going to escape” death:

“Past 40 you’re on the downwards slope on the rollercoaster… I have a fear of death because I don’t think that there’s another place. But I’m not going to escape it. No one is. But hopefully I’ve got a long time still to go” [Bob].

As explored in Section 4.2.1.1, participants regularly viewed the future as uncertain, including Victoria. Despite being Catholic, and thus finding some comfort in religion (unlike Bob), Victoria is concerned with maintaining a healthy body to prolong her life. Indeed, health promoting behaviours can buffer against existential angst (Arndt et al., 2003). Unlike her sister’s unshakable faith in an enduring afterlife, and despite the reminders of faith tattooed into her skin, Victoria still harbours doubts over what happens after death:

“…I was doing things because I wanted to look better. But now I think it’s more important that I want to have a healthy heart, and I want to live for longer… I just want to be as healthy as possible for as long as I can… I think I’m just quite scared of death because it’s still the unknown. I still don’t really know what’s going to happen. But my sister, she’s completely fine with it. One time when we were walking to school, I’d had some sort of nightmare about dying and I was like, “Oh are you scared to die?” And she said, “I don’t care…I know I’m going to God anyway”. So she has like devout beliefs in it. But I still kind of have doubts sometimes…” [Victoria].

Victoria’s desire to maintain a healthy body despite being religious might have also been influenced by widespread discourses surrounding healthy eating found in Western cultures (Askegaard et al., 1999; Featherstone, 1991; Kristensen et al., 2013). Bauman (1992a, 1992b) argues that in modern cultures death is broken down into its specific ‘causes’. Death is thus framed as a manageable problem which people should take individual responsibility for avoiding through the adoption of healthy lifestyles (ibid). This reflects my observations at Body Worlds, since the exhibition contained much information concerning how visitors can make certain lifestyle choices (e.g. following a healthy diet and not smoking) to avoid diseases and cultivate a healthy body (also see Drummon and Krzjzaniek, 2016). Rusty also sought to maintain a healthy body despite being religious. Their experiences thus support Cave’s (2012) assertion that multiple paths to immortality can co-exist within any culture:
Rusty: “…I am losing weight. I’ve still got a long way to go as you can see. Diet not too bad. I do like my Coke but I do tend to drink Diet Coke… Our diet is not fatty. And exercise, I like walking… Obviously with family heart problems and things like that, the older I get, I want to be as fit as I can… But I don’t drink a terrific amount these days. And I don’t smoke”.

Researcher: “So even though you have a belief in the afterlife, you want this life to be as long as possible?”

Rusty: “Yeah, because I’d like to see my daughter and son have kids. I love this life. I’m quite happy so I’d like it to last… If that means I can prolong it a little bit by being a bit more healthy I will”.

Furthermore, contrasting with Alyssa’s realisation that she was unafraid of death following her son’s death, the deaths of others exacerbated the existential anxieties of several participants, including the death of Bilbo’s aunty in her 30s, as previously noted. To further exemplify, owing to having bad news over the telephone in the past (e.g. learning of her mother’s death), Patricia is plagued with anxieties about her children’s well-being. The telephone, therefore, has become symbolic of her ‘greatest fear’ i.e. her children’s deaths, and she has thereby acquired a telephone tattoo to represent these concerns (Figure 54). Thus, despite identifying with a cyclical conception of time following her aforementioned conversation with her son, the insidious power of linear clock time seems evident:

“…I have this sort of telephone… it is something symbolic probably of my greatest fear, that’s why it’s black and there’s an eye… Being away very often from my kids, one of my greatest fears is that my phone can ring and it’s my husband telling me that something has happened to them. It’s something I think of one hundred times a day. Every time I see a message on my telephone… The telephone is my greatest source of anxiety because for some reason all the worst news in my life has always come through the telephone. Always. And it keeps coming… It really scares me a lot…” [Patricia].

Figure 54: Patricia’s telephone tattoo
Whilst Patricia worried about losing her children, Harry actually lost his stepson to suicide. This difficult life event engendered concerns about his biological children (with whom he is much closer) also taking their lives, and resulted in him becoming mindful of depression:

Harry: “...I wasn’t that close to my stepson because I didn’t see that much of him because I split up with his mum. But it did affect me, yeah. It altered the way I look at things now, yeah. Probably made me a bit more of a nicer person. Depression isn’t it, yeah? Yeah it did have a bit of an affect …”

Researcher: “In what ways did it change the way you look at things?”

Harry: “Life’s quite short isn’t it?... I wouldn’t want my kids doing the same. I was worried about my lad Caleb. He’s very deep and very in on himself... So yeah I worry about that… I think it worried me seeing someone who’s a bit down and then someone who’s took their own life. It made me think, oh I wouldn’t like somebody else to do that. It makes you look at depression maybe a bit stronger”.

Marketers often engender and capitalise upon anxieties surrounding time’s passage (and hence death) to sell goods and services, for example anti-ageing products (Coupland, 2009). Public exhibitions such as Body Worlds and DHE visited during my fieldwork aim to ‘desequester’ death in Western cultures. Indeed, the latter was created with the following aim in mind: “As a society we are reluctant to talk about death and dying. This exhibition was about helping to start that conversation” (Bristol Museums, 2017). Yet, my visits to these exhibitions often caused me to reflect upon mortality and reinforced how, like many participants (and other visitors observed), I still experience anxieties about death. Reflecting Bilbo’s concerns, I have long feared facing an ‘untimely’ death due to my mum dying in her 40s. Moreover, following her death and that of my grandparents (with whom I was extremely close) and childhood pet cat (Nike), like Harry and Patricia I fear losing others. My ongoing fears about death were revealed when gazing upon the human corpses at Body Worlds, which caused me to decide not to purchase a print from the gift shop (which I had originally planned to do) due to imagining that it would provide an unwelcome daily reminder of death. I also often felt anxious and upset when observing the various objects/videos displayed at the DHE exhibition, including a display about assisted dying (Figure 55):

I enter a small dim room, in which there is a large screen playing a video of various experts talking about end of life care. I sit down on a leather bench and watch it. Again this causes me to reflect about my own body and mortality, and makes me feel quite anxious. What would I choose to do if I became ill? Would I want these medical professionals to prolong my life, even if it meant living in pain for an extra few months?... Am I healthy? Should I change the way I live? I get up and look in the lit glass cabinet in front of me, which holds several empty medicine bottles and a couple of little chocolates. I read the information to the right of the cabinet… I let out an audible gasp as I realise that it is an actual bottle of poison used in euthanasia. I feel very uneasy as I imagine somebody drinking the bottle and dying. This is a bit too overwhelming [Fieldnotes: DHE].
My existential anxieties were also exacerbated in the reflections room found at the end of the DHE exhibition, which encouraged visitors to actively reflect upon death (Figure 56). The fieldnotes below capture my thoughts and feelings whilst sitting in this room, and writing my reflective note to place into the fire pit found at the centre of it:

…I find myself at the end of the exhibition and opposite the reflections room. This is a small dimly lit room… and at the top of the back wall the following is projected: “Start the conversation. Make your thoughts known. Let’s talk about death”. I enter the room and... I find a black beanbag, put my iPod headphones in… and write my own note in private. I write about the mixed emotions I experienced throughout my visit, and how I think the exhibit is important in desequestering death from UK society… and I place my note in the fire pit… I decide that my first note was a bit academic, and decide to write a more personal message to people I have lost. I write a second note telling my mum, nana, granddad, and cat Nike that I miss them and will always love them, and add it into the pit… [Fieldnotes: DHE].

Figure 56: The reflections room
In summary, whilst the avoidance of thinking about/seeing death and dying bodies, placing faith in religious belief systems, and holding more cyclical notions of time soothed several participants’ existential anxieties, the majority held a linear conception of time and feared death. Furthermore, my own anxieties about mortality were revealed and heightened by my fieldwork visits to time and death-related exhibitions. The next section focuses on participants’ attempts to transcend their own and/or others’ temporal boundaries through the construction of symbolic legacies via tattooing their paradoxically *impermanent* bodies.

**4.2.3.2. Crafting corporeal legacies**

It has been contended that the underlying drive of much human behaviour (whether consciously or not) is the fear of death and subsequent desires to deny it (Becker 1973; Cave, 2012; Greenberg and Arndt, 2012). Hence, to ‘rage, rage against the dying of the light’ as captured in the Dylan Thomas poem cited at the beginning of this theme. As Bauman (1992a, p. 4) asserts, within modern cultures “…death (more exactly, awareness of mortality) is the ultimate condition of cultural creativity… it makes permanence into a task, into an urgent task…” He argues that in modern cultures, individual death is broken down into specific causes which consumers are encouraged to take personal responsibility for avoiding (*ibid*; Bauman 1992b). As Turley (2005, p. 74) explains, this deconstruction of mortality fuels much ‘health-enhancing, death-defying’ consumption activities. Likewise, Heidegger (1927 [2010]) observes how anticipation of death shapes our perceptions and behaviours during everyday life (also see Carel, 2006; Critchley, 2009; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017). Indeed, human beings have long desired to transcend their temporal boundaries by attaining a sense of immortality, whether through placing their faith in religious belief systems, maintaining a healthy body, creating biological legacies through producing offspring, and/or crafting *symbolic legacies* (Cave, 2012), which is a key concept to which I return below.

Accordingly, several participants identified with religious principles, strived to maintain a healthy body, and/or had children, as previously noted. This section, however, focuses on how participants engaged in tattoo consumption to attain a semblance of control over death (and hence time) through their temporal bodies. As discussed in Section 4.2.2.3, Chris has long undertaken extreme sports such as BMX racing. His parents disapproved of this, and ultimately kicked him out of the family home for it when he was 17. For many years he was homeless and lacked a sense of future, thereby causing apathy about death. He would thereby often tempt death by behaving recklessly. Yet, following one sporting accident in which he
attained a serious head injury, he developed a fear of death. He subsequently acquired a skull tattoo on his back to represent how he wanted to put his anxieties about death behind him:

“… The skull on my back… I ended up in hospital with a bit of a head injury… That scared the shit out of me… They put me into, not a chemically induced coma, but basically they put me under. And when I woke up, I went out to ride again and turned into a massive fanny (laughs) and couldn’t ride and stuff… I don’t really believe that's the way you should live your life though. I think you should grab things by both hands and so yeah…. Just to try and put the fear of death behind me…” [Chris].

He has since witnessed friends and clients from his past carer job role becoming seriously injured owing to sporting accidents. This inspired him to acquire a ‘Do Not Revive’ tattoo on his chest (Figure 57) to indicate to doctors not to resuscitate him if he is near death (e.g. owing to an extreme sporting accident). This reflects terminally ill patients who often fear painfully dying over a prolonged period of time, and hence (where legal) might opt for physician assisted suicide to attain control over the ending of their lives (Paserard and Menaud, 2016). Like these patients, Chris seems to be trying to negotiate control over the end of his life via his body, whilst simultaneously recognising that he might not ultimately be in control over when his life might end, as indicated by his remark “when your time comes”. In attempting to attain control over death via his tattooed body, he still seems to hold some fears about dying, despite attempts to transcend these anxieties:

“...I’ve known a few friends that have basically crashed far too hard and shouldn’t have been brought back. They’ve now got people that have got to empty their colostomy bag; they are complete vegetables... I’d rather be dead than have no quality of life basically... I kind of believe that when your time comes, it’s time to stop... If I’m idiotic enough to kill myself doing what I like doing, then it’s my time” [Chris].

Figure 57: Chris’s DNR tattoo

Furthermore, Kate suffered from crippling anxiety and depression triggered by mounting work pressures. This ultimately led to her leaving her teaching job. Echoing Chris, at her lowest point she no longer wished to be alive. However, after reading about *Project*
Semicolon online (see Project Semicolon, 2016), she felt less alone and more hopeful about the future. She subsequently acquired a semicolon tattoo (Figure 58) to indicate how, instead of ending her life, she now wants her ‘story’ to endure into the future:

“...I was just feeling really down at home. I started reading online about The Semicolon Project and semicolon tattoos and it just sort of struck a chord with me...I’ve been so down I thought what’s the point; I don’t even want to be here...So when I read about it and sort of the idea of you might have gone through an awful time in your life but then you realise actually it’s not over and your story is going to carry on...” [Kate].

Project Semicolon was instigated in 2013 by Amy Bleuel who lost her father to suicide, and has since developed into a global community bringing together people dealing with mental health issues (Project Semicolon, 2016). Those identifying with the project are encouraged to draw a semicolon on their skin, as “A semicolon is used when an author could’ve ended a sentence but chose not to” (ibid; my emphasis). And thus, to symbolise how “you are the author and the sentence is your life” (ibid; my emphasis). Like Chris, therefore, Kate seemed to be trying to symbolise a semblance of control over the ending of her life via her tattooed body. Over recent years, like Kate people are increasingly choosing to permanently ink this symbol of an enduring self through tattoos. In the editor’s letter of the September 2015 issue of Skin Deep tattooing magazine, he expresses his support for semicolon tattoos (Skin Deep, 2015a). Furthermore, during my visit to M1 Tattoos tattoo studio, a tattoo artist informed me how his old workplace (another tattoo studio) recently held a ‘mental health awareness day’ which they spent doing semicolon tattoos for consumers. This indicates the growing popularity of this tattoo type, and hence people’s desire to create a sense of self-permanence.

Figure 58: Kate’s semicolon tattoo

The concept of a symbolic legacy stems back to the Ancient Greeks, who held the dualistic belief that culture did not suffer the same decay as nature (Cave, 2012). Hence, in contrast to the mortal body, the cultural realm is often considered an enduring space in which to transcend one’s temporal boundaries and attain symbolic immortality (ibid).
Bauman’s (1992a, p. 4) contention that, within modern societies culture functions as a “...huge and never stopping factory of permanence”. Indeed, he remarks how “Culture is about expanding temporal and spatial boundaries of being, with a view to dismantling them altogether” (ibid, p. 5). By experiencing their bodies as autobodiographies, with their bodies thus expressing accounts of their past, present, and anticipated/desired future, as discussed in the first temporal theme (Section 4.2.1), participants were seemingly creating (whether consciously or not) a personal symbolic legacy paradoxically through their tattooed skin.

However, akin to my first tattoo, eight participants also endeavoured to create a symbolic legacy for others via their bodies by acquiring memorial tattoos, including grandparents, parents, partners, children, and pets (Table 6). This contrasts with Bauman’s (1992a) more individualistic and privatised ideas surrounding human mortality. Indeed, the November 2015 issue of Skin Deep magazine contained an article about memorial tattoos entitled The Memory Remains, which discusses how memorial tattoos can be used to mark (and help deal with the emotional pain of) loved ones’ deaths (Skin Deep, 2015b). Furthermore, memorial tattoos featured in the DHE exhibition alongside other longstanding means of memorialising others, including statues and monuments, dedicated days and silences, and celebratory stadiums, in addition to more contemporary ways such as gravestone QR codes (Figure 59). Thus, although people have long marked their bodies for the dead (Fleming, 2000), this indicates the rising popularity of memorial tattoos in the West. Indeed, during bereavement, consumers’ vulnerabilities are exacerbated, which can lead to the pursuit of marketplace offerings to help them to reduce and/or deal with these (Dobscha, 2016; O’Donohoe, 2016).

Table 6: People participants were memorialising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>People memorialised through tattoo(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa</td>
<td>Son and Grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natedog</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Mum, grandparents, and pet cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusty</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ufobaby</td>
<td>Mum and pet cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants used memorial tattoos in three key ways: First to preserve personal memories of the deceased person; second, to share (positive) stories about that person with others; and finally, to instigate continuing bonds with that person (Figure 60). As indicated in the diagram below, however, these identified features of memorial tattoos overlap rather than being mutually exclusive; namely, a participant’s memorial tattoo might provide all three functions in creating a corporeal legacy for a loved one.
Concerning the first identified feature, participants had often omitted living romantic partners from their autobodies owing to perceptions of these relationships being potentially transient, as discussed in Section 4.2.1.1. Yet, memorial tattoos enabled participants to carry the memories of dead loved ones with them permanently, including for Hamlet a romantic partner. Ufobaby, for example, has a Salvador Dali inspired ‘full sleeve’ which incorporates memorial tattoos for his mother and cat. Indeed, although perhaps considered a less significant form of grief in contemporary Western cultures (Mansfield, 2016), due to the close bonds frequently shared between owners and their pets, evidence of them being buried together stems as far back as 7500 BC (ibid). Moreover, ritualistic postmortem practices were undertaken for animals by the Ancient Egyptians and in the Roman Empire (ibid):

“…I decided because my cat died, I just thought it would be good to get something of that included in the tattoo. And one of the first things we saw when we typed in Salvador Dali [into Google] was his portrait with a cat next to it as well. So we used that, but an actual picture of my cat rather than the one on the internet… I had it [the cat] for probably about ten years… I’m not sure really whether he was poorly for a while or not… He just went to the vets and then had an operation and he didn’t make it through the operation… Whilst I was kind of having the tattoo done my mother passed away… I think it’s something which, not that you’re ever likely to forget your mother, but it is a good permanent reminder of her and how significant she kind of was in my life…” [Ufobaby].

Although Ufobaby acknowledges how he is ‘not ever likely’ to forget his mother, he acquired a memorial tattoo to ensure that his personal memories of her and his cat will last forever. Thus, given the future is never totally certain, he seems to have acquired his memorial tattoos to buffer against the fragility of memory (Ricoeur, 2004). This resonates with consumers who create scrapbooks to protect their memories (Phillips, 2016). Likewise, Bob and his wife are unable to have children, and hence they consider their pet dogs as their offspring. Whilst Bob currently has no tattoos to represent his dogs, he has plans to perhaps do so in the future following their deaths. This is to have a permanent reminder of them once they are no longer triggering his memories everyday by running around alongside him:

Bob: “Me and the wife can’t have children so we have animals. We have a lot of dogs… So when each of my dogs pass I might have a little reminder of them… It’ll just be a personal reminder… That’s the good thing about tattoos. Once you’ve got them, they’re there forever. Every time you see a part of it you think, oh I remember that…”

Researcher: “Yeah. You said you’d maybe get a tattoo once they’d passed away. Is there a reason why you wouldn’t get them now that they’re living?”

Bob: “It’d be more of a memorial to the dogs; just to remind me of them. I’ve got enough memories of them now. They’re actually there running around all the time, driving me mad. So once they do pass I think a tattoo is a great way to remember”.
Second, alongside ensuring that they would always personally remember the deceased person, depending on bodily placement (i.e. whether visible or hidden), memorial tattoos also helped participants to transfer narratives about them to others. Thus, to keep that person’s legacy ongoing in other people’s memories via shared conversations. This reflects how grief websites enable people to share stories/photographs of a deceased person to attain social immortality for them (Gabel, 2016). However, whereas these webpages ordinarily involve a social form of grieving by people with a shared connection to the deceased person (ibid), the narratives attached to memorial tattoos might also be shared with persons without a prior connection to the people they represent. Indeed, Turley (2016) observes how, by telling stories about a deceased person in an interview situation, the storyteller can transform that person’s identity and reaffirm their continuing importance. When discussing memorial tattoos during interviews, participants would often tell stories about the person it symbolised, despite me not personally knowing them. To exemplify, when talking about the memorial tattoo acquired for her gaga (grandfather) with whom she was very close, Sarah constructed a positive narrative about him. This is indicated by her assurances that nobody had ever said a bad thing about him, and how “he was the best person in the world”:

“My granddad died when I was 18/19... He was a massive influence on my life. I never heard anyone say a bad thing about him at all. Ever. So I don’t know whether subconsciously all these, you know moving away and making something of myself... was a subconscious reaction to him dying... I think that was around the time I was messing up my first degree and I remember thinking, my granddad is never going to be proud of me... Yeah he was just such a nice guy, and I never heard him say anything nasty about anyone; never heard anyone say anything bad about him. I absolutely admired him. He was the best person in the world as far as I was concerned... Absolutely gutted when he died. Really, really sad” [Sarah].

Similarly, when speaking about the portrait tattoo of his grandfather acquired to memorialise him (Figure 61), Natedog told me fond stories about him, as he conceivably also tells to others given he noted how “people always ask” him about it. Through remarking how his grandfather was “a good egg” and how “he wanted to see our faces on the rides looking all happy”, akin to Sarah, Natedog is ensuring that his grandfather has a positive legacy:
“...People always ask... They look at the picture and go, “Oh it really looks like you”... He was a good egg. He was a Leeds fan... and he always used to go out in the morning and buy a paper... and he’d always write down the football scores. And if I ever have kids, or adopt kids and they have kids, I’d want to be that granddad that sits down in the chair and writes down the scores from the paper... Legacies live on. And memories live on. I just think it’s important to me and the meaning of him will live with me in another way... He’d always make me porridge. But it was always cold porridge. And to this day, I’ve never had a bowl of hot porridge... We used to go to Legoland and he’d always crack a joke. I remember one day, we went out and he got badly sunburned and it was the typical English thing he was wearing suit trousers and was literally red raw. And it was mint. And he wouldn’t go on any rides but he wanted to see our faces on the rides looking all happy. He would have done that twice over. So when I saw him we were quite close...” [Natedog].

Hence, although Rusty notably spoke of the difficult relationship with his deceased father, participants would ordinarily paint a utopic picture of dead loved ones. Indeed, narratives do not offer unmediated windows into lived experiences, as the past is reinterpreted and edited over time (Ricoeur, 1992, 2004; Section 4.2.1.2). This reflects the Asante tribe in Ghana who endeavour to craft positive postmortem identities for dead relatives, for example by dressing the dead body in fancy clothing, and purchasing elaborate caskets to express their symbolic wealth (Bonsu and Belk, 2003). Furthermore, in a Western context, the Victorians were known for constructing elaborate graves to convey the deceased person’s social status, as evidenced in Highgate Cemetery. The online world today can also provide a productive space in which to (re)construct the postmortem identities of deceased persons, for example through sharing written stories and photographs relating to them on grief websites (Gabel, 2016).

Both Natedog’s and Sarah’s grandfathers have also influenced their actions beyond the grave. Sarah explains above how her desire to attain her university degree was fueled by wanting to make her grandfather proud. Similarly, Natedog observes how he only eats cold porridge; a habit inherited from his grandfather. This bolsters Shilling’s (2012) contention that the boundaries between living and dead bodies are blurred, as deceased people can shape our thoughts, feelings, and actions despite being physically absent. Subsequently, the third identified feature of memorial tattoos was that they are used not only to preserve or transfer memories of dead loved ones; they were also sometimes acquired to keep relationships with them ongoing. Hence, as a way of overturning linear ideas of life spanning birth to death (Lai, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012), and separable boundaries between past, present,
and future (Adam, 1995) and the living and dead (Shilling, 2012). The concept of *continuing bonds* is useful for interpreting these findings. It expresses how, unlike traditional notions of the grief process eventually culminating in detachment from the deceased person, continuing relationships with dead loved ones are not necessarily pathological and are quite common (Field, 2006; Klass, 2006; Neimeyer *et al.*, 2006; O’Donohoe, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012). Akin to how gravestones (Klass, 2006; Woodthorpe, 2011a), urns containing ashes (Baker *et al.*, 2016), and possessions associated with the deceased (O’Donohoe, 2016; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012; Woodthorpe, 2011a) can facilitate continuing bonds between the living and dead, as did memorial tattoos for several participants. Sarah explains how her memorial tattoo (Figure 62) enables her to always have her ‘gaga’ on her back alongside her:

“And it was around the time my granddad died and I always said when he died I wanted a tattoo to remind me of him… So I got two lilies on my shoulder blade, on my back, for my granddad, my gaga, because he was a gardener and obviously lilies symbolise death. But I wanted something that was really vibrant so I went for a really vibrant bright colour. And even though I can’t see them, it’s kind of like I’ve always got him on my back kinda’ thing” [Sarah].

**Figure 62: Sarah’s memorial tattoo**

Likewise, Hamlet lost his long-term partner (Lynne) suddenly, and he teared up at times when talking about her. Mirroring the Mickey Mouse Lynne had tattooed on her own body, Hamlet acquired a Mikey Mouse tattoo to represent her following her death (Figure 63). As well as commemorating her, like Sarah he seems to view his memorial tattoo as engendering a continuing bond between himself and Lynne. This is evidenced by his remark that the tattoo is “something just between me [him] and Lynne”, thus depicting it as a secret they share:
“I’ve got a Mickey tattoo… Lynne, bless her, died suddenly from cancer last year. In June, was diagnosed in January and dead by June. Horrible awful time. And the Mickey that I’ve had was a sort of personal thing for me just to commemorate and remind me of the tattoo that she had… Personal and closer because, as far as it goes, it’s not for anyone else, it’s not really on show, it’s not one of those. It was something just between me and Lynne kind of thing and I was happy with that… It makes me feel warm I suppose…” [Hamlet].

Figure 63: Hamlet’s memorial tattoo

Moreover, as aforementioned, Alyssa lost her son. After Walter’s death, she acquired a tattoo of a diamond to memorialise him. This was acquired not just to render her memories of him permanent, but also as a means of ‘reintegrating’ him into her life in the present and future:

“…A piece of that person stays with you. I’ve got the clothes that Walter wore in the hospital… But something may happen to those things, you never know. You could get burgled and someone steals them… Whereas this can never be taken away from me. So having something for someone who isn’t here anymore is a way of, not just memorialising them, but I think reintegrating them into your life now as well… my children they’ve passed, but… this is my connection to them. That’s with me always” [Alyssa].

The reintegration of the deceased into the life of those left behind represents an important sense-making activity during the bereavement process (Baker et al., 2016), and can engender feelings of continuity in the backdrop of life’s messiness (Field, 2006). Thus, processes of contemplating, planning, acquiring, gazing upon, and discussing her memorial tattoo helps Alyssa to find meaning in her son’s death, and maintain an ongoing relationship with him.

Given possessions and clothing can hold memories (Buse and Twigg, 2015; Epp and Price, 2010; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012), participants also spoke of objects which preserved memories of deceased people, which they sometimes brought to the life history interview. Alyssa, for example, keeps Walter’s clothing and blanket (which still smell of the hospital) in a memory box. These objects function as linking objects (objects associated with the dead person) and linking phenomena (things with sensory impact linked to the dead person)
Victoria discussed a prayer card relating to her grandfather which is stuck on her bedroom wall; and Rusty has a framed picture once belonging to his father hanging on a wall in his house. Contrasting with these more ‘spatially fixed’ mnemonic objects, Natedog has flat caps belonging to his deceased granddad which he now wears himself, including during a holiday to New York. Whilst Hamlet has several pill boxes containing Lynne’s ashes, which he takes around the world. To personify the pill boxes, he decorated them with jewels to match Lynne’s love of glitz and glamour. Hamlet explains below the process of scattering her ashes, creating these pill boxes, and how he recently took a pill box (and hence Lynne) to Kent with him given she had never been before:

“…We love the lakes. Really love the lakes. And when she died, bless her, we had a couple of special places, as you do, in Tarns. And when she died, half the ashes went to her son because he wants to put them in the family grave. And the other half I want because I scattered most of them. So we went to the lakes and scattered them… We scattered her ashes in two particular places. A place called Angle Tarn, and another one that we’ve called Lynne’s Place because it was a little one that we always stopped at to have a drink and a bit of chocolate… But then, my daughter and son said, “You can do other things if you want to” … So we went online and found some pill boxes. And Lynne loved glitter. She loved glamour… The first time we went shopping together, I don’t know 30 years ago, we went to Debenhams in Manchester at Christmas time and she was going to buy a dress or something. I’d never been with her shopping before. And in we go, and she heads straight for sequins and glitter and stuff. I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe all the glitter you know… She loved glitter and sparkle… Three pill boxes that I’d got, Swarovski little jewels on top… We put the resin in the pill boxes and we put some ashes on top and we let them set. So I’ve got pill boxes with ashes in and I take one with me wherever I go. She went to Kent last week, bless her. She went with us to Kent… I love her with me, that’s the key. She’d never been down to there had she? She hadn’t been” [Hamlet].

Unlike my inability to conceive of human ashes as once being a living person when gazing upon them at the DHE exhibition, Hamlet views them as actually being (a part of) Lynne, perhaps due to being stored in personified pill boxes. His remarks of how “she went to Kent last week” and “I love her with me”, indicate how Hamlet viewed himself as being on holiday with Lynne despite her physical death. This echoes participants in Baker et al.’s (2016) study of bodily dispossession, since they would often interact with dead loved ones, for example by talking to urns containing their ashes. Indeed, Hamlet noted how he still talks to Lynne, as facilitated by his pill boxes. Although he acquired a memorial tattoo to represent Lynne, which commemorated her and to some extent evoked continuing bonds, due to actually being her the pill boxes work even more powerfully in this latter regard for Hamlet:
Ashes/cremation tattoos combine human ashes into the tattoo ink and are slowly becoming more widely available in Western cultures, despite remaining relatively rare. Indeed, although I conducted a brief telephone interview with an operations manager (Alan) of a tattoo studio which provides ashes tattoos, in addition to a brief email exchange with the woman who claims to have been the first person in the UK to acquire one (see BBC News, 2009), I was unable to find somebody to conduct a full interview with. This might be explained by the typical sequestration of dead and dying bodies in Western cultures (Shilling, 2012; Willmott, 2000), meaning that there still seems to be some taboo and/or high respect surrounding human remains and in turn ashes tattoos. Indeed, both Body Worlds and DHE exhibitions prohibited visitors from taking photographs of the human remains being displayed, and when I have chatted to people about cremation tattoos, the usual response has been disgust. As Alan informed me, his company has done many memorial tattoos without the incorporation of human remains. Cremation tattoos, however, represent a much smaller proportion of their client base. Nevertheless, they have met the requests of 10-15 consumers wanting to include people’s ashes in their memorial tattoos. Usually the chosen tattoo is small (either a name or date), and memorialises a parent, grandparent, or child. Below, Alan explains the cremation tattooing process. His use of the term ‘gory factor’ when describing why not all the tattooists working for him feel comfortable doing cremation tattoos indicates how they remain taboo:

“…It’s not something we would do kind of off the cuff. It’s requested. The tattooist may not be that comfortable doing it. The gory factor. But from the technical side of things, it’s pretty much the same as doing any other tattoo. We take the ashes; we autoclave them, which is a machine that we use to sterilise any equipment that we use… It goes around in a sealed bag; it’s heated up to 190°C, not that it’s likely to have any bacteria in it anyway because it’s already been incinerated. And then a small amount of the ash is put directly into the ink in the little pot just before they do the tattoo. And it’s a simple process of the tattoo needle kind of being dipped into the ink, and then the tattooist performs in exactly the same way. The percentage of the actual ash that’s put into the skin is really very, very minimal. We’ve probably done it maybe 10 or 15 times” [Alan].

The woman with whom I exchanged emails acquired a memorial tattoo incorporating the ashes of her son (who passed away at two-years-old) to help with the grief process and to keep her son close to her. Ashes tattoos resonate with cremation jewellery, i.e. jewellery containing ashes of loved ones, which growing numbers of companies are providing (e.g.
Scattering Ashes, 2017), and jewellery made from parts of dead bodies (e.g. teeth and bones), as displayed in the DHE exhibition. Indeed, this woman also had jewellery containing her son’s ashes (see BBC News, 2009). Were they to become more widely available (and less taboo) in the future, cremation tattoos would provide increasing numbers of people with a means of maintaining ongoing relationships with dead loved ones through inking the bodily remains of the latter into the bodies of the former.

However, the creation of symbolic legacies for self and others through tattooing the body still seems rather paradoxical. Symbolic legacies are conventionally constructed within the cultural realm, as aforementioned, which is considered an enduring space within which to attain symbolic immortality (Cave, 2012). The cultural realm contrasts with the human body which, although both biological and cultural (Shilling, 2012), is impermanent. As Bauman (1992a, p. 20) observes, the physical body is “...the least reliable, the most ephemeral, the most evidently mortal side of the human individual...” Whilst possessions can be used to create symbolic legacies for persons (Curasi et al., 2004; Kates, 2001; Price et al., 2000; Türe and Ger, 2016), as Belk (1988) cautions, these can be lost, stolen, and damaged. Indeed, as Alyssa remarked, whilst the medicalised smell of the blanket in which Walter was wrapped evokes strong memories of him, “something may happen to those things”, whereas her tattoos can “never be taken away from me [her]”. Subsequently, both mnemonic objects and memorial tattoos are temporally fluid, since they transport the past (i.e. memories of the dead person) into the present and future. Whilst tattoos are fixed on the body, which can also be considered a space (Roux, 2014), they travel everywhere the embodied person does. Possessions, however, are not always so spatially fluid. For example, although Natedog wears his granddad’s hats around the world and Hamlet takes his pill boxes with him wherever he goes, Rusty’s framed picture and Victoria’s prayer card remain fixed to walls of their homes. The body thus seems to provide a more intimate, enduring, and controllable canvas on which to attain permanence for the self and others.

Memorial tattoos, however, disrupt conventional notions of what permanence is, as they crumble alongside the decaying human body into which they are inscribed (Fleming, 2000). Thus, for consumers of memorial tattoos, the idea of permanence is tethered to their temporally finite lifespan. Given he has no children through which to attain a biological legacy, to craft a personal symbolic legacy Bob “…told my [his] wife she can skin me [him] and sell me [him] to the Museum of Modern Art”. Although this might seem strange, tattooed skin was displayed in the Wellcome Collection’s 2010 Skin exhibition (Wellcome Collection...
Blog, 2010). Indeed, an article entitled *Don’t Fear the Reaper* found in the January 2016 issue of Skin Deep tattooing magazine explains how Charles Hamm has instigated *The National Association for the Preservation of Skin Art*, which offers the opportunity for people to pass on their tattooed skin to loved ones following their death (Skin Deep, 2016; also see Save My Ink, 2015). The article observes how, “We’re all destined to meet the Reaper, but the idea that our ink doesn’t have to end up as so much as dust in the wind is growing” (*ibid*, p. 25). Hence, in the future more people might be able to create more enduring personal symbolic legacies through their tattooed skin outliving them. This reflects the way in which objects containing a dead person’s ashes can be passed on as family heirlooms (Baker *et al*., 2016). Yet, for most people their (memorial) tattoos, unless burned into ash, will follow them into the grave. As Back (2007, p. 95) observes about tattooed bodies:

“As the cadavers disappear, the traces of their embodied history, of life and love, are lost. They pass through hospital wards to the crematoria, their names remembered in floral wreaths and the inscriptions made on young flesh that will in turn grow old”.

Thus, to prolong the permanence of their ultimately impermanent tattoos, participants would often engage in ongoing aftercare regimes, to now be discussed.

### 4.2.3.3. Prolonging permanence

It has been observed that Western cultures seem to be ‘accelerating’ and increasingly ephemeral (Bauman, 2000; Elliott and Hsu, 2016; Rosa, 2003; Section 2.3.2). Giddens (1999, p. 2), for example, suggests that “the world in which we find ourselves today… seems out of our control- a runaway world”. Furthermore, commonplace postmodern notions of self-identity propose that “under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction…” (Gergen, 1991, p. 7; also see Bauman 1996; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). According to Bauman (2000), modern societies can be described as ‘solid’ due to comprising more stable social structures and identities, whereas post/late modern cultures are ‘liquid’. He suggests that liquid modernity is characterised by “...the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty” (*ibid*, p. viii; original emphasis). Whilst durability was once sought, Bauman (2000, p. xii) thus argues that transience is now more desirable:

“Modernity was triggered by the horrifying signs and prospects of durable things falling apart, and of a whirlwind of transient ephemera filling the vacancy. But hardly two centuries later, the relation of superiority/inferiority between the values of durability and transience has been reversed”.
Within consumer research, Bardhi et al. (2012) have drawn upon Bauman’s notion of liquid modernity to develop their account of liquid consumption (also see Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017; forthcoming). They observe how consumers within contemporary Western consumer culture value immaterial possessions and have more fleeting attachments to them, for example global nomads who require flexibility when moving around the globe (ibid). Indeed, they assert that “in today’s globalized world, attachment to things can be problematic because we live in an increasingly liquid world where identity projects are constantly changing” (ibid, p. 512). Their contentions are supported by Figueiredo and Uncles’s (2015) research into how globally mobile professionals negotiate temporal frameworks, Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) investigation of access-based car sharing, and Ulver and Ostberg’s (2014) study into identity and status transitions. Moreover, the concept of consumer tribes, namely fluid groupings of people temporarily held together through shared emotions/ambience, is also popular in the field (e.g. Cova and Cova, 2001; Cova et al., 2007; Goulding et al., 2013). Participants regularly referred to things they considered as transient, which have been discussed throughout the findings chapter, for example romantic relationships, sense of self, bodily modifications like Botox® and hair transformations, tattoo meanings, and life itself. To demonstrate, following breaking up with an ex-boyfriend, Sarah acquired a diamond tattoo (Figure 64) as a reminder of how, in contrast to permanent tattoos, romantic relationships are more ephemeral:

“…I went through a break-up with the guy in the tattooists… he used to always call me a diamond. So I got a diamond tattooed… just as a bit of a reminder that tattoos last longer than men…” [Sarah].

**Figure 64: Sarah’s diamond tattoo**

Although participants often refrained from tattooing anything they considered transient on their bodies, such as romantic partners, they frequently expressed liking the permanence of tattoos. This finding challenges ideas that transience is now favoured by persons over
durability (Bauman, 1992a, 2000; Bardhi et al., 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Figueiredo and Uncles, 2015). Bob, for example, noted how “that’s the good thing about tattoos: once you’ve got them, they’re there forever”. Likewise, Polly remarked how “…it’s quite nice the fact that you’re actually stuck with it”. Challenging Turner’s (2000) conception of postmodern societies as comprising ‘cool loyalties’, and thereby tattoos as playful and transient body marks, participants often engaged in moisturising regimes to prolong the permanence of their tattoos. As Red Devil observed, “…there are certain tattoo creams that you can buy to help you to preserve the art that they put on you”, and indeed tattoo artists typically recommend Bepanthen cream in their aftercare regimes. Keith, for example, remarked “I just get worried that it’ll fade. It’s quite amusing actually. I now moisturise my arm twice a day…And it’s great that it’s permanent”. Echoing, Keith, Natedog “…moisturise[s] twice a day… to obviously keep the tattoos in good nick”. Likewise, I experienced anxieties about my first tattoo being impermanent, and thereby engaged in consumption behaviours to avoid this undesirable potentiality:

It’s been a few days since I got my first tattoo and I have been ensuring that I put my Bepanthen cream on as regularly as possible. I’ve been a bit paranoid that it’s going to fade really quickly… I also woke up the other day and found an ink imprint of my tattoo on my bed covers, and then started to panic that my tattoo is just going to wash off in the shower or while I am moving around sleeping… I wore a ‘boob tube’ type top for the first two days just in case it did ‘rub off’ on my clothing… [Research diary].

As Denis and Pontille (2014, p. 12) observe, “…signs are never truly stable. Their colors fade, they wear out, their surface is attacked by mould; they are stolen, they break…” Like decaying city signage and ageing possessions (Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012; Valtonen, 2016), visibly fading tattoos indicate human vulnerability, life’s fragility, and mortality. Hence, participants’ moisturising regimes reflect the ongoing repair and maintenance of signage (Denis and Pontille, 2014; Graham and Thrift, 2007), and refreshing of family heirlooms to combat material decay and preserve (fluid) family legacies (Türe and Ger, 2016). Indeed, participants also often constructed sunlight as an enemy of permanence they fought against by shielding their tattoos under clothing and using high factor sun lotion:

“…The bottom of your arms are out a lot during summer time… Looking after your tattoo is obviously important… Don’t have them in direct sunlight all the time… For instance, if you’re a truck driver in the US and you’re driving around all the time with your arm out because it’s boiling hot, if you had two sleeves then one would be more faded than the other… But these types of things that they tell you not to do if you can help it… There are certain things they do tell you to do with skincare, especially if you want to avoid skin cancers… In terms of looking after the tattoo you can moisturise…” [Red Devil].
As previously intimated, Bauman (1992a, p. 4) argued that within modern cultures immortality was highly desired, and culture functioned as a ‘factory of permanence’. In contrast, he asserts that due to possessions, relationships, and work seeming more ephemeral today, death is no longer as feared and immortality thus not as highly prized (ibid). Because everything seems so transient, he observes that every day is a dress rehearsal for death, whereby the postmodern life strategy:

“…does not allow the finality of time to worry the living…by slicing time into short-lived, evanescent episodes. It deprives mortality of its vile terror by taking it out of hiding, and tossing it into the realm of the familiar… Daily life becomes a perpetual dress rehearsal of death…” (ibid, p. 187).

However, participants’ use of tattoos to create symbolic legacies for themselves/others, and preservation of tattoo permanence via aftercare regimes, demonstrates how in the backdrop of (and perhaps in response to) a seemingly accelerating and transient world, the quest to attain permanence (or ‘solidity’) on a broader existential level remains. Hence, I argue that persons might be seeking comfort in practices of ‘(re)solidification’ (e.g. tattoo consumption) in a ‘liquid’ consumer culture. This supports extant literature demonstrating how consumers engage in reconsumption activities to attain a sense of temporal continuity and stability (Russell and Levy, 2012), and dispossess, memorialisation, and funerary practices to construct legacies for self/others/groups (e.g. Back, 2007; Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Curasi et al., 2004; Parkin, 1999; Phillips, 2016; Price et al., 2000; Velliquette et al., 2006). Whilst Back (2007) theorises the tattooing of others on the body as a working class means of emotional expression, the participants in this study who had acquired memorial tattoos cut across the classes. Hence, the desire to immortalise self/others seems to be a class-defying pursuit, as well as spanning time and space (Cave, 2012). Indeed, we are witnessing the ongoing creation and expansion of industries concerned with prolonging life and/or rendering humans immortal, including anti-ageing technologies; cryonics; gravestone QR codes; vitamins/superfoods; and nanotechnology, stem cell research, and genetic engineering (Cave, 2012; Dumas, 2012; Shilling, 2012). Thus, challenging Bauman’s (2000, p. 126) claim that “the devaluation of immortality… [is] arguably the most decisive turning point in human cultural history”, I would argue that we have never turned our backs on this ancient pursuit.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

“This is not the end; this is not even the beginning of the end; this is just perhaps the end of the beginning” -Winston Churchill.

“Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire”

(Jorge Luis Borges, 1962, p. 234).

5.1. Chapter introduction

In this concluding chapter, I will first remind readers of the constructs being explored in this thesis, in addition to the study’s main research questions. I then proceed to thread together the three key themes identified and discussed in the previous chapter by providing a critical discussion of the delicate subject/object- or in control/out of control- dialectic running through my key findings and participants’ embodied and temporal experiences. Next I unpack the study’s main contributions to theory, methodology, practice, and society. Finally, I will detail the key limitations, alongside several potential directions for future research.

Mirroring my longstanding fascination, consumer culture is obsessed with the body (Featherstone, 1991; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010), and it is central to many pressing societal issues, from ageing Western populations to ongoing developments in genetic engineering (Shilling, 2012; Turner, 2008). Like the body, time is becoming increasingly foregrounded in ‘accelerating’ Western cultures (Bauman, 2000; Elliott and Hsu, 2016; Rosa, 2003), and we regularly hear of time-related maladies, such as stress, burnout, and time poverty (Agger, 2011; Shove et al., 2009). Consumer culture contributes to this perceived acceleration, for example by reducing the shelf-lives of technological products (Graham and Thrift, 2007), clothing (Appadurai, 1996), and even mattresses (Dreams, 2017). But marketers also promise that consumers can save time, for instance by investing in fast food or express delivery services, or ‘decelerate’ time by engaging in the slow food movement (Parkins, 2004; Shove et al., 2009), and by investing in anti-ageing products and procedures (Cooke, 2008; Coupland, 2009). Given our embodied and temporal existence, however, we are ‘beings-towards-death’ (Heidegger, 1927 [2010]), and our physical death remains inescapable despite ongoing developments in industries aiming to prolong life and eventually render us immortal, for example nanotechnologies, healthy foods, and vitamins (Cave, 2012; Shilling, 2012).
Subsequently, owing to the tight links between bodies and time, and the rising importance of both within Western consumer culture, we arguably require enhanced understandings of their undertheorised relations. At the heart of this thesis, therefore, lies an ethnographic study of the entanglements between bodies, time/temporality, (im)mortality, and consumer culture within the primary context of tattooing. I explored the three following research questions:

1. How might bodily modifications relate in contrasting ways to cultural notions of time and lived temporality?
2. How and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities?

3a. Why might the consumption of temporal permanence still be sought in an ‘accelerating’ cultural context?
And;

3b. How and why might people endeavour to attain a sense of temporal permanence for themselves and/or others through modifying the impermanent body?

In the thesis prologue, I provided insights into my personal experiences with the (my) body, time, and the deaths of loved ones. I thus illustrated how and why I have long been personally interested in the study’s key research constructs and consumption context. Furthermore, I demonstrated the rising centrality of the body and time to Western consumer culture, and hence why it is necessary to develop enhanced understandings of body-time entanglements. I indicated, therefore, how the thesis is topical and thereby why others should also be interested in it. Finally, I briefly outlined the key contributions being developed in the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the existing literature concerning the body, time, and their interrelations across a range of disciplines, including: consumer research/marketing; sociology; anthropology; feminist theory; philosophy; cultural/social gerontology; psychology; and geography. The first half of the chapter concerned human bodies. I first considered how and why the body was traditionally neglected in sociology and consumer research, alongside why there has been a growing literature base regarding embodiment in both fields more recently. Second, I outlined the contrasting natural, sociocultural, and phenomenological conceptions of the body, and drew upon the work of several notable theorists to do so (i.e. Bakhtin; Foucault; Butler; Goffman; Mauss; Bourdieu; Elias; and Merleau-Ponty). Third, I explained the temporalised view of the body taken in this thesis, in relation to Shilling’s (2005, 2012) account of corporeal realism. Finally, I explored the centrality of the body to Western consumer culture, and focused in on tattoo consumption by detailing the Western history of tattooing and the links between tattooing and the self.
The second half of the chapter concerned time/temporality. I first discussed the modern notion of linear clock time and contrasted it with natural cyclical time. Second, I explored the temporal acceleration and fragmentation associated with late/postmodernity. Next, I discussed how lived temporality is shaped by these cultural conceptions of time, alongside meso and micro-level factors, including retail/service environment, emotional state, and life-stage. Fourth, I outlined three influential philosophers’ views of time, i.e. Husserl, Heidegger, and Ricoeur. Fifth, I discussed the entanglements between time and bodies, and the role Western consumer culture plays in consumers’ (re)negotiations of temporality through and upon their bodies. Sixth, I noted how owing to our embodied and temporal existence, we are mortal beings. This led to a discussion of the various ways in which people seek to attain immortality, including through religious belief systems, contemporary technologies (e.g. cryonics), maintaining bodily health, and creating symbolic legacies. Finally, I outlined the key literature gaps being addressed and the study’s three key research questions.

In Chapter 3, I detailed and justified the iterative ethnographic research design employed. First, I discussed the key tenets of interpretive consumer research and my hermeneutic assumptions concerning ontology and epistemology. Second, I outlined why the primary context of tattoo consumption was adopted. Third, I discussed how and why participant observation was used, including detailing the eight ethnographic sites visited; the activities undertaken at each site; the use of visual methods; and how participant observation provides insights into bodies and time. Fourth, I detailed how and why biographical and elicitation style interviews were conducted with 18 tattoo consumers, including the purposive, snowball, and theoretical sampling approach used; who the interviewees were; what the interviews comprised; and finally, how the interviews were designed to complement the study’s focus on bodies and time. Fifth, the iterative hermeneutic data analysis/interpretation approach taken was explained and justified, alongside a discussion of researcher reflexivity and transparency. Finally, the ethical considerations upheld throughout the thesis were outlined.

In Chapter 4, I explored the study’s key findings, which centred on the temporality of bodily modifications, with a particular focus on the temporality of tattoo consumption; namely, how this mode of consumption relates to cultural notions of time and lived temporality. I first detailed the emergent theoretical framework drawn upon to enrich data interpretations. Next, I provided some initial observations of how tattoo consumption might have a slower perceived and experienced tempo than in previous decades, in contrast with ‘accelerating’ Western cultures (Bauman, 2000; Rosa, 2003). This is owing to the rising availability and
popularity of larger customisable tattoos (as regularly dreamed of, planned, waited for, acquired, cared for, and gazed upon by participants), coupled with often more time-consuming tattoo acquisition processes and longer tattoo studio waiting lists. I then further unravelled the temporality of bodily modifications by presenting and discussing the three key themes identified in the data. Within each theme, I compared and contrasted my findings with existing research to demonstrate the theoretical contributions being developed.

Within the first theme- *Autobodyographies: Inscribing, revising, and hiding temporality*- I discussed the centrality of the body’s surface, and the marks of temporality captured upon it, to expressing human identity, and subsequently introduced the concept of autobodyography. It concerns how, through both involuntary and intentional temporal inscriptions, the body’s surface can narrate partial, processual, and palimpsestic accounts of a person’s past, present, and anticipated future. I explored participants’ (re)negotiation of a range of temporal inscriptions, including hair transformations, wrinkles, scars, and weight loss/gain, alongside tattoos, within ongoing processes of inscribing, revising, and hiding time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities. Hence, in this theme my first and second research questions were addressed; namely: How might bodily modifications relate in contrasting ways to cultural notions of time and lived temporality? And how and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities?

The second theme- *Broken beings: Repairing temporal ruptures*- discussed how, following significant life turning points, participants’ temporal perceptions/orientations ordinarily shifted alongside their sense of self, with time subsequently becoming foregrounded- or in Leder’s (1990) terms ‘dys-appearing’- within their lives. I then explored how participants often tattooed their bodies following biographical disruption, and time’s ‘dys-appearance’, to construct a sense of temporal order and continuity out of disorientation and disorder. Three longer participant narratives were provided to further unpack these insights. This theme, therefore, further attended to my second research question: How and why might persons negotiate multiple marks of time through and upon their bodies via consumption activities?

The final theme- *Inking immortality: Transcending temporal boundaries*- explored how participants typically viewed time as finite and regularly feared death. They attempted to transcend their temporal boundaries by placing faith in religious belief systems, maintaining healthy bodies, and/or producing biological offspring. The focus of this theme, however, was participants’ construction of *symbolic legacies* for themselves and/or others through tattooing their impermanent bodies, including via memorial tattoos. I presented the three key ways in
which memorial tattoos helped participants to immortalise loved ones: First, by preserving personal memories of that person; second, through enabling the transference of (positive) narratives about them to others; and finally, by instigating continuing bonds between themselves and dead loved ones. Finally, I explored participants’ attempts to maintain the permanence of their tattoos. In this theme, my third research question was thus explored: Why might the consumption of temporal permanence still be sought in an ‘accelerating’ cultural context? And how and why might people endeavour to attain a sense of temporal permanence for themselves and/or others through modifying the *impermanent* body? I will now provide a critical discussion which threads together these three key themes.

5.2. **Critical discussion: Taming the temporal body?**

The desire for control inspires much consumption and body-directed behaviour (Becker, 1997; Pitts, 1998; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Thompson, 1996; Schouten, 1991); and indeed, within participants’ embodied and temporalised experiences, there evidently lies an intricate dialectic of control (Figure 65). Participants, for example, regularly sought to control time’s passage by reflexively inscribing, revising, and hiding accounts of their past, present, and future through and upon their bodies. Moreover, they frequently turned to tattooing their bodies in times of perceived temporal chaos to restore a semblance of temporal order and continuity. Finally, participants also sought to prolong their lives by maintaining healthy bodies or constructed symbolic legacies for themselves and/or others through their bodies, for example via memorial tattoos. These bodily behaviours can in turn be contextualised in relation to Western discourses and ideals regarding temporal, bodily, and self-control.

Concerning the former, human beings have long desired to control time, whether to conquer space (Bauman, 2000; May and Thrift, 2001); discipline the bodies of soldiers (Birth, 2012), factory workers (Davies, 1994; Hoffman, 2009; Inglis and Holmes, 2000), athletes (Phoenix *et al.*, 2007; Tulle, 2007), and ill/injured persons (Seymour, 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2003); and/or to attain immortality for themselves and others (Bauman, 1992a; Becker, 1973; Cave, 2012). Moreover, retail/service environments are regularly designed to control consumers’ temporal perceptions, for example to reduce perceived waiting time in queuing situations (Baker and Cameron, 1996; Kellaris and Kent, 1992). Consumers also sometimes actively engage in consumption activities, such as the reconsumption of films, books, and places (Russell and Levy, 2012), temporal coordinating mechanisms like world clock and calendar features on smartphones (Figueiredo and Uncle, 2015), anti-ageing products (Cooke, 2008; Elliott, 2008), and daily schedules (Thompson, 1996) to gain perceptions of temporal control.
Regarding the latter, institutions such as the church, army, government, prisons, and mental institutions have long sought to regulate people’s bodies (Foucault, 1979; Synnott, 1993; Turner, 2008). Meanwhile, during the development of European court societies in the Renaissance period, persons began to discipline their own bodies in accordance with societal codes of conduct demanding greater control over bodily desires, to thereby attain social status (Atkinson, 2002; Elias, 1978; Shilling, 2012). In contemporary Western consumer culture, we are encouraged by multiple social actors including marketers to continuously monitor our bodies for signs of socially constructed imperfections (Featherstone, 1991; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995). It has been observed, therefore, that we are living in accordance with the insidious power of the ‘disciplinary gaze’ (Foucault, 1979; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Patterson and Elliott, 2002; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004).

**Figure 65: The common thread of control**

In contemporary consumer culture, we are promised that we can master time, the body, and ultimately death through various marketplace offerings, for example anti-ageing products and services, vitamins and superfoods, and even cryonics (Cave, 2012; Coupland, 2009). Furthermore, ongoing developments in genetic engineering, stem cell research, and
nanotechnology aim to prolong our lives and eventually render us immortal (Shilling, 2012). Marketers typically frame the body as a plastic (i.e. highly malleable) entity which we should take personal responsibility for keeping healthy and moulding in line with constructed bodily ideals (Featherstone, 1991; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010). Persons thus engage in cosmetic surgery (Askegaard et al., 2002; Atkinson, 2008; Kinnunen, 2010), dieting (Johnston, Reilly, and Kremer, 2004), body building (Wacquant, 1995b), and scarification (Pitts, 1998) to attain/reclaim control over their bodies and the temporal inscriptions captured upon them. Although once used to mark (and hence govern) the bodies of slaves and criminals (Fisher, 2002; Gustafson, 2000; Larsen et al., 2014), tattooing is also regularly engaged in by people to attain a sense of control over their bodies and lives (Hardin, 1999; Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Velliquette et al., 2006). This is even more pronounced in contexts wherein that person’s body is regulated by others, for example in prisons (Back, 2007; Benson, 2000; Phillips, 2001). Thus, the body might appear to provide a more stable, intimate, and enduring entity in a seemingly accelerated, transient, and unstable world largely outside of our control (Oksanen and Turtiainen, 2005; Shilling, 2012; Sweetman, 1999).

As Patterson and Schroeder (2010) observe, much consumer research regarding embodiment considers the body as a plastic resource to be moulded in reflexive identity building activities. This is clear, for example, in Askegaard et al.’s (2002) study into cosmetic surgery and consumers’ reflexive identity projects, and Schouten’s (1991) investigation into the consumption of cosmetic surgery to reintegrate the self-concept; both of which do not really consider how the materiality of the body might rebel against consumers’ consumption pursuits. Several consumer researchers do draw attention to how consumer culture’s framing of the body as malleable ‘plastic’ is quixotic, such as Parmentier and Fischer’s (2011) research into how fashion models’ bodies do not always easily conform to the culturally celebrated ‘look’, and Patterson and Schroeder’s (2010) observation that persons do not have an equal level of financial resources or cultural knowledge with which to modify their bodies. Yet, despite the growing popularity of practice theory approaches to studying consumer behaviour, which stress more habitual and routinised behaviours (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2014), research into consumers’ identity projects (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), temporality (Robinson, 2015), and body modification (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010) has been critiqued for providing overly individualistic and agentic accounts of consumption. However, despite participants’ attempts to attain a semblance of control over time, body, and/or death via (tattoo) consumption practices, their experiences with unintentional temporal
inscriptions on their bodies (e.g. scars and inadvertent weight loss/gain), various illnesses and diseases, processes of bodily ageing, and the deaths of loved ones demonstrates how they ultimately lie outside of our control. Indeed, the temporal body is the locus of our physical mortality (Bauman, 1992a, Cave, 2012), and human mortality thus represents the ‘ultimate failure of modernity’ with its central aim of attaining control over nature (Bauman, 1992a; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995). Nowhere was this made clearer than when gazing upon the skinless human corpses at Body Worlds. Drummond and Krszjanek (2016) utilise Kristeva’s concept of the abject to conceptualise how the cadavers at Body Worlds are typically seen as ‘other’ to the self. Yet, rather than being dissimilar to human beings, the corpses on display are instead windows into an inescapable part of the human condition. Indeed, the fieldnotes below illustrate how, when gazing upon the corpses exhibited at Body Worlds, I often felt anxious due to being reminded of my unavoidable mortal nature:

I turn to my left and a depiction of a human corpse steering a ship catches my eye. I go over to take a closer look. I realise that it is the bodies displayed in action and/or with clear facial features which provoke the most emotion in me... I look into his eyes for a few seconds, and slowly move around the display to view his muscular corpse from all angles. I am beginning to feel slightly uneasy, since he looks so young and full of vitality. How did he die when he seems so fit and healthy? Perhaps I shouldn’t buy a print from the exhibit after all, as it might provoke anxious thoughts about mortality? [Fieldnotes: Body Worlds].

Tattoos, therefore, layer a cloak of permanence over an impermanent surface. Despite marketers’ seductive invitation to become the powerful masters of body, time, and death, we are ultimately their reluctant slaves. As Benson (2000, p. 25; original emphasis) eloquently observes about bodily practices such as tattooing:

“For in truth we do not own our bodies, they own us, that the only thing that is certain about our bodies is that they will let us down, that in the end they cannot be mastered or bent to our will. In this sense what these practices bring into sharp focus is the impossibility of Western ideals about body and self, and of these fantasies of permanence, control, autonomy that they seek to negotiate”.

Heidegger (1927 [2010]) emphasises our temporally finite nature and observes how we are ‘beings-towards-death’, meaning that life is a process of paradoxically moving towards the end limit to our possibilities. For Heidegger, the denial of death- and hence time’s unrelenting passage, which marketers provoke anxieties about to flog us an illusion of control over- is ‘inauthentic’ (Carel, 2006). As previously intimated, we witness the death of others in the media and popular culture; yet, within Western cultures the dying and dead bodies of loved ones are usually hidden away in institutions, thereby exacerbating existential anxieties (Bauman, 1992a; Shilling, 2012). As a product of this sequestration of death, the majority of
participants feared time’s passage, and subsequently discussed myriad ways in which they tried to avoid thinking about/seeing death, prolong their finite lives, and attain a sense of permanence for themselves and others. Yet, we need a temporally finite existence to engender action and provide our lives with meaning. If we were to live forever, our lives would imaginably become filled with boredom and apathy (Albom, 2012; Cave, 2012; Turner, 2008). Indeed, participants sometimes noted how their perceptions of finite time inspired them to maximise their lives, and value more highly the limited time they have to spend with loved ones. As Cave (2012, p. 285) notes:

“The dread that, on our deathbed, we might look backward on a wasted life, propels us to realise our dreams. The clock that steals a second of our lives with every tick reminds us that the time to act is now”.

Instead of striving to ‘tame’ the temporal body, therefore, perhaps we should talk more openly and honestly about this inescapable, yet necessary, feature of the human condition. Rather than vilifying our vulnerability to make profit, marketers should perhaps instead help us to venerate this beautiful and endearing aspect of what it is to be human.

5.3. Theoretical contributions

This thesis contributes to literature in the social sciences surrounding bodies and time, and the field of consumer research more directly, in three key ways. First, I introduce a novel account of body-time entanglements which I term autobodyographies, in turn contributing more nuanced and contextualised insights into underexplored body and time interrelations. Second, I develop an enriched understanding of liquid consumption by illustrating how people might be coping with perceived transience and instability by seeking out practices of (re)solidification. Third, I contribute fresh understandings of symbolic immortality through an embodied lens by exploring people’s construction of a sense of permanence through the impermanent body. I will now further unpack each of these theoretical contributions in turn.

5.3.1. Autobodyographies and body-time entanglements

By answering my first two research questions, and developing the construct of autobodyographies, I offer more nuanced and contextualised understandings of body-time entanglements. I thus respond to calls for more embodied (Toyoki et al., 2013) and culturally-informed (Robinson, 2015) insights into temporality within consumer research. To demonstrate, in classic social/literary theorists’ explorations of embodiment, time ordinarily remains an implicit feature. Examples of this include Bakhtin’s (1984) conceptualisation of grotesque bodies being in process, Foucault’s (1979) observation that the way in which bodies are governed has changed over time, and Elias’s (1978) theories concerning how we
learn to use and display our bodies within *dynamic* social figurations (Section 2.2.2). One exception is Merleau-Ponty (1962), who considers both the body and time as constitutive of the self. He is, however, largely concerned with the pre-reflective embodied experiences of individuals in the present (Aho, 2005), and he has thus been criticised for providing a somewhat ahistorical picture of embodied beings (Shilling, 2012).

Similarly, there is contemporary sociological work into ageing bodies (e.g. Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995; Katz, 1995; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2008; Tulle, 2000, 2008; Twigg, 2004), the consumption of anti-ageing technologies (e.g. Atkinson, 2008; Brooks, 2010; Elliott, 2008; Kinnunen, 2010), and the tattooing of life events (e.g. Oksanen and Turtiaten, 2005; Sweetman, 1999). Again, however, time is typically an implicit feature of such studies (for exceptions see Cooke, 2008; Coupland, 2009). Furthermore, there are sociological studies into the relations between time and bodily injuries (e.g. Seymour, 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2003), and time and sporting bodies (e.g. Phoenix *et al*., 2007). These studies, however, do not consider consumer culture and consumption activities, as this thesis does.

In consumer research, there are discussions of ageing consumers (e.g. Catterall and Maclaran, 2001; Goulding and Shankar, 2004; Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001, 2006), and explorations into the consumption of cosmetic surgery (Sayre, 1999; Schouten, 1991) and tattoos (Shelton and Peters, 2006, 2008; Velliquette *et al*., 2006) following significant life events. However, akin to sociology, time represents more of a background feature within this literature. Szmigin and Carrigan (2006), for example, briefly note how Western associations between old age and the end of the life course are shaped by linear notions of time. Yet, they neglect to further explore the links between bodies, ageing, and time in the rest of their paper regarding the consumption experiences of women over 40. In an earlier study concerning time usage and temporal perceptions of older consumers, they do explicitly investigate the relations between ageing and time (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001). They observe how bodily ailments can result in the slower tempo of (consumption) activities and constrain older consumers’ time usage (*ibid*). However, the links between (ageing) bodies and time do not represent their core concern, and they take a rather individualistic view of temporality; indeed, they include a section in their paper entitled ‘time and the individual’ (*ibid*; p. 1097).

Moreover, echoing philosophical discussions of time (e.g. Heidegger, 1927 [2010]; Husserl, 1964; Ricoeur, 1984), studies regarding time in consumer research and marketing usually pay limited explicit attention to the body (e.g. Baker and Cameron, 1996; Kellaris and Kent, 1992; Robinson, 2015; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017; Russell and Levy, 2012). Two recent
consumer research papers have observed how persons engage in habitual bodily routines to negotiate timeflows during practices (Woermann and Rokka, 2015), and temporal frameworks when traveling around the world (Figueiredo and Uncles, 2015). Yet, the links between bodies and time do not represent the central focus of either study, and neither explore how persons might also more reflexively negotiate time’s passage via the body.

Subsequently, in this thesis I sought to bring together the literature concerning bodies and time more directly to develop a more temporalised understanding of bodies, and in turn, an embodied appreciation of temporality. In doing so, I introduced and unpicked an account of body-time entanglements within consumer culture which I termed autobodyographies (Section 4.2.1). Regarding the more nuanced understandings of body-time interrelations developed within this thesis, existing studies into body modification practices ordinarily investigate a single body-related consumption context in depth (e.g. Patterson and Elliott, 2003; Schouten, 1991; Shelton and Peters, 2006). Hence, extant research into tattoo consumption typically neglects to consider how tattoos might function alongside other temporal inscriptions in expressing a person’s temporalised identity (for exceptions see Back, 2007; Sweetman, 1999). However, to address this literature gap, when exploring how bodies and temporality intertwine, I considered how multiple bodily markers of time, including tattoos, scars, bodily contours, hair style/colour, and wrinkles intermingle in narrating a person’s past, present, and anticipated future. Moreover, these more nuanced insights into body-time entanglements were further developed by exploring the intricacies (e.g. ongoing permanence/change, subject/object, and self/society iterations) involved in, not only the inscribing of these various temporal indicators, but also the revising and hiding of them through and upon the body over time.

Concerning the more contextualised understandings of body-time interrelations developed in this thesis, I considered participants’ embodied and temporal experiences in light of macro-level cultural constructions of time, alongside common Western experiences and perceptions of time, death, and embodiment. As Robinson (2015) observes, much of the existing literature regarding time within consumer research tends to be undersocialised. Indeed, whilst Woermann and Rokka (2015), for example, consider cultural understandings of (sporting) practices within their timeflow framework, they neglect to contextualise people’s temporal perceptions in relation to broader culturally-shared notions of time. Hence, in providing a more culturally-sensitive account of embodied temporality I considered, for example, how perceptions of time as linear (as is dominant in Western cultures) typically led to participants
fearing death and engaging in consumption activities, such as the acquisition of memorial tattoos, to transcend their own/others’ temporal boundaries. This contextualisation thus helped to further move beyond the typical framing of (consumption) behaviours as individualistic and agentic endeavours (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011), and provided more culturally-informed insights into the entanglements between bodies, time, and consumption practices. This is important given human behaviours never exist in a historical or social vacuum, and hence cannot be adequately understood without this wider contextualisation.

Furthermore, the popular concepts of identity and body projects frame identity building and body modification activities as individualistic and reflexive pursuits (Askegaard et al., 2002; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 2012). Despite the growing popularity of practice theory approaches to studying consumption which stress more habitual and routinised behaviours (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2014), consumer research into consumers’ identity/body projects (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010) and temporality (Robinson, 2015; Toyoki et al., 2013) has been challenged for typically providing individualistic and agentic accounts of consumer behaviour. Thus, alongside exploring reflexive inscriptions and revisions of temporality via the body, I also considered how the body’s surface can unintentionally, or retrospectively, communicate times in a person’s life, and hence their temporalised sense of self (e.g. inadvertent weight loss following heartbreak). I therefore contribute insights into how consumers can more retrospectively assign meaning to bodily modifications, or consumption behaviours more generally, rather than always reflexively engaging in these activities to express identity. This is important given that pre-reflective consumption behaviours and retrospective meaning-making have been somewhat neglected by consumer researchers due to their typical ‘fetish for meaning’ (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010).

Accordingly, my threading together of Shilling’s (2005, 2012) concept of corporeal realism with Ricoeur’s (1984, 1992) work concerning narrative identity, and Heidegger’s (1927 [2010]) theories regarding time and death when theorising my key constructs of bodies, time, and death (Section 4.1), provides a productive means through which researchers could consider body and time interrelations in the future (Figure 66). This is given Shilling (2005, 2012) is sensitive to the dynamic iterative interplays between body/society, nature/culture, and subject/object in lived embodied experiences; yet, as aforementioned, human temporality is not his main concern (Section 2.2.4). Hence, when his ideas are enriched with Ricoeur’s (1984, 1992) creative and agentic notion of narrative identity (see McNay, 2000), and Heidegger’s (1927 [2010]) theories concerning finite temporality (and hence how time is
ultimately outside of our agentic control; Section 2.3.4), a more nuanced and temporalised understanding of embodiment is engendered. This theoretical ‘framework’ offers researchers a more effective means to ensure their sensitivity to the body/time and subject/object (or in control/out of control) interplays involved in embodied and temporal experiences in a consumer culture.

**Figure 66: Theorising body-time entanglements**

![Diagram showing the relationship between Shilling’s Corporeal Realism, Body-time entanglements, Ricoeur’s Narrative Identity, Heidegger’s Beings-towards-death, Subject, and Object.]

**5.3.2. Liquid consumption and (re)solidification**

Furthermore, I contribute further enrichment of the literature concerning liquid modernity/consumption by indicating how it could be more sensitive to people’s engagement in consumption practices to combat perceptions of acceleration, transience, and instability. In contrast with Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2017; forthcoming) assertion that most existing consumer research has focused on ‘solid’ (i.e. enduring and tangible) forms of consumption, a discernible theme in the field over recent decades concerns the transient and fast-paced nature of Western consumer culture. This echoes observations in sociology regarding the accelerated quality of contemporary Western cultures (e.g. Bauman, 2000; Elliott and Hsu,
2016; Giddens, 1999). We regularly hear in marketing and consumer research, for example, about ephemeral consumer tribes (e.g. Cova and Cova, 2001; Cova et al., 2007; Goulding et al., 2013); consumers’ fleeting relationships to possessions in a globalised world (e.g. Bardhi et al., 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012, 2017; Figueiredo and Uncles, 2015); and fluid postmodern identities (e.g. Bardhi et al., 2012, 2017; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Indeed, the notion of ‘liquid consumption’, which stresses more ephemeral consumer identities and attachments to dematerialised possessions, is becoming increasingly popular in the discipline (see Bardhi et al., 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017; forthcoming).

However, as Rosa (2003) contends, to better understand societal acceleration (to which perceptions of transience are related), processes of deceleration should also be considered. Within their updated conceptual account of liquid consumption, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017; forthcoming) importantly acknowledge how the move towards ‘liquid’ consumption, for which they argue, does not necessarily bring positive consequences for consumers. This is since, as they observe, transience can result in feelings of instability and insecurity (ibid).

Yet, they do not focus their attention on how persons might be turning to the marketplace to placate these resultant negative feelings. In light of this literature gap, I demonstrated how in response to perceived acceleration and ephemerality, people are seemingly seeking comfort in practices of ‘(re)solidification’; namely those consumption activities providing persons with a sense of stability and durability, such as tattoo consumption. Indeed, participants often engaged in tattoo consumption to attain a sense of narrative stability and coherence via their bodies. They also frequently expressed liking the permanence of tattoos, and thereby engaged in moisturising regimes to maintain tattoo permanence.

This thesis, therefore, responds to Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2017; forthcoming) calls for further empirical research into consumers’ coping strategies in a seemingly liquid consumer culture. The notion of ‘(re)solidification’ practices, as theorised in this thesis, could in turn be incorporated into the account of liquid consumption. Furthermore, I illustrate how this construct could also be more sensitive to ongoing existential pursuits for permanence through various marketplace offerings, from healthy foods to organ donation. Indeed, by exploring participants’ acquisition of memorial tattoos, I demonstrate how the longstanding quest for ‘solidity’ on an existential level endures. This is notwithstanding Bauman’s (2000) aforementioned claim that within liquid modernity, immortality is no longer as highly sought.
5.3.3. Corporeal legacies

Third, by exploring participants’ use of their bodies as a site of memorialisation, I contribute fresh insights into the nascent literature concerning death and consumption from an embodied perspective. To demonstrate, the use of possessions/objects (e.g. Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Kates, 2001; Price et al., 2000; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012) and the online world (e.g. Belk, 2013; Gabel, 2016) to assemble symbolic immortality has been studied. However, less is known about why the impermanent body might be drawn upon to construct a corporeal symbolic legacy. Much existing research regarding tattoo consumption in both sociology and consumer research concerns its links to (gender) identity (e.g. Goulding and Follett, 2002; Oksanen and Turtiaten, 2005; Patterson and Elliott, 2003; Patterson and Schroeder, 2010; Sweetman, 1999; Velliquette et al., 2006). Whilst brand logo tattoos as a more specific tattoo type have been investigated (e.g. Bengtsson et al., 2005; Orend and Gagne, 2009), memorial tattoos have been given limited research attention. They are just mentioned very briefly, for example, in Velliquette et al.’s (2006) investigation into the tattooing of ‘personal myths’; and likewise, in Back’s (2007) discussion of tattoos as inscriptions of love. Yet, despite persons having long marked their bodies for the dead (Flemming, 2000), memorial tattoos are becoming ever more prevalent in Western cultures (Skin Deep, 2015b).

In this thesis, therefore, I sought to better understand this increasingly popular form of symbolic immortality. Whilst the use of memorial tattoos to construct a lasting legacy for a loved one might seem rather paradoxical, several participants expressed how they considered their body as a more intimate, stable, and enduring means through which to craft a symbolic legacy than mnemonic objects which might be lost, stolen, or damaged. I thus contribute insights into why in a seemingly accelerated, unstable, and transient Western societal context, possessions/objects might not be considered as the most secure or desirable way to attain (symbolic) immortality, and the body might instead be increasingly turned to. Indeed, there are ongoing investments in industries and technologies geared around modifying the body to extend (or immortalise) people’s lives, for example genetic engineering and nanotechnology, vitamins and superfoods, and cryonics (Cave, 2012; Shilling, 2012). Furthermore, the ancient concept of a symbolic legacy relates to the notion that the cultural realm provides an enduring space in which to craft immortality following a person’s physical death (Cave, 2012). However, the practice of constructing a lasting legacy through the impermanent body via memorial tattoos unsettles these conventional ideas of what permanence constitutes. Thus, this thesis also contributes novel insights into how the concept of permanence might be a
more fluid and multi-faceted construct, since for consumers of memorial tattoos it is tethered to their personally finite lifespan. Subsequently, these fresh insights are important as nobody will escape physical death; and hence more open discussions about this uniting aspect of human existence, as this thesis helps to foster through an embodied lens, are required.

5.4. Methodological contributions

There is ongoing debate in the social sciences surrounding research philosophy (Hunt, 1991; Shankar and Patterson, 2001) and introspective methods (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Gould, 2012; Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993). However, we arguably cannot ever fully disentangle ‘academic’ and ‘personal’ selves (Bochner, 1997; Broom et al., 2009; Shankar and Patterson, 2001). Thus, the highly reflexive methodological approach adopted in this thesis could help to steer future (consumer) research projects towards even greater transparency regarding research design choices and processes of interpretation, which often remain somewhat opaque owing to their messy nature. Taking inspiration from feminist theorists’ notable sensitivity to researcher positionality (Woodthorpe, 2009), throughout the thesis I sought to lay bare how my life history and tattoo consumption activities influenced my interpretations of my participants’ lived experiences, and hence my a priori assumptions. As suggested by Nadin and Cassell (2006) - and discussed in Section 3.6 - to aid with this reflexivity, I recorded my ongoing thoughts and feelings regarding my methodological decisions and tattoo consumption experiences into a research diary. Furthermore, as aided by this research diary, I took lead from the personal introspective accounts of several consumer researchers by also adopting narrative introspection (e.g. Gould, 1991; Sayre, 1999; Shankar, 2000; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2012), and hence offering partial accounts of my life/consumption story (see Gould, 2012; Section 3.6). However, whilst these extant papers focus upon the researchers’ personal consumption narratives, I instead incorporated myself as a research participant, with my lived experiences thus intermingling with and interpreted alongside my participants’ in my findings chapter. Other researchers could, therefore, take inspiration from this novel and underutilised introspective approach by keeping an ongoing research diary concerning their methodological decisions and experiences with the phenomenon under study, with their personal narratives forming an additional part of their wider empirical data. This would help to alleviate Ellis and Bochner’s (2000) observation that researchers’ voices typically just appear in the introduction and conclusion of research accounts, by ensuring that they are instead transparent throughout. It is hoped that by encouraging others to adopt this reflexive research style, it will engender further growth in ‘intellectual honesty’ (Woodthorpe, 2011b).
5.5. Marketing and societal implications

Given many of this study’s participants held a linear conception of time, coupled with fears about death, my findings suggest that companies within the anti-ageing industry could continue provoking anxieties in consumers about time’s passage to promote and sell products and services (see Coupland, 2009). Indeed, as Bordo (1997, p. 21) observes, consumer culture “depends on the continual creation and proliferation of ‘defect,’ that is always making us feel bad about ourselves...” (cited in Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). In the anti-ageing industry, marketers often capitalise upon a perceived lack of time. In agreement with Turley’s (2005, p. 82) assertion that “…manipulating consumers’ death anxiety to maximise market share sounds like an ethical non-starter”, I am, however, critical of such marketing practices. I instead call for marketers to venerate, rather than vilify, human vulnerability, and foster acceptance about our temporally finite lives, rather than playing upon people’s fears about them. I will thus offer two more productive and positive ways in which marketers could potentially help to improve the well-being of consumers, as indicated by my PhD insights.

First, my visit to the death: the human experience (DHE) exhibition and interviews with participants indicated that many people desire to attain symbolic immortality for deceased loved ones, whether through memorial tattoos; special possessions; jewellery; grief websites; gravestone QR codes; or celebratory monuments. This demonstrates how new players could enter the death services market, or notable existing players (e.g. Co-op Funeral Care) could perhaps expand the range of services they currently offer in the area of memorialisation. Scattering Ashes, for example, is UK-based business which provides a variety of innovative ways through which people can celebrate and commemorate dead loved ones, such as cremation jewellery and glass, fireworks comprising human remains, and either sending ashes into the stratosphere, or burying them at sea (Scattering Ashes, 2017). Other companies could take inspiration from these innovative approaches to memorialisation, thereby providing some consumers with greater comfort during the bereavement process.

Second, the DHE exhibition at which I conducted participant observation was held at Bristol Museum 24th October 2015-13th March 2016, and attracted over 50 thousand visitors during these five months (Bristol Museums, 2016; The Economist, 2016). As noted in Section 4.2.3.1, the exhibition was created with the aim of ‘desequestering’ death within Western cultures by encouraging visitors to actively reflect upon death (ibid). Similar exhibitions could be created and rolled out across the UK. This might help to bring death further out of
the shadows, and quell the lingering taboo and anxieties about openly conversing about one’s death and that of those close to us in the West (Elias, 1985; Shilling, 2012).

Finally, insights from this thesis could have lessons for education and policy. Schools in the UK, for example, could offer lessons in the curriculum about why we need a temporally finite lifespan to provide our lives with meaning, thus expanding teachings about death beyond the typical religious education framing. This might help to foster a greater acceptance of death in future generations; potentially engendering a broader cultural shift to valuing vulnerability.

5.6. Limitations

This thesis has three main limitations. First, I conducted participant observation at eight ethnographic sites (Section 3.4.2). I could, however, have perhaps visited fewer sights over more extensive periods of time, which is further reflected upon in Section 6.1.1. It was sometimes challenging to integrate my diverse findings from so many sites when writing my findings chapter. I also sometimes felt a bit awkward when in certain spaces (e.g. tattoo conventions), as can be the case when conducting short-term participant observation (Brockmann, 2011). If I had spent more time in fewer fieldwork spaces, I could have perhaps engendered even greater rapport with research participants (i.e. tattoo artists), and thereby experienced less feelings of awkwardness and conspicuousness. From a more positive perspective, however, visiting eight sites enabled me to shine light on my research constructs and context from multiple angles, thus engendering more holistic insights into them. This was important given bodies, time, and tattoo consumption are intricate and multi-faceted. Moreover, having access into multiple tattoo studios, and thus tattoo artists, was helpful when recruiting interview participants from their client bases.

Second, several videos were taken during participant observation, for example of the tattooing process (including acquiring my two tattoos), entertainment acts at tattoo conventions, and informative videos at Body Worlds and DHE exhibitions. It was felt that videos would help to capture the dynamism of human life, thus befitting my temporal focus (Section 3.4.2). Yet, owing to concerns over participant anonymity, being obtrusive, and a lack of experience with video editing, I took far more photographs than videos during the project. I plan, therefore, to seek out training opportunities concerning video editing in order to make more extensive use of videography in future research.

Finally, the primary context drawn upon in the thesis was tattoo consumption. Whilst questions concerning other bodily modifications were incorporated in the interviews, and I
read about numerous body modification practices, I did not empirically investigate these additional contexts in as much depth as tattooing. However, to engender ever more nuanced understandings of body-time entanglements, I could have also conducted participant observation in sites relating to other bodily modifications, such as cosmetic surgery waiting rooms, make-up counters, and weight loss groups. Yet, owing to temporal and financial constraints, and the potentially unmanageable amount of data that could be generated from this additional data collection, I decided that for the PhD project it would be better to explore one consumption context in depth, as further discussed in Section 6.1.1. Indeed, I was still able to develop insights into multiple temporal inscriptions by chatting to interview participants about other bodily modifications, as explored when building the account of autobodyographies in Section 4.2.1. The temporality of other bodily modifications could, therefore, be studied in more depth in future research projects.

5.7. Future research

As indicated above, further empirical research could be conducted into body-time entanglements within in a range of consumption contexts, from permanent and intentional scarification practices, to more cyclical and ephemeral body maintenance practices like hair dyeing. Insights from this work could lend further empirical support to the ‘temporality of bodily modifications’ diagram provided at the end of Section 4.2.1, with the potential for other bodily changes and body-related modes of consumption to be incorporated. Moreover, internal and/or involuntary bodily cycles and rhythms, for example hormone production, the beating heart, and cycles of sleep (see Hsu, 2014), remain underexplored in the social sciences. How these further instances of body-time interrelations intersect with marketplace offerings, for example heart rate tracking technologies or ‘night shift’ reduced brightness features on smartphones, could also be investigated. Such research would help to enrich understandings of the relations between bodies, time, and consumption activities beyond tattoo consumption and in undertheorised contexts.

Furthermore, within consumer research ‘liquid consumption’ has been investigated in the context of global nomads (Bardhi et al., 2012; Figueiredo and Uncles, 2015), access-based car sharing (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), fast fashion (Samsioe and Bardhi, 2014), and identity/status transitions (Ulver and Ostberg, 2014). Further research could be conducted into consumers’ experiences of, or active quest for, transience (liquidity), alongside the search for stability/durability (solidity) across a range of consumption phenomena. Regarding ephemerality, for example, Bauman’s (2003) concept of ‘liquid love’ (i.e. increasingly
transient human bonds) could be explored in relation to the rise in online dating technologies and how these might be changing perceptions and experiences of romantic love. Concerning durability, other examples of ‘(re)solidification’ practices beyond tattoo consumption could be studied, such as scarification, the tracing of life on social media, and/or clothing repairs. Additionally, considering the ongoing human quest for immortality, and hence ‘solidity’ at a broader existential level, further ways through which persons strive to attain it could be investigated. This could include both longstanding paths to immortality (e.g. gravestones, fame, and family heirlooms), as well as more contemporary forms (e.g. cryonics, genetic engineering, and gravestone QR codes). Such research would further build upon the nascent literature base concerning death and consumption (e.g. Bonsu and Belk, 2003; Dobscha, 2016; Robinson and Chelekis, 2017; Turley, 2005; Turley and O’Donohoe, 2012).
Epilogue: Closing reflections

“From this new and intimate perspective, she learned a simple, obvious thing she had always known, and everyone knew: that a person is, among all else, a material thing, easily torn, not easily mended”


Given I adopted a reflexive research approach and I am also highly introspective in my everyday life, I will end my thesis by reflecting upon the main lessons I have learned about research and, above all, the fragility of existence from embarking upon this PhD journey.

6.1. Lessons about research
6.1.1. Methodology: Restraining the ivy

The first aspect of research I have learned important lessons about is constructing boundaries around data collection. Despite often being presented as a neat, logical, and linear process in textbooks and on training courses, I have discovered that, in practice, research can be like ivy. Growing over time and, if not to some extent restrained, sprawling in numerous directions; sometimes twisting around a tree into the bright sunlight; yet, at other times creeping around the brick walls of a house into a blind alley. Since a PhD project spans several years, there initially seems to be a limitless number of ways through which to generate insights about research constructs and questions. As body-time entanglements are so complex and multi-faceted, countless times throughout the PhD I wondered whether I should employ multiple consumption contexts. During data collection, however, I was confronted with a vast amount of data generated from exploring a single consumption context in depth. I thus decided to keep tattooing as my primary context, and instead incorporated questions concerning other bodily modifications in my interviews with tattoo consumers, rather than recruiting new interview participants (i.e. cosmetic surgery consumers) and visiting sites relating to other body modification practices (e.g. surgeons’ waiting rooms):

I quite like the idea of employing multiple contexts... This is probably the key dilemma that has bothered me throughout my PhD... I wonder whether I should employ tattooing as my primary context... and then support this with a series of smaller less in-depth consumption contexts, such as Botox, scarification, branding, and/or charm bracelets, which all seem to relate to the entanglements between bodies and time... I think it might come down to whether I have enough time and resources to achieve this, since I am learning how much data emerges... just in the context of tattoo consumption [Research diary].
Likewise, I was initially keen to seize any data collection opportunity arising to further my understandings of body-time relations, from accompanying a friend to a tattoo convention (Manchester Tattoo Show), to visiting exhibitions recommended to me by friends (Time: Tattoo Art Today), and family (Body Worlds). Whilst visiting eight ethnographic sites did generate more holistic understandings of my research constructs, context, and questions, it was sometimes tricky managing the huge amount of data arising from such a range of encounters, and then integrating my insights from each when writing my findings chapter. Later in the PhD process, I became more reflective about whether the insights gained from additional fieldwork would outweigh the temporal and financial costs of conducting it:

I am slightly concerned about the amount of data I am generating at the moment. I never realised just how time-consuming ethnographic approaches are, and I do feel as though I am starting to drown in my data... I am perhaps considering reducing the amount of ethnographic sites I am planning to visit, since I am now unsure what additional insights attending another tattoo convention in January (The Tattoo Freeze) would provide me with... [Research diary].

Subsequently, although I often questioned whether I had collected ‘enough’ data from which to generate doctoral-level findings, I eventually learned that, once ‘theoretical saturation’ has seemingly been reached (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), data collection should be stopped. If not, the ivy might spread forever more and the PhD project could be taken into the grave:

...I am beginning to wonder how many people in total I should interview. I know this is a question like ‘how long is a piece of string?’... I should perhaps think about this in terms of ‘theoretical saturation’... [Research diary].

...I am only looking for another couple of people to potentially interview... I feel that any more interviews would not really gain any new insights and could result in information overload, whereby I won’t have time to interpret all of the data collected thoroughly enough... [Research diary].

6.1.2. Belonging: Insider/outsider iterations

The second key aspect of research which I often reflected upon during the thesis, was the intricate and ongoing iterations between feeling like an insider or outsider when conducting research. Indeed, other researchers have also documented difficult feelings of being an outsider (e.g. Brockmann, 2011; Jafari et al., 2013). As a tattoo consumer myself, I drew upon my personal life and tattooing experiences to develop rapport with and better understand my participants; yet, I also maintained some analytical distance by being sensitive to potential differences in our experiences (Section 3.6).

Furthermore, there were some fieldwork spaces in which I perceived a sense of belonging (e.g. art/museum exhibitions), whereas in others I felt a lack of belonging (i.e. tattoo
conventions). This resonates with the experiences of women and minorities entering spaces historically dominated by White male bodies (e.g. Westminster), and feeling like bodies out of place or ‘space invaders’ (Puwar, 2004). It is an issue reflected in my fieldnotes below:

...I am worried about being viewed as an ‘outsider’ even now that I do have a tattoo myself; since it is very small and concealed from others. I remind myself that this time Red Devil was going to be with me, who has quite a few visible tattoos, and so will be acting as my ‘corporeal ticket’ into the convention... I am very unsure of what to wear to the convention, and I am very aware of trying to create some sort of ‘rocky’ or ‘punky’ image with my clothing to do my best to fit in with the others who I imagine will be there. Then at least some part of my body will seem ‘in place’, even if my skin will perhaps place me within the relatively ‘uninked’ minority [Fieldnotes: Manchester Tattoo Show].

I note above how I was worried about being seen by heavily tattooed attendees at Manchester Tattoo Show as an ‘outsider’. I actively sought to construct a punky/rocky image with my clothing choices beforehand to fit in. This is despite having a tattoo myself, and hence being part of the context I was exploring. Given on this particular fieldwork visit I was accompanied by a heavily tattooed participant (Red Devil), once in the convention I felt somewhat ‘in place’, since his body functioned as a ‘corporeal ticket’ into the space (and by association mine). The fieldnotes below indicate how I felt a greater sense of belonging when in the tattoo museum area of Liverpool Tattoo Convention. As aforementioned, this was often the case when I was in the art/museum exhibition fieldwork sites:

...I spot a heavily tattooed woman with short straight dark hair sitting behind a table in the museum area... She motions me to a book on the table in front of her, and I begin to flick through it. The book has images of black tattoo stencils, tattooed people, and tells the story of her family and their history with tattooing... I spend a short while looking around the museum area, which I feel a greater sense of belonging in than the other rooms [Fieldnotes: Liverpool Tattoo Convention].

These experiences have thus sensitised me to how, even when the researcher is part of the context being explored, there are certain research situations where he/she might feel a greater or lesser sense of belonging. I thereby now feel more emotionally-prepared for these insider/outsider iterations, which will conceivably be provoked in future research projects.

6.1.3. Historicity: Work/life slippages

Although I had read about the slippery boundaries between academic and personal selves (Bochner, 1997, Conle, 1999; Shankar and Patterson, 2001), and how research projects can be emotional for researchers (Hubbard et al., 2001; Jafari et al., 2013; Malacrida, 2007; Turley, 2016; Woodthorpe, 2009, 2011b), during the PhD I learned first-hand how the research process can involve a rollercoaster of different emotions; from excitement and
intrigue, to sadness and anxiety. Indeed, considering the aforementioned hermeneutic concept of historicity (J. Thompson, 1981; C. Thompson, 1998), persons are thoroughly historical beings. Hence, in agreement with Woodthorpe (2011b), especially when studying central aspects of the human condition as in this study (e.g. embodiment, time’s passage, and death), in addition to behaviours overlapping with one’s own (e.g. memorialising lost loved ones), it is conceivably impossible for a researcher to fully detach themselves from their life history (nor would this arguably be very productive in understanding others). I thus often reflected upon my life experiences, alongside human existence more broadly, over the course of study (e.g. when writing the thesis, or listening back to interview recordings). This sometimes provoked strong emotional responses, as captured in the diary extracts below:

The idea of the neutral and detached ‘scientist’ seems utterly fantastical when conducting social research with human beings, particularly with such anxiety provoking and emotional topics as covered in my study. I think that the ‘personal’ self and ‘researcher’ self are completely intertwined... It is very difficult to detach oneself emotionally when considering these topics [Research diary].

I always imagined that, by exploring people’s life histories... I would at times be told emotional stories... I also expected that I would probably at times reflect upon my own life history and the difficult times I have faced in my life as a result of conducting this particular PhD. This is especially since my first tattoo is related to the loss of the closest people in my life, and I am exploring people’s experiences of acquiring memorial tattoos. However, I never anticipated just how emotionally crippling conducting this sort of research could be, how much it would affect me personally, and cause me to reflect so much on my own life... [Research diary].

As indicated above, whilst I was not totally naïve about how my research topic might cause self-reflection and emotional responses, I was perhaps not fully aware of how emotionally crippling exploring concepts such as time and death might at times be. As Woodthorpe (2009) observes, whilst training courses can provide useful information about the practicalities of conducting research, the emotional responses sometimes involved in carrying out studies is often ignored. I have thus learned that, whilst protecting the emotional well-being of research participants is crucial, researchers should also uphold a sense of ethical responsibility towards themselves. Indeed, Jafari et al. (2013) stress the importance of protecting researchers’ emotional well-being in their discussion of researcher vulnerability. Subsequently, as I found writing a reflexive diary, discussing issues with my PhD supervisors and other PhD students, and taking breaks from more emotionally-charged PhD tasks when needed, I will take forwards these tips into future studies.
6.2. Lessons about life

6.2.1. Vulnerability and temporal finiteness

\textit{Vul\'ner\'a\'ble} \textbf{adj} 1: capable of being wounded; susceptible of wounds or external injuries; as, a vulnerable body. 2: Liable to injury; subject to be affected injuriously; assailable...

\textit{Vul\'ner\'a\'bil\'i\'ty} \textbf{n} 1: The quality or state of being vulnerable; vulnerableness—related words breakability, crushability, fragility, frailty, incapability, incompetence, soft spot, susceptibility...

(Baker \textit{et al.}, 2005, p. 1).

This thesis is a tale of human vulnerability. Whilst I did not initially plan for it to be so, it became evident during the course of study that vulnerability lies at the intersection between bodies, time, and (im)mortality. Furthermore, a common thread running through my interview participants’ experiences, was a sense of raw vulnerability. The skinless human corpses at Body Worlds and death-related artefacts displayed at death: the human experience, were like windows into my future, and caused me to reflect upon life’s fragility more than ever before. Before conducting this study, thoughts about death had sometimes crept into my awareness as I lay in bed. I have at times tried to shift my attention away from this unwelcomed ending to my life, reflecting the frequent sequestration of death in Western cultures (Bauman, 1992a; Elias, 1985). During my PhD, however, the whisper of death’s promise transformed into a crescendo of my inevitable future meeting with the Grim Reaper.

Consumer vulnerability has been defined as “...a state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products” (Baker \textit{et al.}, 2005, p. 134). However, here I am referring to vulnerability more generally as the potential for physical and/or emotional harm, which is a central aspect of the human condition whether caused by- or provoking- marketplace interactions, or otherwise. Although vulnerability is sometimes associated with being a more enduring state based on demographics (e.g. old age), it is more of an existential experience that can be felt by any one of us (Baker \textit{et al.}, 2005; Baker \textit{et al.}, 2016; Hamilton \textit{et al.}, 2016; Shildrick, 2002). Indeed, as I noted in the prologue, ‘I am vulnerable, therefore I am’. We are embodied and affective beings susceptible to both physical and emotional injury. Life is riddled with disruption, angst, and confusion (Becker, 1997), and organisations can prey on these vulnerabilities to promote and sell products to consumers; from life insurance to anti-ageing creams. The study’s participants had faced some of life’s biggest battles, from heartbreak and loss, to exclusion and emotional breakdowns. Yet, they had also experienced some of life’s greatest
joys, from falling in love and having children, to building professional success and finding a sense of belonging. They were able to create a sense of order out of disorder; find strength from suffering; and meaning out of life’s messiness.

Having faced difficulties in my own life, some of which echo my participants’ experiences, I found some comfort in their narratives, and I hope this was also true for any readers of this thesis. I now feel more equipped to build strength from suffering, as my participants often had. As aforementioned, narratives are not just about lives, but can also change lives (Ricoeur, 1992). Modernist discourses concerning subjectivity, however, construct vulnerability as a shortcoming to be avoided (or at least hidden), due to contrasting with the bounded and rational ideal (male) subject (Shildrick, 2002). Shildrick (2002, p. 71) contends that in Western cultures, “...vulnerability is figured as a shortcoming, an impending failure both of form and function... those who too readily admit or who succumb to vulnerability are either weak or unfortunate...” This is captured in the commonplace sayings ‘man up’ and ‘put on a brave face’. As Baker et al. (2016) observe, much literature concerning consumer vulnerability views it as a negative experience reducing consumer well-being. Indeed, Hamilton et al. (2016, p. 1) define consumer vulnerability as “...an undesirable state catalysed by a number of human conditions and contexts”. Yet, as Baker et al. (2016) observe, vulnerability should not be considered as a wholly negative quality, as it can foster intimacy and self-transformation. In agreement, through the course of my study I have learned to embrace, and even revere, vulnerability, and would urge others to do the same, despite marketers’ drives to both create, and provide marketized ‘solutions’ to, vulnerabilities. To me, vulnerability is the most endearing aspect of what it is to be human. Without pain we cannot fully appreciate happiness; without loss we can take the people we love for granted; and without laying ourselves bare to others we cannot achieve intimacy.

To conclude, whilst the future is always to an extent uncertain (as regularly expressed by participants), the one certainty that we will all face is our physical death. As Heidegger (1927 [2010]) famously remarked, we are ultimately ‘beings-towards-death’. He considers the self (or in his terms ‘Dasein’) as being time, and our lives as crucially temporally finite (ibid; Section 2.3.4.2). Throughout human history, persons have sought to transcend their temporal boundaries and attain a sense of immortality, from placing faith in religious belief systems, to religiously gulping down a vitamin cocktail each morning (Bauman, 1992a; Cave, 2012; Section 2.3.6). Following Berger’s (1991) claim that writers function as ‘death secretaries’ producing registers of life (cited in Back, 2007), the narratives presented in this thesis could
be considered as a form of legacy for my research participants. Heidegger (1927 [2010]), however, observes how to live an ‘authentic’ life, we must actively confront our mortal nature and endeavour to construct meaning in the backdrop of it (also see Carel, 2006; Critchley, 2009). I had read academic texts and novels which, supporting Heidegger, proclaimed the necessity of human mortality in providing our lives with meaning, (e.g. Albom, 2012; Bauman, 1992a; Cave, 2012; Hoffman, 2009). Until embarking upon the PhD, however, I regarded death with a strong sense of existential angst. The most important lesson I have learned, therefore, is that we really do require a temporally finite life to ensure that we do not take our limited days, and the people with whom we choose to spend them, for granted. To paraphrase Bauman (1992a, p. 5), it is because I am aware that I must die, that I will now ensure that I am busy making the most of every second of my fragile existence.
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Appendix 1: Manchester Tattoo Show narrative and photographs

In August 2014, I was asked along to Manchester Tattoo Show, held at the GMEX centre in Manchester, by interview informant Red Devil, and I spent four hours there. The convention was held in a vast warehouse style room with high industrial looking ceilings, which gave the impression that it was quite empty despite there being many attendees during the day. Countless mini tattoo studios were set up in rows snaking around the convention, complete with a banner advertising the studio’s name and contact details; portfolios; business cards; and a black leather tattooing bed, where a heavily tattooed artist would usually be tattooing a similarly heavily tattooed client. Near to the entrance there were two more exotic looking spaces containing oriental style beds and Buddha ornaments. Here tattoo artists were using a ‘tapping’ method of tattooing on men who were getting spiked and tapped by various instruments into their necks and chins in front of a curious audience. Intermingled throughout the countless rows of tattoo studios were quirky little stalls selling jewellery; clothing; bedding; artwork; decorative animal skulls; masks; tattoo guns; and colourful tattoo ink. There was also a small comfy looking chill-out area containing colourful bean bags, and a popular tarot reading tent. At the back of the room was a stage, on which a hipster-looking guy with a black handlebar moustache would appear throughout the day, shouting through his microphone trying to attract people to the stage.

Akin to the ‘familiarisation’ stage of Goulding et al.’s (2013) exploration of Von Hagen’s Body Worlds exhibition, given I had not attended this tattoo convention before, my aim of the day was to get a feel of what goes on at the convention. Red Devil and I slowly circled the room throughout our four-hour visit; gazing upon each tattoo studio in turn; flicking through some of their portfolios; chatting to each other; and listening to some of the stage performances, such as a beat boxer. These performances usually attracted large crowds who would be viewing the performances through the lens of their phone cameras. The room was quite cold and surprisingly did not smell of antiseptic, which I was expecting beforehand. I could hear the repetitive buzzing sound of tattoo guns mixed with music, and the majority of attendees were heavily tattooed with a tough rocky/punky style. Unless you were getting tattooed or planning your future designs there was not much to occupy visitors. After a couple of hours of circling the room, Red Devil and I stopped to have a break in a cafe outside of the main room; we chatted about his tattoos and arranged a future interview. After our short break, he introduced me to his tattoo artist (Lenny) who had been busy tattooing a woman (Alyssa) for several hours. I chatted to them briefly about my research...
project and Lenny took me through his portfolio to show me designs he had done which relate to times in people’s lives. Alyssa then proceeded to tell me about her sleeve *Lenny* had been tattooing for her during the convention, and how it relates to various times in her life and memorialises others. Whilst chatting to Alyssa, Lenny introduced me to one of his clients who had a large Egyptian themed tattoo on his back, which he proceeded to show to me. He told me how it related to not knowing his father when he was younger. I took down their contact details and arranged to speak to them in the future for my project. I took several photographs throughout the day and videos of a couple of live performances. Detailed fieldnotes were taken shortly following my visit.
Appendix 2: Liverpool Tattoo Convention narrative and photographs

I visited a second tattoo convention to compare and contrast my experience at Manchester Tattoo Show. Given its convenience in terms of geographical location, I decided to visit Liverpool Tattoo Convention in May 2015, held at the Britannia Adelphi Hotel. This time I went alone and spent two hours there. As I arrived at the hotel, I walked past several small groups of visibly tattooed people and entered the hotel via a posh revolving door, which reminded me of those found in American films. As I peered into the convention room from the hotel reception area, I was struck by how different this convention space was from the cold industrial feel of Manchester Tattoo Show:

“...I negotiate the moving door and I am struck by the beauty of the cream and gold marbled reception area I have entered, and pause carefully to orientate myself. Immediately ahead of me I can see a short set of stairs leading into a large and luxurious looking room, which boasts high ceilings with two large grand chandelier type lights, marble pillars, and cozy carpets. I am struck by how different this convention space is to the Manchester-based conventions I have been to in the past which felt much more industrial and cold, and feel excited to look around as I smile to myself” [Fieldnotes: Liverpool Tattoo Convention].

After paying for my tattoo convention ticket in exchange for a red wristband, which reminded me of music festivals, I entered the tattoo convention and began to quickly circle around each room trying to familiarise myself with the goings-on. The busy and bustling convention felt like a sauna, and sweat was dripping down my back during my visit. As I veered closer to each tattoo studio space, observing what was going on and trying to squeeze past others walking towards me, a faint yet familiar sickly smell of antiseptic washed over me. I was also confronted with the familiar repetitive buzzing of tattoo guns intermingled with the sound of music and stage performances. The attendees all had a very similar image, since most were visibly heavily tattooed, were wearing black clothing, and some were also heavily pierced.

I became fairly disorientated after a while of observing the goings-on in each room, pausing at times to take photographs, and became unsure if I had been in each room yet or not. Unlike Manchester Tattoo Show which had all of the tattoo studios and activities in the same large warehouse space, Liverpool Tattoo Convention was spread over a few rooms like a maze, all of which were decorated in a grand style with plush carpets, marble, Grecian style columns, impressive chandeliers, and beautiful artistic ceilings. However, like the Manchester convention, each room housed rows of mini tattoo studio spaces complete with portfolios on tables covered with black cloths, colourful inks and metal tattoo guns, a tattooing bed with a heavily tattooed artist tattooing a client, and a
banner detailing the studio name. In one room there was a stage area which housed various live shows. Several stores selling quirky clothing, jewellery, animal skulls and stuffed animals, artwork, and tattooing magazines, could also be found dotted around.

In a passageway between two of the tattooing rooms, live musical acts were playing and I sat on a sofa opposite the bands intermittently throughout my visit to take fieldnotes (which I enriched shortly after leaving). Indeed, the convention had a music festival atmosphere overall, with the entrance wristbands; the stage area; music acts; music playing through speakers; several bars dotted around; and people walking around with bottles/plastic cups of beer, or drinking outside on benches with their friends.

After walking around the convention for just over an hour, I spotted a travelling tattoo museum which included old black and white photographs of tattooed people and tattooing memorabilia, and stopped to take a look. I briefly chatted to the heavily tattooed woman sitting behind a desk about the museum and her family’s longstanding links to tattooing.

Upon leaving the museum area after around 15 minutes, I soon stumbled upon a table on which decaying banana skins with black writing were placed on kitchen roll, alongside bright yellow banana toys, and a sign on the wall behind the table saying Banana Ink. The Eastern European tattooed guy sitting behind the table asked me whether I would like to have a go at tattooing. Despite feeling extremely nervous about using a tattoo gun for the first time, and concerns about permanently tattooing my hand by mistake, I gave it a go and tattooed a very wobbly Chloe on the banana skin. I definitely learned how difficult tattooing actually is through partaking in this activity:

“I nervously take the tattoo gun from him and dip it into the small black ink pot whilst my foot is on the pedal on the floor below me. My hands begin to shake a bit and my heart begins to pound. What if I accidently tattoo my hand? I laugh nervously at times as I take my time to cautiously tattoo over the line I originally drew with a pen. I’m actually enjoying this and feel more a part of the convention now. Once I finish... someone the guy works with takes a picture of us together with the completed banana skin, which actually ended up quite wonky looking... I’m just glad my hand isn’t tattooed” [Fieldnotes: Liverpool Tattoo Convention].
Appendix 3: North West Tattooing narrative and photographs

Following meeting Lenny- an extremely focused, dedicated, and talented European tattoo artist- at Manchester Tattoo Show, I was able to negotiate access into the tattoo studio at which he works. Like Alfie, he became an important contact throughout the project. *North West Tattooing* is located in a bit of a rundown looking housing area of Manchester. This surprised me given it is a well-respected tattoo studio which boasts celebrities amongst its client base.

The tattoo studio is owned by a respected English tattoo artist and several other talented tattoo artists (including Lenny) work out of the same studio space in small divided sections. This contrasts with Alfie’s Tattoos which is a family-run business. From the front, the tattoo studio’s shabby facade gives the impression that it has shut down, which worried me at first. However, the main entrance to the tattoo studio is at the rear of the building.

As you enter the studio, there is a steep flight of industrial metal stairs which lead into a futuristic looking and dimly lit waiting area, which comprises purple walls; silver metal porthole decorations; a couple of comfy black sofas set against the left-hand wall; a few green plastic pod chairs; and an Apple computer/till. If you exit this room through the open door to your left, Lenny’s small studio space can be found, which contains a green velvet tattooing bed, a collection of colourful inks, client portfolios, and colourful images of tattoos cover the walls. Next to Lenny’s studio space is another small tattooing area out of which a female tattoo artist works; yet, there is a divide between the two spaces making it feel a bit more private. Several other tattoo artists, including the owner, I figured must also work in tattooing spaces downstairs, although I never entered these. The tattoo studio does not have a noticeable smell, unlike the strong antiseptic smell often found at conventions, and is neither too hot nor cold.

My first visit to North West Tattooing was in April 2015 and lasted for around four hours. The plan was to have a look around the studio and chat to Lenny, who was going to hopefully recommend me some of his clients for interviews. However, it ended up being a very hectic and slightly stressful day. As I entered the studio, I found Lenny finishing tattooing a guy (*Ufobaby*) and I observed the process for a few minutes. He informed me that Ufobaby was willing to be interviewed by me today, which took me by surprise as I did not imagine that I would be interviewing anybody on this visit. Luckily I had my dictaphone and some participant information sheets with me. Once Lenny had cling filmed Ufobaby’s tattoo, I conducted a short semi-structured interview with him in the client waiting area.

After I had interviewed Ufobaby and taken a few notes, I found Lenny chatting to a heavy set tattooed guy (*Bob*), who promptly took off his top to show me his impressive science themed
back piece. Lenny informed me that he was here to chat to me about my project. I chatted to him for about five minutes about my project, his tattoos, and his love for science, when another skinny tattooed guy (Tom) entered the room who Lenny told me had come in especially to talk to me. This made it feel quite chaotic, as Lenny was also darting in and out of the room. After introducing myself to Tom, and briefly explaining my research project, I noticed that Bob had disappeared. Thus, I conducted another short semi-structured interview with Tom in Lenny’s tattooing room. Part way through our interview, however, I noticed that Bob was actually in the client waiting room. Hence, I cut the interview quite short as I did not want Bob waiting around for me. So once I had finished interviewing Tom, and took some photographs of his tattoos with his permission, I proceeded to interview Bob for 45 minutes and took photographs of his tattoos, also with his permission.

After taking some brief notes in the tattooing room, I found Lenny chatting to a couple (Keith and Natasha) who were having a consultation about Keith’s sleeve he was planning as his first tattoo. I sat in the room with them for just over an hour and chatted to them sporadically. I informed them about my project and Keith told me about his tattoo design plans. Since he had also brought along a few objects and photographs he wanted to incorporate into his tattoo, I gained his permission to photograph them. After the meeting, I arranged to observe him getting his first tattoo in a few days’ time. The atmosphere had noticeably shifted from being rather hectic and stressful to very exciting:

“Whilst we were chatting, Lenny was darting in and out of the room with his laptop and some of Keith’s objects to start building up a tattoo design for him take a look at, and I could feel the excitement bubbling in the air. When Lenny told Keith at the end of this consultation that he had a cancellation in a few days’ time where they could get started on the sleeve, my own stomach flipped with a mixture of nervousness and excitement for the couple...” [Fieldnotes: North West Tattooing].

After Keith and Natasha had left the studio, Lenny took me through some of his past work and identified a few people who I could possibly interview. His passion for tattooing was evident. Unlike Alfie’s Tattoos, the tattoo studio was quite chaotic and bustling throughout the day, with many different people darting in and out of the waiting area. I took photographs of the tattoo studio with Lenny’s permission, and took brief fieldnotes sporadically during my visit where possible, which I enriched once at home.

My second visit was several days after my first, and revolved around me observing Keith getting his first tattoo. As I entered the studio, excited to see the process, I found Natasha sitting in the client waiting area. She told me that she was not allowed into the tattooing area due to a rule in place meaning that only the person being tattooed was permitted in the room.
She seemed quite fed up about this. I felt quite disappointed as I was concerned that I would also not be able to enter. However, after popping my head around the door to say hello, Lenny invited me into the room and got me a chair. This made me feel a bit awkward. I observed Keith being tattooed for around three hours, and chatted to him, Natasha, and Lenny. I also took several photographs of the tattooing process with their permission. Before leaving, I arranged for Keith to be interviewed for my project. I took detailed fieldnotes shortly following this visit.
Appendix 4: M1 Tattoos narrative

I visited *M1 Tattoos* serendipitously given my interview participant *Sarah* had invited me along to observe her getting a new tattoo. M1 Tattoos is located in Manchester on a busy road next to a series of little shops. As you enter the studio, there are several ethnic looking cushions on the windowsill to the left, and straight ahead a payment desk can be found, alongside several glass cabinets housing piercing rings/studs and samples of brightly coloured hair. Towards the end of the room are a couple of tattooing spaces located close together. On the walls several framed images of brightly coloured tattoo designs can be found. This first room is quite small and has a busy feel, and indie rock music and buzzing tattoo guns can be heard.

At the end of the room is a staircase which leads to a larger tattooing room which comprises a kitchen area, and two tattooing beds located right next to each other, not giving the clients any privacy. This is in stark contrast to Alfie’s Tattoos which has a private tattooing room upstairs and North West Tattooing which has a privacy divide between tattooing spaces. On the walls nearest to the tattooing beds, there are several tattoo designs and stencils. Again the sounds of music and buzzing tattoo guns are audible.

My visit to M1 Tattoos was on a cold autumnal day in November 2015, and lasted for just under three hours. As I entered the studio, I found Sarah eating skittles sitting on the ethnic cushions on the windowsill. She was chatting to a heavily pierced guy sitting behind the reception desk about the laser surgery test patch he had just done on her skin. I informed him about being here for my project and he seemed quite sceptical. He allowed me to observe the tattooing process as long as I, in his words, “Didn't do anything mad like take photos or interview people”. This made me feel quite awkward, and thus no photographs were taken during my visit. A young female tattooist who was darting in and out of the room sorted out Sarah’s desired tattooing stencil size, and I followed them upstairs past a guy being tattooed.

In the upstairs tattooing room, a guy was lying down with his trousers off on a tattooing bed being tattooed by a male tattoo artist. The lack of privacy surprised me. Another male tattoo artist was drawing in the kitchen area. Once Sarah was happy with the tattoo size and placement with the help of the tattoo artists, she was taken to the tattooing bed located right next to the other guy being tattooed. I observed her being tattooed by the female tattoo artist for around two hours, and chatted to the two male tattoo artists about my project sporadically.
The atmosphere at M1 Tattoos was in stark contrast to Alfie’s Tattoos which has a homely family feel and North West Tattooing which is very professional, since there was a lot of banter back and forth between the tattoo artists, which made me feel a bit uncomfortable at times. Fieldnotes were taken intermittently during my visit and enriched shortly afterwards.
Appendix 5: Time: Tattoo Art Today narrative and photographs

I heard about the *Time: Tattoo Art Today* art exhibition serendipitously through a friend and thus, given my study’s focus on time and tattooing, I decided to go. The exhibition centred on leading tattoo artists from around the world producing artwork concerning the notion of time. It was held in Somerset House, London, which is a lavish and beautiful historic building situated behind a water display and bronze statue. It was originally constructed by Edward Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, following the death of King Henry VIII in the mid 1500s. It has since housed Queen Elizabeth I, Anne of Denmark, King Charles I and his wife Henrietta Maria, and King Charles II and his wife Catherine, before being knocked down and reconstructed in the late 1700s. It is now a creative hub of London and houses art exhibitions, concerts, and an outdoor ice rink.

The art exhibition was located in the Embankment Galleries in the South Wing of Somerset House, and from the reception area there were a series of pink arrows guiding guests towards it. Indeed, the exhibition was branded in pink with an image of an hourglass and a skull, reminding people of the links between time and death. The arrows led through a long grand corridor with high white ceilings, from which artistic light fittings were hung, white walls, and white door frames leading to different exhibition rooms, for example the Hundred Leading Ladies photograph exhibition which was on at the time of my visit. At the end of the corridor, the arrows led around the corner to a winding concrete staircase, and finally to the tattoo art exhibition which was housed in what seemed to be a separate building. The entrance door was glass and had a gold image of a skull and hourglass upon it.

The gallery comprised two open spaced rooms connected by two narrow passageways, and was all white with white concrete floors, walls, and high ceilings, to presumably ensure that attention was given to the artwork. There were a few pink notices informing people of the purpose of the exhibition and the tattoo artists taking part, including famous tattoo artist Ed Hardy. The white walls were covered in artwork, and there were also several white podiums with artistic objects/sculptures sitting upon them.

I visited the exhibition on a cold, grey, and rainy autumnal day in October 2014 for around two hours. I spent my time slowly observing each piece of art in turn (as well as the other visitors inconspicuously), which comprised 70 items in total, including: paintings; a tattooed baby doll; a small bronze body statue; a black skull; a plastic white female torso; and a plastic crucified Jesus. The themes relating to time most commonly featured within the artwork were death, religion, the human body, clocks, and escape. I took photographs of each item and
fieldnotes intermittently during my visit. The gallery was very cold, and the air conditioning blew cool air onto my skin causing me to shiver at times. There was an ebb and flow of a wide range of people during my visit, who were observing each piece of art, sometimes taking photographs of it, and chatting to each other. Unlike a tattoo convention whereby attendees usually wear revealing clothing to show off their tattoos, I saw very few visibly tattooed people in the exhibition. Akin to a traditional art gallery it was extremely quiet, with only the sounds of hushed whispers; slow footsteps echoing on the hard floors; shoes squeaking, wet from the rain outside; photographs being taken; and quiet laughter audible.
Appendix 6: Body Worlds narrative and photographs

I heard about the *Body Worlds* exhibition from my parents who had recently visited. Given permanence and related concepts of (im)mortality are central to my thesis, I decided to travel to Amsterdam to check it out. As created by Dr. Gunther von Hagens, Body Worlds exhibitions travel all over the world, each with a slightly different focus. Yet, the exhibition in Amsterdam, which revolves around the idea of happiness, is the permanent version. The exhibition presents skinless and plastinated human corpses artistically, alongside a range of body parts which have been extracted from bodily donors. In short, plastination concerns the process invented by von Hagens of preserving dead bodies by stopping decomposition via removing bodily fluids and replacing these with polymers.

The exhibition is housed in a tall building on seven floors and, like the tattooing art exhibition, is branded in hot pink. Entering the building, as you look up a flying plastinated pig can be found. Straight ahead is the payment desk and a series of metal lockers, and to the left a lift which takes visitors up to the sixth floor where the exhibition begins. Each floor is dedicated to a different aspect of bodies: the sixth floor revolves around the brain and associated diseases such as Alzheimer’s; the fifth the nervous system, bones, muscles, blood, and ears; the fourth muscles, the heart, and blood vessels; the third lungs, the stomach, intestines, and the liver; the second diets from around the world, obesity, kidneys, breasts, the prostate, and reproductive organs; the first procreation, childbirth, and embryos; and finally, the theme found in the basement concerns love, sex, and relationships.

Although each floor has a slightly different focus, each contains glass cabinets of preserved body parts and/or whole human corpses usually presented in action poses, such as driving a boat, playing a sport, and having sex. There are also many informative wall plaques and videos on each floor, often educating visitors about different diseases and how these impact the body, which gives the exhibition quite an informative and medicalised feel. There are also a couple of interactive activities for visitors to partake in, such as swinging on a wooden swing, blood pressure tests, and writing down a time when you were last happy, which is then projected onto a public screen. On the walls above the staircases separating the floors, are a few motivational quotes seemingly designed to encourage visitors to feel happier.

I visited Body Worlds on a cold, grey, and rainy day in June 2015 and spent four hours there. After taking a couple of photographs of the building’s facade (photographs of human exhibits were not permitted), I made my way past a group of what seemed to be school children into the exhibition and towards the lift. Since the lift was mirrored, I was instantly confronted
with the image of my own body from all angles and I felt uncomfortable. Straight out of the
lift on the sixth floor a video can be found projected onto three screens, in front of which
there is a bench for the audience to sit on. I sat down on the bench amongst other visitors and
watched (and filmed) the two-and-a-half-minute presentation, which is quite a child-like
educational video concerning emotions and how they impact the body.

I proceeded to make my way slowly through each floor of the exhibition, carefully ensuring
to look at every display, as well as inconspicuously observing the other visitors. I also tried
out the activities of swinging, checking my blood pressure several times (I was proud to
discover mine is healthy), and writing down the last time I was happy (I wrote that it was
when swinging in the exhibit today). I also took detailed fieldnotes on each floor. Throughout
my visit, there was an ebb and flow of a wide range of visitors spanning all demographics.
They looked at the displays intently and with particular intrigue at the human corpses; chatted
and laughed with one another; sometimes educated each other about the body; and at times
expressed disgust. I experienced a wide-range of emotions, spanning intrigue; anxiety;
sadness; wonder; happiness; excitement; disgust; and apathy. It was difficult to comprehend
that the plastinated corpses and body parts had once been living breathing bodies just like me:

“My eyes are instantly drawn towards two interacting whole human corpses, and
I’m feeling a mixture of excitement and intrigue as I walk towards the cabinet to
take a closer look. I realise that it is an artistic representation of a man holding up
a woman in an action pose... These corpses do seem more lifelike than the body
parts I have seen so far in the exhibition, including the bones, skulls, and hands
displayed on this floor, since they are depicted as being in action. Yet, it remains
so difficult to comprehend that these static and skinless corpses were once living,
breathing human bodies just like me” [Fieldnotes: Body Worlds].
“Plastination unveils the beauty beneath the skin, frozen in time between death and decay.”

The body donors & their enduring legacy for plastination

The specimens in this exhibit are from body donors, individuals who during their lifetime bequeathed that upon their death, their bodies could be used in the exhibition. The identities, ages, and causes of death are not given with these exhibits, because the exhibit focuses on the nature of the physical being, not on providing personal information or private tragedies.

The body donors chose to participate in this programme for a variety of reasons. All wanted to contribute to the medical enlightenment of the people, and without their contribution, this exhibit would not be possible, medical enlightenment of legislation and without their contribution, this exhibit would not be possible.
Appendix 7: death: the human experience narrative and photographs

I discovered the death: the human experience exhibition serendipitously when reading about the topic of death online for my study. I decided to go along to enrich the insights from my Body Worlds fieldwork visit, as well as my interviews. The exhibition was held at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (a grand looking building) and I spent just under three hours there. The purpose of the exhibition was to educate people about the way in which different cultures consider death, and more specifically to foster a more open and honest discussion about death. Inside the large museum entrance room are high ceilings, from which chandeliers hang, and Grecian looking columns over which two ornamental Asian dragons dance, giving it a grand feel. There were also several hot pink notices which pointed the way towards the death exhibit, which could be found down a long luxurious corridor, and several long hot pink cloths were strewn high in the air overhead, seeming to cast death in a celebratory light.

The doors into the exhibition were glass and had an image of a Victorian looking woman mourning printed to one side, and a hot pink sign explaining the purpose of the exhibit to the left. As you enter the door, you were instantly confronted with a dark pink curtain with the following message projected upon it: “Take a moment from your busy life. Take some time to reflect on death...” Bird song plays overhead. The exhibition was divided into different stages of death, including: symbols of death; post mortem; containing the dead; funerals; grave goods; final resting places; mourning; memorialisation; and connecting with the dead. At the end of the exhibition, was a dimly lit reflections room which comprised several bean bags/chairs, a couple of small wooden tables on which post-it-notes and pens were placed, and a pit for dropping your written reflections into. Indeed, the exhibition was designed to encourage visitors to reflect about death, and in some areas questions are printed on the walls/doors, for example “Is it our fault if we die from a disease?” The exhibition included a wide range of different objects (e.g. a skeleton, coffins, and funeral clothing), informative plaques and videos (e.g. about different funeral types, suicide, and assisted dying), and bodies (e.g. human ashes and jewellery made from body parts). Several sombre funeral procession sounding songs play continuously on a loop through speakers in all areas of the exhibition.

I spent my time slowly observing every element of the exhibition in turn, with the aid of informative headphones I picked up from the entrance. I took photographs of each area (excluding human remains which was prohibited), paused to take fieldnotes sporadically on a black leather bench located in the middle of the exhibition, and inconspicuously observed the other visitors. As with Body Worlds, there was a wide range of visitors at the exhibition
(although I overheard a museum worker claim that under 12’s were prohibited), and they conveyed emotions such as sadness, intrigue, and humour. However, unlike Body Worlds where I was often feeling emotionally detached from the displayed bodies since they seemed quite dehumanised, this exhibition encouraged me to reflect upon my own and others’ mortality much more frequently:

“This tears begin to fill my own eyes as I begin to reflect on my own mortality and the various people I have lost... I realise that I am much more moved emotionally by this exhibition than at Body Worlds. This is perhaps because the bodies on display in Amsterdam were dehumanised by removing their skin and were placed in such an artistic manner... it was difficult at times to understand how the bodies were once living humans. However, in this exhibit there are many messages on the various informative plaques and projected onto the walls which encourage visitors to reflect on their own mortality and how they view death. This, coupled with the multiple images and artefacts of clocks, the sombre music being played on repeat, and dim lighting in several of the passageways and small rooms, is encouraging me to think about my own death and people I have lost...” [Fieldnotes: DHE].

I ended my visit in the reflections room, and began by writing a note about my mixed emotions at the exhibition and how I think it is important for desquestering death in Western society, and dropped it into the pit. I quickly decided that this seemed overly academic and instead wrote a note telling the people I had lost that I love and miss them, dropped this into the pit, and then left the exhibition as it was closing for the day.
Memorial tattoo

Memorial tattoos allow people to carry the memory of a loved one with them permanently, and share their stories when someone asks about the meaning behind them. Shady Dee’s tribute to her ‘friend’ Sue was planned by Shady Dee and Sue together when Sue was unwell. All of the elements are bright, lively and sweet – just like her. She always used to go for darker, more gothic artwork – but this was all for Sue. Some people also incorporate the ashes of their loved ones into their tattoos.

Take a moment from your busy life.
Take some time to reflect on death...
...
what does it mean to you?
How does it feel for others?
The journey we will take affects the way we live.
Let’s talk about death...
Appendix 8: Participant information sheet and consent form

**Bodies, time, and tattooing study**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. It is important that you understand the aims of the research, what your participation will involve, and how the data will be used before you decide whether or not to take part. Please take the time to read through the following information carefully before deciding whether you want to take part in the study. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them at any time. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this.

*The study*

My name is Chloe Steadman and this research is being conducted as part of my PhD degree at the University of Manchester. The main aim of my study is to find out a bit more about how people’s life histories can become marked on, and/or erased off, the human body over time. To better understand these relations between the body and time, I am more specifically exploring how people might use tattoos to mark particular events or periods in their life histories, and decide to remove and/or cover up their tattoos as their lives change.

*Your participation*

You are being invited to take part in two separate interviews, which will both be quite conversational in nature. The first interview will involve you bringing along one or more objects which hold memories about an important time in your life, and talking to me about your life history and how your tattoos might relate to this. The second interview will be conducted at a later date which best suits you, and will involve me asking further questions about your tattoos and tattooing experiences, your experiences with ageing, and other ways in which you might modify your body. The interviews will be audio-recorded to aid with data analysis if you feel comfortable with this. However, it is important to know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary, will involve no risks to you, and you can decide to leave the research process at any time.

*What happens with the data?*

The interviews will be typed up and the findings might be discussed with my PhD advisors at times. However, your information will be kept completely anonymous at all times, as you will be given a false name in the data presentation, which you will be given the opportunity to choose. Any information and pictures you provide will also be stored securely in password protected computer files on my personal laptop. Your personal information will not be shared with anyone and will not be held for longer than necessary. The final written report will be submitted for marking to the exam board, and some of the findings might be used in future conference presentations and written academic articles. Please let me know if you would like me to send to you a summary of the main findings once my project has been finished.

*If you have any questions, I will be more than happy to answer them at any time:*

E-mail: chloe.steadman@postgrad.mbs.ac.uk  OR  chloesteadman@hotmail.co.uk

*If you wish to take part in this study, please read and sign the attached consent form.*
Interview consent form

Please read through the following information carefully and tick the box of each statement you agree with. Please sign in the space provided at the bottom of the form if you agree to take part in the study, and return it to the researcher at your earliest convenience.

-I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary

-I understand that I can withdraw my participation in the study at any point without penalty

-I understand that there are no risks involved with me taking part in this study

-I agree to the interview being audio-recorded

-I agree to have my tattoos and important object(s) photographed

-I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and they have been answered

-I understand what is required of me and I wish to take part in this study

Participant
Signed: _____________________        Date:__________________
Print name: ________________________________

Researcher
Signed: _______________________________        Date:__________________
Print name: _______________________________
Appendix 9: Interview one guide

- **Grand tour question:** “*Please could you tell me the story of your life, including the events you feel have been most important to shaping the person you are today?*”
- I’ll just listen and take some notes. If your object(s) will help you to tell any parts of your story, feel free to tell me about them as you’re telling your story.

[Actively listen; note down the most significant life events/turning points using their key phrases/words; body language to show still listening to the story etc]

- Once they’ve finished the whole life story, take a couple of minutes to go back through the notes and pick out the key events to probe for further information about
- Ask narrative-inducing questions to probe for further detail about these key events
- If not mentioned their object during the interview, ask whether it holds any memories/relates to an event or period in their life history
- At the end of the interview try to arrange the next tattooing-based interview.
Appendix 10: Interview two guide

- Probe for further detail about anything required from the first interview.
- **Grand tour question:** “Please could you tell me the story of your tattoos: so which one did you get first, and do they relate to any events or times in your life?”
- Actively listen and probe for further information/narratives from this first story told.
- Do you have any future tattoo plans?
- Would you ever remove/cover-up any of your tattoos?
- Is there a type of tattoo you wouldn’t get?
- Why some life events tattooed on the body & others not? How was this negotiated?
- Do you ever think about the permanence of tattoos?
- Is the permanence of tattoos something you quite like or don’t like for any reason?
- Does the permanence of tattoos influence your tattoo consumption choices at all?
- Do you ever think about the ways in which your tattoos might age over time?
- Do you ever worry about ageing more generally?
- Do you use any anti-ageing products/services? Would you?
- Do you engage in any other body modification practices?
- Did you ever modify your body in any other way following significant life events?
- Do any other forms of body modification/scars remind you of any times in your life?
- Anything else you want to add/feel I missed out asking you about that’s important?
Appendix 11: Intercase NVivo coding

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