Thanatos

Post mortem digital identities and new memorial uses of Facebook: Analysing the memorial page creators' identity.

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Abstract

As a privileged site for individual identity building, the Web and its uses have reorganised social relationships. Nowadays, the persistence of digital data after the death of the user who created them raises several questions. What happens to the identity data of web users after their death? Do they care about them while they are still alive? How do their relatives deal with these data? How do major actors of the Web, such as Facebook and Google, manage them? For a few years now, international research has been exploring the social issues raised by profiles of deceased, as well as changes in mourning practices on the Web. In France, only a few research projects have been conducted on this theme. The study of death enlightens social structure and raises individual and collective questions for example on the historical conceptions of the body and self-representation. One such question asked in this study was how relatives reconstruct digital identity on Facebook after the death of a family member? In this contribution, we present the first analysis of the enunciation subject in Facebook profiles and pages paying tribute to a deceased by examining the identity of the creators of fifteen French memorial pages on Facebook. This corpus is analysed using a pragmatic semiotic approach, which considers social discourse as constitutive acts of social relations and places strong emphasis on the technical dimension of objects supporting communication phenomena (Meunier & Peraya 2004).

Introduction

With the development of social networking, the Web has now become an everyday context in which individuals present themselves. However, the ageing of web users and the death of individuals who created web profile pages raise the question of post mortem data (Merzeau 2009). What happens to the data that individuals create about themselves on the Internet? Do deceased persons leave a digital identity? In what way is this phenomenon linked to that of their digital identity while they are still living? As the physical permanence of digital data does not depend on the presence

of the individual but on the server and the Web platform owner, if no one intervenes, the user's digital identity will remain as it was when the user was alive. However, the presence of these traces on the Internet may be upsetting for family and friends as a constant reminder of their bereavement. This may be further exacerbated as participative Web platforms—such as Facebook social networking website—which sends out reminders to the individual's contacts if her account is inactive. As Facebook cannot differentiate between a deceased user and a user whose account is simply inactive, it sends automatic notifications to the deceased's entourage encouraging them to reconnect, which arouses a feeling of distress and reawakens the pain of grief. Web pages can also be created on the initiative of family or friends to announce a death or funeral service (Wrona 2011) or to express their pain both to the living and the person who has died. These issues question the limits of the post mortem digital identity. Although studies on digital identity are well represented in current research, the question of what these identities become and how they change after the user's death is still nascent. It is, however, bound to become an increasingly important issue for society on account of the ageing of Web users.

This contribution presents the first steps of an on-going research project on Facebook memorial profiles, using a pragmatic semiotic approach based on an analytical framework of digital identity. With the long-term objective of gaining greater insight into how an entourage manages the digital traces of their deceased, this first approach proposes an analysis of the representations of the creator of the Facebook memorial page.

In the first section, I propose an approach from the pragmatic semiotic perspective to digital identity in relation to a typological approach to websites that present deceased. The second section takes the relationship between the subject (the creator of the profile page) and the object of the page (the deceased) as its discriminating criterion. A comparison between these two domains makes it possible to highlight, in the third section, the issues of the memorial page creators' identity, which was studied using fifteen memorial pages gathered from Facebook.

Digital identity examined from a pragmatic semiotic angle

"Digital identity" is a socio-technical term that appeared with the emergence of digital communication and the first forms of Internet user profiles (Georges 2009). Pages presenting a user's identity raise questions pertaining both to the transfer of the modalities of self-presentation on the Web (Georges 2009; Coutant & Stenger 2010) and to the issues of managing user data and privacy, or the ownership of personal data and the right to be forgotten (Ertzscheid et al. 2013).

Using a pragmatic semiotic approach, we have been investigating the digital identity of living users on the basis of user profile pages in forums, personal pages, video games, blogs and participative web profile pages. We thus defined digital identity as the ensemble of observable on-screen signs pertaining to the user. The collection and analysis of this information enabled us to propose different classifications that meet the discriminating criteria of the relationship between the creator of the user profile and the enunciation source of the textual and visual information appearing in it. In this section, we show how this first investigation of living user profiles may highlight some specific aspects relating to memorial pages and user profiles paying tribute to deceased users.

Adopting a Peircian pragmatic semiotic approach[1], one should consider the digital representation of identity as a schematic outline of the self given by the interpretant in the form of a multimodal discursive production (C. S. Peirce's representamen). The triad icon-index-symbol is particularly well suited to the study of multimodal productions in the digital media we studied, which have the image of self as their object.

In online communication, as in face-to-face communication, the symbolic relationship is inseparable from the processes of receiving and interpreting: in both cases, the users co-construct interpretive schemas in the form of conventions established between the users of a small group (e.g. when a user sets his or her default status to "unavailable", close contacts know that this does not mean that the user is unavailable to chat, whereas more distant contacts will take this notification at its face value), or more generally agreed-on uses (e.g. using capital letters to indicate shouting).

Some previous investigation into the iconic relation, not involving deceased's profiles but just living user's profiles, revealed an analogous relation between the user's digital profile and his or her perceived image of self. Thus, the model of the profile's metaphor (Georges 2010) questions the way in which the website shapes the image of the self through digital representations as defined above. This approach in turn proposes a reading of the way in which the user profile can influence the image that the subject has of his or her own personal identity. The user profile is thus interpreted as a mirror in which the subject sees an image of him(her)self that changes, with or without the subject's choosing and which (s)he can adjust depending on the image (s)he wishes to project.

The notion of index made it possible to distinguish between the signs that are a trace of the living individual, activity of his or her friends or the web platform's activity, enabling us to investigate the content creators control over their own identity. The digital identity model thus identified the signs directly entered by the user to present his or her digital self (last name, first name, gender, photographs, interests, activities, mood, etc.), and others that result from the data capture and notifications by the website platform that are present on the current user's profile page, whether they are *textual* or *quantified*[2]. A quantified approach to this model showed that the participative Web is characterised by a user's loss of control over his or her representation, due to the participation of "friends", "contacts" and the Web platform in the enunciative process (Georges 2009): even if the user enters no information (pre-supposing that (s)he has created a profile), the website platform generates a continuous flow of information on the user's identity.

Studies have shown that the declarative information provided by the subject for self-presentation is judged to be less "authentic" by the user's "friends" than the information entered by third parties; through a surprising iconic interpretive process, the aesthetic character of the profile photos of "friends" posted on a Facebook user's wall seems to play a decisive role in the degree to which a user's image is sympathetic (Walter et al. 2008). Whatever the user's wishes, the digital identity may continue to be constructed through a form of delegation of self-presentation to the technical apparatus and his or her community of "friends".

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[1] Charles Sanders Peirce was an American logician and philosopher. He is considered as the founder of the branch of semiotics which considers the sign in context, i.e. included in a process of interpretation.

[2] Textual information may be found in what we called "acting identity": e.g. in the news feed of Facebook, "x is now a friend of y", "x has downloaded such and such an application", etc. Quantified information may be found in what we called "calculated identity": e.g. in Facebook or other social networks, number of friends, number of groups, number of "likes".

Using Peirce's model of the icon-index-symbol helps us to highlight three dimensions of discursive production that has the self as object: (1) the co-constructed dimension of utilisations, which gives rise to norms (both local and general) in the dual movement as in interpretant-subject's interpretation and production of the digital representation of his or her identity; (2) the role of the profile pages in the construction of the perceived self-image in digital context and in general by consequence, taking into account the play of intersubjectivity in the self construction process; (3) the user's increasing loss of control over his or her representation due to the intervention of the user's "contacts" and the website platform.

Typology of websites presenting deceased users

The study of the post mortem context of digital identity makes it possible to investigate the scope of the results presented earlier concerning the study of digital identity during the user's lifetime. So as to highlight the enunciative relation, the first approach involves distinguishing between three categories of sites presenting identity data about deceased persons on the Internet (Georges & Julliard 2014). This distinction is based on Vladimir Jankélévitch's relational model of death, applied by Rabatel and Floréa to death announcements in the media. It enables them to show that, while the conventional media focus on the "death in the third person"[3], the new technologies offer totally new channels for talking about death in the "second person" and "first person" (Jankélévitch 1977), or in other words the death of someone close, on the one hand, and one's own death experienced in the future, on the other (Rabatel & Floréa 2011). We chose to draw on categorisations of Sofka (2009) and Haverinen (2010), who respectively take the intentional character of the memorial aim of the profiles (whether or not the users wanted their profile to persist online after death), and the dedicated character of the web platform (whether or not the profile is specifically for memorial purposes) (cf. Walter et al. 2012) as the discriminating criteria. Investigating the post mortem digital identity from the standpoint of the subject's relationship to the object of the enunciation, we thus made the distinction between: (1) memorials created by the entourage after the user's death (3rd person), (2) the profiles created by users during their lifetime and then transformed by the entourage after the user's death (2nd person) into a place for grieving and paying tribute, and lastly (3) the sites proposing that users create and manage the data while they are still alive in view of their future death (1st person).

The first category of memorials created by the entourage after death, belonging to the "third person" relationship to death, is the oldest: as early as in the 1990s, cyber-cemeteries appeared on the Internet. Built in a graphic universe inspired by traditional cemeteries, they allow family and friends to create online memorials to pay tribute to the deceased (de Vries & Rutherdorf 2004). Some are specialised, such as the cyber-cemeteries dedicated to those who died from HIV, to pets (Blando et al. 2004), to celebrities (Hall & Reid 2009) or to war victims (Walter et al. 2012). These memorials allow the user to choose a gravestone, flower it, burn incense and write tributes (Bell 2006).

The second category comprises websites dedicated to death "in the second person", in particular social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Myspace). Not initially dedicated to the remembrance of the deceased, death is sometimes presented on these sites through the profiles of the deceased users. On Facebook, impromptu notifications inviting people to reconnect with deceased friends, as mentioned earlier, modifies the mourning process (Wrona 2011) by awakening painful feelings for the users (Pène 2011). Even when a website platform has implemented a functionality

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[3] V. Jankélévitch distinguishes death *in the third person* ("death in general, abstract and anonymous death"), death *in the second person* (the death of someone close, the death of a loved one) and death *in the first person* (my own death, where no one can replace me) (Jankélévitch 1977, 25).

which allows the page – providing that official proof of death is given – to be deleted or modified into a static memorial page that sends out no reconnect reminders, the functionality is little known and thus little used (Odom et al. 2010). Facebook is a place for three kinds of death announcements: the death announcement itself, the deceased's profile pages and the commemoration of disasters, crimes, accidents and illnesses (Pène 2011). These three forms of death announcements pose different emotional and symbolic questions, mainly due to their novel approach compared to cyber-cemetery pages: they may show indexical signs of the deceased (signs of activity, moods, downloaded photos) and for this reason they can be seen as analogous to the "first-person" death relationship.

The third category comprises the sites that directly propose that users create their own memorial during their lifetime. Attempts to communicate with family and friends after one's death appeared relatively early, at the beginning of the 1990s. These attempts turned email-distribution service functionalities to their advantage: a message is written to one or more people in the entourage of the user, who plans for the email to be sent at a later date, in this case after the supposed date of his or her death. More sophisticated Internet sites have tended to develop in recent years (Foong & Kera 2008), dedicated to a post mortem presentation of oneself by oneself. In this category, the representations of the deceased are entirely authored by the deceased.

This classification thus shows that the new social networking sites indeed provide a place for expressing death in the first and second person, and even death in the third person. Drawing on previous studies that show the user's loss of control over self-representation, we can also identify the trend on the participative Web to develop a relation to death in the third person. These different enunciative contexts point to the outstanding question of the identity of the subject that creates the page in tribute to a deceased person. The aforementioned approaches to digital identity help us to formulate this question.

The identity of the producer of the memorial page

The typology presented in the previous section enabled us to point up the question of enunciation on memorial pages. In the online social networks in particular (category 2), the representations of the deceased person in the second and first person coincide. In particular, Facebook pages paying tribute to the deceased, whether created by the user during their lifetime or by their entourage after their death, raise the question of the encounter between the subject and the object of the representation. We will reposition this phenomenon in the framework of the study of digital identity presented in the first section, so as to clarify the problem of enunciation.

Firstly, while the iconic dimension of the image of self can no longer influence the construction of self-representation, it does impact the image that others have of the owner of this self-image. In the case of memorials created ex nihilo by the entourage after the user's death (cf. second category of the typology), sites such as Facebook, due to the fact that they are specialised in profile pages and not memorial pages, imply that the creators of memorial pages have to divert the fields dedicated to presentation of the subject/object of the profile page (cf. supra: the autonym ligator). In our corpus, the creators present themselves in close proximity to the deceased being the object of the web page created after his or her death. For example, the memorial page "Rest in peace (Last name, first name)" is authored by "Rest in peace (Last name, first name)", who is not the object of the page (the deceased), but in fact one or more people in the deceased's entourage. This equation of the subject and the object represented, which is not neutral, thus seems a priori very specific to the non-specialist social networking sites, and has no equivalent in the traditional funeral and

mourning processes. These conditions of enunciation create an ambivalent digital identity of the creator, by which the subject (the living creator) includes symbolically the object (the deceased).

Secondly, post mortem identity can be viewed as prolonging the delegation of self-representation to the website platform or to "contacts". What happens when the user dies and can no longer in any way be the subject of the discursive production of his or her page: does his or her digital identity continue to be constructed? Brubaker and Vertesi (2010) have shown that this is the case: after the user's death, his or her digital identity continues to be constructed through the actions of their entourage, who thus perpetuate the memory of the deceased. Their research even shows that this process engenders a specific phenomenon of "persistence": the entourage expresses the feeling that the deceased, through his or her Facebook profile, is still "persistent and active". The creation and maintenance of memorial profiles, but also the engagement in posting messages on it, may thus have consequences for the actual mourning experience as it keeps the distress of bereavement alive while easing the pain, and prolongs the mourning process (Brubaker & Hayes 2011).

This phenomenon of persistence of identity data pointed up by Brubaker and Vertesi (2010), may partly be explained, on the basis of our previous research, by the growing importance of the acting and calculated dimensions of digital identity. Yet, this can only be valid for the profile pages created while the users are still alive. As the modalities of enunciation change in the memorials created ex nihilo by friends and family after the user's death (cf. second category of the typology), we may question the linkage that this ambiguous enunciation creates between, on the one hand, the enunciative subject, which is the entourage that are creators of the memorial page and, on the other hand, the deceased, who is the object of the enunciation and symbolically included in the enunciative subject.

To carry out this first analysis of the issues relating to the role of the enunciative apparatus in post mortem memorials, we gathered fifteen memorial pages from the online social network, Facebook. These fifteen memorial pages were analysed in respect to the creator-subject of the page. This first approach did not use automated processing to compile or analyse the corpus. The deceased persons' profile pages were collected through a manual search using Facebook's search engine and the keywords "Hommage" (tribute) and "Repose en paix" (Rest in peace). This method yielded numerous results and we used the first occurrences that presented memorial profiles created by friends and family, fans or people unknown to the deceased, in tribute to one or more deceased users. Twelve of these fifteen pages were public, two had restricted access and one semi-public. The fact that the pages are public reduces the so-called "sensitive" aspect of these data, but in this paper we nonetheless present them anonymously. For the restricted access or semi-public pages, we did not analyse the data that had a confidential status.

To analyse the enunciation produced by the creator of the page, we collected the following data: page title, page category (group, personality, personal profile), and the postings authored by the creator of the page, or in other words, by the "autonym ligator"[4]. From this ensemble, we collected information on the enunciation subject in the posted texts ("I", "we", passive form, signature). Of the fifteen pages analysed, ten present a creator-subject that is different from the object of the page, the five other being profile pages where the user of the page is both enunciation subject and object, and pays tribute to a deceased third-party.

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[4] The expression "autonym ligator" designates the ensemble formed by the profile photo (as ligator) and the page title or username (as autonym).

In addition, we conducted seven exploratory interviews with young adults about other memorial pages or user profiles reporting our paying tribute to the death of a friend or family member.

The impact of the page category chosen on the creator's enunciative positioning
The Facebook page category used to create a memorial implies a specific relationship between the creator of the page and its object. Out of the fifteen pages analysed, seven are "group" pages, six are personal profiles and two professional profiles (actor/producer and teacher).

Among the six "group" pages, five are public and one is semi-private (only the list of members is visible). The page titles clearly present the object of the memorial page, a result that is also due to the keywords used in our search. The subject producing the enunciation does obviously not coincide with the object of the page (i.e. the deceased). However, this difference, which poses no problem elsewhere (e.g., in the cyber-cemeteries of the first category of the typology, cf. infra), does raise a problem for the pages of this Facebook page category. As these pages were not designed to manage an identity other than that of the creator-subject (in "group" or "community" pages, the creator of the page is part of the group), these pages are "hijacked" (a semiotic appropriation) so that authorship under group's name will not be confused with the group's object (the deceased). In the context of this strategy, the users set up procedures calling on the expressions "Tribute" or "Rest in peace", supplemented in all three cases by various maxims ("Forever in our hearts") or expressions of affection ("my love", "our dearest angel").

Two pages of the corpus belong to a specific category dedicated to professionals (categories named in Facebook "actor/producer" and "teacher"). One uses the expression "A tribute to", the other "Rest in peace". These pages are devoted to the presentation of a famous or known figure, and allow tributes in the third person. Although it does not formally distinguish the identity of the person who created the profile page of the personality in question, in practice this difference seems implicit and does not escape being challenged by the participants, as we will show later.

In the personal profile pages bearing a maxim or expression of affection for the bereavement tribute, two groups can be distinguished: of the six profiles in this category, three mention, in parentheses and next to the user's first and last names, the expression "rest in peace" followed by the first or last name of the deceased, and three place "rest in peace" in parentheses after the first and last names of the deceased.

The first group, which reflects an apparently common procedure given the large number of occurrences in this limited sample, refers to a temporary tribute to a deceased person on the profile page of someone in the deceased's entourage. In the sample we consulted, one of the three profiles bearing this mention had been removed within a month period.

The only page in our corpus presenting a profile of a deceased user does not mention the date of death, nor does it present any text postings: only photos of the deceased are shown, with no comments. The interviews, on the other hand, provided additional information on the private profile pages created by the deceased when they were alive, which are not included in the corpus. In this category of pages, the creator of the page is identical to the object of the page during the user's lifetime as it involves a digital presentation of self by self. After the user's death, these pages can continue to be enriched, as we saw earlier, by friends and family and the website platform. We had assumed that this phenomenon could in itself explain the impression felt by the entourage of a persisting identity. Moreover, the interviews showed specific cases that seem to occur in the corpus: the "autonym ligator" (the profile picture plus the

name of the user) may still appear active after the death of the user, creating an incongruous enunciative situation in which the deceased ("autonym ligator") announces his or her own death or funerals: "the funeral will take place…" Even though nothing technically indicates this except for the use of the third person in the contents of the posting, the effective subject of the enunciation is evidently not the deceased, but a friend or a group of friends who are using the deceased's name to announce his or her funeral. For this to be possible, given that Facebook never authorises third-party access to usernames, the friends in question must have somehow managed to obtain the deceased's username and the password after his or her death. The applied analysis of these pages can be pursued in future studies to investigate and throw light on the enunciative modalities of transferring the deceased's authorship to his or her friends.

The presentation of the identity of the creator of the memorial page involves a technical ambiguity when it comes to memorials created by friends after the death of the user, and even more so for the pages created by users while they are still alive and then transformed into a place where friends can pay tribute following their death. However, the mention of the person to whom tribute is paid is made clear in fourteen of the fifteen pages by the use of a maxim ("tribute to" and "rest in peace"). This clarification relates to the non-equation of the deceased person with the person who created the memorial page, but none of the cases in our corpus makes this relationship explicit. An analysis of the subject of the enunciation in the contents of postings will help to shed light on this aspect.

The textual subject of the posting and the signature
The identity of the creator of the memorial page is not prominently indicated on the site, and the subject of the textual enunciation does not always make this immediately explicit.

In the content of the messages posted under the page's "autonym ligator", "I" is used in eight of the ten pages of the sub-corpus. On three pages, it is used as the main personal pronoun, indicating a well-identified relationship: in one case, this is a mother, in another, a sister and yet in another, a fan of the deceased. In the other cases, the "I" is used alternately with impersonal-sounding wordings (the generic "we", "one", "it would be appreciated"). In particular, just after the creation of the memorial page, impersonal wording or the generic "we" is more often used, and the enunciative subject is gradually revealed to become an "I" that is accompanied by anecdotes or postings that are more personal or focussed on the subject and his or her pain and emotions. For example, "me, your dearest mum" or "dadou, your protégée" may appear in posts published only a few minutes apart, suggesting that the users organise themselves to publish all together on the deceased's profile page.

The use of "we" is relatively unclear as far as the identity of the subject is concerned. Particularly in the memorial's first postings, the "we" swings between a generic "we" (e.g. "we miss you") and a collective "we" referring to clearly identified people (e.g. "your dad", "your sisters and me"), as well as an implicitly defined "we" (e.g. the "we all learnt today" on the memorial page to a teacher can refer to a speech given at his or her school in honour of the deceased). The enunciation of this "we" in an intimate context on the pages produced by family or friends seems to fit with the expected interpretative frameworks relating to the circle of family and friends. One post, for example, mentions "our place for meditating in your room" along with a photo of framed photos on the wall decorated with fairy lights; this post suggests that the "we" refers to family in the broad sense.

In sum, the "we" seems to refer implicitly to all of the deceased's close friends and family who are likely to continue to maintain the deceased's Facebook page, just as they would tend to the deceased's grave. Some users take care to

include, in the contents of a posting under the generic username (e.g. "RIP x"), their civil name or their position within the family (e.g. on the profile of a deceased baby: "your godmother", "your granny"), or their relationship to the deceased (e.g. on the profile of a young man who had died: "your protégée"). These designations are all signs that express mourning in the second person, the grieving for someone dear, whom the users address believing that the message would be understood by the deceased.

Polemics on the identity of the creator of the page
Although the "we" is rarely explicitly identifiable, some creators of memorial pages respond on the deceased's profile to some of the questions addressed to them and to judgements about their legitimacy to do so when they are not part of the family, or when they do not occupy a legitimate place within the family.

The creator of a memorial page dedicated to a famous person who had died comments on this topic:

> *To all those who say that I did well to create this page, I wanted to say that I was only 15 years old, but I was a fan of this actress and my favourite film was X, and I miss her!!*

This posting alludes not only to the judgements made on her project that she sees as positive, but also to a value judgement referring to her social status ("I was only 15 years old but") and to the use of a justification of her project by her devotion ("I was a fan", "I miss her!").

In the case of the tribute from a couple of young adults, the creator of the page expresses her irritation, prompted either because they belonged to different families or because of the overall negative judgement on her:

> *I honestly have to tell you, I'm fed up with receiving these messages saying 'who owns this page,' who this and who that. I'm here to pay tribute to my two friends because yes I had a hard time grieving; accepting this tragedy. Accepting that they were no longer there! I don't want to ask anyone for permission to do this page and keep it alive so that my grieving can happen better… They just deserve it; I spent my childhood with them even if in the last 4 years at high school we drifted apart, me, I need to do that, it helps me. So if you don't like it; if you don't agree with me doing this page, no one forces you to stay here and read the following. Because me I notice that even the people who, close to them or not, certainly knew them for 1 or 2 years have been affected by this plague. So please just respect their dignity and the tribute I'm paying to them. Good night and thank you also to all those who follow it and keep it alive each day!*

This user takes into account, as does the previous user, the value judgements made about her memorial project—negative ones in this case—and likewise justifies her project by the pain she feels. The last expression is particularly significant for the notion of "persistence" with respect to maintaining the page, much as one would keep up the memory of the deceased: here the user talks of "keeping alive" the page each day. Looking after the page is indeed perceived as keeping the deceased's memory alive.

While the enunciator of the memorial page may conceal their identity, he or she may be urged to disclose it either on the page itself or in a private message. A strong symbolic charge seems to rest on the shoulders of the creator of the page due to the questioning and justification of their legitimacy. The close family's traditional role of taking care of the deceased's memory and grave seems partly challenged by digital practices. Online, a memorial is created by

someone from the entourage who finds meaning in producing a Facebook memorial and, for this reason, this someone is not always the person judged to be the most legitimate by the entourage and particularly the family.

In the exploratory interviews that we conducted with young adults on online memorials that pay tribute to close friends or acquaintances, the question of challenging this legitimacy was not spontaneously broached by the users, who nonetheless attested to the fact that the memorials were maintained by the innermost circle of friends, and this was not mentioned as being problematic.

Conclusion

The analysis of how identity is presented by the creators of fifteen Facebook memorial pages and of what enunciative position they adopt showed that the website typically lacked a clear dividing line between the creator of the memorial page (created by the entourage or group of fans) and the object of the memorial page (the deceased).

The sample studied shows that the users engage in different strategies to make this difference clear, mainly by explicitly mentioning a tribute to the deceased in the title of the page. The complex presentation of the enunciator and their gradual unveiling is specific to Facebook, and perhaps to the social networking sites that were not initially designed for creating memorials.

Concerning the individual identification of the creators of memorial pages, several phases were observed, which could be further investigated. The first phase corresponds to the death announcement and shows a preference for impersonal turns of phrase. Quite soon afterwards (two to three days after the death announcement), a second phase reveals the creator: who refers to himself or herself in the first person singular and presents the object of the page (in our corpus) prompted by private messages. Finally, the third phase involves maintaining the page on a regular basis, which reveals a shift to the use of "I" to express the mourning experience.

A second use that is well represented in the corpus is that of the parenthesised mention, following the username, of the deceased's first name and the mention "rest in peace". These "second-person" forms of mourning are less focused on the deceased and highlight the social postures of mourning.

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