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THEME ISSUE

Death, mourning and the internet:

death cultures in web environments

Contents

Finnish Death Studies Association

The Finnish Death Studies Association (FDSA) *was founded March 28th 2011 in Helsinki by scholars interested in the field of thanatological research. The aim was to create an organization that could create a more public interdisciplinary dialogue about death and dying in Finnish society.*

The purpose of the association is also to advance the domestic death studies and professional education, create synergy between Finnish and international professionals and researchers, and last but not least, to promote discussion about researching, studying and working in the field of death and bereavement research. With the website (www.kuolemantutkimus.com) and open access online journal (www.thanatos.-journal.com) the association wishes to provide information about future events both in Finland and abroad, publish articles, book reviews, research reports and other texts concerning the vast and colorful field of death. More about membership from our website.

Thanatos *is a peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary and a scientific web-journal published by the Finnish Death Studies Association. We publish twice a year a journal that consists of articles, short and long research reports, book reviews, columns and seminar reports. The primary publication language is Finnish, but we do accept manuscripts in English and Swedish as well, however, the costs of proofreading are the responsibility of the author. The journal is peer-reviewed, which means we use fellow scholars in determing the potentiality of the manuscript for publication.*

Thanatos aspires to advance dialogue between interdisciplinary scholars and professionals working in the field of death and dying. The association welcomes all ideas for publications and for future theme issues. We are aiming for more broader discussions over the traditional scientific boundaries and to enhance a more holistic way of dealing subjects such as hospice care, suicide, bereavement, materiality around death and dying, aging, (im)mortality and so forth. Join us: www.kuolemantutkimus.com.

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editorial

Thanatos

Editorial – the digitalisation of death culture(s)

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A memorial blog, memorial YouTube video, memorial event in World of Warcraft, headstone erected in a virtual world such as Second Life, memorialised profile page in Facebook, a virtual candle flickering on a two-dimensional webpage… All these examples are currently flourishing online and creating a technologically *mediatised* death culture, which is now transforming the practices and rituals of death rituals on a global level. (Haverinen 2014b; on mediatised rituals see also Sumiala 2014.)

In this spring issue of *Thanatos*, we portray a wide collection of on-going research from across the globe. Digital technologies – or as in this case mostly internet applications – are being appropriated in various ways to mourn and honor the memory of loved ones and in coping with the difficult emotions caused by loss and bereavement. The current internet[1], the Web 2.0, can be described as *social* since the most popular websites currently used focus in the self-produced content of individuals who share pictures, moments, memories and stories of their everyday lives. Experiences related to death – both as a social and cultural moment – are also produced in various ways, such as in the abovementioned memorial websites, memorial videos, memorialised profile pages and shrines in virtual worlds. In this context, the social internet provides solace and comfort despite geographical or time distances, as well as a private space to explore social and cultural taboos, such as abortion or suicide.

Memorials (online) symbolise all places of memory and remembrance (Haverinen 2014b; Tilley 1994). Although many online spaces are initially created for socialising, distribution of knowledge and even play and fun, many service providers have acknowledged the fact that their users are dying, and their intimates want to either access, download or memorialise the content left behind. For example, Facebook, the most popular social networking website, created the *memorialization request*[2] in 2009 when one of the developers had to face the death of a Facebook friend. In gaming

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[1] See more Suominen et al. 2013.

[2] See https://www.facebook.com/help/contact/?id=305593649477238.

communities and virtual worlds the developers have either created specific areas for memorialisations (such as Linden Memorial Park in Second Life), or build in-game tombs and memorials for significant gamers by request (such as the memorials in the massively multiplayer online role-playing game World of Warcraft). (Haverinen 2014a; Gibbs et al. 2012.)

These memorials (or often even tombs) resemble the spontaneous memorials of the offline world, which are often erected to traffic accident victims, and also the public memorials in graveyards such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which do not contain the physical body of the deceased, but an *idea* of that person. They are *cenotaphs*, mental tombs and symbols of an individual being remembered and their community. Memorials polarise a sense of community through the rituals practiced on the memorials. (Azaryahu 1996; Doss 2006; Santino 2006; Davies 2011; Sumiala 2013; Haverinen 2011; 2014b, 202.)

In the previous issue of *Thanatos* Sumiala and Hakola (2013) already stated, that the development of death culture (the industrialisation, urbanisation and individualisation) has changed the way people mourn and honor dramatically, but currently, we are on the brink of a new change, where the privatised death has become increasingly more public. The media and the internet have been playing their own part in this change, where the private everyday is being published and produced publicly in various ways, and from which social media applications are flourishing.

When we posted the call for abstracts before Christmas 2013, I did not expect we would receive such a large amount of submissions from across the globe, but fortunately I was pleasantly surprised. During spring 2014 the first Death Online conference was also arranged – which I could unfortunately not attend, but enviously followed the fantastic tweets of different talented researchers – and the conference was a success. The conference proved, along with the popularity of this theme issue, that there is a demand for *online thanatology*, a field of different disciplines researching death cultures in online environments. Now that demand is being answered. Networking and sharing ideas about on-going projects and preliminary results are creating a solid groundwork for this research area, which has been widely contributed by anthropology, linguistics, sociology, digital culture research, computer sciences and many more.

This issue brings together scholars from sociology, anthropology, communication sciences, digital culture, design and psychology in a collection of three articles, three research reports and five research reviews (along with two book reviews), which illuminate fascinating thematics on mourning online.

The first article from the United Kingdom in this theme issue is about Facebook memorial websites and entextualised moments of mourning by communication and linguistics researcher Korina Giaxoglou. The article suggests, that participatory mourning on Facebook is based on the material shared on the memorial and blends in the formal/informal forms of communication practices. The second article from Australia is by anthropologist Anthony Heathcote who discusses how aborted fetuses in Vietnam are being remembered by their mothers in memorial websites, since the society and Vietnamese culture stigmatises abortion, pre-marital sex (often the reason for abortion) and does not acknowledge aborted fetuses as part of the ancestral worship embedded in the Vietnamese death culture. The third article by Astrid Waagstein from Denmark provides insights from the field of digital design and rhetorics with a focus on death aware respondents and their sentiments towards the importance and preservation of digital legacy. The study shows that people are seldom aware about the content they can leave behind after death, but that the content should be accessible by their intimates, albeit often denied by the service providers of different web sites.

The research reports collected for this theme issue provide insight and preliminary results from on-going research projects, Cultural scientist Laure M.C. Faro explores how an online digital monument for the Jewish Community in the Netherlands produces commemoration and concepts of memorial space and design. French communication researcher Fanny Georges explores in her study how the identity of the producer of a memorial Facebook page is semiotically embedded in the memorial page posts. Independent researcher Vered (Rose) Shavit and technology scientist Roey Tzezana conducted a survey research in Israel examining the gap between current legislation and web site service providers policies considering the ownership of digital materials, which after the death of an individual can not be accessed by their intimates. The research shows similar results as the previously introduced research from Denmark by Waagstein and shows the acute importance of changing policies and legislation considering digital ownership and legacies.

In the research reviews we begin with an important outlook on the current research in the field of online thanatology, provided by cyber-sogiologist Stine Gotved from Denmark. From there we continue to the more philosophical review by designer Selina Ellis Gray, who discusses the unspoken and little researched matter of digital content that remains in the Web creating social presences – often unwanted or even painful – of the dead. Gray discusses the recent literature considering digital legacy and raises the question of the materiality of digital networks.

Social anthropologist Laura Huttunen has studied (offline) memorial events from Bosnia-Hertzegovina, which are being produced in the form of YouTube videos with various political agendas, and provides tentative keys for reading their political, social and cultural dimensions as forms of (digital) remembrance. Communication researcher Kaylee Kruzan provides a psychological insight to existential fear and terror management theory, and how these approaches could be applied to online technology research. Furthermore, communication researchers Ishani Mukherjee and Maggie Griffith Williams discuss *perimortem* (*at* or *near* time of death*)* and *postmortem* (*after* the death of a loved one) memory sharing in transitional social networks. By reviewing recent literature they claim that social networking sites, such as Facebook, can reinforce the digital enactment of what people do when they mourn online and aid the mourners to cope with the transitional phase of *perimortem* and *postmortem* issues.

The two book reviews in this theme issue do not concern internet or other digital environments, but review current literature from Finland, where historian Ilona Pajari reviews Bo Lönnqvist's book about Swedish-Finnish death culture, and I, Anna Haverinen, a Finnish publication about the life and work of historian and thanatologist Philippe Ariès and how different political and scientific agendas can even change the results of translated researches, because etymologies and semantics of different terms are different.

All memorial spaces are highly contextual and digital versions of offline places are as much contextual as their online counterparts. Christopher Tilley (1994) has argued, that all spaces are always mediating human experience. Websites and virtual environments contain rich contextualities that are both visual imagery as well as practices of language. Online researchers must be aware of these contextualities, when researching different environments, since they seldom are bound and closed environments, but a part of a complex hypertext fabric of sharing, linking, producing and creating content. The authors of this theme issue raise important questions of digital legacy, identity practices and bereavement care in online environments, as well *how* to research the social and cultural experience of mourning

online. Digital technology is now embedded in the daily lives of over 2 billion people[3], and the development of new technology applications does not seem to decelerate. It will affect not only death, bereavement and dying, but also social and cultural constructions of identity, community, love, family, friendship and values (see more Wesch 2008).

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[3]   See eg. infographics from http://www.thecultureist.com/2013/05/09/how-many-people-use-the-internet-more-than-2-billion-infographic/ [accessed 17.6.2014]

9(45)

articles

Thanatos

"R.I.P. man...u are missed and loved by many": entextualising moments of mourning on a Facebook Rest In Peace group site

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Abstract

Digital media offer new domains for people to articulate aspects of their everyday selves, as well as to share resources, views, attitudes, and emotions on an unprecedented scale (Barton and Lee 2013; Georgakopoulou 2006; Jones and Hafner 2012). The recent emergence of online environments as new sites for the temporal, spatial and social expansion of death and mourning (Brubaker and Hayes 2011; Brubaker, Hayes and Dourish 2013) has attracted scholarly interest in digital post-death rituals of mourning and memorialisation as an important social phenomenon (Walter et al. 2011; de Vries and Roberts 2004).

While previous studies have been largely based on content analyses of individual MySpace logs and Facebook or discussion forum posts, the present study approaches digital memorial posts as *entextualised moments of mourning* shared with and for a networked audience (John 2013; Androutsopoulos 2014).

The article analyses a corpus of Facebook memorial posts (N=525) as post sequences, wall events and texts, looking at how content on the site is produced, shared and discursively regimented. Based on the analysis, it is suggested that the entextualisation of moments of mourning on Facebook is *participatory:* it involves users' selection of moments for public display relating to offline ceremonies of mourning, calendar-important dates or personal updates and contributing to the production of a textured wall in memory of the dead. The textuality of posts is found to rely on an *ad hoc* blending of formal genres of mourning and vernacular genres of writing dependent on (i) situational (date of posting activity, position in the post sequence) and (ii) extra-textual parameters (gender of poster, relationship with the deceased). The present socio-discursive investigation contributes to the growing, in-depth understanding of the texture and textuality of Web 2.0 mourning practices.

Introduction

Online environments have recently emerged as 'new' sites for the temporal, spatial and social expansion of death and mourning (Brubaker and Hayes 2011; Brubaker, Hayes and Dourish 2013), calling for the systematic study of digital post-death rituals of mourning and memorialisation (Walter et al. 2011; de Vries and Roberts 2004). Research in the area is currently burgeoning across the disciplines of thanatology, psychology, sociology, game studies, and discourse and communication studies, opening up exciting possibilities for interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation that can contribute to the development of a well-rounded understanding of death, dying and mourning in a techno-social era. This paper examines socio-discursive norms for mourning that are reproduced or emergent in Web 2.0 environments, contributing a discourse-centred approach to the study of digital death and mourning.

Research so far (see section *Digital Life and Death*) suggests that the use of Internet and Web 2.0 technologies for mourning 'brings death back into everyday life' (Walter et al. 2011, 295), and has important implications for the continuation of bonds with the deceased as well as for the construction of the deceased's post-mortem identity. Numerous studies have foregrounded the benefits of online cemeteries, memorials and support groups for the bereaved, especially in cases of sudden or unexpected death (Cable 1996). In online spaces for grieving, it has been found that the bereaved, including disenfranchised mourners, feel an increased sense of social support through shared reminiscences (Rosenblatt & Elde, 1990; cited in Roberts 2004, 63). Furthermore, the bereaved are seen to communicate and process loss through very personal stories (Pawelczyk 2013, 15) and to use writing as a therapeutic resource for emotionally relocating the dead (Worden 2009; cited in Pawelczyk 2013, 5). Building on the aforementioned previous work and drawing on socio-discursive analytic frameworks, the present article explores the texture and textuality of online mourning based on the examination of practices of semi-public grieving and memorialisation on the Facebook social networking service[1].

Before moving on, some terminological clarification of the terms grief, grieving and mourning is in order. Grief denotes the feeling state of intense sorrow or embodied pain but, as a term, it is also used to refer to the process of recovering from loss (*grieving*). Following the by now classic schema of Kübler-Ross (2005), the recovery process involved in grieving can be conceptualised according to five stages, which are in no way necessary or sequentially ordered, and which appear to be universal. These are *denial* (one simply refuses to accept the fact), *anger* (when one can no longer deny the fact but resists accepting it), *bargaining* (when one tries to somehow postpone or diminish the inescapable fact), *depression* (libidinal disinvestment) and *acceptance*.

Grief is experienced as a crisis, as the onset of vertigo for the sufferer faced with the irrevocable dissolution of one's meaningful life bonds with the other, the dissolution of the everyday and, fundamentally, the loss of self (see Marris 1974; cited in Moss 2004, 78). Grief marks the limits of our bonds and relations with others, disrupting our sense of

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[1] Facebook is the most visited global site on the Iinternet, with over 70 per cent of its users living outside the US where it was first launched in 2004 (Miller 2011, x). [1] According to Facebook statistics, about 802757 million people are active on the site on a daily basis, and approximately 81% of those are outside the U.S. and Canada (Facebook 2014).

autonomy and control[2]; as a liminal state, it marks the limits of language by evading articulation, explanation or recounting. Grief marks the limits of the cultural frames in which we live and, at the same time, redraws them every time we attempt to make sense of or talk about our loss. In his account of his experience of grief over the loss of his wife, the author Julian Barnes (2014, 88) noted that "grief is vertical - and vertiginous - while mourning is horizontal. Grief makes your stomach turn, snatches the breath from you, cuts off the blood supply to the brain; mourning blows you in a new direction".

Mourning is often used as synonymous with *grief,* denoting the "process of reckoning with loss and death" (Leaman 2013, 312), or is used to refer to "the social expression of bereavement or grief, sometimes defined by culture, custom, and religion" (Hensley and Clayton 2008, 152). The latter definition encompasses ritual practices and other types of public activity that include crying, sobbing, talking, writing, telling stories, memorialising and other symbolic acts. For the purposes of this article, *grief* will be used to denote the private experience of pain, *grieving* the process of recovery from loss, and *mourning* will be used to denote public and socially sanctioned displays of grief.

Mourning practices, which lie at the heart of the present paper, are social practices that vary across and within cultures and epochs, and which are often employed to contrast pre-modern and post-modern cultures. On one hand, numerous accounts of death and dying in local traditions around the world suggest that the death of someone in tightly-knit communities organised primarily around kin and social ties marks a significant break in the social fabric of the group, which requires extensive and varied public rituals of mourning to help to hold the community together in the face of irrevocable loss and to restore social order (cf. Wilce 2009)[3]. On the other hand, accounts of death and mourning in late modernity, characterised by a loosening of social bonds and radical individualism (Giddens 1990), hold that death no longer disrupts communal worlds, but rather individual ones. As Walter et al. (2011, 289) have noted, while "pre-modern societies tended to produce a bereaved community, modern societies tend to produce bereaved individuals", leading to the privatisation of death, its experience and its sequestration from everyday life[4] (Walter 1996).

As already mentioned above, the advent of technologies of communication has opened up opportunities for the re-insertion of death and mourning into the everyday, allowing the bereaved to share the experience of death by opening up and disclosing personal stories of grief and trauma, and exchanging informational and emotional support resources

[2] In her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence,* Judith Butler (2004, 20) locates loss and vulnerability in the nature of our bodies as socially constituted and attached to others, hence exposed to the risk of loss. As Butler puts it (2004, 22), "I think I have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost 'in' you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as the tie by which those terms are differentiated and related".

[3] In his book *Crying Shame,* James Wilce moves beyond the scholarly recognition of the significance of mourning as a cultural phenomenon that can be studied through lament, "a genre of crying with melody and words" (Wilce 2009, 2) and draws attention to scholarly representations of lament as pre-modern mourning and the many uses of lament as a trope for the loss of tradition or even culture in (post)modernity (ibid, 4-11).

[4] As Mellor and Schilling (2003, 414) observe, the gradual privatisation of death in Europe and North America has been manifest in the notable decrease in the public space afforded to death, a shrinkage of the scope of the sacred in terms of the experience of death (in favour of the medicalisation of death) and a fundamental shift in the corporeal boundaries, symbolic and actual, associated with the dead and the living. Death has hence become "institutionalized, hidden and thus de-ritualised" (de Vries and Roberts 2004, 1).

(Baym 2010; Pawelczyk 2013). Online spaces for mourning and support groups arguably afford the creation and maintenance of (online) communities of the bereaved in which mourning re-emerges as a group experience (Walter et al. 2011). With norms for grief relaxing or shifting (Jakoby & Reiser 2013), a wider group of mourners is entitled to participate in public mourning while, at the same time, the potential for conflict among the bereaved increases, as evident in the emergence of organised trolling behaviour on Facebook, for example (Phillips 2011).

The present article provides an empirical study of the sharing of grief on Web 2.0 semi-public spaces for mourning and sheds light on the reconfigured and emerging discourse norms for grieving online. The insights from the study are important for addressing claims regarding radical changes in mourning and the place of death and grief in (post)modern societies. The following section will outline some of the key insights into digital life and death from existing literature across death studies, psychology, sociology and computer-mediated communication, before moving on to the analysis of practices of mourning shared on a selected Facebook memorial group site.

Digital life and death

In this section, some key remarks relating to digital life and death will be presented and discussed, setting the theoretical background and motivation for the present study.

Contemporary social life is *textually mediated* (Barton and Lee 2013, 27), with texts pervading all domains of activity and persisting in a growing online corpus of communication records and identity traces. For individual users, digital media present new opportunities for the articulation of their everyday selves, as well as for sharing resources, views, attitudes and emotions in various ways depending on the affordances and constraints of the medium of use. Following the advent of Web 2.0 technologies (Herring 2013), social network sites (henceforth SNSs), defined by computer-mediated communication scholars boyd and Ellison (2007 cited in Athique 2013, 103) as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, [and] (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system", have become the prime sites for users to generate their own content and discourse in a persistent, replicable, scalable and searchable way. SNS users now have the possibility to present their views, opinions and feelings to a wide public, overriding audience distinctions entailed in different social time-spaces. This is known as *context collapse* and it comes at a cost, namely extensive work on users' self-presentation for their multiple, parallel audiences or adapted use of the platform's affordances and tools, such as selecting friends or groups of friends to whom to broadcast a post (boyd and Ellison 2010, 9).

What distinguishes SNSs from earlier media is the increased encouragement and affordance of *social sharing*[5]. According to Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, around 4 billion 'things' (status updates, images, etc.) are now being publicly shared on Facebook every day with social sharing growing exponentially. For new media scholars, it makes more sense to talk about *practices of sharing* which, according to John (2013, 175–6), involve the *distribution* of digital content in the form of links, photos, video clips and *communication,* for instance, by updating one's status on micro-blogging sites. Sharing involves reporting, telling and broadcasting anything relating to the here-and-now of one's activity, such as one's current location, activity or view on current affairs or happenings, or one's current mood, stance or feelings.

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[5] Facebook states its mission as to "give you the power to share and to make the world more open and connected" (Facebook Website 2014).

In the field of computer-mediated communication research, Androutsopoulos (2014, 9) has proposed an understanding of practices of sharing as "the entextualization of significant moments for a networked audience", foregrounding the processes of selection, styling and negotiating that shape the discursively constructed self online via new 'technologies' of entextualisation, which allow users to capture aspects of their bodies and behaviour, compile and visualise that information in multiple ways and transmit it to large numbers of people (Jones 2013, 2-3). In other words, in SNSs it is not just 'things' that are shared, but rather it is selected moments of life that become re-semiotised or embedded in multimodal texts for further use (e.g. recycling and re-contextualisation) and consumption.

The entextualisation of selected moments of life (or death) relies on discursive frameworks, which set expectations for the production and reception of a particular kind of text. Authors draw on and shape such frameworks in their use and invocation of framing devices that carry with them guidelines as to the further unfolding of the discourse, while establishing an intertextual relationship with prior texts (Bauman 2004). The classic example of a framing device is the conventional opening of the modern fairy tale via the opening expression 'Once upon a time', which sets a distant spatiotemporal context for the expected unfolding of the story while establishing a link to previous tellings of stories. Framing devices are contingent to the context of use and can become more or less crystallised over time following cycles of (re)entextualisations. The process of entextualisation involves the construction of stretches of discourse as a discrete textual unit that can be referred to, described, named, displayed, cited, and otherwise treated as an object (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Bauman 2004, 4). Applying the notion of entextualisation to the study of digital representations of self involves a necessary extension of the 'textual' to include pictures, emoticons, videos and other modalities often featured on digital spaces. The aforementioned concepts developed for the study of digital life are very useful for developing an in-depth understanding of digital textuality of death-related practices.

Digital environments for dealing with death and dying have existed since the 1990s in the form of cyber-memorials, web memorials, virtual cemeteries and shrines, described as emerging post-death rituals (Roberts 2004), oriented to the living rather than to the deceased and playing an important role in the recovery process for grieving individuals (Roberts and Vidal 2000). Since the 2000s, SNSs gradually emerged as the primary sites for mourning, grieving and memorialising the dead. SNSs generally encourage the production of content that is more dynamic and interactive, and technologically augment active and latent social bonds (Athique 2013, 103), providing users with affordances for constructing and sustaining post-mortem relationships (Williams and Merten, 2009).

In previous research on digital death, SNSs were acknowledged as sites that encouraged the increased, ongoing interaction of the living with the deceased on residual 'gravemarker' personal profiles (Kasket 2012), as well as enabling the intersubjective production of post-mortem identity by the deceased's friends (Brubaker and Vertesi 2010). Referring to MySpace post-mortem personal profiles and comments, informatics scholars Brubaker and Hayes (2011) showed that post-mortem social networking practices include, among others, sharing memories, posting updates and maintaining connections with the deceased via comments, flooding users' personal profile page for at least up to three years after the user's death. Similar findings regarding the content of the comments posted have been reported in recent empirical investigations of post-mortem messages in a range of other online platforms, including memorial websites created by parents who have experienced a loss due to sudden infant death syndrome (Finlay and Krueger 2011), online forums for the bereaved by suicide (Schotanus-Dijstra et al. 2013) and posts following the death of Michael Jackson on Twitter, TMZ.com and Facebook (Sanderson and Cheong 2010).

Post-mortem social networking activity on Facebook RIP pages has been discussed in Caroll and Landry's (2010) study of two hundred Facebook wall comments. The researchers pointed to the potential of social network sites for the empowerment of individuals otherwise marginalised in traditional memorialising practices (*disenfranchised mourners*). Furthermore, in their consideration of the implications of context collapse for impression management, social media researchers Marwick and Ellison (2011) affirmed the increased 'power' and legitimacy of family and close friends when compared to acquaintances and grief tourists.

So far, research on digital mourning seems to have predominantly privileged the study of adolescents' profiles, demonstrating a concern with *grieving* or *memorialising* processes (Brubaker & Hayes 2011; Carroll & Landry 2010; Dobler 2009; Roberts & Vidal 2000; Williams & Merten 2009). More recently, studies have registered a concern with the linguistic/emotional style of individual posts across a large sample of data (Brubaker et al. 2012) or the interactional and discursive production of coping with grief in online support groups (Pawelczyk 2013). More broadly the field is witnessing a growing interest in interdisciplinary work touching on different media forms and communities of practice, and addressing sociocultural aspects of communicating and performing death-related practices (see, for instance, Christensen and Willerslev 2013). Such a sociocultural focus requires a move away from an overriding focus on the content, themes and general functions of online mourning sites in favour of empirical studies of situated practices. This article provides methodological and analytic remarks that can be useful in that direction.

The present article focuses on a Facebook Rest In Peace (R.I.P.) group site (see *Data and Methodology* section) and examines user-generated content on the site. Focusing on sequentially emergent themes and interactivity, as well as on the variations in the discourse patterning of individual posts, the research questions that will be addressed are the following:

1) How is posting activity on SNS memorial sites produced and shared?
2) To what extent (and how) is posting activity on SNS memorial sites discursively regimented?

The next section presents the data for the present study, the analytic framework thereof and the scheme and procedure followed in coding the data.

Data and Methodology

Focus on a Facebook R.I.P. group site

Facebook memorial group sites, also known as R.I.P. group sites, offer rich material for the study of the everyday entextualisation of moments of mourning. Taking a Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography approach (DCOE) (Androutsopoulos, 2008), initial research for this project focused on monitoring a range of sites to establish (i) the kinds of activities unfolding online in relation to grieving (communicating with the bereaved, the deceased or group members), (ii) participants (the bereaved vs. online memorial 'tourists') and (iii) different types of interactivity involved (guestbook comments, post-mortem wall posts, private messages, R.I.P. posts on SNSs, etc.). After scrutinising a significant number of sites, I chose to focus on a specific R.I.P. Facebook group site for a young adult from the United States, which accommodates over than one thousand members, including people who knew him well and people who

had never met him. For the purposes of sampling, I used the principle of *advenience*[6] (Barthes 2000[1980], 19), in an attempt to override selections prompted by personal and cultural preferences and look instead for a sense of dynamism and liveliness emanating from the site and the users' engagement with it. The research started in August 2013 and is still ongoing.

Facebook allows users to create memorials in two ways, either by memorialising the profile of the deceased (feature added in 2009), or by using the application *Facebook Groups*[7]. Group sites can be set up as *open*, making posts visible to all users, members and non-members alike, or *closed*, making posts visible to group members only. Memorial group sites on Facebook tend to be headed R.I.P. (Rest In Peace) followed by the name (or nickname) of the deceased.

The group site in question was created immediately after the death of an 18-year-old college student, David [pseudonym], in May 2012 by six of his closest friends in the state of Georgia, USA. The site is open to the public and is therefore accessible to all Facebook users. Part of the aim of the site is to commemorate and celebrate the deceased's life. In early stages of the project, Facebook messages were sent to the administrators of the FB group introducing the research project and reassuring the close friends of the deceased that all measures to safeguard the deceased's and participants' anonymity would be taken for the duration of the project. The administrators were asked to contact me directly if they had any concerns or questions about the project. Users and posts have been anonymised through the use of pseudonyms, and the reporting of sensitive information or references to places has been edited or avoided altogether. I am writing this article in the hope that my interest in this project will not be judged offensive to any of the authors of the posts, the creators of the group site or the bereaved members of the family.

The present article is concerned with the study of socially shared texts as practices of mourning on SNS memorial group sites; this means that the focus lies in the types of texts that users *produce/distribute* and *share* with and for a networked audience (John 2013; Androutsopoulos, 2013, 7).

Coding the corpus

The selected Facebook memorial group site has been coded and analysed for (i) content as a way of clarifying what is distributed or broadcast by and for networked audiences, (ii) significant moments aiming to capture how content is shared, and (iii) wall post openings and closings seeking to reveal the orienting generic framework guiding text production on the site.

Wall posts published on the site make up a corpus of 525 logs with a total 29, 136 words, ranging from a minimum of two words minimum to a maximum of 281 words. Postings on the group site date from the creation of the page in 2012 and cover a year following the death of David (new posts continue to appear on the group's timeline).

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[6] Roland Barthes, in his reflections on photography, history, theatre and death, talks of a feeling of attraction as a guide for picking out and analysing photographs and that he describes as *advenience* or even *adventure* (2000 [1980], 19 [italics in the original]). To avoid the impulses of an impatient subjectivity articulated in the form of I like/I don't like, Barthes opts instead for an articulation of the form "'This picture advenes, this doesn't,'" a principle which can be usefully applied to other types of data selection.

[7] In the case of celebrities, however, Facebook encourages the option of creating a new page that can accommodate an enormous number of 'friends.'

In terms of the sequentially unfolding discourse, wall posts cover a range of themes that have been coded in the corpus as *threads*, including sets of posts sequentially published on the timeline. Based on a close reading and re-reading of the entire corpus, the following overarching content types have been identified and used for coding individual posts: (i) death reactions, (ii) funeral services, (iii) death anniversaries, (iv) celebrations (birthday, graduation, Christmas, thanksgiving, sports games), (vi) other celebrations (Thanksgiving, Christmas) and, finally, (v) unclassified (sets of short sequences of one to five posts, which do not form a thematic thread). The coding was based on the identification of the dominant theme or references of the post, as well as on the sequential place of the post in a thread. For posts that did not include any relevant references, sequentiality was considered as the overriding criterion for inclusion in the thread.

For the coding of *moments* across the corpus, the unit of analysis is what Androutsopoulos (2014, 7) terms a *wall event*, "a multi-authored sequence of contributions that is displayed on a user's FB wall". Wall events consist of a minimum of one contribution (the initiative post, usually a so-called status update), followed by Likes and/or responsive contributions (Comments). Wall events thus encapsulate both the initiative moment of sharing and the responses of the networked audience. They are visually set off from each other and displayed in reverse chronological order on the profile page.

Finally, threads have been organised in excel spreadsheets, creating a single worksheet template for each in order to facilitate the qualitative analysis of the posts. The initial thread of sequential posts covering death reactions, populated in the course of two days with 17% (N=89) of the total posts in the corpus, has been also coded for author, gender and discourse structure, with a focus on framing devices. More specifically, each post has been assigned a code indicating whether the post features an opening/closing or not and, if it does, the forms of the opening/closing.

Based on reading and re-reading the posts, the following types of openings and closings were selected as categories for coding and analysis:

Types of opening

1) short epitaph (e.g. RIP)
2) greeting forms (e.g. hi, hey)
      3) address forms (e.g. Davey, Dave, David)
      4) discourse markers (e.g. well, first of all)
      5) politeness formula (e.g. thank you)

Types of closing

1) short epitaph (e.g. RIP, fly high, love always)
2) formulaic expressions denoting that the dead is missed (e.g. u are missed, missyou)
3) formulaic expressions denoting personal feelings (e.g. we all love you)
4) direct address to the dead (e.g. you're in a far more better place now)

The analysis in the next section discusses the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the corpus based on the afore-described coding categories, which will shed light on the production/distribution, sharing and discursive regimentation of posting activity online. The overarching aim of the analysis is to specify socio-discursive norms for mourning, which can point to the texture and textuality of Web 2.0 mourning.

Analysis

User-generated content on the Facebook wall

The first section of the analysis addresses the question of how posting activity is produced and distributed on the Facebook group site under study. The section examines the types of content broadcast on the Facebook R.I.P. memorial group site.

Posting activity on the site is at its highest in the days immediately before and after the set mourning ceremonies. More specifically, the first thread recording the immediate reactions to the death and the initial contributions following the creation of the group accumulates the majority of posts (N=89), which include updates on the services and memorial logs. In the posts, writers express their feelings about the deceased or stance vis-à-vis the death, or in some cases, leave notes of absence from the memorial services. Following the official services and over time posting activity decreases, but it never ceases entirely; new posts are being published each month at the moment of writing. Peaks of posting activity occur at specific times of the year, including graduation, birthday and death anniversaries and other celebrations, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The analysis of posts for threads indicates that sequences of posts accumulate on the wall in sequences of approximately fifty to ninety posts, prompted by off-line events and important calendar dates. In between the thematic threads, shorter post sequences of approximately one to five posts, which are unrelated to off-line events or marked dates, also feature across the corpus.

Thematic threads largely shape the texture of mourning online and organise the activity of writing around a flexible set of recurrent temporal points, as well as around specific topics, themes and references. Indexing off-line events and important calendar dates in individual posts across sequences yields a sense of emerging coherence in the spatially and temporally expanded space of grieving, which is frequented by bereaved friends, acquaintances and strangers before, contemporaneously to, and after the formal ceremonies. The entextualisation of individual moments of mourning on the site is achieved in a way that fits in with the wider community's experience of grieving, generating a multi-voiced wall of tributes for public display (*participatory entextualisation of mourning*). The coherence emerging in and through posting activity on the group site under study creates sets of expectations for the reception and production of new posts, with users feeling compelled to linguistically mirror previous posts while anticipating new ones. For instance, in the thread emerging as a response to the first birthday anniversary of David, all fifty-five posts broadcast on that day linguistically mirror each other and include the formulaic expression 'Happy birthday' with little, if any, additional content. Wider discourse expectations shaped in less formulaic threads on the site will be discussed in more detail later in this article (see the Section *Regimenting Discourse Activity*).

Unlike the thematic threads discussed above, shorter post sequences are produced as regular outbursts of posting activity by individual authors. This type of posting activity is seemingly linked to an individual's personal experience of grieving, and is akin to updates on Facebook profile pages that are described as dominated by breaking news of ordinary, everyday events, with users sharing slices of mundane life (Georgakopoulou 2013, 20). Facebook RIP updates include expressions of personal feelings about the dead, the sharing of memories and dreams, as well as updates on everyday life, adding to the accumulated tribute, praise and memorial posts across the corpus. In and through the use of Facebook RIP updates, individual group members entextualise moments of mourning on an one-off basis,

'stopping by' to update their connection with the dead in a way that is very similar to putting new flowers on a grave and which is similar to practices in virtual cemeteries (Roberts 2004, 63).

In summary, the texture of mourning on the Facebook group site under study relies on the temporal-thematic organisation of user-generated content, indexing important calendar dates and memorial ceremonies in the community, (re) creating or expanding in individual users a sense of belonging to a group of mourners who wish to continue to engage with or to become involved in practices of memorialisation. Users are afforded the opportunity to engage in writing activity as a way of conveying and validating their stances vis-à-vis the deceased and the event of the death with and for a networked group of bereaved individuals, enfranchising the mourning of close friends, acquaintances and members of the wider community (school and church) who may feel affected by the sudden death. The temporal and thematic points of reference guiding writing activity on the site suggest that the production of mourning online is regimented to some extent, creating specific expectations in group members about what or when to post, as well as a sense of duty to keep the group site regularly updated. Participation and affiliation with the group then emerges and is maintained via writers' adherence to these locally developing norms.

On the Facebook RIP group site, individual expressions of grief gain meaning in the context of collectively generated sequences of posts. At the same time, the public display of collectively created mosaics of tributes is enriched and personalised by regular, one-off, individual user contributions. The sense of belonging to a group, then, emerges from the collectively achieved texture of the site that takes the form of a live collective diary of grieving (Giaxoglou 2014). Users' affiliation with the online group of bereaved is enhanced by the interactive functions afforded by the Facebook platform. The next section turns to the consideration of ways in which content is communicated on the site as a means of pointing to the way in which interactive features are embedded in the group site's texture.

Sharing content on the Facebook wall

The texture of mourning online is enhanced by the specific kinds of activities afforded by the platform's social plug-ins, such as the Like button and the Comments box,[8] which allow users to share content and to co-construct meaning on the site in the absence of face-to-face communication cues.

The Like button is one of the key interactive social plug-ins on Facebook, visualised via the 'thumbs up' icon. Clicking on the button enables users to communicate with each other, to acknowledge their presence online and to share content, increasing its visibility for networked friends. The study of wall events suggests that the social plug-in in question is regularly used. and in fact more often than the Share and Comment interactive buttons, performing a range of functions.

While on personal Facebook profile pages the number of Likes a post accumulates is generally used as an analogue for the user's social status in the online community, on the RIP group site the Like button is predominantly used for enhancing the popularity and visibility of the group site itself and for affirming or validating group members' engagement with the site, by virtue of the fact that Like activities feature on personal profile timelines (see Example 1).

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[8] Facebook describes the Like button as a function that lets people share pages and content from their site on friends' Facebook profiles with one click, increasing the visibility of content to friends. The Comments plugin lets people comment on any content on the site (Facebook 2014).

<u>Example 1 (21 likes)</u>

> *PLEASE READ THIS EVERYONE!!!!!ITS ABOUT DAVID!!!!*
>
> *'Aye Sumone Who Should Tell EDITED NAME or EDITED NAME At The Gradution To Leave David's Chair*
> *WHere Its Suppose To Be & Ask His Mom For His Cap & Ginon? & Put It In His Chair & To Still Call His Name*
> *To Make It Like We Never Lost Him'*
> *PLEASE LIKE IF YOU AGREE ?!?!?!?!?!*
>
> (Facebook Memorial group wall post, No1, Accessed 20/04/2014).

The example above features the first post via which the group site was launched, in which the writer and one of the close friends of the deceased explicitly asks other group members to click Like as a way of expressing their agreement regarding the proposal for paying tribute to David on the day of the school graduation. In this case, the use of the Like button serves as a resource for group decision-making, akin to an online voting application that users can deploy for signalling approval of a certain course of action. Example 1, then, illustrates how the use of interactive social plug-ins enhances a sense of belonging to a group in which members are encouraged to commit both to online and offline memorialising activities.

The majority of accumulated Likes on posts across the corpus, however, indicate that the social plug-in in question is most regularly used as an acknowledgement of sharing, akin to a nod, arguably indexing the Liker's active engagement with posting activity on the site and indicating his/her support for online mourners and the deceased (cf. Marwick and Ellison, 2012, 14) (see Example 2). In online memorials, then, participants not only "upload grief and download compassion" (Blando et al. 2004; cited in Moss 2004, 79), but also upload mediated forms of support and compassion by clicking on Like.

<u>Example 2 (39 likes)</u>

> *I can still hear you singing and see you walking down the hallway, talking to everyone you passed. You were a great*
> *inspiration to so many people and you brought so many people so much closer together today. It was great to see everyone*
> *come together at the school as one. And people I never thought I'd see at a church were there tonight for you and they got to*
> *hear the gospel because of you. I know you were up there with a big smile on your face and praising Jesus with us as we*
> *worshipped him tonight in the youth room. I'll miss you David more than you know and I'll miss eating Moes with you on*
> *Monday's and we just talked last week about how we needed to start going again but now you're gone. I know no matter*
> *where I go you'll always be there in spirit and it's great to have you and my dad as my guardian angels, always with me!!*
> *Love you David!*
>
> (Facebook Memorial group wall post, No23 Accessed 20/04/2014).

Most importantly, the use of Like was found to be equally available to the networked public, irrespective of the place a user occupies in the hierarchy of legitimate mourners (with family, close friends, acquaintances and strangers with family occupying the top place in the hierarchy) (Marwick and Ellison 2012, 12). The use of the Comments box, which enables users to add their own content as response or follow-up to an individual post, is used less frequently[9] compared to the use of Like. Its use seems to be preferred by members of the group who interact with each other outside the online group and index a close relationship to the deceased, hence featuring high in the hierarchy of

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[9] It is estimated that the Comments plug-in is used as response or follow-up in the case of 9.3% of initiative posts in the corpus.

legitimate mourners. For example, the greatest amount of brief comments is inserted in appreciation of the posting of a tribute song created by friends of David and shared with the group. With very few exceptions, comments on the wall event are authored by individuals who knew the deceased personally, while Likes are used by anyone in the hierarchy of legitimate mourners.

The use of the social plug-in Like and the Comments box is therefore argued to be differentially distributed across users, depending on their place in the hierarchy of mourners; in other words, how well - if at all - they knew the deceased. The use of these social plugins enhances the popularity of the deceased. ascertaining the worthiness of remembering and commemorating him and, at the same time, indexes individual group members' engagement with activity on the site. In other words, user-generated content is not just produced and achieved in a participatory manner, but is also shared with and for a networked audience wishing to engage with memorialising activity as a way of enhancing the deceased's popularity, and to display that engagement via the use of Comment or Like. The final part of the analysis will turn to linguistic-discursive aspects of posting activity in order to clarify how users textually shape their posts, guided by more or less tight frameworks of genre.

Regimenting posting activity

This section addresses the question of the extent to which (and how) posting activity on SNS memorial sites is regimented in terms of discourse genres. This part of the analysis will focus on the analysis of the first thread (Death Reactions, N=89), which is considered as key for setting the tone for subsequent posts in the corpus.

Discourse genres of mourning[10] are prototypically emotional genres, whose structure and tone vary according to a set of parameters, including situational (setting, audience) and extra-textual parameters (gender of the mourner, gender of the deceased, relationship of mourner to the deceased). The present analysis looks at openings and closings of individual posts in order to shed light on the discourse shape of posts. Openings and closings serve to frame a message in terms of an orienting framework that sets expectations about the unfolding discourse and which guides interpretation. The sample is made up of eighty-nine (89) posts, of which forty-four (44) were authored by male and forty -five (45) by female participants.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative study of posts in the sample of openings and closings (see Section *Coding the Corpus*), it was found that openings are optional, while closings are preferred by the majority of authors. In terms of openings, more specifically, there does not seem to be a clear pattern emerging between the option of opening the post (52%) using any of the coded forms (short epitaph, form of greeting, direct address, discourse marker or politeness formula) or starting the message directly by using personal pronouns in the singular ('I', 'you', 'it's') or plural ('we') (46% of posts). Both seem to be equally acceptable.

A closer look at the posts suggests that about half of the posts (54%) featuring openings start with a direct address using the name of the deceased, either in full (David) or using a diminutive form of the name (Davey, Dave). The main

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[10] Popular genres of mourning and commemoration in the United States include eulogies, a speech or writing in praise of the dead and epitaphs, brief statements in memory of the dead inscribed on tomb headstones. Such genres have been predominantly associated with formal occasions of mourning, displaying conventional openings, phrases and closings, although the bereaved are increasingly opting for personalised versions in their choice or production of eulogies and headstone epitaphs.

body of these posts is varied (see Figure 1): it predominantly includes expressions of praise for the deceased, followed by a closing with the short epitaph 'RIP' (see underlined elements in Example 3). Alternatively, posts opening with a direct address can revolve around the expression of personal feelings about the dead or the event of death, and close with the short epitaph 'Fly High' (see underlined elements in Example 4)[11].

Example 3.

> *Davey u will always be rememberd man u were the best out of all players man we love. R.I.P [full name] rest in peace* (Facebook Memorial group wall post, No 32, Male sample, Accessed 01/06/2014)

Example 4.

> *Davey, I miss you a lot. But I know your [sic] in a better place watching over all of us. I'll never forget when you gave me that great advice about gossiping and drama 3 weeks ago. You always knew what to say, and you always knew how to put a smile on somebody's face. Can't wait to see you again. I love & miss you a lot. Fly high.* (Facebook Memorial group wall post, No 62, Female sample, Accessed 01/06/2014)

Figure 1. illustrates the two main types of discourse variations (v1, v2) observed in the sample of posts starting with a direct address.

In terms of gender patterns in the posts, it has been found that it is predominantly females who show a preference for opening their posts using the name of the dead (direct address), compared to using the short epitaph RIP at the start of their post (a single occurrence in the sample of female authored posts).

A smaller number of posts (17%) open with the short epitaph RIP and even fewer posts open with forms of greeting (11%), a discourse marker (9%) or politeness formulae (7%). Posts opening with the short epitaph RIP (see Figure 2) tend to be followed by a term of address or direct address, and close with an expression of missing the dead (see underlined elements in Example 5) or include an expression of praising the dead and lack a clear closing (see underlined elements in Example 6).

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[11] In longer posts, both praising and the expression of personal feeling can feature.

Example 5.

> *RIP* man .. *u are missed and loved by many* (Facebook Memorial group wall post, No2, Male Sample, Accessed 01/06/2014)

Example 6.

> *Rest in peace Davey. You where a great person all around & impacted so many lives. You will always be greatly missed but never forgotten.*
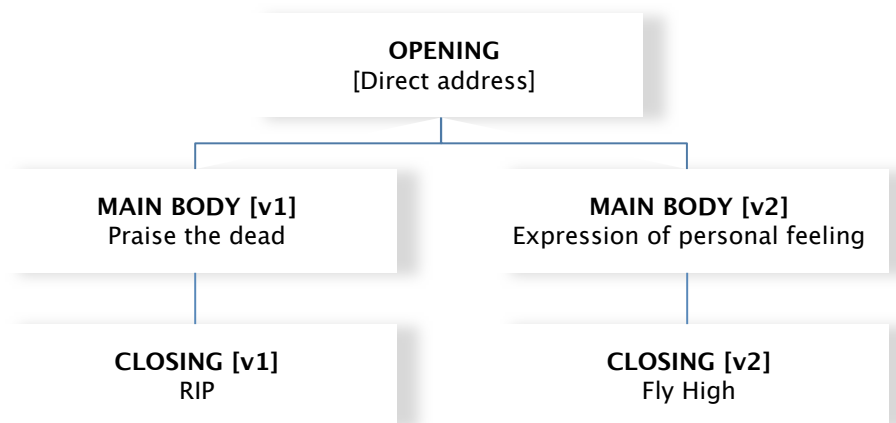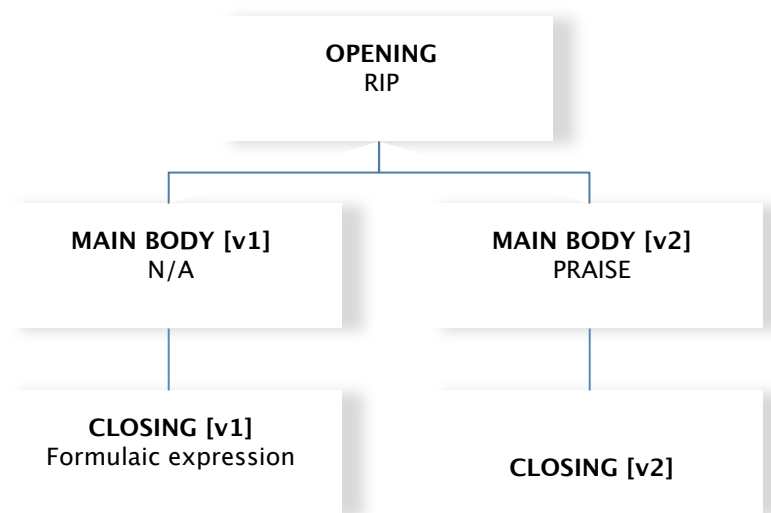> (Facebook Memorial group wall post, No6, Male Sample, Accessed 01/06/2014)

Figure 2. illustrates the two main types of discourse variations (v1, v2) observed in the sample of posts starting with the short epitaph (RIP).

In terms of gender patterns in the sample of posts opening with the short epitaph RIP, it has been found that male authors tend to prefer this type of discourse shape, also accompanying the epitaph with a term of address (bro, man), which indexes the author's close relationship to the deceased.

Finally, in terms of closings, the patterned distribution is clearer than in the analysis of openings. More specifically, the majority of posts feature some type of closing (85%), arguably serving to discursively set off the post from other posts on the tribute wall and discourage the development of a wall event in interaction with networked mourners. Short epitaphs (RIP, Fly High, love always) were found to be the preferred type of closing in almost half (42%) of the posts that featured a closing. Conventional expressions of personal feelings featured less often as closings (29%), while expressions of sadness or missing the dead were used even less (14%) (as these tend to feature in the main body of the message). Gender patterns indicate that females show a preference for the use of the short epitaph 'Fly High', while males preferred by far the use of RIP (with the exception of one post by a male author, which features both forms of short epitaphs).

The gendered patterning observed indicates that a more explicitly positive style tends to be generated by female authors, compared to a more solemn style shared among male authors. It is argued that the positive style is not only a

matter of gender, but that this style is viewed as being more appropriate for group members indexing a lower place in the hierarchy of legitimate mourners. In this group, male mourners occupy a higher place in the hierarchy of mourners, as they are the ones who were closer to the deceased, who was also male.

To sum up, the structure of posts displays a discourse patterning that varies in terms of openings and closings framing the message. The lack of clear patterning for openings suggests the lack of strict generic regimentation and points to the emergence of *ad hoc* generic blending depending on extra-textual parameters, such as the gender of the author and the relationship with the deceased. The opening of posts by the use of direct address or the use of personal pronouns invokes genres of personal writing and diary writing, respectively. The preference for including some form of closing, especially the expressions R.I.P. or Fly High, invokes the genre of short epitaphs inscribed on headstones. The analysis therefore points to the mixing of conventional genres of mourning, including epitaphs, letter and diary writing.

In conclusion, patterned variation in the discourse structure of Facebook RIP posts in the use of framing devices (openings and closings) indicates that the speech style guiding the discursive production and reception of posts in the semi-public digital environment under study is based on an *ad hoc* generic blending of formal and vernacular genres of mourning in response to extra-textual parameters, such as the gender of the poster or the relationship with the deceased. The analysis extends previous research, which has acknowledged the emergence of social norms on Facebook memorial pages as a process of negotiation that involves both wide cultural norms and specific contextual understanding (Marwick and Ellison 2012, 32), by providing a close examination of the posts' discourse structure. The findings are preliminary at this stage, as they will need to be further tested against a larger sample to include all threads in the corpus under study, as well as across different memorial sites.

Conclusion

This paper examined practices of sharing mourning on Web 2.0 participatory environments with a focus on a selected Facebook R.I.P. group site, which presents a rich and complex picture of text-centred, informal grieving activity, regulated by the closest friends and peers of the deceased instead of by the family or the funeral home.

The analysis examined wall posts as post sequences, wall events and texts with the aim to shed light to how content on the site is produced, shared and regimented. It was suggested that user-based content generation involves users' selection of moments for public display relating to offline ceremonies of mourning, calendar-important dates or personal updates, contributing to the production of a textured wall in memory of the dead. The texturing of mourning around the thematic organisation of content around important calendar dates and off line ceremonies of mourning, interpolated by regular outbursts of personal updates helps create vernacular and personalised memorial spaces. Similar to web cemeteries and online memorials (Roberts 2004), Facebook R.I.P. group sites afford users the opportunity to give meaning to their individual expressions of grief in the context of their participatory entextualisation of moments of mourning. In addition, through the use of social plugins (Like button, Comment box) users affirm their engagement with the site, as well as their commitment to supporting each other and raising the deceased's post-mortem profile through posting or interacting with others on the site.

In the Facebook memorial site under study, as in other social network sites, writing remains at the core of digital activity and is used along with visual and multimodal resources in users' technologised representations of self in participatory contexts. Even though these contexts appear to be less regimented and more agentive, they in fact feature

subtle thematic, interactional and discursive regimentation. The representation of mourning in Web 2.0 environments is achieved through **participatory entextualisation** (Androutsopoulos 2013); users select significant moments for public display, configuring the semiotic resources at their disposal to produce a textured wall. In and through such entextualising activity, participants (re)create for and with the networked bereaved a sense of belonging to a group, affording the potential for the exchange of emotional support resources. The group also accommodates the broadcast of personal updates helping users to maintain bonds with the dead while attesting to the deceased's popularity and status as a person who was greatly loved and missed[12].

Web 2.0 mourning is found to be largely a reconfigured, rather than an entirely new form of mourning practice, which relies on sharing user-generated content produced in an *ad hoc* blending of formal and vernacular genres dependent on (i) situational (date of posting activity, position in the thread or sequence) and (ii) extra-textual parameters (gender of poster, relationship with the deceased). The textuality of contributed posts is reconfigured from existing genres of mourning, namely epitaphs and eulogies, as well as genres of vernacular writing such as diary writing and letter writing, which set up specific local norms for posting activity and interaction on the site. This article provided a socio-discursive investigation of mourning practices seeking to contribute to the growing, in-depth understanding of the texture and textuality of Web 2.0 mourning practices.

To conclude, the call by researchers of online texts in digital media for interdisciplinary approaches to the study of social practices in online worlds (see Georgakopoulou 2006; Jones and Hafner 2012) also applies to the study of death-related practices online. Such an interdisciplinary direction would greatly benefit from discourse-centred situated studies of grieving and mourning online practices that can complicate our accounts of digital death and mourning.

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[12] It is important, however, to note that posting on the memorial site need not be seen exclusively as a therapeutic outlet for the bereaved. Posting activity on memorial sites also constitutes a cultural account and objectification of grief, reproducing and remediating dominant ideologies of mourning in contemporary societies in ways that deserve further scholarly attention.

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Thanatos

A grief that cannot be shared: Continuing relationships with aborted fetuses in contemporary Vietnam

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Abstract[1]

For Vietnamese women who undergo an abortion, the deeply distressing experience can be extenuated by the stigmatisation of abortion and the disenfranchisement of grief relating to it. Abortion is a sensitive subject in Vietnam, embedded in moral ambiguities concerning youth sexual activities and the ancestral relationship the Vietnamese have with the dead. The aborted fetus is not easily reconciled with the act of ancestor worship and questions arise as to how women express their grief and if a continuing relationship should be sustained with the aborted fetus. Based on twelve months' ethnographic research, this article contends that some Vietnamese women are continuing a relationship with their aborted fetus within the online memorial Nghia Trang Online as a way of performing ancestor worship and expressing their grief. Through the theory of durable biography and disenfranchised grief, it will be demonstrated that a continuing relationship is formed through communication and online offerings to express grief, ask for forgiveness, share past and present experiences, and through prayer and guidance for the fetus in the otherworld.

Introduction

...abortion IS BAD. In our culture people who kill their babies or abort are not treated in fairways. But actually they don't care about what others think. And those people seem unsociable, I think. But they're not worth to be helped. They have to pay for what they did... I find it so messed up about those people who aborted or killed their own babies. In our culture, if you get pregnant without getting married, you'll be treated like a prostitute, and prostitutes are those whom

others will treat LIKE A PIECE OF SHIT. (Vinh[2], an English student in the outer districts of Ho Chi Minh City.)

Son, how are you? There are many thoughts which are piling on me and making me tired and in a terrible mood. I want to erase everything I am thinking about and start something new. I almost can't stand it anymore. I could not sleep well last night because of these thoughts. There is no one with whom I can share my feelings and it leaves me feeling uncomfortable and lonely. If I could cry I would, but these tears have run dry. I feel as I am at a standstill. Only one thing left, my little son. If only you and I could travel far away. (Communication between a member and fetus on the Vietnamese memorial website *Nghia Trang Online*; translation[3].)

The above quotations highlight differing perceptions of abortion in Vietnam. The first is by a young man on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, who feels that those who undergo abortion are morally similar to prostitutes and deserve an obliteration of societal care; an endless round of scorn should await. The second quotation illuminates online communication between a mother and her fetus, in this case a son who would never be born. The tone is reflective and insightful about her recent feelings and powerfully interweaves the living and the dead into a conjoined moment in time: while the future for them cannot be, their online communication remains. At first glance, the words could perhaps be written by any mother, anywhere. There is a familiarity to the longings and sadness examined and yet this communication is intrinsically tied to Vietnamese cosmologies relating to the dead, abortion, technology, and fundamentally to the relationship between those who abort and their unborn offspring.

While there is a large body of research concerned with Vietnamese women's suffering after an abortion (Gammeltoft 2003, 2006, 2010; Nguyen and Liamputtong 2007; Whittaker 2010), how Vietnamese use online memorials to mitigate their grief has not been studied. This article argues that abortion brings about a profound disenfranchised grief for some Vietnamese women. In the online realm however, a durable biography can be created between a mother and her fetus through direct communications and online offerings, which can help to enfranchise her grief. This article will firstly explore research concerned with the continuation of a relationship with the dead through the concept of a durable biography (Walter 1996), which is where individuals make sense of their loss through their own recollections and by conversing with others about the dead, which in turn weaves the deceased meaningfully back into their own life. Conversations and the sharing of experiences and emotions are the key elements in the continued relationships.

This article will then examine the concept of disenfranchised grief (Doka 2002) – grief difficult to express in society, and not socially sanctioned – contextualising it within literature on grief following perinatal death more widely. For those who experience pregnancy loss through abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, or other pregnancy complications[4], it can be a devastating experience extenuated by disenfranchised grief. This section will demonstrate that in online

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[2] To protect anonymity minor details concerning informants, members, and those memorialised on *Nghia Trang Online* have been changed. Pseudonyms have also been utilized.

[3] Vietnamese translated to English has been noted at the end of quotes. All other quotes are verbatim. Translations in this work are the authors.

[4] While I am aware that the experiences of abortion and other forms of pregnancy loss may be profoundly different, for the purposes of this article, abortion and other pregnancy loss constitute a broader context of loss around issues embedded in the memorialisation process, including: the disenfranchisement of grief, the lack of long-term support, and the ambiguity of the body and personhood of the fetus. I weave in these other forms of perinatal loss to help compliment the theory more thoroughly as there is limited research concerning abortion and online memorialisation.

memorials members can powerfully enfranchise their grief, remember their fetus and connect with others to discuss the deceased and find support. An overview of the project, the methodology utilised, the field site and the informant selection will then be presented.

Moving on, attitudes towards abortion and youth sexual practices are analysed in relation to ancestor worship, which is the main relationship Vietnamese have with the dead, to demonstrate significant reasons it is difficult to continue a relationship with an aborted fetus in Vietnam. Many Vietnamese believe that an aborted fetus will "haunt" those responsible and lead to future fertility difficulties. In the face of such a powerful cosmology of the dead, the question becomes, how can Vietnamese women remember their fetus?

One possible way, which is the final focus of this article, is through a continued relationship online, as Vietnamese women[5] who have undergone an abortion visit the online memorial site *Nghia Trang Online* (NTO) to create a tomb for their fetus. It will be argued that members use online communication and offerings to engage in ancestor worship, express grief to the fetus, ask **for** forgiveness, and pray and guide the fetus in the otherworld. Through these interactions, a durable biography (Walter 1996) is created which reincorporates the fetuses back into the world of the living.

Continuing Bonds, Durable Biography and Disenfranchised Grief

While death ends a physical relationship, research has recognised the important bonds which can continue between the living and the dead (Francis et al. 2005; Howarth 2000; Klass et al. 1996; Valentine 2008; Walter 1996). This was not always so: previous influential psychological, psychoanalytical and psychiatric models of grief and bereavement argued that after death, survivors had to detach themselves from relations with the dead through the untangling of emotional ties (Parkes 1986; see Klass et al. 1996, 5–14 for discussion). Such a paradigm defined the process of grief as being something which needed "to be eventually 'resolved' by 'detaching', 'letting go' and 'moving on'" to new relationships (Walter 1999, xi). Indeed, Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nikman note:

> The view of grief most accepted in this century holds that for successful mourning to take place the mourner must disengage from the deceased, and let go of the past…(T)o experience a continuing bond with the deceased in the present has been thought of as symptomatic of psychological problems. (Klass et al.1996, 4)

Klass et al. (1996) coined the term *continuing bonds* to express the meaningful ways individuals could continue a relationship with the dead, and were in part responsible for the shift in bereavement literature which argued that the dead could be incorporated back into the life of the living.

In the same year as this transformative research into continuing bonds, Tony Walter (1996) proposed the theory of *durable biography* that also interrogated previous grief and bereavement scholarship. Using personal experiences of loss through the deaths of his father and girlfriend, Walter demonstrated how we shape our understandings of the deceased through our own and others' recollections in a durable biography, as the dead are once again weaved into

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[5] Vietnamese women were not alone in their online interactions (other informants included the father, friends and sometimes other family), but for the purpose of this article I concentrate on the experiences of women. Women formed the large majority of members who visited and participated in the fetus online memorials and consequently, it was Vietnamese women who participated in the research.

the ongoing narrative of the living. Part of this process means that a biography created by individuals needs "to be reasonably accurate and this requires testing it against the views of others" (ibid, 13) who knew the deceased individual.

However, Walter (ibid, 15) suggests "our *need* to talk about the dead, our need reflexively to monitor our relationships with them…may be increasing, and yet…the availability of others with whom to do this may be decreasing". Reasons for this according to Walter (ibid, 15-16) include: the availability of medical staff who can explain why the deceased died; intergenerational differences in grieving; religious decline; family and work relationships, and "longevity combined with geographical mobility. Those who knew the dead person are often physically separated from one another" (ibid, 16). The question arises then as to how in modern societies, where there is a "disembedding from place, from tradition and from kin" (ibid, 15) and a difficulty in finding people to talk to about the dead, do individuals still create such a durable biography?

Walter demonstrated the need to talk with others, through the example of self help groups with members who "have had similar experiences and share one's own feelings. There is a sharing of experience. They do not share objective knowledge of the deceased, but, having suffered the same category of loss, they do have similar feelings" (Walter 1996, 18). Thus while not knowing the deceased personally, it is the sharing of feeling with those who can understand and emphasize which becomes meaningful in the creation of a durable biography. This is vital for individuals whose grief is disenfranchised.

Kenneth Doka (1999, 37) defines disenfranchised grief as "experienced by those who incur a loss that is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported". Subsequently, "it can be much more difficult to mourn and reactions are often complicated" (ibid). This is in stark contrast to enfranchised grief in which individuals feel their grief is sanctioned and supported by society, and that they are free to express it (Corr 2002, 41). Doka (2002, 10-14) is concerned with how difficult deaths (due to AIDS, suicide or homicide, etc.) contribute to a sense of disenfranchised grief. In this context, perinatal loss can lead to a profoundly difficult grief for survivors, and the following section examines why this is and how online memorials can play their part in the enfranchisement of grief.

Perhaps they just don't know what to say[6]: Pregnancy Loss, Silence and Memorialisation

The experience of pregnancy loss – through abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth – is for many individuals a deeply painful experience, extenuated by the disenfranchisement of grief (Lang et al. 2001; Layne 1997; Martel 2014; Weaver-Hightower 2012, 473). Marcus Weaver-Hightower (2012, 473) hauntingly illustrates the disenfranchisement of grief and the rupture in social relationships through the personal experience of the stillbirth of his daughter Matilda:

> …(B)eing the parent of a stillborn child bestows a stigma. You become the living representation of
> the worst-case scenario. You are 'those poor people,' and consciously or not some people pull away.
> Perhaps they fear your bad luck rubbing off. Perhaps they just don't know what to say. (Weaver-
> Hightower 2012, 473.)

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6 Weaver-Hightower 2012, 473.

Similarly Linda Layne (1997, 292) writes of the profound effect related to the "cultural denial of pregnancy loss", wherein "relatives, friends, and co-workers pretend that nothing happened". Doka supports this, stating:

> Perinatal deaths lead to strong grief reactions, yet research indicates that many still perceive the loss to be relatively minor… An abortion, too, can constitute a serious loss…but the abortion can take place without the knowledge or sanction of others or even the recognition that a loss has occurred. (Doka 2002, 11.)

Not yet a citizen of society and yet deeply treasured by the living, the loss of life through pregnancy loss is enmeshed in ambiguities, often a lack of body and social identity, which extenuates the loss dramatically for those involved (see Lang et al. 2001, 184). How then can individuals express their grief and relate to others with similar experiences of loss?

Online memorialisation is one way that individuals are engaging with pregnancy loss, through: expressing emotions relating to loss; remembering their child through written, audio and visual communication; connecting with a wider online community[7] of members; and accessing relevant information (Flohr Sørensen 2011; Godel 2007; Kean 2009; Refslund Christensen & Sandvik 2013). As Helen Kean (2009, 157–158) observes, "the technology of the Internet has clearly been central to the flourishing of pregnancy loss discourse and memorialization", noting that the discourse of loss as examined through her research, primarily in a North American context, involves a narrative of prehistory and history of the child and an exploration of the future experiences they could have had in life. In these environments, individuals can resist disintegration and alienation and be "publicly acknowledged through the appropriation of new communicative technologies" (ibid., 267; for the enfranchisement of grief more widely in online memorials see de Vries and Rutherford 2004; de Vries and Moldaw 2012; Gilbert et al., 2009; Hollander 2001; Moss 2004, 78).

The field site, methodology and informants

Twelve months' fieldwork was undertaken between 2012-2013 in Vietnam within the major cities of Ho Chi Minh City (South Vietnam), Hanoi (North Vietnam) and Da Nang (in central Vietnam), through online and offline participation in the online memorial site *Nghia Trang Online* (which translates to 'Cemetery Online', also known as *Nho Mai* which translates to 'Forever Memory') and also on Facebook[8] social networking site. NTO was created in 2008 and currently has around 70,000 members, and offers a wide array of online memorialisation options including cemeteries for children, artists, war martyrs, historic people, foreigners, Catholics, Buddhists, and pets. Online,

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[7] I use online community in Howard Rheingold's (1993, 57) sense as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace". (For further discussions see Gruzd, Wellman, Takhteyev 2011, 1295; Wilson and Peterson 2002).

[8] Facebook was also used by some NTO members to commemorate their loved ones and to connect with a wider audience. Those who visited the fetus tomb would occasionally use Facebook to chat with fellow members and to express their emotions in regards to abortion. This could be achieved through the changing of a profile image to a sad face for example, or the posting of music which reflected their mood in the Facebook feed. In this research follow up interviews with informants at times took place through the Facebook chat function, which became particularly helpful when returning to Australia.

members can create tombs for the deceased, light incense and candles, leave messages (both audio and textual) and "send" online offerings. Online offerings are the uploading of digital pictures of an endless array –food, drink, money, clothes, toys, cars –which reflects offline ancestor worship where paper objects are burnt and food placed on the family altar, which will be addressed in the next section. The online memorials generally consist of a picture of the deceased, their name, the year and place of birth, the date of death, and the location of burial. Some members meet offline and participate in death days (*gio*), cemetery visits, birthdays, weddings, charity events and social gatherings. The online memorial within NTO that is the focus of this article, the tomb for fetuses, has approximately 700 tombs. With 22,000 online candles lit for fetuses aged between 2 weeks and 5 months, it is the largest online memorial for fetuses in Vietnam.

Image 1. A tomb created in Nghia Trang online for two fetuses. One is for a fetus 12 weeks in age, the other seven weeks. Notice the online offerings which have been posted on the tomb, including: teddy bears and other toys; cakes; milk bottles; candles; images of buses and trains; shoes; flowers; and cartoon characters for young children. (Image uploaded from Nghia Trang Online.)

In recent years anthropologists have engaged with the Internet and ethnography as an important field for the studies of culture and social interaction (see e.g. Boellstorff 2008; Miller & Slater 2000; Garcia et al. 2009 for an in-depth discussion on the use of ethnography in Internet research). Defining the field from an online and offline perspective can sometimes be difficult, with a myriad of 'in-between spaces'. This research removed itself from a single bound field by necessity and moved within and between online and offline interactions. At times I was deeply immersed in the field, spending whole days on the computer within NTO. At other times I was less focused on the NTO site, and my time revolved around learning the language, visiting national commemorations, museums, pagodas and cemeteries. Informants were busy with their own everyday life and so interviews often had to be planned for distant dates.

This research has been a part of a larger PhD project conducted at Adelaide University, concerning the extraordinarily diverse intersection of death, ancestor worship, memory, forgetting and online memorialisation in contemporary Vietnam. The research has been qualitative in nature with online and offline participation/observation and textual analysis of NTO, as well as interviews and surveys. Due to the social stigma and sensitive issues surrounding abortion in Vietnam, informants were introduced to the researcher through members who were already incorporated into the research. Messages were placed both on NTO and Facebook, notifying members and moderators of my research interests and asking for any interested participants to contact me. In these ways I was able to access a cross-section of members and moderators who both did and did not visit the online fetus memorial. Interviews took place where the informants felt comfortable, usually in coffee lounges, or the parks which thread their

way throughout the main cities of Vietnam. Follow-up interviews were arranged in Australia through email, Skype, NTO and Facebook.

A lot of girls have to kill their babies[9]: Attitudes to abortion, ancestor worship and the haunting by the fetus in Vietnam

In Vietnam premarital sexual activity is understood as being morally wrong from a religious and social perspective (Gammeltoft 2006, 2010; Nguyen and Liamputtong 2007). Hoa Ngan Nguyen and Pranee Liamputtong (ibid., 92) remark, "when young, unmarried women engage in premarital sex, they are considered as 'stained' and 'spoiled', and are devalued morally". Any resulting pregnancies and subsequent abortions become "an indication of illicit and immoral sexual activity; as evidence of a selfish pursuit of sexual pleasure or other personal gains"[10] (Gammeltoft 2003, 139) and compounds the stigma associated with abortion. Many Vietnamese I met expressed the opinion that abortion was morally wrong, from a religious, moral and social perspective. In Hanoi, a young student remarked: "*I'm Buddhist so Buddha said it's not good so I think it's not good either. Because the baby in a woman is still a human and they need to live. I just hope that when they have babies they could have money for them and they won't need to make a mistake*". She continued: "*a lot of girls have to kill their baby because for them it is a mistake, the family won't like that and the guy wants to leave, they have lots of bad comments made to them*". At times informants became noticeably upset when discussing abortion and likened Vietnamese who underwent abortion to prostitutes. Along with this, an important aspect of the moral devaluation associated with abortion stems from the relationship Vietnamese have with their dead, known as ancestor worship.

Ancestor worship (*tho cung to tien*) – 'remembering the moral debt' – is the "moral cornerstone of Vietnamese philosophy, religion and cultural life" (Phan 1993, 161). In Vietnamese cosmology, the dead continue their existence in the otherworld (*the gioi khac*) as family members provide offerings of food, drink and votive paper offerings (*hang ma*) at the ancestor altar. Votive paper offerings – which are primarily made of bamboo and paper to facilitate burning and the consequent transmutation to the otherworld – include everyday objects such as umbrellas, motorbikes, houses, toothbrushes, combs, iPhones, televisions, washing machines, and money; these can be used in the afterlife. Family members in turn ask for assistance from their ancestors, which can come in the form of good luck and guidance (see Bich 1998, 221–223; Endres & Lauser 2011, 124–125; Kwon 2007, 91–93).

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[9] Quote from informant.

[10] Wider issues enmeshed with youth sexuality and abortion include: avoidance, embarrassment and lack of knowledge in relation to sex and contraception use (Binh 2012; Nguyen et al. 2006; Wolf et al. 2010); limited communication about sexual topics between parents and children (Nguyen 2009, 8–10; Trinh et al. 2009); and social and economic transformations implemented by the Vietnamese government through the Renovation (*doi moi*) (Ngo et al. 2008; Nguyen 2007, 301–308; Nguyen & Liamputtong 2007). In research undertaken in Ho Chi Minh City, Hoa Ngan Nguyen, Pranee Liamputtong and Gregory Murphy (2006, 406) note that although condoms and contraceptive pills can be relatively cheap or even free, there are fears relating to their use; many young Vietnamese displayed general ignorance and even disgust to contraception. Access to contraception can likewise be difficult for unmarried adolescents due to the social disapproval of premarital sex (Wolf et al. 2010, 60).

Image 2: Online offerings within NTO, including (from top left to bottom right): towels and clothing; playschool toys; clothing for a young girl; clothing for a young baby which reads 'I love Dad'; umbrellas; wooden children's toys; a glass of milk; dessert including fruit and ice cream; and Vietnamese spring rolls. (Images uploaded from Nghia Trang Online.)

In death, not all ancestors are equal: forgoing proper funeral and burial rituals (such as where the deceased's body is absent) is a 'bad' death (see Kwon 2006, 12; Malarney 2002, 179) which creates wandering ghosts (*con ma*). These ancestors roam hungry for the nutrition of memory never served, hellishly caught between the world of the living and that of the dead (see Gustafsson 2007, 62–65). Unless appeased by appropriate offerings, the living cannot expect assistance from wandering ghosts, but instead hold them responsible for bad things that happen to them. With this in mind, the aborted dead sit uneasily in Vietnamese conceptions of the dead: they are not yet born and yet, in the words of one informant, "a soul and spirit remain".

After an abortion, ritually appeasing and remembering fetuses is problematic for Vietnamese women and their families, who are often concerned with the well-being and future reproduction of their family members in the face of 'powerful memories' (Gammeltoft 2010, 71; see also Nguyen & Liamputtong 2007) and the potential haunting of the living by the deceased fetus. Gammeltoft (ibid., 66) notes that many of her informants in Hanoi articulated the desire for a proper burial of their fetus after an abortion. Despite this, up to half decided to leave burial rituals to hospital staff, in part encouraged by senior family members to enable the process of separating the fetus from the larger extended family of ancestors in the home (ibid., 67–69). How then can young Vietnamese women deal with their grief concerning an abortion, as well as access a community of others to share their experiences? It is the argument of the following section that Vietnamese women use NTO to express grief, continue a relationship with the deceased fetus, and receive support from other members.

No appropriate words: Sharing grief and finding support

> *The heart and my spirit are the most important thing and I could not feel them. It's hard to talk about this with friends and family in Vietnam. It is because of our Asian culture. There are no appropriate words to describe my loss and I kept the abortion secret except for one friend. In Vietnamese culture, women are not allowed to get pregnant with their boyfriend before marriage. If they want to keep their child they have to get married as soon as possible. Having an abortion is the worst thing.* (Thuy, 23 year old female, translation.)

For Thuy, a young student from Da Nang in central Vietnam, her recollections of abortion brought with them a deep feeling of remorse, which was extenuated by her silence. For a long time it was simply an experience that she knew was 'dangerous' to share with others as it would bring judgement and scorn, the type illustrated in the quote at the beginning of this article. Her boyfriend did not want to continue the relationship and even her friend could not really understand.

She had learnt of the online memorial site in a newspaper article about a young student who had killed himself, but it was not something which particularly interested her. "*I knew about Nghia Trang Online a long time before I created a tomb but I didn't really care. It was not relevant to me*". After the abortion however, Thuy's difficulty in expressing her loss led her to NTO. Thuy was not alone as immediacy was given to the online memorialisation of fetuses for many informants I spoke to, as if the floodgates had been released on a silence long sustained. On learning of NTO through newspapers, family or friends, several members talked of feeling physically shocked and saddened in some cases that they did not know of NTO earlier. It is a sentiment shared between members, as expressed to the fetuses themselves. "*I read of this website in the newspaper! So I, your mother, have come to make a grave for you*" (translation) states one member. "*Your mother knows of this site through online media. I felt indescribable joy when I realized this would be the home of you, young child. It has somewhat lessened my remorse*" (translation) writes another.

The creation of an online tomb was the beginning of members' communication with their fetus and other site users. Online, members could light 'thousands of candles' and have 'thousands of memories' for their deceased, and the deceased of others; as one participant observed, "*there are many persons who can remember my child here*", bringing the dead into a wider community of members. In comparison, offline cemeteries were described as isolating experiences. As noted by a long-term moderator of the site:

> *NTO is a special community where many people come together thinking about the person who passed away, pray for them then try their best to make the best for life, including the person who is dead and those still alive. People at NTO can share feelings, happiness and sorrow, creating friendship… it is like a big family with love, sharing and caring. Its contents are happy and sorrow, smiles and tears. Many people originally came to NTO with curiosity, but increasingly fascinated by the great humanity of it. NTO occasionally raises some problems, but these are quickly resolved…Love and sharing is equally important.* (Hanh, 37 years old.)

Interactions evolved over time and created a balance in the life of some members:

> *When I feel sad I think about people on NTO. I know I cannot fall down, it makes me strong again. I don't have the most terrible life in the world. Many people do not have jobs, are homeless, have more grief than me, have many more children pass.* (Linh, 43 years old.)

For Thuy, who created an online tomb for her fetus, the knowledge of others using the site was central to her time spent online:

> *Maybe what I have done is to share my sadness and my happiness with others. Though we have not met we understand each other. We can release inner feelings that cannot be shared with anybody else. After I made the mistake I really came to understand the feeling of those around me much more. I cared more about other people. On the tomb I can care and share the pain that other people suffered and I can understand more about them and make more friends.* (Translation)

Thuy had discovered people with whom she could share her feelings and experiences. They did not know the deceased but they had suffered the same category of loss and had experienced similar feelings (Walter 1996, 18). *Nghia Trang Online* enabled a community for Thuy, which she felt she could not find otherwise. She had had no physical site at which to burn votive paper, neither a family altar or a cemetery; her silence had effectively severed the possibility of advice and supporting words from family or friends, and the stigma of abortion meant that such succour may not have been afforded to her if she had spoken. She was, in a sense, "disembedd(ed) from place, from tradition and from kin" (ibid, 15). NTO provided a home for her fetus. The digital candles and online offerings, every pixel she used to create the online tomb, form a new tradition of online remembrance. And through the sharing of stories, her voice joins with others, her online kin. Through the interaction with other members, and communication with and offerings to the fetus (which will be discussed in the following sections) the deceased is being purposefully worked back to have a 'stable' place in that of the living.

Continuing a relationship in the online memorial

Communication within online memorials can be multifaceted and evolving; survivors can "tell the dead how much they are missed, give them updates on recent activities and reminisce" (Roberts 2012, 59), express thankfulness that the suffering is over for the deceased, relate experiences of guilt and anger (de Vries & Rutherford, 12-13), and communicate shocking directness and sincerity (Geser 1998, 7). Online memorials are not only engaging with the expression of memory and grief, they are hosting continuing relationships with the deceased.

Within NTO, communication with the fetus forms an integral part of the sustained relationship, as the fetus is told about everything from money concerns, work life, schooling, romantic relationships, friends and family, grocery shopping, arguments, and national holidays. One informant stated that she would tell the fetus if she and her partner (the fetus's father) were having a difficult time and would pray to the fetus for help. Others felt that the fetus had good and bad days exactly like them. One member demonstrates communication about the past and present, while weaving the fetus into everyday experiences. I quote several passages (which took place over a number of weeks) from NTO between a mother (Phuong) and her fetus, to illustrate the way she incorporates her fetus into a continuing relationship:

> *I love you child! After you died I cried every day. I cried because I missed you and I felt sorry for your father, who is also hurting. I cried because I felt it was my entire fault. I love you child. Child, I still love your father and I want to make him happy. But I am not confident to love again and I'm afraid he will suffer. When we broke up it was very difficult for your mother and I am afraid to re-live that experience now. Please child, how will I survive this? What can I do now?*

Hello, my dear. Are you scared of the rain from the storm today? I intended to go out and borrow some clothing for a work opportunity but how will it go in such bad weather? I met your father yesterday. We are still angry about many things. I thought things would change for the best between us but it never seems to change.

Hi, my dear. I had a memorable work interview today although there was heavy rain in the morning. It stopped raining, and then it was sunny again. This made me happy and glad. I wanted to share this happiness with you.

Hi, my dear. Are you healthy or not? Your grandfather is sick again. He has been health checked and treated at the hospital. Could you bless him to not be sick anymore and get healthy? Please bless your grandmother as well. I love you. (All above quotes translated.)

Embedded in these seemingly routine messages underlying themes emerge. The fetus becomes a silent listener but is also asked to look after the sick grandfather, and asked questions in relation to Phuong's changing attitudes to the father. The fetus is brought into the everyday life and family of Phuong, through stories of work opportunities and observations of the weather and there is a clear desire for the fetus to intervene and be present. Far from being a passive bystander, Phuong's fetus is profoundly incorporated into her life narrative and asked to be a continued part of it.

Along with communication which imbedded the fetus into their life, members also expressed loss and regret to the fetus, apologised and asked for forgiveness, and also explained the reasons for the abortion. Fetuses were urged to understand the parent's situation and to empathise with how difficult the abortion was for them. One member states: "*Can anyone understand the pain one feels when one is handed medication and kills their child? It was the most painful day of your mother's life*" (translation). Another writes: "*Now all I have is one grave on a network compared to a happy family*" (translation). The expression of grief communicated to the fetus became a central experience for those who visited the online memorial:

Forgive your mother child! These past ten years I have not been able to forget. I cannot forgive myself that I made such a decision at a young age. This mistake cannot be accepted. Even though your mother and father now have a new life, your mother cannot abandon her past guilt. I will always love you! You are always in my heart and in my mind! (Truc, 29 year old female)

I am so sorry I have taken away the right of the child. I cannot justify my actions. I was not brave enough to give birth at the time. Please forgive your senseless and cruel mother. I apologize a thousand times because I did not keep you inside of me. The greatest happiness was your life, but now I have lost you child. I am so selfish and heartless. I love you more than everything I have in life. Peace child! (Kim, 21 year old female)

I love you child! I am sorry for not keeping you my child. I do not know what to say, so please just remember that I apologise a thousand times. Please do not blame me for this. It has been many years and I have had to repress this pain. I have had to bury this pain in my heart. Your father abandoned me but you should not blame your father! I love you! I believe that you still remember your mother and I am still tormented by what happened to me. Please do not be angry with your mother. (Mai, 26 year old female) (All above quotes translated)

There is intensity in these expressions and a sense of a voice finally opening up. For a number of informants it was the first time in a long time, if ever, they had been able to express such sentiments. It is possible, in some cases, that these

expressions may actually *enhance* or *extend* grief (see Klass 2006, 844–845; Stroebe and Schut 2005, 482), that these continued relationships encouraged by the very existence of the website and its community, prolong what may have been abated more swiftly in the silence; there are after all roughly 700 tombs. However, informants in this research have all reported overwhelmingly positive associations in their site participation and so I would argue that where grief is *engaged with* more comprehensively, and articulated more clearly –as resonates in the above passages –there would be a mitigation of grief. Apart from providing a forum for grief, there is another aspect of NTO that works towards lessening the severity of grief: the facilitation of online offerings, which are believed to have a very real effect on the 'life' of the aborted fetus.

To be full like the current life: Online offerings for the fetus

An expression of ancestor worship is the burning of paper votive objects to appease and support the deceased in the otherworld. For many Vietnamese who participated in this research, online offerings were a crucial component in the relationship with their fetus; members primarily 'sent' online offerings which expressed a concern for the soul of the fetus and its subsequent journey in the otherworld. Informants often stated that the fetuses were too small, weak and confused to comprehend their after-death journey and NTO provided a direct connection where they could assist the fetus as "*reassurance and prayers are not enough*".

Online offerings then have practical applications for the deceased; everything from toys, milk, handbags, pancakes, toothpaste, cubby-houses and croissants were uploaded. Members desired to provide them real physical comfort: baby milk and a dazzling assortment of food was offered to assuage hunger; warm clothes to thwart the cold (and which should be changed on a regular basis); rattles and other toys for entertainment and play; beds, sheets and pillows for a comfortable sleep. As stated by Hanh, who created a tomb several years after her abortion:

> *When I'm on NTO I feel that the baby can hear my words, they understand, so I also think they receive what I give them. It is important to send to NTO to feed them so they are not hungry. When I think that they need to play and exercise well, I'll find toys for them. When it's cold I'll post offerings that will keep the baby warm. In the heat I also need to send the correct clothes. It is particularly important that you do not get sick in the cold. It is my desire to do this and make baby forgive me.*

These words were stated as Hanh displayed online offerings on her computer: baby clothing (dresses, pants, skirts); milk (both fresh and formula); food (cakes, chocolate, *pho*, and chicken); as well as food and objects associated with important Vietnamese holidays, such as Tet. I asked Hanh if the soul of the fetus could eat these foods even though they were self-evidently for many age groups and she suggested that just as the living adapt and change, so too there was fluidity to the deceased in the otherworld, just like in the 'real' one. This was reiterated by several informants who noted that their ancestors would have adapted to new technology in the otherworld. After all, according to one informant, it was no use offering the dead old technology, "*for even if they could use it, technology would change*". Another informant illuminated how the younger generation incorporated numerous Western things and felt it would not change in death, stating "*the dead are influenced much like the living*". As stated by a moderator of the online tomb for fetuses, online offerings were created because the members "*always want the baby to be full like the current life*". In this sense, Vietnamese women prayed that their fetuses had a life worth living in death. By showing concern about their fetuses'

lives in the otherworld and continuing a relationship with them online, Vietnamese women are giving a voice more widely to the experience and emotions associated with abortion.

In Vietnam, remembering a fetus after an abortion is a profoundly difficult act as it is tied into concerns about sexual activities of the unmarried and of youth, and the fetus does not fit comfortably into the pervasive cosmology of the Vietnamese relationship with the dead. The mother's grief becomes disenfranchised and the question of whether to remember the fetus or not, is a complex one. This article has argued that on the memorial website *Nghia Trang Online*, Vietnamese women can enfranchise their grief through interactions with a wider audience of members who have undergone a similar loss, and through continuing relationships with the deceased. Communication with the fetus ranges from the minutiae, to the difficult matter of what led to the abortion, and these conversations join online offerings to guide the fetus in their otherworld existence. Through this, a durable biography is created both by mothers and other members and the deceased is meaningfully weaved back into the survivor's life. Together these experiences demonstrate that for some Vietnamese, online memorialisation helps to challenge the silence and stigmatisation of abortion, "*the grief that cannot be shared*"[11]. Online, silence does not reign.

Conclusion

Recently, while idling away time on Facebook, Thuy asked where I had been as my online identity had seemed to disappear. Into a world of books, I told her, speaking about the final stages of writing up a PhD. She said that she had thought of me and my research questions to her recently after she had clicked on a personalised Facebook video feature:

> *The music started and I did not even worry about what I was going to see. It did not occur to me. Then suddenly there are pictures of me as a child, and then as I am getting older. Then there is an image of tears which I created at the time* (referring to the abortion). *I felt so empty after this and I really missed my child. I am not a good mother and I regret it very much but I am the mother of the child.* (Translation)

Being the "mother of the child" was for Thuy something that would always remain, alongside her grief. The memorial site *Nghia Trang Online* provides a place for her to perform her grief, and a home for her fetus. It enables a new tradition of online offerings where mothers can continue to care for their fetuses in death, and a community of kin who listen and respond to their voice, enfranchising their grief.

Biographical note:

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[11] Quote from informant.

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Thanatos

An exploratory study of digital legacy among death aware people

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Abstract

This article explores the awareness of and sentiments toward digital legacy through eleven semi-structured interviews carried out in Copenhagen in January 2013. It focuses primarily on the methodical aspects and considerations of the conducted study. In short, digital legacy in this review refers to the digital artefacts people consider worthy of preserving either for practical, historical, sentimental or even economical reasons, and which are most often inaccessible due to password protection (Waagstein 2013). The study is based upon the premise that very few people presumably give thought to their digital legacy[1] due to the subject matter's novelty. Death aware[2] respondents were chosen to increase the probability of getting valid data, since a large degree of death awareness is expected to correlate with the possibility that one also considers one's (digital) legacy. In this study, the death aware sample consisted primarily of hospice employees, who were implicitly asked whether they can relate to their digital legacy. They were also asked to what degree they felt that their digital legacy was important to them and what artefacts they regarded as valuable and potential heirlooms.

The study showed that the respondents were not aware of their digital legacy at all. Despite their death awareness and having experienced similar problems with inaccessible digital assets regarding

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[1] The term digital legacy potentially applies to everything from digitised content, accounts, passwords, usernames and hardware since they are all interdependent: digital content cannot exist without being stored on hardware or cloud services, hardware would be worthless without its content and passwords are the key to accessing all the content. However, the majority of the valued digital legacy in this study applies to *content* like digital photos, diaries, letters, music etc., most often with sentimental value.

[2] The term *death awareness* refers to a state of consciousness emerging from being either terminally ill, a close relative to terminally ill person, a hospice employee, or the like. The awareness is evoked by the realisation of the irrevocability of death, and it notably affects thoughts and actions of a *death aware* person (Waagstein 2013).

family or friends, they had not considered the problems regarding their own digital legacy. However, following the interviews many of the respondents changed practice both professionally and personally, ensuring their digital access, should their spouse die unexpectedly, as well as addressing the topic with patients and relatives. The study also identified the types of artefacts respondents considered as either practically or emotionally important, and worthy of preserving.

Introduction

> We need to treat the Internet as a new frontier that forms a part of our digital legacy. The things we create as an offshoot of our lives don't just live with us, in our homes; they live in new forms in a virtual world, which extends well beyond our immediate surroundings. (Richard Banks 2011, 123.)

As people are becoming digital, virtual belongings are becoming deeply integrated into our lives and subsequently our legacies, and these legacies comprise of a combination of life experiences, values and artefacts, including digital artefacts. (Gulotta, Faste & Forlizzi 2012: Gulotta, Odom, Forlizzi & Faste 2013). This means, that not only do we live a great part of our lives online, but we might also leave a great part of our online life behind when we die, and this post-mortem online life potentially constitute what we can call digital legacy.

Every individual produces approximately 88 GB content in a 75-year average lifespan according to Stephen Bulfer, CEO and founder of LifeCellar.com, who made the estimate in 2008 based on numbers from Google reporting, that stated, at the time, they processed 20 petabytes user-generated content each day. To get an idea of the magnitude, 88 GB corresponds to the individual producing approximately 17.6 million documents of size similar to this document, which is approximately 5 KB (see Table 1. below).

Byte (B)	8 bits
Kilobyte (KB)	1,000 B
Megabyte (MB)	1,000 KB
Gigabyte (GB)	1,000 MB
Terabyte (TB)	1,000 GB
Petabyte (PB)	1,000 TB
Exabyte (EB)	1,000 PB
Zettabyte (ZB)	1,000 EB

Table 1. Units of file sizes. (Screenshot by Waagstein, 11.3.2014, Peachpit.com.)

However, this estimate might already be obsolete, because not only has digital data become more sophisticated and extensive, the estimate covers only the content we share and produce online and not, consequently, the data we store locally (Carroll & Romano 2011, 39). Hence, we create, co-create and share a lot of digital content every day, and just as its analogue counterpart, digitised documents, letters, photos, music, I argue, play an important role in portraying a person's life and personality.

But what happens to these digital belongings when we are no longer around to maintain it? And how does our digital death affect ourselves, our loved ones and the generations to come? Let me start by answering the first question with a personal example before reviewing the study in question.

My (very tech savvy) grandmother died in June 2011. She was the one administering her own and my grandfather's online banking accounts, exchanging emails with the members of the local badminton club and fixing the computer hard- and software when needed. When she died, unsurprisingly she left behind several SNS-profiles[3] and password protected devices, which my grandfather had absolutely no idea how to manage or access, nor did his digitally native grandchildren. The effort trying to access her PC was unsuccessful, since no one knew her passwords, and suddenly a chain reaction of inaccessibility started: without knowing the password to her PC, we could not access her email account, and without being able to access her email account, we could not deactivate her Facebook profile and so forth. Eventually we managed to access her laptop, where digital photos, email contacts and other important documents were stored, by crosschecking little password-like pieces of paper, with network, computer, SNS and mobile-logins, but nevertheless the example illustrates that it can be rather complicated for both the individual and the descendants to die in the digital age.

Content is often no longer physically accessible in drawers and old shoeboxes like it was ten or fifteen years ago, but it is stored in the cloud and on password-protected devices, which can paradoxically only be accessed by the deceased. This means that if we do not plan ahead, which very few of us seemingly do, our digital legacy becomes inaccessible. This is a problem on several levels: the bereaved family becomes paralysed when trying to settle the digital estate – and forced data access might violate the posthumous privacy of the deceased, the descendants are without digital heirlooms, and society loses the ability to track the digital dimension of everyday culture. "If we look to the literature that describes things that happened politically, historically and artistically in the twentieth century, the most important research is based on private archives of letters, notes and manuscripts (…) It is therefore crucial to future historians, writers and journalists that this type of information is preserved digitally", notes Birgitte Possing, Professor of History at the State Archive (Dannemand Jensen, 2013).

Fortunately, there has been an increasing interest in studying the fields of the research situated at the intersection of death and technology, providing us with new information on how death and dying affects technology and its users and vice versa. Next I will go over related work, focusing on research primarily within the area of Thanatosensitive research. Thanatosensitive research refers to a humanistically-grounded concept that actively considers and integrates mortality, dying, and death into technological research and design, and the idea was introduced by interaction researcher, Michael Massimi, and PhD in English, Andrea Charise (Massimi & Charise 2009, 6-8).

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[3] See Boyd & Ellison, 2008.

Related work

The relation between death and media is not a new phenomenon. From early print culture to the present digital age, media has always played a role in how we understand death, cope with it, hear and communicate about it and commemorate it (Jones 2004, 87). The difference in the relation between death and media today is, that although in modernity dying and grief are secluded from everyday view, the dead have been given more social presence in society through new communication technologies such as SNS (Walter, Hourizi, Moncur & Pitsillides 2011, 297).

Facebook profiles of the dead keep existing alongside profiles of the living, and bereaved relatives can have conversations with the dead through SNS's and thereby they are given the opportunity to continue the bonds with their deceased loved ones, almost as if the internet was some sort of digital heaven (Alexandra Sherlock 2013, 166). For some people this ongoing mediated conversation with the dead provides comfort and peace of mind, and for others it seems obscure and morbid. No matter people's preference, it would seem as if there is no happy medium regarding people's online presence post-mortem: either your digital footprints remain in cyberspace for eternity (or at least as long as the online services exists) or they become completely inaccessible. As a reaction to this, many online providers such as the Danish Aftercloud (http://aftercloud.co) or American-Canadian PasswordBox (https://www.passwordbox.com) that offers ante- and post-death digital asset management have begun to see the light of day. Some addressing their service to the bereaved family post mortem by helping them settle the digital estate, and others addressing the living intestitate, meaning person formulating a non-legally binding will, helping them plan for their impending death. Evan Carroll and John Romano have also engaged in Thanatosensitive research field, concerning digital legacy management specifically. They have covered important fundamental issues on the safeguarding of digital legacy, and provided their readers with an elaborate strategy for securing their personal digital assets (Carroll & Romano, 2011). The emergence of these online death services, together with an increased research interest in the Thanatosensitive field, suggests that on one hand there is a need for gaining knowledge about how we safe-keep and inherit digital artefacts and on the other hand how we reflect on and perceive digital effects in the context of death and dying. On the basis of research of among other Richard Banks and David Kirk & Abigail Sellen, we have come closer to an understanding of the latter: the value people derive from looking back and the role technology heirlooms play in this regard. According to Banks, objects or heirlooms have the potential of triggering memories, emotions and thoughts of people, places and events, and this is true even for digital objects. Objects, whether they are digital or physical, hold the ability to connect us to ourselves, to other people and to the past (Banks 2011; Kirk & Sellen 2010; Unruh 1983). Thus, making them both sentimental and historically valuable. The notion is supported by studies of home archiving practices, suggesting that cherished and sentimental objects also involve digital items (Massimi & Baecker 2012; Gulotta et al. 2013).

The study in question will follow in the footsteps of the studies mentioned, exploring reflections and thoughts on digital effects, only it will be on a more fundamental level. It seems as though we have not yet tried to comprehend the fundamental awareness of sentiments toward digital legacy, which, in my belief, is an important first step in understanding how people in fact value the digital legacy in order to develop appropriate Thanatosensitive systems.

Problem formulation

To explore the awareness of the digital legacy, I have implicitly[4] asked death aware respondents if they can relate to their digital legacy, and if so, how? I have also asked them to what degree they feel the digital legacy is important to them, and what artefacts they regard as valuable and potential heirlooms. The death awareness refers to a state of consciousness that emerges from being either terminally ill, a close relative or nursing staff to a terminally ill person or the like. The death awareness is evoked by the realisation of the irrevocability of death, and it notably affects thoughts and actions of the death aware which presumably might trigger thoughts on (digital) legacy (Waagstein 2013). "People tend to begin planning for death as they become more aware of the finite nature of their lives. This tends to be around middle age; however, death of a loved one can highlight the issue sooner." (Carroll & Romano 2011, 54.)

The main stakeholders in this complicated area are the living individual, also referred to as the intestates, and the bereaved family. These two groups of stakeholders are in a way interdependent. The intestate is capable of planning ahead and providing the relatives with access to important digitised content *ante-mortem[5]*, but bereaved relatives are able to assess what types of digital artefacts belonging to the deceased they value and wish to inherit post-mortem, since bereavement can cause an object's value to change:

> Objects are polysemous (…) the same object can carry with it different meanings for different people, and these meanings can change over time and in accordance with the changing nature of the relationships we have with other people (Ekerdt & Sergeant 2006; Kirk & Sellen 2010). This is true even through bereavement, where artefacts can take on new meaning. (Banks, Kirk & Sellen 2012, 65).

Also, bereaved family members are the ones that experience the consequences of the individual's planning-or-not choice post mortem. The interdependence, therefore also refers to the shared interest regarding the management of digital legacy, which often exists between the two stakeholders. Family members usually wish to act in agreement with the wishes of their deceased:

> *You can see how fast it goes [with death, dying, accidents etc.], and then I'm thinking, it must be nice to know the wishes of your loved ones. At any rate I know I would like to know the last wishes of my mom* (Respondent A).[6]

I will elaborate on some of the major challenges regarding post-mortem digital legacy management in the final chapter, but next I will turn to the methodological exposition. In addition, it should be noted that the research in question is not theoretical, but rather explores the methodology of this cross-disciplinary research field.

Methodological approach

To gain a better understanding of the hospice environment and to be able to approach the study in the most ethical and moral manner possible, a careful preliminary study into the area of palliative care preceded the recruitment and

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[4] The term *implicitly* refers to the three-step methodological approach described next, which in particular refers to the way the interview guide was formulated and conducted, and the way the pre-presentation was held.

[5] See more on ante-, peri-, and post-mortem stages in Gotved 2014.

[6] All interview transcripts are anonymous, interviewed by Waagstein in February 2013, Copenhagen. Translations from Danish into English are author's.

data collection. The study consisted of a conference on possible methodological approaches with professionals specialized in palliative care[7]; Chief of Palliative Research Center, a hospice nurse of development, Chief of Secretariat in Hospice Forum Denmark, and a hospital pastor with specialization in palliative care. The article Tailoring traditional interviewing techniques for qualitative research with seriously ill patients about the End-of-Life was among other readings, a fundamental part of the research preparation. It offers field-tested techniques for interviewing seriously ill individuals and suggests tailored practices for discussions of end-of-life (EoL) issues with the patients (Schulman-Green, McCorkle & Bradley 2010). Even though proxy data was used instead of interviewing dying patients, my belief is that the thoughtfulness and carefulness prescribed in the encounter with EoL-patients is equally important when interviewing hospice employees. They work in a sensitive and emotionally demanding environment and face death and dying every day.

The study is exploratory, which is why no initial hypothesis was put forward regarding the sentiments towards digital legacy. However, it is, as stated, highly motivated by the presumption that few people have thought about their digital legacy, and this is reflected both in the choice of the methodical approach as well as in the choice of respondents.

Empirical data

The empirical, qualitative data consist of eleven semi-structured interviews with women aged between 22 and 64. They are employed by the Danish care sector[8] and the majority are between 40 and 50. Nine interviews were conducted with hospice nurses, one with a pedagogue student attending a grief therapy group and one with a doctor, which was also conducted as a pilot interview. The majority of the respondents are bereaved relatives; hence the death awareness, and they all have a certain degree of digital activity in common. Digital activity refers to a day-to-day use of tablets, PC, smart phones or the like.

In addition, an interview with digital legacy expert, Evan Carroll, was conducted together with an interview with the head of a secretariat of the Danish National Association Life and Death. The Carroll interview deals mainly with the perspectives on digital legacy management while the Association's interview deals with the creation and development of the association's My Last Will. The will is a non-legally binding document acquired and filled out by many Danes in preparation for their death and funeral, interestingly in August 2012 the Association added the option of writing down one's pass codes to the will. Furthermore, a discussion about Dane's perception of Death in the 21st century was initiated.

Apart from the preliminary study, I have operated with a three-step methodological approach consisting of 1) a recruitment process 2) a pre-meeting & presentation of subject and 3) the interviewing.

Recruitment for interviews

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[7] Palliative care means 'alleviating care' and captures the preventive effort made by professionals to alleviate the pain of people with life-threatening conditions such as cancer, heart failure, neurological conditions and the like. Palliative care exists to enhance the quality of life for the affected person and targets both the physical, psychological, social as well as the spiritual distress. (Palliativt Videncenter. 2013. Om palliation. Available at: http://www.pavi.dk/OmPalliation.aspx [accessed 17.3.2013]

[8] All referred to as *hospice employees* or *respondents* throughout the article.

The hospice environment is a private and protective institution and for good reasons. A hospice's main purpose is to protect the privacy of dying patients, who above all need care, rest and peace of mind during the last days of their lives. The initial plan was to recruit dying patients since they are the closest one can get to death awareness, but interviewing patients at EoL stage has its ethical as well as practical challenges concerning both dying patients as well as researchers. Dying patients might be debilitated, their anxiety and emotions can be heightened, and although qualitative interviewers in general face challenges of building trust and obtaining answers to their research questions, these issues are intensified for interviewers of EoL issues because of the sensitive subject matter (Grumann, Mareile M. & Speigel, David. 2003, 23; Schulman-Green et al. 2009, 90). But also the qualitative researcher can be emotionally affected when carrying out sensitive research. Qualitative researchers doing sensitive research risk burning out subsequently if they are not supported with clear research guidelines, e.g. in form of strategies to deal with emotions if research participants die during the research, or if they are not equipped with specific research strategies developed in conjunction with a research supervisor (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Pranee 2007, 345–346).

In the study in question, proxy data was chosen instead of patient informants for three main reasons. Firstly, hospice employees would not be physically challenged by the interview situation like dying patients might be. Secondly, the subject matter would not be as sensitive for the employees to discuss as they were not terminally ill, and thirdly, if the patients were to react with the same surprise towards the existence of digital legacy, as it turned out the hospice employees did, it might cause the patients serious stress as they would not have the necessary time to prepare for their digital death.

The process of recruitment of death aware informants was carefully planned, since it can be difficult to gain access to clinical sites, and it began by collecting stamp of approval from hospice leaders, chief of Palliative Care centers and Grief support groups. The idea for this top-down approach comes from research scientists in Nursing Debra Lynn-McHale-Wiegand, Sally A. Norton and Judith Gedney Baggs (2008, 170-171), and has later been described in Schulman-Green, McCorkle & Bradley's recruiting techniques for patient informants concerning qualitative research in critical care:

> If interviews are being conducted in an institutional setting such as a hospital, nursing home, or hospice, having a staff member introduce the study to other staff members can also assist with gaining access to patient participants (Schulman-Green, McCorkle and Bradley 2009, 92).

One hospice leader in particular found the research project interesting and helped in introducing it to her employees. Emails were sent out describing the study on behalf of the researcher, information posters were hung on the hospice's noticeboard and the leader agreed to the holding of an information- and recruitment meeting that would give the employees a basic understanding of the concept digital legacy. The pre-meeting was a fundamental part of the methodic approach, since the subject field might be too complex, novel and abstract for the uninitiated (and less tech savvy) to immediately reflect on. Also, it was not expected that the employees would be willing to volunteer merely on the basis of a poster.

Pre-meeting and presentation

The goal of the pre-meeting was to give the respondents a neutral, prior understanding of digital legacy. At this point the respondents had supposedly only read superficial newspaper articles about dead Facebook profiles existing

amongst the living or about those upcoming digital death services. However, there is a big difference between having a sketchy consideration of the afterlife of one's Facebook profile, and reflecting on a post-mortem management of one's entire digital legacy. My assessment was therefore that an introductory presentation would be necessary since the chance of somebody being capable of answering questions about digital legacy would be rather small. Reflections on the possible negative effect of this pre-meeting on to the subsequent interviews will follow in the next chapter.

The presentation had four overall goals: 1) to enlighten the respondents on the subject field, 2) to make the subject matter as tangible, understandable and applicable to the respondents as possible, 3) to plant a seed of reflection on digital legacy, 4) and to use the pre-meeting as an opportunity to build trust between the interviewer and interviewees – an important step in qualitative research that touches upon death and immortality, and in which "the interviewer can also gain a sense of the participant through informal pre-interview talk (…)" (Schulman-Green, McCorkle & Bradley 2010, 95; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 92).

Perhaps most important goal of the presentation, however, was to present the subject matter in the most neutral and unbiased manner as possible. If the presentation was not impartial, the researcher would risk making a self-fulfilling presumption of the study. On the other hand, the presentation had to be profound enough for the interviewees to be able to apply information about digital legacy onto their reflections on their own digital legacy. I will reflect on the outcome of the delicate balance of these considerations later.

The three posters in Figure 1. were used at the pre-meeting for illustrating the fundamental problems of accessing and managing digital legacy.
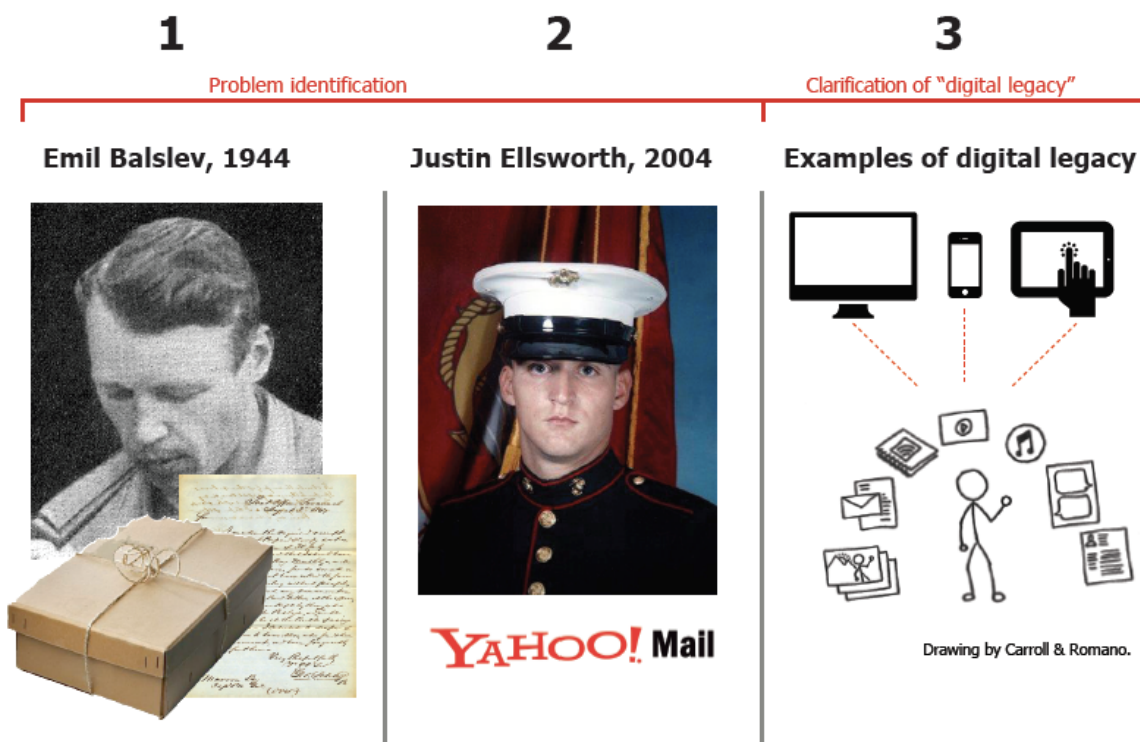

Figure 1. Three posters used at the pre-meeting for illustrating the fundamental problems of securing and managing digital legacy. (Figure: Astrid Waagstein)

Picture one illustrates the story of a Danish freedom fighter, Emil Balslev, who was executed in 1944. During World War II Baslev had exchanged handwritten letters with his wife Gudrun, one of them only a few hours before his execution. Gudrun hid all of her husband's letters in shoeboxes in their home in Roenne, Denmark, and the letters were therefore accessible to Gudrun as well as later generations. In fact, Balslev's last letter to Gudrun was published in 1945 together with 111 other farewell letters by executed freedom fighters in the anthology called De Sidste Timer [The Last Hours] (Gade 2012).

Picture two illustrates the story of an American soldier, Justin Ellsworth, who died 60 years after Balslev, in the Iraq war. During the war, Ellsworth had exchanged e-mails with his dad, John, just like Gudrun and Emil had, except that Justin and John's letters were electronically exchanged. When Justin died, his father wanted to make a scrapbook of Justin's emails and pictures, but he could not access his son's email account. Firstly, because he did not know his son's login information, and secondly, because the legal ownership of Justin's email account had automatically passed down to Yahoo!. To make a long story short, Justin's father took Yahoo! to court, won the trial and received a CD with the content of his son's email account (Carroll and Romano 2011, 11–13). Although this story had a happy outcome, the example illustrates that the access to documents, pictures or other important objects is no longer given. We cannot expect our belongings to be physically accessible when we die, but they depend on service providers, such as Google, Yahoo! or Dropbox, or the deceased to grant us access to the digital archives.

While the two first pictures identify the problem area of digital legacy, the third picture concretises our potential, digital legacy by displaying the artefacts we typically store online. The type and size of the digital legacy varies, but it can consist of digital photos or videos, iTunes songs and playlists, digitized documents such as letters, diaries and songs or more official documents such as marriage certificate or contracts. I will describe the types of artefact digital legacy constitute in more detail in the results chapter.

Interviewing

All interviews were conducted one to five days after the pre-meeting, and were for the most part semi-structured. The semi-structured interview form involves, as the name implies, a semi-structured approach to the interview. It can be conducted in various ways, but typically the researcher will follow a set of predetermined topics or open-ended questions that are based on the research question. These open-ended questions will not have a fixed range of responses or a specific order and the semi-structured interview is therefore both investigative and settled. (Given 2008.)

During interviews, five key questions were always asked in order to give the interviewees some sort of direction that could help to answer fundamental matters on digital legacy. Also, when the interviewer knows what she is asking about and why she is asking, a more reliable underlying basis for a later analysis can already be made during the interview by clarifying relevant statements and eliminating ambiguous ones (Kvale 2004, 136).

All questions were formulated partly on the basis of the study's problem formulation, and partly on the basis of a philosophical, phenomenological approach where the researcher asked herself what questions she would ask is she was to conduct an interview about digital legacy? This type of reflective, methodical grip is typical to the work of the anthropologists, who are as much in dialogue with others as they are with themselves, especially the branch of anthropology called Anthropology of Experience (Turner & Bruner 1986, 13-14).

The approach resulted in a gross list of questions and sub-questions that could be asked depending on the direction each interview took. Besides the five key questions, every interview was initiated with the question: Have you ever thought about the subject matter, digital legacy, before it was presented to you yesterday? It filled the function of giving the respondents time to adapt to the interview situation and, at the same time, getting an impression of the respondent's prior knowledge of digital legacy. Question 1.a to 1.d shown below were asked depending on the respondent's capacity to operate information about digital legacy. Together these constitute the first of five key questions:

1. (a) Have you prepared for your death in any way?

   (b) How would you like to be commemorated?

   (c) The inherent and personal memories of a physical, tangible object such as pictures or letters can help families reminisce about their deceased loved ones. Do you think some of your digital belongings could help your family reminisce about you?

   (d) Do any of your digital effects have value to you at present, and do you think they could have value to your family post-mortem?

2. Are there any digital artefacts you would like to have deleted/made inaccessible upon your death?

3. Are there any digital artefacts you have doubts about deleting or securing for posterity?

4. Are there any digital artefacts you don't care about are being preserved, passed along or deleted?

5. Are there any digital artefacts (hardware, software, passwords etc.) you think would be clever to make accessible before death?

Methods for analysis

The qualitative data was analysed with a mix of two qualitative methods called Summary of meaning and Ad hoc-meaning-establishment, respectively, formulated by Steinar Kvale, Professor of educational psychology and director of the Centre of Qualitative Research at the University of Aarhus. In the former, the researcher reads and listens through the complete transcript of the interview, and subsequently tries to identify the most significant units of content. These units will then be summed up as central themes, which again will be compared to the overall aim of the research study. In the present study the aim was to figure out what the themes tell us about the death aware respondents relation to their digital legacy.

The Ad-hoc-meaning-establishment method is a mixed method approach consisting of various techniques such as quantification of statements, visualising results, generation of patterns, search for plausibility, generation of general impressions etc. The methods can be used separately or jointly and are suitable for bringing out connections and structure in interviews that are not meaningful at first. (Kvale 2004, 201).

The application of Kvale's methods involved several simultaneous readings of and listenings to the interviews in practice. The readings were both exhaustive and superficial depending on the purpose at the time, and resulted in the emergence of important key themes. A counting of statements was also made, and resulted in the quantification of the respondent's digital activity illustrated in Figure 2. below, as well as the visualization of the findings of valuable digital assets (see Figure 3.). To discover patterns and obtaining data overview, a summary of all the interviews was performed, and in-depth readings were performed on selected significant statements in the end.
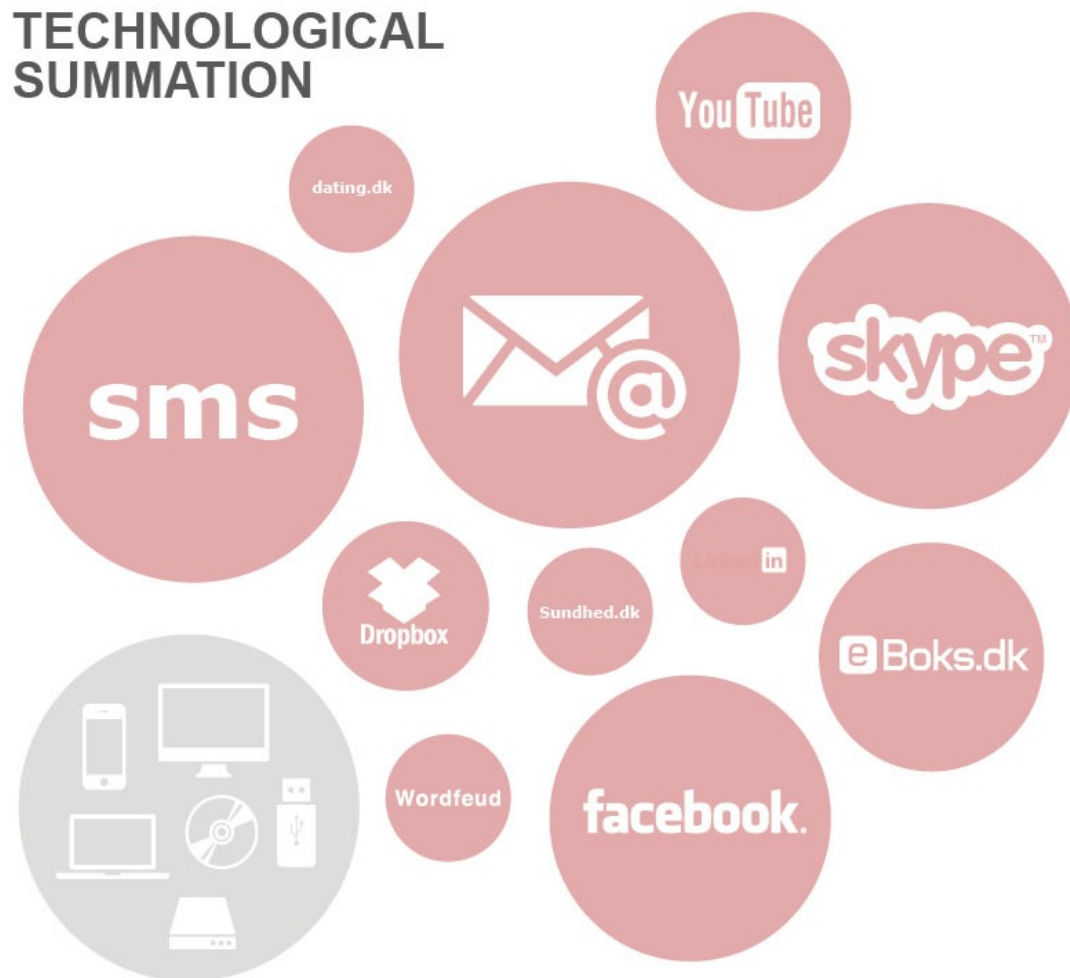
Figure 2. Bubblechart displaying the number of devices each respondent owns as well as the types of online services they make use of. The size of each bubble indicates the number of respondents using a certain service, thus, the bigger the circle the more users. The quantification of the respondent's digital activity also unveiled that ten out of eleven devices are password protected. (Figure: Astrid Waagstein.)

Reflecting the Research Methods

As previously stated, perhaps the most important goal of the pre-meeting was to present the subject matter, on digital legacy, as neutrally and unbiasedly as possible. However, an evident question arises in the wake of this statement, namely, that whether the researcher could have avoided any issues on bias by simply failing to make a presentation? I suggest that the answer is no. It is due to the information provided at the pre-meeting that the respondents were able to reflect on a level resulting in the profound findings on digital legacy. Results, that clearly suggest a reflection was initiated by the presentation in the form of exclamations of surprise and the emergence of aha experiences.

Could one then argue that the presentation could have been more objective? Some may claim so, but my first counterargument is, based on humanistic-hermeneutic philosophy of science, that absolute objectivity does not exist but, rather, the interpretation will always depend on the anticipation of the interpreter as well as the context of the

study (Olsen & Pedersen 1999, 140). The late anthropologist Clifford Geertz said that it was not possible for social scientists to record tangible social realities, because reality will always be an interpretation of an interpretation. Analysis of personal experience lies in other words at the core of the research on human behavior and development (anthropology), and introspection therefore evidently becomes a part of the objective understanding (Geertz 1973, 3–32).

Moreover, the study's exploratory approach argues in favor of an unprejudiced presentation. The exploring researcher does not have an interest in hidden agendas, but is rather motivated by her neutral curiosity. Also, the respondents do not only repeat examples from the pre-meeting but also come up with personal exemplifications regarding inaccessible digital artefacts, an action that speaks against a prospective presupposition. However, one objection to this methodical approach is the rather narrow dispersion of informant types. All respondents are women mainly in the age between 40 and 50 and mostly employed by the care sector. Since the study is exploratory and not quantitative nor comparative, a wider dispersion would have been desirable. However, as the numbers of recruitment strategies are limited within EoL research and the sizes of samples for such research are reduced by recruitment problems unique to EoL studies, this naturally limits the power and generalizability of samples in EoL studies (Kirchhoff & Kehl 2008, 515).

I will discuss this is further detail and give my recommendation for future research designs in the section Discussion and Future work.

Relating to Digital Legacy

The analysis is divided into three main sections each answering a question stated in the problem formulation. The first section answers the matter of the awareness, the second answers the matter of the respondents' relation and reactions to the subject and the third answers the matter of the value of the digital. The selected examples below are representative of the information contributed by the respondents through pre-meeting and interviews.

Do the respondent's relate to their digital legacy?

The term relate to refers to the respondents being aware of themselves possessing valuable digital artefacts. Consequently, they might have ensured the securement and accessibility of the valuable artefacts (without thinking directly along the lines of digital legacy, however). The short answer to the question, whether the respondents relate to their digital legacy, is no. The respondents were not aware of the existence of their digital legacy at all. Despite their death awareness, which among other things is revealed by their use of My Last Will and the fact that many respondents seem to have experiences with inaccessible digitised content both personally and through family, they have not drawn a parallel between these experiences and the existence of their digital legacy:

> Respondent B: *Yeah, so I thought about the problematics before [when my brother-in-law had died and my sister had problems with accessing his computer, red.]. But not in the same way as after the presentation. It became more tangible, more systematic then.*
>
> Interviewer: *Ok, so what did you think on the subject matter before the pre-meeting?*
>
> Respondent B: *I hadn't thought about it, actually (…) and I certainly wasn't thinking of doing anything about it. You know securing it and preserving it. I just wasn't there yet. But suddenly some aspects were put into relief and I went straight home to my husband and said: How do we handle our digital assets if one of us dies?*

Another example illustrates that not even a personal experience with inaccessible hardware is tantamount to one considering making one's digital belongings accessible. One of the respondent reports that she lost access to her family's hard drive with all their family photos after her husband's death since he was the only one who knew the password.

> Respondent C: *Yes, I have thought about the problems regarding digital legacy before you mentioned it yesterday, because my husband died two years ago. He was an IT engineer and he made sure that I could access all of his online accounts before his death. He had just forgotten about the external hard drive where all his digital photos were on.*

However, the same respondent had not thought about ensuring the access to her own hardware and software post-mortem for the sake of her daughter, despite the fact she has experienced problems with inaccessibility herself. This paradox is realised during the interview:

> Interviewer: *Is your computer password protected?*
> Respondent C: *Yes.*
> Interviewer: *And your daughter, does she know the password?*
> Respondent C: *….No, she doesn't* (pause and thoughtfulness)*….That it is actually completely ridiculous. I have been in the exact same situation and haven't even thought about this.* (Interviewee C).

In other words, neither one's relative's experiences with inaccessible artefacts nor one's personal experiences affects the respondent's general awareness toward digital legacy. However, a general tendency amongst many of the respondents seems to be that a deeper understanding and awareness of digital legacy arises during the interviews, and not only as a result of the pre-meeting. One respondent suddenly realizes that she doesn't know how to login into the Picasa family photo album, some thing that she apparently would like to be able to, should her husband die untimely;

> Interviewer: *So where do you have those pictures now?*
> Respondent D: *Well, they're on Picasa*
> Interviewer: *And do you know how to access them?*
> Respondent D: (Pause) *No I do not, actually, because my husband created the albums and he always invites me in….. you caught me there. That's not good.*
> Interviewer: *Okay, so how many pictures do you think you've uploaded to Picasa so far?*
> Respondent D: *Oh…a lot!*

In summary, both the interviews and the presentation contributed to a situation of change where reflections on digital legacy were initiated and broadened.

How do they relate and react to the knowledge of digital legacy?

With the respondents becoming aware of the existence of their potential digital legacy, it is interesting to examine how they relate to it. Do they consider the digital artefacts equally important as their physical belongings or does the digital have no importance to them at all? The fact that many of the respondents took action the very same day of the interview, making sure that they are able to access shared hard- and software post-mortem, suggests an appreciation of

the digital. Action refers in this case to both the physical transfer of data and the obtainment of usernames, passwords and location of digital assets through clarifying conversations with family.

> Respondent E: *I talked to my husband after that [the pre-meeting, red.], and asked him if there was anything I needed to be able to access should he be killed tomorrow" or as another respondent puts it: "When you told us about all this yesterday I raced home to my husband and asked him to tell me the password for his hard drive.*

Even though the hard drive turned out not to be password protected, the immediate reaction and urge to take action suggests the appreciation of the digital that is mentioned explicitly several times:

> Respondent F: *I'm not a particularly tech savvy, but I think it's a really interesting topic. The world is getting more and more digitised and that is why I think it's important to pay attention to and think about. My son has probably never thought about it so I think we're going to sit down and have a talk about it at some point.*

The respondents have also changed professional practices. A revisit at the hospice six months later unveiled that the employees had begun discussing digital legacy, and passing access codes from patients to relatives.

Securing digital legacy not only refers to the passing of access codes and login information, but also to the backing up of content – especially considering the increasing use of mobile devices. Mobility means that we are carrying valuable digital content around with us possibly resulting in the loss of digital content, if we do not get to back up our content:

> Respondent G: *I have only transferred them* [the iPhone pictues, red.] *one time to my external hard drive. It happens that I forget to transfer them for at couple of years, and then suddenly they're gone because the mobile has been stolen or broke.*

In fact, a surprising number of respondents report either broken or stolen hardware, which, besides inaccessibility, is a risk factor that challenges the safeguarding of digital legacy:

> Interviwer: *Do you take (digital) pictures?*
> Respondent H: *Yeah I do, in large numbers….but we've had burglary several times, actually four times in three years. I think we lost a computer twice and in that connection I lost some of my digital photos.*

Even though it turns out that some respondents 'unknowingly' backup their digital content due to the mentioned fragility of hardware, and write down their passwords in notebooks to support their own memory, the risk of inaccessibly post-mortem is still present. As we see, digital legacy is left with no heir in mind and descendants are left only with disconnected and scattered information, which might or might not be sufficient for post-mortem access.

In summary, the reactions and statements of the respondents suggest that they consider the subject matter relevant, important and topical. The new knowledge has resulted in the discovery of a need to deliberately secure their digital assets both professionally and personally as they appreciate the digital. Respondents also 'unknowingly' back up their digital content in order to prevail loss. However, this act alone does not secure access post-mortem as descendants might lack a transparent system for post-mortem access.

The value of digital things

While the previous sections showed that the respondents regard their digital belongings as valuable, this section outlines the type of digital assets that the respondents have, at some point, termed 'worthy of preserving'. The majority of the digital artefacts that are considered valuable are digital content, which makes sense since typically the photos on the camera, and not the camera itself are what has sentimental value to us (unless the camera belonged to, say, our deceased granddad).

However, in the digital age, hardware, content and passwords are interdependent. Digital content cannot exist without being stored on hardware or cloud services, hardware would be worthless without its content, and passwords are the key to accessing all the content. 'Digital legacy' therefore applies to everything from content, account passwords and usernames to hardware.

The degree of appreciation for the digital artefacts was assessed on the basis of statements, the statements' emotional accentuation and the context of the statements that resulted in a qualitative scale of value ranging from 'not valuable at all' to 'very valuable'. The most treasured digital artefacts between the respondent's are displayed in Figure 3. Furthermore the value scale is divided into artefacts primarily representing a practical value, a sentimental value or a historical value. Next, I will give a few selected examples of digital artefacts with a sentimental, practical and historical value, respectively.

The ability to juxtapose digital objects with physical objects plays a great role in the assessment of the digital value to the respondents. People typically acknowledge the value of an old photo regardless of time and place, and thus it is so much easier to imagine the long-ranged value of a digital photo than it is to see the value of a blog or a Facebook profile. Maybe this could be one of the reasons why almost all the respondents stress the value of digital photos in particular:

> *A patient once reminded me that you can always buy a new sofa, but you cannot buy new photos. I thought about it and realised that if your house burns down to the ground, it's potentially the memories of a whole lifetime that are lost…On the basis of this conversation I bought myself a new hard drive.* (Respondent H).

Also, digitised documents such as personal letters, poetry, songs, blogs, digital playlists and SMS's are denoted as sentimentally valuable. One of the respondent e.g. reports that she has kept and printed out the SMS's of her late husband which she received during his spell of sickness:

VALUABLE DIGITAL ASSETS

Historical value

Sentimental value   Practical value

- **Digital photos** on smartphone, camera, PC, tablet, harddrive or web services such as Dropbox eller Picasa.
- **SMS'**
- **Digital music collection**
- **Blogs**
- **Web pages**
- **Personal mails**
- **DD* containing**: Songs, speeches, diary/travel diary, old love letters/letters in general.

- **Digitised work documents, examples**: Sermons, old course notes, lodge documents.

NemID / Other

Content on:
- **e-Boks** (public mailbox)
- **Online banking**
- **Sundhed.dk** (online personal health account)
- **Login information**
- **External harddrive** as these typically contain a collection of the most important content of the family.
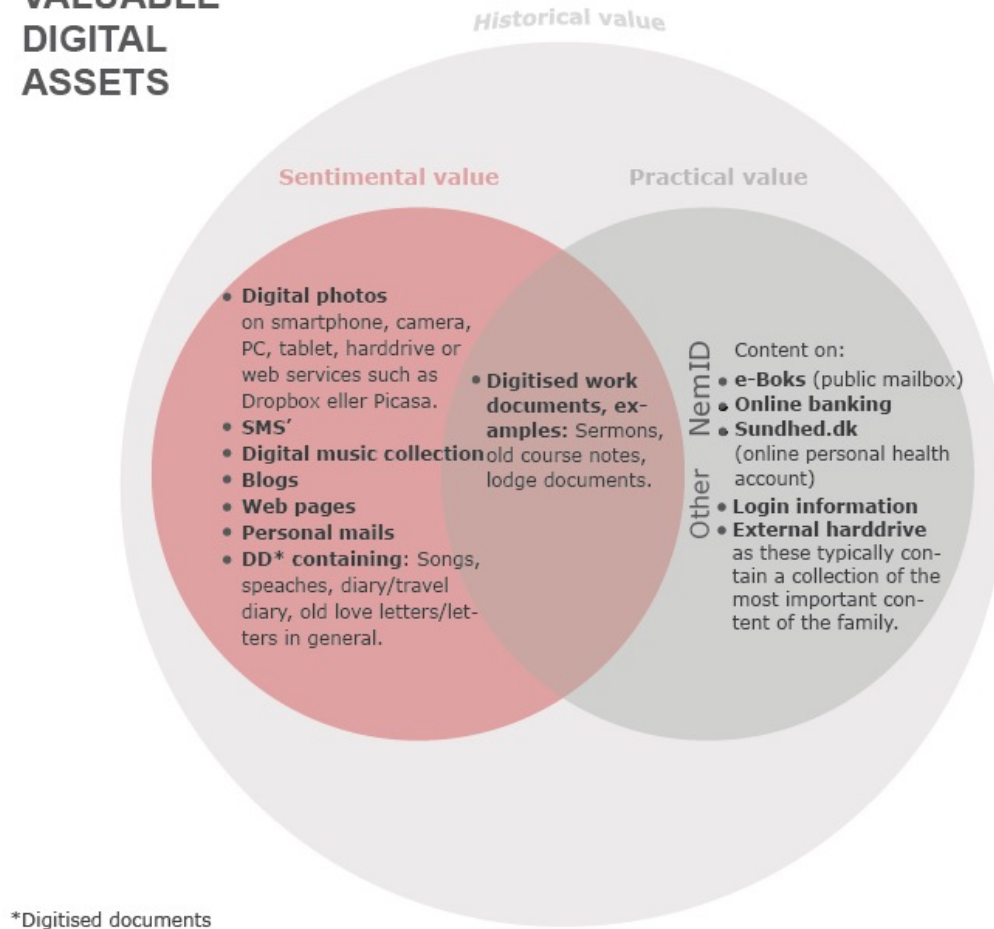
*Digitised documents

Figure 3. Outline of the digital effects that the respondents consider practically, historically or sentimentally valuable. Figure: Astrid Waagstein.

> *I received a lot of texts from him when he was sick. Because he was hospitalised I wasn't allowed to stay overnight and so we texted each other. We texted a lot and I wanted to keep those text, so I sent them to my email address and printed them out.* (Respondent C).

In this case the text also takes the form of a digital heirloom that helps the respondent reminisce about her deceased husband. It does so in a manner very personal and vivid since the text was written by deceased. According to HCI researchers Richard Banks, David Kirk and Abigail Sellen (2013) who have focused some of their research on technology heirlooms, the recollection of the past is the first task of the heirloom:

> Artifacts play an important role as triggers for personal memory. They help in the recollection of past experience and in reminiscing about people, places, and times gone by. Of particular interest to us is one type of artifact, the heirloom, which may also have rich connections with memory, but often through the lens of the life of a deceased member of a family, or a friend. (Banks, Kirk & Sellen 2012, 63).

The inherent stories and memories of places, people and a time gone by are also what constitute the historical value of an artefact, which in many cases are pointed out by the respondents:

> Respondent F: *I remember when the whole family sat together and watched old slides. It was so fun to see how my grandmother was dressed at that time. And I'm thinking, that my digital photos might give my son the same joy eventually, because they [photos] do in fact represent a piece of history. You can see how people looked in the 60's, 70's and 80's.*

Another respondent reflects about the historical value in the following way:

> Respondent I: *I want my daughter to be able to understand who I was even if I die young, and I hope she can do that through the stuff I leave behind - also the digital. I have always thought that old diaries, letters or photos were quite magical because of the insight they give you into another time.*

Though it is the sentimental value that is mainly discussed in the present study, many of the respondents touch upon issues with postmortem access to both public and private online services and settlement of estate – also digital. A young respondent whose father died recently expresses the overwhelming amount of practicalities her family faced after his death, many of which required online access and the knowledge of deceased's login information:

> Respondent J: *There were so many things that we had to take care of… I can't remember them all, but it was things like cancellation of subscriptions, -memberships, -profiles, -orders, report moving, manage online banking affairs so my mother wouldn't be be financially strained in the time after his death. And I remember that we were so grateful that we knew his passwords. I also remember that he had placed all these orders on camping gear but we didn't know where to pick up it up because the information was in some kind of mail we couldn't find…so in the end we just gave up.*

The example illustrates that the tasks of settling an estate can be extensive and, what is more, is often needs to be handled while simultaneously dealing with the loss and organizing the funeral. Also, much of the existing post-mortem settlement requires online access and knowledge of the deceased's login information – login-knowledge that has a practical value to the surviving family post-mortem, but which they often do not have. Two more things to add to this notion is that bereaved relatives might have to face uncomfortable situations when they handle unsettled digital legacies of those who die (Massimi and Baecker 2010, 1826), and forced data access might violate the posthumous privacy of the deceased. There seems to be very little support for post-mortem privacy – referring to an individual's right to preserve and control what becomes of his or her reputation, integrity and dignity after death – and it therefore needs a closer inspection in common law (Harbinja & Edwards 2013, 102–104; Tungare 2012, 1–2).

The issues described above are only some of the problems researchers encounter when trying to map out the landscape of digital legacy management. Unfortunately, there is no simple fix to ascribe to this subject matter but we can start by trying to at least frame some of the challenges of this highly complex and still changing culture.

Discussion and Future Work

This exploratory study on the awareness of and sentiments toward digital legacy shows that even though respondents have had experience with inaccessible digital assets personally or through family or friends, they were not at all aware

of their digital inheritance before the problem was presented to them. When made aware the respondents expressed a large desire towards ensuring their digital artefacts for their families and themselves, as they felt that their digital effects have value. The validity of the respondent's statements can be confirmed since a revisit to the hospice unveiled that action on the matter of securing the digital had been taken: the employees had begun discussing digital legacy and passing access codes with patients. The digital artefacts reported worthy of preserving consist of everything from digital documents (personal letters, poetry, songs), digital photos, SMS's, blogs, playlists, e-Boks[9] contents, access to online banking, hardware and password itself, all of which are displayed in Figure 3. The value of the digital is classified as mainly sentimental or practical but all artefacts possess an inherent historical value on par with physical assets pointed out by the respondents. Respondents back up their digital content occasionally (with the exception of mobile hardware) due to the fragility of it, but since securement is not made with descendants in mind, the surviving family might be left only with scattered and unintelligible login information. Overall, the results suggest that dying in the digital age is rather complicated for both the individual and the descendants.

Although not representative, the study in question points towards important views on digital legacy of death aware. The awareness of the existence of digital legacy at present is still rather small, but as we slowly become aware of the existence of our digital legacy and realize the value of our digital belongings, the need for providing people with suitable ways of safekeeping their private digital belongings will increase. Next, I will give my recommendation for future research and I will reflect on some of the major challenges this research area currently face.

As stated earlier, the study is qualitative and therefore not exhaustive. The goal of this study was not to put forward an exhaustive list of potential digital heirlooms, but rather to explore the knowledge and sentiments toward digital legacy, and to see if digital objects are treasured at all. However, since previous studies (including this) seems quite limited in terms of dispersion of informant types and sample size, and because similar studies conducted on the subject matter draw different conclusions regarding the value of digital affects, further and broader investigation into the subject matter is needed: one study on home archiving practices comparing physical and digital mementos suggests that physical mementos are valued more than digital mementos (Petrelli and Whittaker 2010), and yet other studies rank the sentimental value of digital objects alongside physical (Kirk & Sellen 2010; Gulotta et al. 2013; Massimi & Baecker 2010). In addition, it is important to consider whether digital and physical objects should be compared at all in future, or if digital objects should rather be explored on their own terms. Furthermore, the distribution of male and female informants in future studies on digital legacy should be considered given the potential differences in attitudes towards materiality across gender: men presumably have a more instrumental approach whereas an affective approach seems to better reflect female behaviour (Doka & Martin 2010).

Cohort differences might also influence the outcome of such studies (Hunter & Rowles 2004, 344) and undoubtedly, there are still differences in what types of digital data that are meaningful and valuable to the intestitate compared to those meaningful and valuable to the bereaved relative. Exploring these differences in stakeholder attitudes seems particularly relevant since studies show that surviving relatives might hold on to objects because they feel obligated to, not necessarily because they value them (Banks 2011).

As mentioned, there are also some challenges of greater scope on the road to an applicable solution. Besides the more "familiar" challenges such as incompatibility across platforms (Jones 2004; Carroll & Romano 2011), questions of

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[9] e-Boks is a digital platform for secure communication used by the public sector in Denmark.

longevity of digital data (Petrelli &Whittaker 2010; Waagstein 2013), alleged sequestration of death in Western societies (which might or might not affect our relation towards digital legacy and our interaction with Thanatosensitive systems) (Kübler-Ross 1969; Ariés 1975; Elias Nobert 1985; Howarth 2007; Walter et al. 2011); we are first of all challenged by people's general unawareness of digital legacy. Unawareness is not in itself problematic, but since it can cause inaccessibility and the potential loss of private digital legacy, it becomes an issue. As Carroll and Romano put it: "No matter what your wishes are for your digital content, access is an important issue to resolve" (Carroll & Romano 2011, 76). Secondly, we lack common practice and case law that allows us to manage, bequeath and organise our valuable digital possessions, not to mention laws and practices allowing us to take ownership over our digital assets (McCallig 2014). The study in question showed that respondents want to safe-keep their digital content for themselves and for their family. However, without applicable systems or laws that renders digital legacy management possible, there is only so much we can do to prepare for our digital death, and this is according to professor of Law Naomi Cahn "becoming a huge problem" (pbs.org 2013). A third major challenge concerns the immense and growing size of the private digital economy and the potential information overload we risk exposing our next of kin to (Banks 2011, 10; Bellamy, Arnold, Gibbs, Nansen & Kohn 2013). Van der Hoven et al. states: "People increasingly have vast collections of digital media about their pasts, including photos, texts and music files (…) and they collect because they can" (Van der Hoven, Sas & Whittaker 2012). The ease with which you can create, copy, share and distribute data in the digital age combined with people's resistance towards deletion and the fact that we are not as good as organising data as we might think, is already becoming a post-mortem issue (Bergman et al. 2009; Whittaker, Bergman & Clough 2010; Odom et al. 2010). Various research on how we organise, manage and archive our digital belongings has already been initiated and Thanatosensitive design prototypes has been developed (e.g. Gemmel et al. 2006; Wiley et al. 2011; Banks, Kirk & Sellen 2012; Kirk et al. 2010). However, it would be interesting to explore how might quantity affect people's perception and appreciation of the digital. In sum, addressing some of these challenges and suggested research approaches is part and parcel of making a sound argument for future interventions that will make the digital afterlife more easily managed, whatever form they may take.

Biographical note:

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research

reports

Thanatos

Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands and the Jewish Monument Community: commemoration and meaning[1]

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Abstract

In April 2005, the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands went online. This monument is an Internet monument dedicated to preserving the memory of more than 100,000 men, women and children, Dutch Jewish victims of the Shoah. As of September 2010, the interactive Jewish Monument Community website has been linked to the website of the Digital Monument. The main objective of the monument, and its community, is to reconstruct the picture of the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the eve of their destruction by "returning" to each individual victim his or her identity. With this monument, and its companion Community website, a new approach to commemoration is introduced, characterized by the application of new concepts in design, memorial space, and communication. My research on the practices engaged in, and the meaning of this Digital Monument and the associated Community, has been a qualitative and explorative exercise within the interdisciplinary field of memory studies and ritual studies. Questionnaires, ninety in total, were returned by first-, second- and third-generation users and by other users without any family connection to victims remembered on the monument.

The results of my research show that although practices are mostly limited in time they evoke deeply felt emotions raised by the enormous number of names, the ages at which people were killed, and the stories behind the victims. My research also shows that the characteristics Foot, Warnick & Schneider put forward as being typical of web-based memorializing – co-production of memory and voice – are indeed distinguishing features of the Digital Monument and its associated Community (Foot, Warnick & Schneider 2006, 88–91). By sharing with the Community their own personal remembrances, stories,

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[1] The author wishes to thank the staff, in particular editor Anat Harel, from the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, for their kind support and assistance in this project.

pictures or other digitized objects, users are in effect co–producing the remembrance of the Shoah. Each individual may decide, 24/7 and from all over the world, what they consider is important to voice within the Community; the memorial refrains from taking sides or imposing closure upon the audience's interpretation of the memory of the Shoah. Expressing oneself in public – in this case in a virtual environment – appears to have a healing effect (Casey 2004, 17–44; Savage 2009, 261–295).

Overview to research report

"t is a very important and valuable monument. It acts like a monument at a (digital) grave- yard to honor those who went up in smoke. It makes all those people and thus also my previous (before 1942) social life tangible. I think it is a blessing that their names will not be forgotten. My answers should be considered against the background of the loss of almost my entire family and social background during the Shoah.

Focus

In this report, the focus will be on the meaning of commemoration practices engaged in at the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands and the Jewish Monument Community in which people are registered as members. The meaning of these commemoration practices will be explored within the context of cyberspace as a place of commemoration. This research report is based on the results of one of the case studies concerning monuments analyzed for my PhD. In my PhD research, the central focus is on manifestation, context and meaning of monuments, and in this project theoretical frameworks from both cultural memory studies and ritual studies have been applied. With regard to the research on the Digital Monument and Community, theoretical frameworks from the field of cultural memory studies have been applied as will be explained in chapter Web-based memorializing in general: theoretical exploration.

Research method

To answer the formulated research question in my PhD research project, an appropriate research method had to be selected. Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss assert that the research question should "dictate" the methodological research approach (Corbin & Strauss 2008, 12). In order to answer the central research question of this project, focused on the meaning of ritual commemorative practices at a monument, it appeared to be essential to enter the field in which these practices take place, and observe and consider people in their relation to a monument. As the main objective of qualitative research is to "[…] study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, 4) it seemed appropriate to apply a qualitative research method in this mainly explorative research project. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln state that within qualitative research, a variety of empirical materials may be gathered through alternative sources. Case study materials, personal experiences, life stories, interviews, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts are mentioned in this respect (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, 4). With regard to this online monument, it was considered to be appropriate to gather as much information as possible on the meaning of the Digital Monument and Community by means of approaching online registered members of the Community and asking them directly to give their opinion.

Therefore, in August 2011, one of the Community editors, Anat Harel, sent out a request to all registered (active and non-active) user profiles of the Community if they would participate in a research on practices, meaning and opinion

of the Digital Monument and Community. After an inventory, the number of user-profiles appeared to be 2503 in total. A positive response to participate was received from ninety members of the Community. These participants originate from all over the world, from the United States of America to Israel, thereby indicating that the use of the Digital Monument and Community is not restricted to Dutch inhabitants. A questionnaire was drafted in both Dutch and English. Some of the participants answered the questionnaire in English. They could elaborate as much as they wanted on their answers to the questions posed in the questionnaire, which many of them did showing that they were very involved with both Monument and Community and my research.

The research method was explorative and qualitative, and the responses to the questionnaires will be interpreted accordingly. Participants were asked to give their opinion on the following topics:

> Practices on the Digital Monument and Community;
>
> Commemoration;
>
> Motives with regard to participation;
>
> Meaning and opinion of the Digital Monument and Community.

Participants were asked how they were related to the Second World War. They could choose between the following options:

> I am a first generation relative;
>
> I am a second generation relative;
>
> I am a third generation relative;
>
> Other, like for instance: historical interest, research, interest in family matters.

Consequently, with regard to the analysis, the participants have been divided in four groups. Participants were asked to give their consent in confidential reporting of the results of the research. All of the ninety participants gave their consent and their responses were consequently included in analysis and reporting.

I will continue with an introduction on the Digital monument and Community. Next I will explore the current scientific debate on web-based memorializing practices. I will summarize and discuss the findings of my empirical research applying the theoretical frameworks, which will be discussed below.

The Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands and the Jewish Monument Community

The Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands

The Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands at first sight appears to be no more than a webpage on the Internet. The home page consists of a screen with thousands of little colored bars grouped together in blocks. Each block represents a family and each little bar within a block represents a person who died during the Second World War. This virtual monument is dedicated to preserving the memory of "all the men, women and children who were persecuted as Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and did not survive the Shoah". In total 104,000 names of victims are included in the Digital Monument. The home page (see Image 1. below) is intended to be the actual virtual monument.
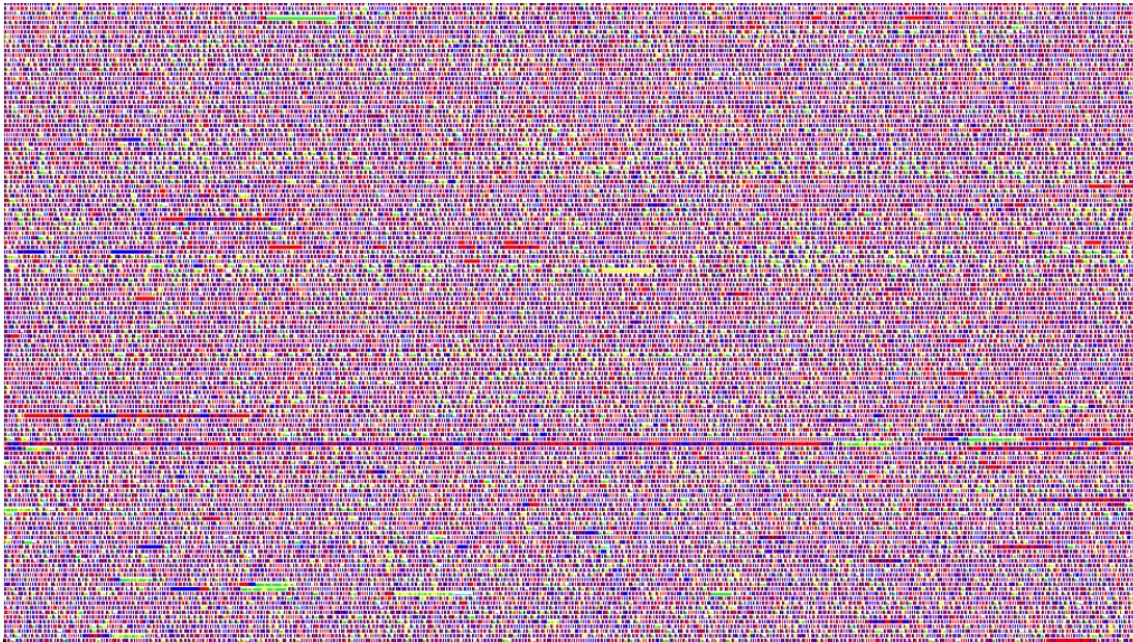
Image 1. Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands (Screenshot Laurie M.C. Faro, 26.6. 2013, www.joodsmonument.nl)

The objective of the Digital Monument is to show the details and circumstances of each individual personal life and that person's family circumstances at around 1941 or 1942 in order to reconstruct the picture of the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the eve of the Shoah. Clicking on a colored bar on the home page of the Digital Monument one is directed to the family that is represented by the bar. All families include individual members. Each member has their own personal page. This way, the life of every individual victim is commemorated. On this personal page, basic personal details are given and, if possible, a reconstruction of the family relationships.

The monument provides information on thousands of individual victims, ranging from biographical details and photographs to information on household belongings. The original addresses of most of the families are known and have been added to the Digital Monument. When you click on a family's address, you will be taken to the address page of that family. On that same page, to the left and right of them, other Jewish families who lived close to this family are shown, and clicking on the address of a neighbor will take you to their family page. Because addresses have been added, visitors of the Digital Monument can take a virtual walk through towns and streets as they were on the eve of the Shoah.

Because of the digital nature of the Monument, there are almost unlimited possibilities for extending the monument. The Digital Monument can thus "grow into a unique presentation of Jewish life in the Netherlands between the 1930s and the early 1940s". Family members who survived the Shoah do not appear on the Digital Monument's home page but they do appear on the family pages as bars without color and thus without information on gender or age.

The initiative for the monument was taken in 2001 by Professor Emeritus Isaac Lipschits. His objective was to sketch a picture of the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the threshold of the deportations (Heyting 2000). This idea was the founding idea of the Digital Monument. His aim was for the monument to bring back in people's memory not only the names of about 104,000 Dutch Jewish victims of the Shoah but also their social environment on the eve of their deportation. To realize these objectives, a digital format seemed to be the most appropriate form. The Digital

Monument, and later on also the Community, were designed by an Amsterdam company called Mediamatic. Responsibility for the Digital Monument, and later on for its Community, were transferred to the Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum) in March 2006.

The Jewish Monument Community

Image 2. Jewish Monument Community (Screenshot Laurie M.C. Faro, 26.6.2013, www.communityjoodsmonument.nl.)

As of September 2010, the Jewish Monument Community website has been linked to the website of the Digital Monument. The Community is an interactive website where registered users or members can contribute and exchange information on the people remembered through the Digital Monument. The Community contains a copy of all the pages of the Digital Monument but will also be extended by contributions from members of the Community. These members may also add their own profiles on their own personal pages. The number of user profiles is still growing: in July 2013, about 6000 user profiles had been registered at the Community website. In 2011, at the time of the research, the number of user profiles was 2503.

The idea behind the Community is to create a place where "past and present meet". The opening phrase on the home page of the Community welcomes visitors and invites them to post pictures, information and stories about persons and

families commemorated through the Digital monument. This way the Monument will be an ongoing effort and a conjoined effort between the original constructors and members of the Community.

The objective of the Community is to allow users to post information and make contact with other Community users. Users who have become registered members can log in and participate actively in the Community. All this is meant to ensure that the ultimate goal − "do not forget" − will be realized, a goal that also occurs on a copy of a yellowed page from a photo album placed prominently on the Community's homepage and showing three photographs of unknown victims with the phrase "Vergeet ons niet" ("Don't forget us") written in pencil below them.

Web-based memorializing in general: theoretical exploration

The concept of memory

In his seminal work Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, the American professor of English Michael Rothberg explores the concept of memory: "memory is the past made present" (Rothberg 2009, 3–4). Rothberg comments that the notion of a "making present" has two implications. A first one is that memory is not something of the past but a contemporary phenomenon: while concerned with the past memory happens in the present. In this project there is a connection between people or events of the past and remembering them in the present by means of a monument. A second observation is that memory is "a form of work", people who remember act through interventions and practices at particular places, for instance by means of erecting a monument.

The American philosopher Edward S. Casey states that through the "work" of commemoration the past does not just disappear in the present but instead only traverses the present on its way to becoming future: "[…]. It is the creating of memorializations in the media of ritual, text, and psyche; it enables us to honor the past by carrying it intact into new and lasting forms of alliance and participation" (Casey 2000, 257).

In this respect the past, present and the future are connected through memory and commemoration and with the aid of media like ritual and text, or perhaps through the erection of a monument.

Web-based memorializing practices

Kirstin Foot, Barbara Warnick and Steven Schneider, in their discussion of web-based memorializing practices after 9/11, define web-based memorializing as "an emerging set of social practices mediated by computer networks, through which digital objects, structures and spaces of commemoration are produced" (Foot, Warnick & Schneider 2006, 72–96).

In one of the early studies on the emerging phenomenon of death memorials and remembrance sites on the Internet, Swiss sociologist Hans Geser defines the potential of the virtual memorial as follows:

> It could be a significant cultural innovation because it has the potential of providing a focus for longer-term mourning: an ever accessible publishing channel for adding emotional expressions and for reworking the remembrances related to the deceased (Geser 1998, 14).

In this respect, virtual memorial sites may reflect the fact that even many years after their family members' deaths, survivors have not ended their emotional relationship to the deceased, as appears to be the case with relatives of the victims of the Shoah. The Internet may provide means for expressing emotional processes which apparently existed at a mental level, but perhaps could not be expressed through the conventional methods and media or through conventional ritual commemoration practices such as attending a ceremony at a monument. Geser suggests that virtual memorial websites should be seen as an "outlet" for expression and that they may have a therapeutic significance.

These therapeutic effects have been studied by other scholars (Roberts & Vidal 2000, 521–545; Roberts 2006, 1–4). Roberts concludes that, according to the results of her assessment, "creating and visiting web memorials can be beneficial for the bereaved" (Roberts 2006, 4). It seems that web memorials are visited more frequently than physical memorials, which might be explained by their easy accessibility. They provide room for emotional expression and personalization which is apparently different from attending funerals and visiting physical memorials. Many web memorials are personal tributes, written in the form of stories or letters, to the deceased. They are a demonstration of continuing bonds and include efforts to make sure that the missed ones are not forgotten. They function as shared grieving through the sharing of stories and the organization of a community in bereavement (Roberts 2006, 1–4). Australian Professor of Digital Humanities Paul Arthur studied how traditional physical memorials to war and other catastrophic events differ from online memorials and concludes that nowadays "online environments provide public spaces for expressing, sharing, and working through experiences of trauma and crisis" (Arthur 2009, 65–75).

Foot, Warnick & Schneider, who extensively studied web-based commemoration, in particular after 9/11, distinguished the following seven dimensions of web-based memorializing practices: The object or focus of commemoration, co-production, voice, immediacy, fixity, intended audience and the relational positioning of victims (Foot, Warnick & Schneider 2006). The focus in this report will be on co-production and voice. As has been explained above in the explanatory paragraph on the Digital Monument and Community, they seem to be the most notable and differentiating dimensions in the virtual commemoration of Dutch victims of the Shoah. Members of the Community may contribute their own and individual memories, and in fact "co-produce" the memory of the Shoah in general.

Co-production

Foot, Warnick & Schneider studied the characteristics of web-based memorializing practices in comparison with offline memorializing and focused on the producers of memory. In the case of traditional monuments, like for instance regular First or Second World War monuments which may be discerned in many places all over the world, the designers can be regarded as the producers as they seek to frame the significance and meaning of the event for a general public. Traditional monuments will have visitors or even audiences, as may be the case on special commemorative occasions, but these, as Foot, Warnick & Schneider observe, will be "spectators'" or "co-celebrants" at ceremonies, but they will not be "co-producers of memory" (Foot, Warnick & Schneider 2006, 75). The characteristics of traditional and offline public commemoration result from authorship, purpose, form and how audiences are positioned to respond, leaving little room for individuals to contribute their own personal memory. In comparison with offline monuments, online monuments, and in this case the Digital Monument and Community, offer the possibility of individual input which may be considered as a form of co-production of memory.

Different voices

Cultural geographer Kenneth Foote explained the difficulties of designing a memorial to commemorate 9/11: "This will be a very difficult task at the World Trade Center site because of the magnitude of the losses, the diversity of the victims, and the fact that the entire nation feels it has a stake in the commemorative process" (Foote 2003, 344).

Following Foote's line of argumentation, a virtual space may play a crucial role in voicing different interpretations in public memory and the virtual memorial will have its own meaning and place, separate from a physically tangible monument (Foote 2003, 343). Where the Digital Monument and Community are concerned, individuals may, in co-production, decide what they consider is important to contribute — the memorial refrains from taking sides and from imposing closure upon the audience's interpretation of the memory of the Shoah. The Digital Monument and Community encourage users to voice and contribute their own individual memories, acknowledging that public memory may be seen as an evolving process.

The Digital Monument and Community: opinions and meaning

Four groups of participants

For analytical purposes, the ninety participants in this research were divided into four groups. The first three groups included people with a family and relative involvement in the Shoah: they were the participants that indicated they were either first-, second- or third-generation relatives. The fourth group consisted of people with a historical and research interest in the Shoah.

First-generation participants

The oldest participant in this group was eighty-eight years old at the time the research took place; the youngest participant was seventy-one. There were fifteen participants in all in this group.

To find out about the relevance of the Digital Monument and Community for these people, they were asked in the questionnaire about their emotions in connection with the monument and what it meant to them to have a digital monument available in their homes. Remarks as to the importance of the monument ranged from "*Important, it is keeping me busy every day*" to "*[the] remembrance of those that were murdered should be kept alive.*"

The Digital Monument and Community elicit a mixture of emotions: participants are at the same time both sad and happy. They are happy to be able "to do something", yet sad because seeing the enormous number of victims all together on a "one-page website monument" is overwhelming (the names are not shown on the monument page) and brings out feelings of great sadness and helplessness. On the other hand, people are also "happy" to be able to do something, if only to keep the victims from being forgotten or "grateful" because data about lost family members had surfaced thanks to the monument.

The group pointed out the many advantages of having the Digital Monument and Community, in particular its facilitating the search or even enabling them to search at all for information on their lost relatives and the fact that they can do this anytime now, at home or wherever they are, all over the world. They receive information that they otherwise might never have been able to gather. One female participant in this group described this monument as being "open to the world" and an ongoing base of support regarding information on victims. Some point out it is very easy to access the information, while others doubt whether especially older people from their own generation will be

able to benefit from the digital advantages of the Digital Monument and Community. The overall opinion on both the Digital Monument and the Community in this first-generation group seemed to be very positive.

Second-generation participants

In this group, the oldest participant was seventy three years old at the time of the research and the youngest forty-four. In all, there were forty-six participating second-generation relatives. Most of the participants valued the Digital Monument and Community very highly. Some because the family tree could finally be completed by means of the information retrieved thanks to the monument: "*Up until five years ago, the family tree stopped at my father's mother*".

One male participant mentioned that both the Digital Monument and the Community increased the family feeling: "It is part of the family feeling because nobody ever spoke about the family". Another participant was happy with the Digital Monument and Community because a family member had managed to find her through it: "I am glad it exists: through the site a cousin managed to find me. All of a sudden I have a relative that I did not know about before". One female participant mentioned that especially with regard to the younger generations, the Digital Monument and Community are very valuable: "My younger brothers and sisters did not dare to become involved. Now that our mother has died three years ago, there is much more openness and curiosity about what happened, I think".

As was the case with the first-generation participants, both the Digital Monument and the Community bring out a mixture of emotions. Participants were sad because of the terrible loss: "A terrible sadness of the loss of warmth of grandparents [...]". People are amazed and stupefied about all that happened but also "glad" that they have this source available and that through it people can be provided with useful information. One female participant mentioned that she did not consider this a monument, but more of a database, but others said that although it is only about "letters and data" it makes it all very real. For some, visiting the Digital Monument and Community is helpful when they are feeling sad: "When I feel sad and visit the site, this offers me comfort".

The fact that it is "only" a website, a database, for some put the emotions into perspective; some participants did not feel comforted when they visited the Digital Monument and Community. One male participant said: "It is with me every day but when you see your murdered family members it offers little comfort". Another male participant phrased it as follows: "*Fine, I am second-generation. My father still has nightmares of tanks rumbling down the road so a website does not have much impact*".

Third-generation participants

In this group of participants, the oldest person was fifty-six years old at the time of the research and the youngest was thirty-two. There were nine participants in all in this group. One of the female participants in this group phrased the relevance of the Digital Monument and Community as follows: "It is like a permanent, sad presence, always at my disposal when I want to visit it, anytime and anywhere".

As was the case with the other groups of participants, this group also reported a variety of emotions with regard to the Digital Monument and Community. First of all, there is sadness: "*Sad, very sad*" and "*great sadness and sorrow*". Others, like this female respondent, mentioned a mixture of emotions:

> *Mainly intense sadness, but on the other hand it also makes me feel good to be able to mourn, unlike my parents who suppressed everything. It is the harm that I have seen as it manifests itself in my parents, which resurfaces and it is as if I am putting this sorrow in the right place at the monument.*

One male participant phrased it as follows: "*It offers some comfort that the site is dedicated to remembrance whilst being of great sadness and sorrow*". Yet another female participant was proud of her grandfather, who, unsuccessfully, tried to escape from his imprisonment: "*It makes me sad because of the loss, but I also feel proud. You do not often hear about attempts to escape [...]*".

Most participants were very positive about the Digital Monument and Community. One female participant pointed out the relevance of the Digital Monument and Community for the present and future generation.

Other participants

People who participate in the Digital Monument and Community for other reasons than immediate family-related matters were included in the fourth group of participants. There were twenty participants in this group. The motives for participating were mostly related to historical interests and research.

One male participant in this group, for example, lives in the street of Maastrichtsestraat in the Dutch town of Scheveningen. When he was organizing a party with all the families living in the same street, older residents were asked to tell about the history of the street. It turned out that back in 1942, Jewish families had been living in the Maastrichtsestraat who were deported and did not return. Many present residents had never heard these stories and this was a shocking experience for them. They began researching things, starting at the Digital Monument and Community, and it turned out that the deportation concerned sixteen families, fifty-two men, women and children. The families in the street decided to erect a "living" monument by creating a site on the internet: www.deportatievanzestienjoodsefamiliesstraat.nl. The information they had found was put on this internet site. One of the residents began to write small portraits of the families who had been deported, and present residents were asked to leave these portraits in the residences in order to keep them connected with the premises, lest the Jewish family be forgotten.

Another male participant discovered that the deportation of the Jews had taken place very close to his own neighbourhood and that all the names could be found at the Digital Monument and Community, which made everything very personal and very emotional, especially when he discovered that the apartment he is living in at the moment, had been owned and occupied by Jewish families, who had been deported and never returned from the Shoah.

This group of participants concerns people who first and foremost are working on and working with the data at the site. However, just as was the case in the other groups of participants, the Monument and Community stirred a lot of emotions. Some participants reported experiencing a mixture of emotions: "sad" obviously, "happy" because they were "able to do something", and also "angry".

One male participant in this group said that working on the site makes him so sad that he finds it difficult to work for more than an hour at a time because of the emotions. Another male participant said: "Again and again: inconsolable",

and: "The enormous amount of individual experiences and individual sorrow oppresses me time and again". One male participant reported that the data provided on the site make it hard for him to do his work properly: "I am often struck by feelings of deep depression. The enormous number of names, the ages, the stories behind the sometimes brief facts impede research".

Overall this group of participants is positive about the Digital Monument and Community and considers it a valuable addition to research their research activities.

Conclusions

This research on practices engaged in at the Digital Monument and Community, and the meaning these sites have for the users, has been a qualitative and explorative exercise. The objective of the Digital Monument and Community is to reconstruct the picture of the Jewish community in the Netherlands on the eve of their destruction by "returning" to each individual victim his or her identity. This objective enables "double individualized" commemoration: commemoration of each individual victim by returning their identity, making known who they were and how they lived, and individualized commemoration, at home, alone or in a small group in each person's own time, instead of mass organized ceremonies on designated days.

In 1998, Geser expressed that in his opinion commemoration practices at a virtual memorial would be limited to "behavior extremely short in time and extremely unrelated to any other social involvements. It becomes a small 'intermezzo', during surfing activities […]" (Geser 1998, 20). The results of the research on the meaning of and the practices found at the Digital Monument and Community show that, although practices are mostly limited in time and take place at irregular intervals, they do not have the character of an 'intermezzo' in between other internet activities. Within all groups of participants, even within the group of participants without any direct personal involvement in the Shoah, the practices evoke deeply felt emotions raised by the enormous number of names, the ages, and the stories behind the victims.

The first-generation participants consider the monument as exemplifying the "true form" of commemoration of the victims. This is how the victims ought to be commemorated: by means of returning them their identity. They seem to be hesitant about the value and use of the Community. The monument is considered to replace or to function as a graveyard, a place to visit and to commemorate the dead. In this respect, the Monument functions as an "organic tombstone", capable of growth and evolution and always open to new inputs from persons wherever and whenever they are (Geser 1998, 27).

For a long period after the war, participants in this group have had difficulties sharing their personal memories with others. The Digital Monument and Community, apart from its commemorative function, appear to have the added function of helping them handle their emotions by contributing their personal stories to the Digital Monument and Community. Many participants in this group have assisted in compiling and completing the Digital Monument right from the start by supplying the names and additional information they could remember. Participants in the research indicated that they felt a "healing" effect in expressing oneself in a public, in this case virtual environment. The results of the research thus show that the site offers many opportunities to co–produce memory, and that every individual input or voice is valued equally.

The element of co–production may be even better illustrated by the other groups of participants. In the other groups of participants, the Community is valued highly and being able to connect to other users is considered important. Many participants consider their practices as being a contribution to their family history but also as being a more general form of contributing to the history of the Shoah. The site is considered as a means of sharing knowledge but also as means to create public awareness of the Shoah. This objective of awareness becomes more private when for example individual people realize that their current residence used to be occupied by Jewish families on the eve of their deportation.

In conclusion: the Digital Monument and Community appear to be valuable contributions to commemoration practices of the Shoah, a place accessible 24/7 for commemoration all over the world, where each can contribute to the memory of the Dutch victims of the Shoah at their own place in their own time. The dimensions of co–production of memory and voice as proposed by Foot, Warnick & Schneider have been defined as distinguishing features of the Digital Monument and Community. In this respect the Digital Monument and Community form a 'living monument', one that is not closed but open, and one that may continue to grow in the future depending on the contributions of the members of the Community.

Biographical note:

Laurie M.C. Faro (1957) has a background in Culture Studies, and is currently working on a (PhD) research project at Tilburg University, focusing on the context and meaning of 'postponed monuments' as a separate category within Dutch monument culture. 'Postponed monuments' are monuments erected a long time after the event or disaster to be commemorated took place. This study is a qualitative exploration within the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, and ritual studies. This research report is based on the results of one of the case studies explored within the context of the PhD study. Contact: l.m.c.faro@uvt.nl

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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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Thanatos

Online Legacies: Online Service Providers and the Public – a Clear Gap

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Abstract

In our contemporary society, people leave behind a great amount of digital assets which are not accessible to their relatives after they die. There is currently a gap between the need for access to online accounts of the deceased, as could be witnessed in several high-profile cases, and the online service providers policies and practices regarding the granting of said access.

We suspect that the above-mentioned gap is a prevalent problem, but most people have not yet experienced it and, thus, remain oblivious to its existence. In order to confirm this hypothesis, we conducted an online survey in Israel in 2013, asking people for their opinion: what should the online service providers' policies be, in regard to this issue?

The survey gathered data from 506 respondents. While a majority of the respondents indicated they would be interested in gaining access to their relatives' e-mail accounts, social media accounts and cellular phones (80%–91% altogether), they were less eager to gain access to other digital legacy categories, such as website surfing history and Internet search history (52%–75%). The wish was also different when dealing with the digital legacies of children and spouses, as opposed to parents.

The overall amount of respondents wishing to gain access to the website surfing history and Internet search history was significantly smaller in comparison to the other digital legacy categories (53%–75% and 52%–74%, respectively). In all of the above cases, the wish to gain access to children's digital legacies was greater than the wish expressed towards spouses' legacies, which was greater still than the wish expressed towards parents' legacies.

Our results show that the majority of respondents (70.8%) believed that online service providers should give access to online legacies to first-degree relatives, unless otherwise stated by the deceased. This indicates once again the existence of a gap between existing policies and the needs and wishes of the public. We believe this gap can be bridged by a few alterations of existing policies and laws. This point is addressed in the paper, in hopes of creating a future change for the families of the deceased.

Introduction

Lance Corporal Justin Ellsworth was 20 years old when killed in Iraq in 2004 during operation "Iraqi Freedom II". He was awarded a Bronze Star Medal with Combat Distinguishing Device posthumously, as his heroic actions as a Combat Engineer saved the lives of 11 other Marines and spared four others from more serious injuries. (TogetherWeServed 2008). Sadly, his name did not become well-known due to his bravery, but because of his family's lawsuit against Yahoo for denying access to his email account after his death (Hu 2004). His family did not have his password, and it was – and still is – in violation of Yahoo's policy to grant access to the account of a deceased user (Yahoo! 2013).

This story was the first on the subject of digital legacies to make headlines, but it was not the last: When 21 years old Benjamin Stassen committed suicide in 2010 (Hopper 2012) and when 15 years old Eric Rash committed suicide in 2011 (Boyle 2013), their respective parents sued Facebook and Google for denying access to their accounts. According to a quote from a Facebook spokesperson, the company's "…policies do not allow access to a dead user's account" (Hopper 2012).

Most of the Internet service providers (ISPs, in which we include mailbox providers and social network providers) have strict policies regarding the granting of access to a user's account after his/her death:

Name	Policy Regarding Access To The Account Of A Deceased User	Reference
Yahoo!	States that "Yahoo cannot provide passwords or access to deceased users' accounts, including account content such as email"	(Yahoo! 2013)
LinkedIn	Only offers to remove profiles of deceased users	(LinkedIn 2013)
Twitter	Only offers "to have an account deactivated" and clarifies that "[w]e are unable to provide account access to anyone regardless of his or her relationship to the deceased"	(Twitter 2014)
Gmail	States that "in rare cases we may be able to provide the contents of the Gmail account", and emphasizes that "[w]e take our responsibility to protect the privacy of people who use Google services very seriously"	(Google 2014)

Google	This policy extends to all of Google's products, including Blogger and YouTube: "in rare cases we may be able to provide the account content"	(Google 2014)
Facebook	Offers to either memorialize the account or to have the account removed	(Facebook 2014; Facebook 2014)
Microsoft	Offers a different solution altogether, called "Next of Kin Process", which supports all Outlook.com accounts (including email accounts ending in @outlook.com, @hotmail.com, @live.com, @windowslive.com or @msn.com). "The Microsoft Next of Kin process allows for the release of Outlook.com contents, including all emails and their attachments, address book, and Messenger contact list". However, "W[w]e cannot provide you with the password to the account or change the password on the account, and we cannot transfer ownership of the account to the next of kin"	(Microsoft 2012)

Chart 1. Examples of policies enacted by the most popular online service providers. Only international online service providers were selected, to provide a wide view of the topic.

As far as legislation is concerned, in the words of attorney Deirdre R. Wheatley-Liss, as quoted in MarketWatch: "Most digital content exists in a legal black hole" (Fottrell 2012). In the United States, "there are few laws who have stepped in to address this (digital legacy issue)", and "[t]he law is lagging behind in this digital space". The present law is a 1986 federal act which prohibits companies from sharing dead individuals' information (NewsHour PBS 13).

Eric Rash's parents initiated a change in legislation following their tragedy, and Virginia passed a bill in May 2013 granting access to social network accounts of deceased minors (Kunkle 2013). According to the newest law in this field, bereaved parents may file a written request to the ISP with an official death certificate. The ISP is then required by law to "provide… access to the deceased minor's communications and subscriber records within 60 days from the receipt of a written request…" (Virginia's Legislative Information System 2013; Virginia General Assembly 2013).

State	Current Legislation	Reference
Connecticut	Gives the personal representative of a deceased person's estate the powers to access or copy the contents of the person's e-mail accounts	(State of Connecticut General Assembly 2014; Lamm 2013)

Idaho	Gives the personal representative of a deceased person's estate the powers to "[t]ake control of, conduct, continue or terminate any accounts of the decedent on any social networking website, any microblogging or short message service website or any e-mail service website"	(State of Idaho Legislature 2014; Lamm 2013)
Indiana	Allows the personal representative to access or copy any of the decedent's documents or information stored electronically by a "custodian," and requires the custodian to retain a deceased person's electronic information for two years after receiving a request for access or copies	(State of Indiana, 2008; Lamm 2013)
Nevada	Gives the personal representative of a deceased person's estate the power to direct the termination of any online account or similar electronic or digital asset of the decedent, but it does not address powers to access these accounts or copy their contents	(State of Nevada 2014; Senate Bill No. 131–Senator Cegavske 2013; Lamm 2013)
Oklahoma	Gives the personal representative of a deceased person's estate the powers "to take control of, conduct, continue, or terminate any accounts of a deceased person on any social networking website, any microblogging or short message service website or any e-mail service websites"	(State of Oklahoma 2014; Lamm 2013)
Rhode Island	Gives the personal representative of a deceased person's estate the powers to access or copy the contents of the person's e-mail accounts	(State of Rhode Island 2014; Lamm 2013)
Virginia	Gives the personal representative of a deceased minor's estate (but not a deceased adult's estate) the power to assume the minor's Terms of Service agreement for an online account "for purposes of consenting to and obtaining the disclosure of the contents of the minor's communications and subscriber records pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 2702"	(Virginia General Assembly 2013; Virginia's Legislative Information System 2013; Office of the Law Revision Counsel 2014; Lamm 2013)

Chart 2. Currently, six other US states have older laws regarding digital assets: Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Nevada, Oklahoma and Rhode Island, and 18 states are considering the matter, to a certain degree (Lamm 2013).

The Password is Strong, but the Will is Weak

As we study the stories above, it would seem that leaving a list of passwords to one's digital legacies is a prudent step. Unfortunately, detailing one's usernames and passwords in a will is not recommended, for two main reasons:

1. It is the nature of the Internet to be dynamic, for people to keep registering to new sites and for ISP users to change their passwords periodically (according to Symantec, some passwords should be changed every month or two), either due to the website's prompting (for security reasons), or due to the user's own volition (upon forgetting his or her password and setting up a new one, for example) (Granger 2011). To assume that a user would update his or her lawyer with the new password after each occurrence seems unrealistic, as "the average Internet user has 26 online accounts... For individuals between the ages of 25–34, the number of online accounts jumps to 40" (Heck 2013).

2. Wills become a public record posthumously, and one would not wish for this data to become public (Eisenberg 2013). Since a will becomes a public document as soon as it is executed, the digital assets become vulnerable to exposure.

If that is the case, shouldn't a person leave in his or her will directions about the whereabouts of a hand written/ digitally created offline list of passwords? While some will certainly do so, the will is written exactly to prevent cases in which a house burns down with all the documents in it, or similar cases in which physical documents are stolen or computer files become infected with viruses. Keeping a physical list in a safe place usually means it is not easily accessed, which diminishes the chances of each and every site and/or changed password there to be updated. It also makes it impossible to access from any place and at any time, which, again, diminishes the chances of the list being kept up-to-date. In addition, spouses or children of the deceased might have an interest of their own regarding the execution of the will, and might thus choose to keep the list hidden or claim not to have found it. Last but not least, a list kept in the house can be found accidentally or on purpose, even before the person in question has died.

Private online companies that offer digital legacy management solutions make use of high-end security measures to keep the stored lists of passwords safe. Several are referring to it as a virtual "safe" or "vault", thus highlighting the need to protect such sensitive data. Some utilize encryption methods to keep the lists safe. Others release the lists only upon receiving a death certificate, along with confirmation from more than one individual who were pre-assigned by the deceased (SecureSafe 2014; Estate++ 2014; Capsoole 2014). However, this service is supplied by private companies that may later be purchased or shut down, instead of the large ISPs themselves offering effective in-house solutions; Google was the first to offer an in-house service: "Inactive Account Manager" tool, which is only a partial solution (Google 2014).

Israel as a Case Study

Many companies now offer online tools for managing digital legacy and assets (Carroll and Romano 2014). These online tools provide an efficient, handy solution, as they are accessible at any time and from any place. Adding sites – or updating passwords to existing sites – is easy and immediate, and it makes more sense to add links to sites online then to dictate a URL over the phone to a lawyer. These online solutions cannot, however, provide an efficient solution for Israeli citizens, as Israeli law differs in two ways:

1. An official will can only be conducted on paper and in front of witnesses: therefore, wills that are online/digital/ virtual/electronic etc., are not accepted (electronic signatures included), according to Inheritance Law and Regulations, clause 18–20 in Chapter 3: Inheritance by Will, Article 1:

       a) "18. Forms of will: A will is made in handwriting, witnessed, before an authority or orally.

       b) 19. Handwritten Will: A handwritten will shall all be written in the testator's hand, shall bear a date written by him and shall be signed by him.

c) 20. Witnessed Will: A witnessed will shall be in writing, shall state the date and shall be signed by the testator before two witnesses, after he declared before them that it is his will; the witnesses shall at that time attest by their signatures on the will that the testator declared and signed as afore said"

(State of Israel 2012).

2. Any posthumous instructions left outside the official will shall have no legal status, according to Inheritance Law and Regulations, Chapter 1, Clause 8a:

a) "8.a. Transactions in future inheritances: An agreement about a person's estate and a waiver of his estate, made while that person was alive, is void"

(State of Israel 2012).

If an Israeli citizen were to use an online solution, it could not be considered a part of his or her will, and if conducted outside the will while carrying instructions to be performed posthumously, it can have no legal status. Even defining digital legacy as digital assets – a word that has legal implications – could prove to be a problem, as it places digital assets under the 8a clause. A solution can be found by defining digital legacy as extra-testamentary: assets which are in a category of their own, outside the assets which combine the estate. This solution is already in use in Israel regarding several financial assets, such as pension funds, study funds and provident funds.

Israel is lagging behind in an additional aspect: most of the Israeli ISPs, if not all, do not publish online their policy following the death of a user (a conduct which Vered [Rose] Shavit, co-author of this paper, is working on rectifying). Even the ISPs which do have a policy do not publish it online, making it impossible for users, while they are still alive (as well as their loved ones, after the death of the user) to be aware of it – until it's too late. Details of Israeli policies can currently be found only in Vered [Rose] Shavit's blog. It is clear that this type of information should be readily available to the users in each ISP's site, just as it is with the international ISPs (Shavit 2012). One of the reasons this online survey was conducted was the hope of steering Israeli ISPs to action by showing the public's wishes.

Incentive for Research

As mentioned, we suspect the gap is widely spread, but most people have not experienced it yet and thus remain oblivious to its existence. In order to confirm this hypothesis, we conducted an online survey in Israel in 2013, asking people for their opinion about the current state of ISPs policies. More specifically, we tried to find what default policy the public wants, in case the deceased did not clearly state his or her wishes in this regard prior to his or her demise. Should the service providers grant access to first-degree relatives? Which is more important: the deceased's right for privacy, or the remaining loved ones' wish to obtain and cherish his or her digital legacy?

Methods

In order to collect the view points of the public on the topic of digital and virtual death and legacies, we decided to conduct an online survey using the online service SurveyMonkey (abbreviated hereafter as SM). SM has received positive feedback in peer-reviewed journals, and has made a mark as an important and highly usable tool for conducting online surveys (Allen and Roberts 2010, 35–48). As such, we deemed it especially fitting for our purposes. Since the free version was limited to 100 respondents, we paid to use the extra features, which included the possibility of receiving the responses of up to 1,000 people.

After writing an initial pilot survey, we sent it to a small number of collaborators who hold expertise in surveys and digital culture, per the recommendation in the literature (Presser, et al. 2004, 109–130). The experts gave criticism and feedback of the survey, and their comments contributed to the final form of the survey.

Delivery of the Survey

Access to the survey was possible only via links created specifically for this purpose. The links were published in various Israeli blogs and social networks, mainly those dealing in digital culture[1]. We specifically targeted the Israeli public, by only conducting the survey in Hebrew. The survey was kept open for a month, between the 5th of May and the 4th of June, 2013. Overall, during this time period, 506 respondents entered the survey and answered some or all of the questions. Demographic data about age, gender, living place (city/area in Israel), marital status, monthly income and religious beliefs of the respondents was collected. Of the respondents, 84% ranged from 18 to 45 years of age, 11.6% ranged from 45 to 60, 3.28% were minors (up to 18) and only 1.09% were between the ages of 60 and 70. The respondents were asked both about their sentiments regarding ISPs' posthumous policies in general as well as their hypothetical feelings and wishes regarding the digital legacies their relatives may posthumously leave behind. They were also asked specifically about the digital legacies they themselves would like to leave behind.

Ethical Aspects

The privacy of the participants was kept in strict confidence, and their answers were not attributed to their names and identities in any way or form. In the interest of utmost anonymity, the respondents were not asked to provide any identifying details such as names, e-mail addresses or digital usernames. However, the IP addresses of the participants were recorded in the surveys, in order to lower the chances that a single person would fill the survey twice. In order to protect this sensitive information (from which the identity of the respondent could theoretically be elucidated), SM makes use of various security measures and technologies, including the encryption of administrator passwords, intrusion detection systems and others (Gill et al. 2013, 1322–1328).

Results

The Wish for Access

We asked the respondents how much access they would want to the digital assets that their relatives may leave behind after their death. The respondents were asked to grade their wishes in a scale of 1 to 5, when 1 is "Not at all" and 5 is "Very much". The number of respondents to each question ranged from 430 to 460 (n=506).

When asked to imagine the death of a loved one, most people wished for access to certain digital assets. A majority of the respondents indicated they would be interested in gaining access to their relatives' e-mail accounts (83%-90%), social media accounts (80%–91%), and cellular phones (84%–91%). The overall wish of the respondents to gain access to the website surfing history and internet search history was significantly lower than the other digital legacy categories (53%–75% and 52%–74%, respectively) (see Figure 1. A–E, the next page).

For easier viewing of the results, we re-clustered the data, and defined 1 as "No wish to gain access" after his/her death and 2–5 as "Wish to gain access, to various degrees", after his/her death (see Figure 1. F–J).

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[1] The links were published mainly in three blogs: Digital Dust (www.digitaldustblog.com); Room 404 (http://room404.net/(and Blazing Sciences (www.mada-duh.com).

A How much would you like to have access to the following people's e-mail account following their death?

F Overall desire (yes/no) to receive access to e-mail account of the following people following their death

B How much would you like to have access to the following people's social networks profile following their death?

G Overall desire (yes/no) to receive access to social networks profile of the following people following their death

C How much would you like to have access to the following people's cellular phone following their death?

H Overall desire (yes/no) to receive access to the cellular phone of the following people following their death

D How much would you like to have access to the following people's website surfing history following their death?

I Overall desire (yes/no) to receive access to the website surfing history of the following people following their death

E How much would you like to have access to the following people's internet search history following their death?

J Overall desire (yes/no) to receive access to the internet search history of the following people following their death
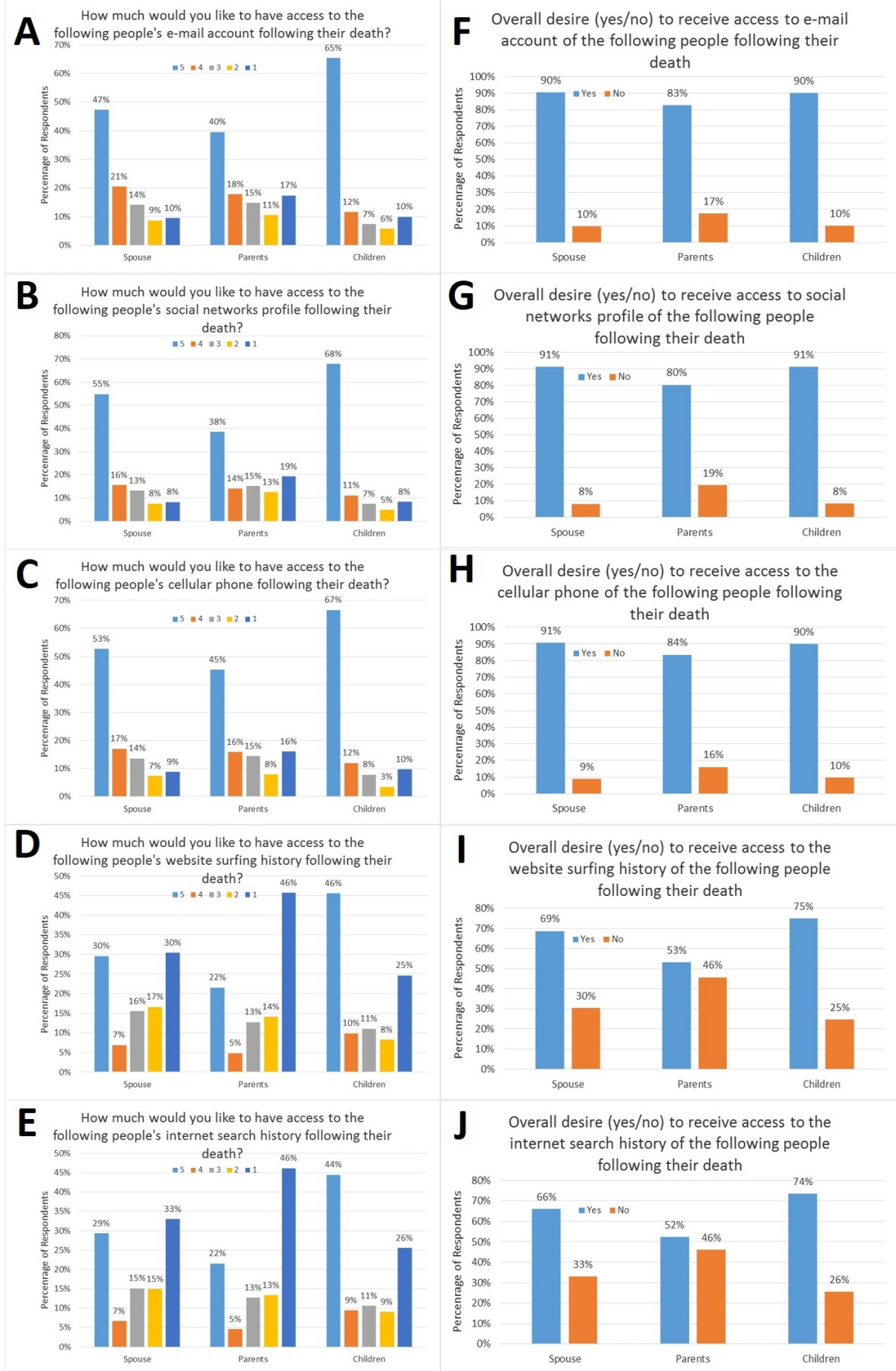
Figure 1. A–E – The respondents were asked to rate their wish for access to the digital assets of a hypothetically deceased relative (in the scale of 1 to 5, when 1 is "Not at all" and 5 is "Very much"). F–J – The data is shown following re-clustering, where 1 equals "No wish to gain access" and 2–5 equals "Wish to gain access to various degrees".

In order to visualize the differences of attitude to various degrees of relations, we created a weighted averaged answer for each category of digital assets and relatives. The weighted average was calculated according to Equation 1, where TNR5 is the Total Number of Respondents who graded their wish as 5, TNR4 is the Total Number of Respondents who graded their wish as 4, etc.

Equation 1:

The visualization of the results in this way made obvious a second distinction that existed in attitudes towards spouses vs. parents, vs. children. The wish to be granted access to digital assets of children is significantly and repeatedly greater throughout the five categories of digital assets, than that expressed to those of spouses and parents. The wish to be granted access to those same digital assets of spouses is significantly and repeatedly greater than that expressed for parents (see Figure 2.).
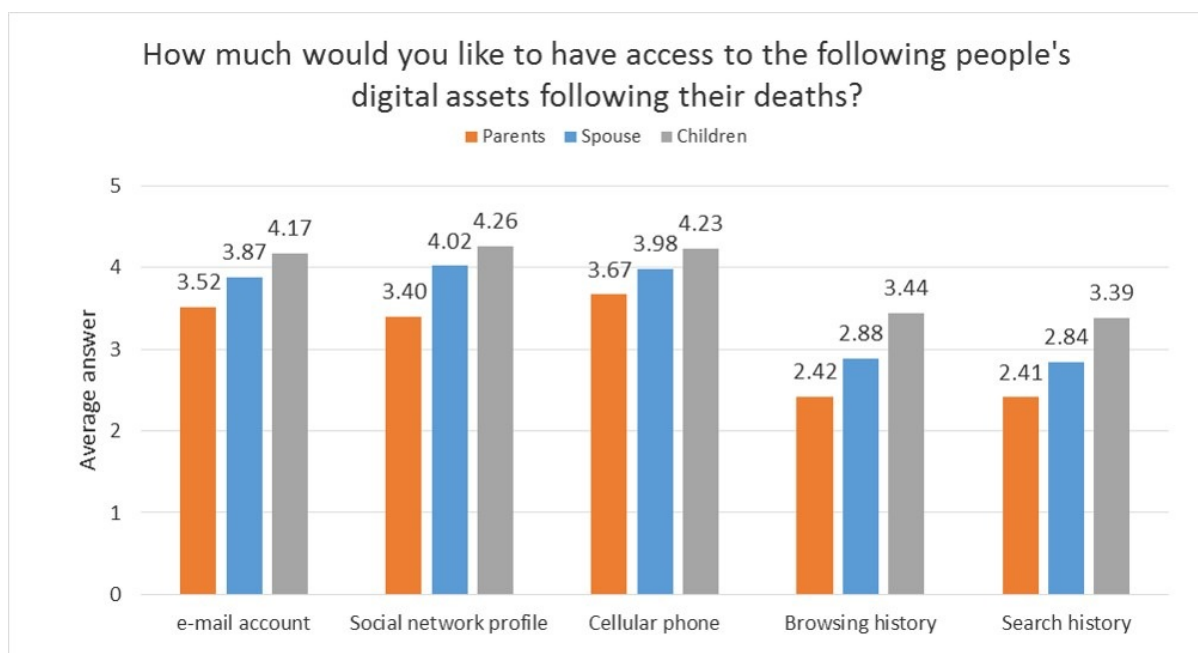

Figure 2. For each of the digital assets, and categories of relatives, we created a weighted average answer that included all the other replies. When presented this way, a distinction is made obvious between the attitudes towards spouses vs. parents, vs. children.

The Right of Minors to Post-Mortem Privacy

We asked the respondents if ISPs should be required by law to give parents/legal guardians access to the digital assets of their minor children or wards (under 18 years of age in Israel) after death. This information could help ISPs decide whether or not to create legally binding contracts with their minor users, and is also of use in developing government policy and regulation on the matter. Overall, 218 respondents replied to this question, either claiming that access should be given to parents only with their child's prior consent, or arguing that access should be given to parents even

without the child's prior consent or acknowledgement of the issue. While we specifically asked only parents and legal guardians of minors to answer this question, many childless respondents and parents of adults provided answers as well. We therefore divided the respondents according to two main categories – with children and without children – but could not divide them according to parents of minors and adults.

Of the parents, only 16.9% believed their children are allowed the right for post-mortem privacy, whereas 83.1% objected. In the group of the non-parents, the results were much more ambiguous, with 42% allowing children post-mortem privacy, and 58% objecting to it. Overall, when both groups are taken into account, 74.8% are pro-regulation that will require ISPs to give parents access to their deceased children's digital assets even without their consent, and 25.2% are against such regulation (see Figure 3.).

Respondents with children -

Only with the child's prior consent, 16.9%

Even without the child's prior consent or acknowledgement, 83.1%

Respondents without children -

Only with the child's prior consent, 42.0%

Even without the child's prior consent or acknowledgement, 58.0%

Total Respondents -

Only with the child's prior consent, 25.2%

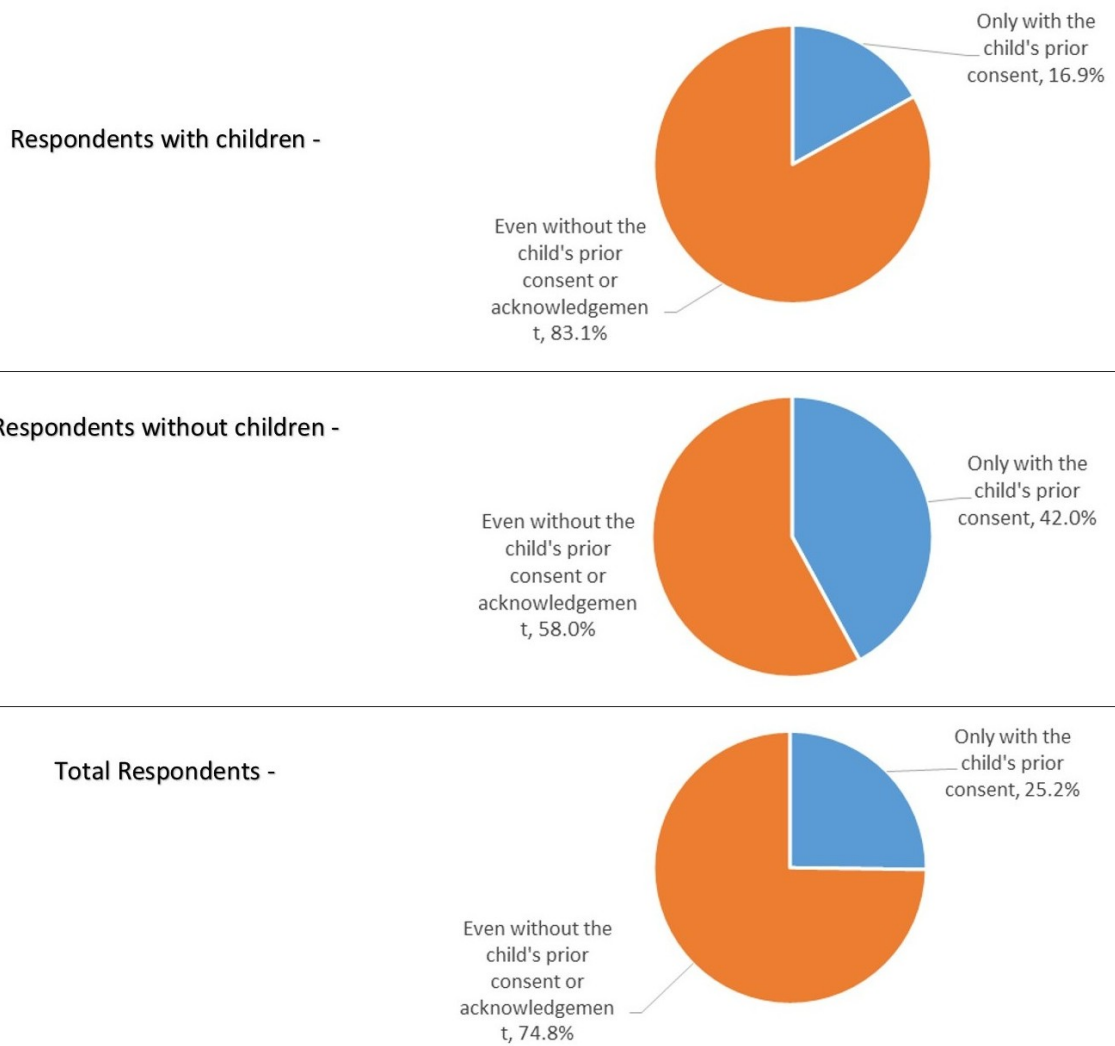Even without the child's prior consent or acknowledgement, 74.8%

Figure 3. Should ISPs be required by law to give parents / legal guardians access to the digital assets of their minor children (under 18 years of age in Israel) after death? Overall, 218 respondents replied to this question. The respondents were divided according to two main categories: with children and without children.

Adults and Post-Mortem Privacy

How should ISPs regard the requests of first degree relatives to gain access to the departed's digital assets, in cases where the deceased has left no instructions regarding said assets? Of all the respondents to the survey, 421 answered

this question, with 70.8% indicating that in such a case, ISPs should give access to relatives of first degree (parents, children and spouse), as opposed to 29.2% who objected to granting access to anyone at all, if no instructions were left (see Figure 4.).

If a person has left no instructions regarding his or her digital assets post-mortem, how should the ISPs act as a default?

The ISPs should not give access to the digital assets to anyone, 29.2%

The ISPs should give access to the digital assets, but only to relatives of first degree (parents/children/ spouse), 70.8%
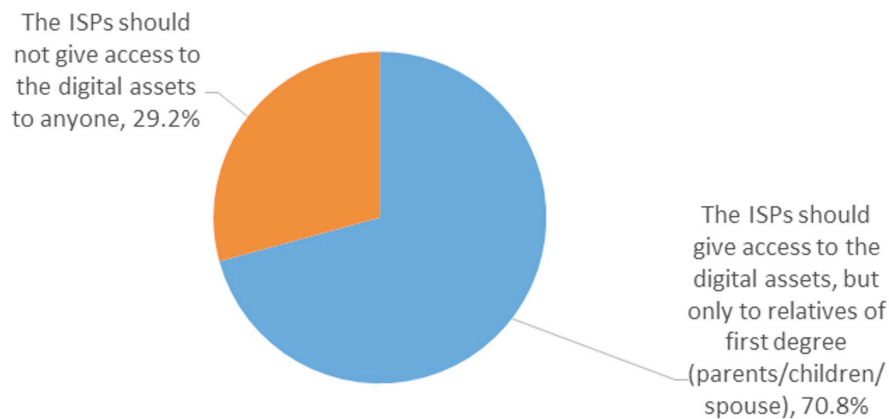
Figure 4. What should the ISPs default policy be, when addressing requests from relatives of deceased users to gain access to their accounts, in cases where the deceased has left no instructions regarding said assets?

Reciprocity

We have asked the respondents about both their wishes to gain access to the digital legacies of their relatives after their death (as discussed in this paper), as well as their willingness to grant their relatives similar access to their own digital legacies posthumously.

Due to space limitations, questions of the second type will not be addressed fully in this paper. In brief, preliminary (unpublished) results reveal that the two main trends discussed so far remain consistent: people are significantly more willing for their spouses to gain access to their digital legacies than their parents and/or children; also, while people are generally reciprocal in their approach (a large majority of those who wish for access to their relatives' digital legacies, are also willing to grant access to their own legacies), this tendency is significantly smaller when it comes to sharing their website surfing history and browser search history, with only ~65% exhibiting reciprocity in these areas.

Discussion

While there have been anecdotal stories about families struggling to gain control over their deceased loved ones' digital legacies, the phenomenon has not yet manifested itself on a broader scale. We believe, however, that with each passing year, more people will be exposed to this dilemma, as their life partners and relatives pass away, leaving behind unavailable digital legacies.

Wish for Access

In all of the cases where people wished to be granted access to their loved ones' digital legacy, the wish to gain access to children's digital legacies was greater than that of spouses' legacies, which was greater still than that of parents' legacies. We believe this stems from the view that the death of a spouse or a parent – while terrible on a personal level – is usually perceived as the result of old age, as a natural part of life. The death of a child, however, is always considered a tragedy. In some cases, a child's death is the result of suicide or acts of violence or bullying in school or online, in which case it is easy to understand why the parents would want to shed light on the circumstances that led to his or her demise. The child's death throws the parents into a "whirlpool of grief" and dissolution (Rubin and Malkinson 2001, 219–240), which enhances the parent's wish to preserve any part of the legacy left to them. In addition, the death of a child is considered to be an extremely (possibly the most) devastating experience, more than the death of a spouse or parent (Christ et al. 2003). We therefore believe that this greater loss leads to the parental wish to cling to any tidbit available to them following the death of their child, to a greater degree than following the death of a spouse/parent (this is not to belittle the tremendous loss these too may suffer).

There was a clear difference between the respondents' approach towards social networks, e-mail accounts and cellular phones, as opposed to website surfing and search history. We believe this difference is based on two synergistic approaches by the surviving relatives: the wish to gain insight intothe deceased's life and preserve important aspects of it, as discussed by Unruh (Unruh 1983); and apprehension of uncovering unknown aspects that might tarnish the image the loved one left behind.

As indicated in a past research about teenagers and their virtual possessions by Jodi Forlizzi et al, social networks and e-mail accounts are used daily "in order to manage… [a] presentation of self to multiple audience" (Odom, Zimmerman and Forlizzi 2011, 1491–1500). It is therefore clear that other people see those digital legacies as representative of the deceased's persona and generated image, and would like to preserve those aspects of his or her life that were promoted actively when the person was alive. Search history, on the other hand, is more indicative of the aspects that this person might have preferred to keep private, and did not choose to actively share even with his or her loved ones.

Regardless of the reasons behind the respondents' answers, it is clear that there is a gap between the current policies enacted by various ISPs and the wish expressed by the public to gain access to their loved ones' digital legacies and representations after their death.

Post-Mortem Privacy

Which is more important: the privilege of privacy, even after death, or the wishes of the living to be granted access to all aspects of the deceased's life? This dilemma has ethical implications and must be resolved in a well-regulated and transparent manner by the ISPs and legal authorities. However, these entities should also pay heed to the sentiments expressed by the public on this issue, and find solutions accordingly.

We wish to clarify that we do not dismiss nor disregard the wishes of people for post-mortem privacy, as these are perfectly understandable and legitimate wishes and should be respected or considered, at the very least. We do believe, however, that most relatives who find themselves locked out of the digital legacies of their loved ones are put in this position not due to the deceased's explicit wish for post-mortem privacy, but due to the deceased's lack of knowledge or awareness regarding his or her digital legacy issues and/or the ISPs policies in this regard.

In order to uncover public opinion on this matter, we asked the respondents whether ISPs should grant access by default to first-order relatives of the deceased, in case no prior consent or acknowledgment were given. In two different questions we separated cases of minors from adults. In both cases, the results were strikingly similar and highly significant. Of all the respondents, 74.8% believed parents or legal guardians should gain access to the digital legacy of a deceased minor child or ward. Similarly, 70.8% believed that first-degree relatives should gain access to the digital legacy of a deceased adult.

These results indicate that while the ISPs policies prohibit the granting of access to relatives of the deceased, a majority of the public feels differently, and believes that access should be granted by default to first-degree relatives, particularly in the case of minors.

A possible solution could be to change the default ISPs policy from opt-out to opt-in, similar to the organ donation system. In some countries, organ donation is not the default, unless the deceased has left explicit instructions in the matter. In other countries, organ donation is the default, unless the deceased has left explicit instructions otherwise (Johnson 2003). Currently, most ISPs policies act in the first manner: access is not granted to relatives, unless the deceased has left explicit instructions otherwise. We assert that the second type of policy – providing access to relatives unless the deceased has left explicit instructions otherwise – should be considered the default, and its implications should be analyzed in depth.

Privacy

Prior to reviewing the results of this survey, we believed that the digital legacy assets people would hold most dear to them would be the contents of their emails, their social network accounts and their cellular phones. The results, however, seem to indicate that people hold their web surfing history and search history as even more private, and therefore are less willing for their loved ones to have access to it. This seems to be the case when the reciprocity angle is taken into account, as the surveyed were also more reluctant in their wishes to gain access to the web surfing history and search history of their relatives and loved ones, which seems to suggest they, too, perceive them as more private. This issue needs to be considered carefully by ISPs, should they redesign their policies.

Reciprocity

Even though reciprocity has been present in most answers, it has not been in all. We believe these findings reveal the complexity and sensitive nature of these issues, as there is no one "right" answer: when reciprocity was looked into, some answers revealed that even some of the people who wish to gain access to the digital legacies of their loved ones, are not necessarily willing for their loved ones to gain access to their own digital legacies, particularly in the two "forbidden" fields of surfing and search history. We believe this highlights the need to find a new solution, one which will allow each and every ISP user to clearly state his or her wishes in this regard, and for each category in the legacy in itself, as there isn't a "one solution fits all" to this sensitive matter.

Research Limitations

Although more than 500 participants answered the questions in the survey, there is a very real possibility of bias, for three reasons. First, due to the online nature of the survey, it is clear that the participants are at least adept at using computers and connecting to the Internet. Secondly, 338 participants (66%) have joined the survey either through Vered (Rose) Shavit's blog, which deals with digital legacies, death and grief (Shavit, Digital Dust 2013), or from a link that was shared by Shavit throughout her social networks. This means that many participants might have prior

knowledge of these topics. Those people who are "in the know" of such information, have often experienced bereavement and grieving themselves, and are thus biased by personal experience.

Further research would need to be conducted on a larger sample size, preferably from other countries as well, since this survey only targeted the Israeli public.

Conclusions

In the past decade there have been several instances in which grieving families were left without access to their loved one's digital legacies. This issue caused the families further pain and anguish, and prompted lawsuits against the ISPs which denied the families access to the deceased's account. However, most ISPs are still adamant that no access should be granted to relatives of the deceased, as such access would violate the terms of use that the deceased signed upon when opening the account, leading to a violation of his/her privacy.

We believe that this issue is not as uncommon as it may seem, and that many families will discover during the next decade or two that they too cannot have access to their loved ones' digital legacies. In order to verify our hypothesis, we conducted a first-of-a-kind online survey among the Israeli public, inquiring into their positions and wishes concerning digital assets and legacies.

The results confirmed our hypothesis: the public largely believes that first-degree relatives should be granted access to the deceased's digital legacies posthumously, even more so in the case of minors. Moreover, parents, spouses and even children state their wish to have access to the deceased's digital legacies posthumously. It is therefore clear that there is a gap between the policies enacted by the ISPs, and the wishes of the public.

While we urge ISPs to take note of the public's opinions and feelings on the matter of digital legacies, we are aware that the solution to the problem cannot be resolved based on public opinion alone. This issue is highly complex, and involves legal, technical, ethical, philosophical and financial aspects that need to be addressed. We hope that this paper will lead to active discussion and further research that will explore this field more deeply, and eventually bring about a change in the present policies. We believe such a change should occur sooner rather than later, as in each year that passes, more people will face similar dilemmas.

Biographical notes:

Ever since her brother, Tal Shavit, was killed when hit by a car on March 2nd 2011, Vered Shavit has delved into the realm of Digital Death. She has been writing and conducting independent research about the virtual, online and digital aspects of modern deaths. She has gained expertise in these fields and has become a lecturer on the subject, appearing in the media numerous times to speak about it. Contact: death.in.digital.era@gmail.com

Dr. Tzezana holds a PhD in Nanotechnology, and is a research fellow in the Yuval Ne'eman Workshop for Science, Technology & Security. His research focuses mainly on emerging and disruptive technologies, analyzing the ways in which they affect society, and offers best practices for handling these technologies. Dr. Tzezana lectures in the Israeli academy about the industries and

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reviews

Thanatos

Research Review: Death Online - Alive and Kicking!

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Abstract

In recent years, the physical death, the related grief, and the ensuing memorials has become visible in the digital arena. As every other aspect of life is to be found online, so are death and the surrounding issues. The research into the area is not far behind, and using the approach of a timeline with different stakeholders, this research review offers a systematic way of keeping track. The rather simple timeline relates to the death of a person, there is before, just around, and after death, appropriately named in a dead language: Ante Mortem, Peri Mortem, and Post Mortem. This review deals exclusively with the digital context of the physical death of existing human beings, as opposed to, e.g., in-game death experience or memorials for fictional characters. These are no doubt interesting issues that deserve their own review, although we might need to put citation marks around "death".

Introduction

In western societies we have sequestrated death and dying. (At least, that is an often-voiced position, despite research contesting it in various ways, as discussed later). Apart from the rare experience of personal loss, we do not face much death and certainly not on a daily basis. And if we do, for example due to life-threatening illness, and choose to blog and tweet about it (like the American woman Lisa B. Adams, who writes about fighting metastatic breast cancer: Adams, n.d.), the reactions in public might be stark and condemning (Keller 2014). Displaying such matters are still widely experienced as transgressions; as perforations of the distinctions between life and death, private and public, sacred and profane (Gotved and Bjerager 2013). Nevertheless, the growing online presence and the many social network sites are lending a new visibility to death and loss, grief and memorials. We share what is emotionally important to us and that includes (at least to a certain degree) areas otherwise sequestrated. The visibility might be a challenge to sequestration – as Walter et al. 2011, put it – or it might just be a temporary peephole into private matters. Whatever it is, the online activity marks a change in the way we are dealing with physical death and the culture surrounding it.

The goal of this review is to sample as much as possible of the activity and research in the area. As a cross-disciplinary cultural sociologist myself, I have used a plethora of keywords while searching the publication databases, together with the all time proven follow-the-references approach. However, the complexity involved is a challenge on several counts. First, the visibility of death online is a rather new phenomenon, with the research activity spread out in small pockets within more traditional areas. Especially within various humanities, sociologies, and legal studies, the contours of new subfields are emerging, concerned with death online. It is rather unpredictable how, when, and where presentations and publishing occurs, also because there are many Ph.D. projects within the area. Second, this multi-disciplinary research topic deals with contemporary cultural and digital changes in rituals, affordances and performances, which are closely related to the surrounding society. Most activities connected to the physical death are fused with, e.g., religion, national regulations, legal implications, and long-term traditions, and within Europe alone the differences are countless. Third and somewhat related, national framing as well as language barriers might encumber cultural understanding or hinder access to challenging empirical findings. A continuous effort to diminish the effects of these three challenges has been undertaken, although they might not be that unusual for a new research area.

In late 2012 I initiated an international research network called Death Online, in the hope to connect as many researchers as possible within this widespread field. As of now (June 2014) we are 75 members, sharing an online collaboration platform, and still attracting more researchers. In April 2014, we had our first international symposium, with panels as diverse as 'Digital Legacy and Inheritance', 'Remembering Loved Ones Online', and 'Digital Media in Funerals and Graveyards'. This extensive networking effort partly ensures awareness of different approaches, traditions and cultures. Thus, this review is indebted to the Death Online research network and the researchers' willingness to share perspectives.

A Timeline Approach

The internet seems to carter to every imaginable need connected to the physical death and its aftermath. As said, a simple timeline is sufficient to guide the field: Ante Mortem, Peri Mortem, and Post Mortem (before, just around, and after death), each category associated with an increasing list of stakeholders. The timeline bears some resemblance to the one introduced by Massimi et al. (2011) in a Human Computer Interface (HCI) design context: Living, Dying, Dead, and Bereaved. Indirectly, a comparable timeline also guides Walter et al. (2011) and thus it might be safe to say that the chronology relates more to the logic of life and embodied experience than to a specific theoretical framework.

The found (research) activities within the timeline also vary. Ante and Peri Mortem are mostly approached by solution-oriented perspectives – how to make it more easy to prepare or how to help those newly bereaved. Thus, legal considerations, technology design, and business ventures dominates Ante and Peri Mortem. The research in the Post Mortem category is more about the cultural shift towards digital sharing of grief, mourning, and practices of remembrance (although there are business and design involved as well). The more cultural-analytical approach is hardly surprising, as the different online memorials are the most common death-related online activity. Due to the visibility, it lend itself to scrutiny and thus, various academic interpretations of rituals, shared emotions, and memorial culture. Of course, this is the broad picture – as the following chapters will show, there are still a lot of variations within the three categories.

Ante Mortem

As a category, Ante Mortem has one prime stakeholder, the individual him/herself.   The closest relatives might be more or less involved, depending on, e.g. the age of the individual and the immediate reason behind the 'death awareness' (Waagstein 2013). However, the category deals with the digital possibilities for an adult planning hers/his own death, and do not include children or people who leave all the hassle to the descendants (and thus, to the Peri and Post Mortem categories). On the individual level, we can speak of two variations in the preparation of one's death, depending on the level of knowledge involved. Of course, we all know for sure we are going to die sometime in the future, but knowing it on an abstract level is clearly different from knowing it on a more specific level – e.g. in a month or in a year. Furthermore, the inclination to engage in preparation varies, from repression (or lack of energy) to putting straight the legacy and setting up the whole funeral.

Walter et al. (2011) points to four Ante Mortem related digital challenges: the need for accessible information about 'how to handle death' (for both the individual and the caregivers), the death-related activity in blogging and the like, broader questions about digital inclusion/exclusion of the oldest citizens, and the existence of diverse digital support groups (Walter et al. 2011). As examples of the latter, a Norwegian study from 2002 explored the Social Support in a Wired World (Kummervold et al. 2002), while Wen et al. (2011) more narrowly focused on the psychological gain for a women participating in an online discussion group, from the diagnosis of her breast cancer to her death.

Digital Assets

Studies show us a special challenge in the Ante Mortem phase: the growing arena of digital assets, legacy, and personal profiles are under a double kind of sequestration, from the everyday repression and from the novelty and relative invisibility of one's digital life. Acknowledging the difficulties in defining a digital afterlife, Carroll & Romano (2011) wrote an early guide to ensuring one's digital legacy. A recent master thesis (Waagstein 2013) dealt with the planning issues among nurses in a hospice. Even as they had 'death awareness' and thus the legal setup prepared for their own death, none of them had included the digital legacy. After the thesis work, the nurses changed their routine, both private (e.g. gathering and storing passwords in an accessible document) and professionally (by reminding the patients/relatives about the digital dimension). Another study (Moncur 2014) used a time capsule metaphor to get people to relate to their digital assets without dealing directly with death and legacy. Even though respondents were digital active older people in life-threatening conditions, they still had a hard time defining the possible value of their digital assets. This double sequestration make business models related to digital preparation of one's death somewhat doomed, despite the apparent need to finding solutions.

Digital services are for example storage for assets like passwords and set-ups for after-death mail delivery. The involved metaphors are a mixture of physical artefacts (e.g. a locker or a tombstone) and spiritual promise (alluding to some kind of eternal digital life). The webpages seems to be changing a lot (for example Itomb.net and Imemorial.net, now with the added LifeKeep.com) or merging into one another (as recently, LegacyLocker.com and PasswordBox.com). This shifting around does nothing to instill trust in eternal handling of one's digital legacy, and the site mentioned by Jones (2004), finalthoughts.com, underscores the risk by being an empty domain up for sale today, 10 years later. The new kids on the block, as Capsoole.com, Perpetu.co and Deathswitch.com, claim to be unique in their services, however it is way to early to tell if they can convince enough people to buy into the idea of continuous password management, after-death emails and/or digital legacy.

However, research directly into these different services seems currently to be absent, apart from a presentation on the earlier mentioned Death Online Research symposium (Gray and Escalante, 2014). Otherwise, the closest related topics are found in the 2012 special issue of Human-Computer Interaction: Designing for Personal Memories: Past, Present, and Future (van den Hoven et al. 2012; Whittaker et al. 2012) and in the 2013 special issue of The Information Society: Death, Afterlife, and Immortality of Bodies and Data (Bollmer 2013; Kera 2013; Sherlock 2013), both issues dealing broadly with digital design for a possible afterlife (and thus also relevant in the Post Mortem subcategory of universal approaches).

Tools for SNS Profiles

However, there is one digital area where the before mentioned sequestration seems to be challenged by broader awareness, at least in business terms. Different social network sites are inventing different strategies, where at least some of the profile management choices are directed at the living individual (as opposed to the bereaved descendant in the Peri and Post Mortem phases). Thus, Google.com (n.d.) makes it possible to decide on beforehand how long an account can be inactive before it is closed down. Kind of contrary, Facebook.com (2014) seems to handle the closing down or memorialization of profiles belonging to dead people on a hands-on basis, despite the guesstimate that 2,89 million Facebook-users would die in 2012 (Lustig, 2012). Well then, of course there is an app for preparing one's death in relation to Facebook. 'If I die' makes it possible to choose the friends that will report one's death to Facebook and, somewhat more enticing, to record a last message to be shown on Facebook after one's death (if i die – the digital afterlife Facebook application, n.d.). Different Ante Mortem platforms, especially those that invite you to write about your life, were in focus in a conference paper at the Association of Internet Research conference in 2013 (Farkas 2013) and this is definitely an area where more research is needed.

In sum, the Ante Mortem category here is about the individual take on digital legacy, assets, and afterlife. The area naturally bleeds into both Peri and Post Mortem, especially if the individual is not really prepared and/or suffer a sudden death. Furthermore, a certain amount of research deals with issues relevant not only for the individual and the family, but for the society as such. This goes especially for the legal aspects of preparing the time after one's death - the definitions of digital assets (Carroll and Romano 2011; McCallig n.d.), of online identity ownership (Lingel 2013) and of the question of data mining (Leaver 2013) are yet to be settled in the legal sphere.

Peri Mortem

This category deals with the time just around the death of an individual and thus includes the closest relatives into the relevant stakeholders; those who have to deal with most practicalities. They are certainly not alone; Moncur et al. (2012) offer an extensive overview of stakeholders and activities involved in what the authors term "(...) the period immediately after dead: the post-mortem interval" (Moncur et al. 2012, 531). Some of the connected activities are moving online, while others are firmly grounded in the physical rituals, and the Peri Mortem is not as widely researched as the subsequent Post Mortem. Still, there are at least two overlapping subcategories in the Peri Mortem period: online businesses connected to the rituals of death, and the role of technology as such. Before those, an extreme case of Peri Mortem comes to the mind: the webcasting of an actual suicide, egged on by the spectators who did not think it was for real (Svedmark 2013). Apart from the apparent ethical challenges connected with researching such cases, the stakeholder group in this incident definitely should include the online spectators as well.

Online Business

As we get more accustomed to shop online, the business opportunities are numerous. As early as 1997, Sofka reports on different support 'internetworks', among others web shops selling caskets and urns (Sofka 1997). Such businesses are still found throughout the net, complete with PayPal payment and UPS shipping. According to Moncur et al (2012), the legal conflicts (in US) between the traditional funeral businesses and the online competition are about to be solved (Moncur et al. 2012, 537). In Denmark, in 2013, the online undertakers are a fast growing industry, making it possible for the descendants to plan the ceremonies online. Connected with this, obituaries (Hume and Bressers 2009) and the small newspaper death notices are moving online with added search ability, prolonged access and geography-defined subscription possibilities. If they work, that is – as Moncur et al. (2012) notes, some of the services are poorly designed and might include improper commercials as, e.g. links to senior dating sites (Moncur et al. 2012, 535). Later in the process, when buying the gravestone to adorn the grave, one of the choices of personalization is to mix the physical object with a digital memorial by ordering the gravestone with an embedded QR-code. This feature (rather dependent on mobile communication technology and the viability of the QR-code as such) is linking the actual spot with digital material of all sorts (Cann 2013; Gotved and Bjerager 2013, 2014). More directly dealing with the digital aftermath of a death is the web based service Aftercloud. It offers the descendant to, on their behalf, either close down the deceased's social media accounts or to integrate them into a private memorial (Aftercloud, n.d.). The service is founded on the experience of loosing a digitally active parent and thus mirrors the challenges bound to surface in the aftermath of a sudden death in the digital age.

Communication Technology

With the social media, we are in a cultural shift towards online sharing of the emotional important, and that also means a lot of digital activity directly connected to the physical death. Walter et al. (2011, 281) put it like this: "Although the personalized funeral (...) predates the dominance of the internet, electronic communication certainly facilitates its spread and its evolution into a co-production between family and celebrant". Furthermore, the social media possess a challenge to the closest relatives in the Peri Mortem phase: how to spread the sad news, how to navigate the online social networks of the deceased? Even if Facebook is seen as an appropriate forum to announce the funeral, the language around 'planning an event' might just as well offend somebody.

The role of technology as such in the process from when a person dies to the funeral itself is fast developing (Allen 2014). This goes for the technology involved by doctors and undertakers as well as by the descendants and other stakeholders (Gilbert and Massimi 2012). Particularly, the involvements of communication technology sometimes transgress the cultural norms connected to sequestration, thus causing a public outcry. This happened with the recent media focus on Selfies at Funerals; photos harvested in social media and put together by Jason Feifer (Selfies at Funerals, n.d.). On the other hand, communication technology can be used to facilitate attendance to the funeral (or other remembrance ceremonies) by webcasting the ceremony for those not able to attend in person (Moncur et al. 2012; Walter et al. 2011). Emotional updates and pictures different from selfies might find their way from funeral to web, prolonging the last leave and maybe blending into the establishment of an online memorial.

In sum, the Peri Mortem phase presents the descendants with an array of traditional services gone digital, and integrates a lot of technology in a very broad sense. Most of the here mentioned aims at making the short window between the physical death and the funeral easier on the closest relatives and to ease the transition between life and

digital afterlife. It increasingly becomes harder to distinguish between private and public in the process; the digitally shared materials are redefining questions of visibility and access, from early in the Peri Mortem phase and on.

The published research into this short phase is yet relatively sparse and almost over-shadowed by the last and somehow infinite phase, the Post Mortem.

Post Mortem

With really no clear distinction time-wise, the Peri Mortem phase continues into Post Mortem, where the extended social network of the deceased are embraced into the stakeholders. The continued process of grief, loss, and shared sentiments mark new forms of supportive communities online. A certain amount of research is dedicated to shared Post Mortem grief as a new phenomenon, partly because the activity is demonstrating the broader cultural change by making the private more public. In the following, the research is divided into three tentative and somehow overlapping subcategories:

Universal approaches (theoretical framing, legal aspects, HCI design)

Platform-specific approaches (Facebook and MySpace)

Loss-specific approaches (the loss of children, parents, named celebrities and certain incidents).

Almost all of the located research touches upon more than one subcategory, so the grouping is mainly to indicate where the prime focus is. While the first approach deals with death online from an outside-in perspective (so to speak), the two latter are predominantly case studies of certain phenomenon, giving us an inside-out perspective.

Universal approaches

The exposure of death related issues was not invented with the social media, and one way to look at the recent activity is to include other forms of mediated death (Sumiala 2013). Walter et al. (1995) and Gibson (2007a) look at death reports in the news, underscoring the mediation as a particular challenge to the sequestration argument. Gibson concludes that there is a widening the gap between public exposure and private sequestration: "(...) the increasing production of death-related stories and images, and the concomitant widening of technological access and consumption, does not necessarily translate into a familiar acceptance or acknowledgement of mortality" (Gibson 2007a:, 423). We can take this argument a step further by asking, if the social media activity around physical death and bereavement will close the gap (due to more networked and co-constructed memorials) or widening the gap even further by offering new ways of death spectatorship – what DeGroot (2013) in another context calls 'emotional rubbernecking'.

For years, scholars have used the theoretical framework of Continuing Bonds (Klass et al. 1996) in relation to grief and bereavement. Instead of severing the bond to the deceased, the relationship is taking on a new form, continuing under different circumstances. This theory goes especially well with studies into different online memorial spaces. Roberts (2004) studies how memorials on the web add value to the traditional bereavement activity, by the sense of continuing bonds with the deceased and by a deepening of connections with those living through similar experiences. Related to these points, Maddrell (2012, 53) states: "The dynamic and interactive character of virtual memorials allow them to be updated and to provide ongoing and active remembrance at least in the medium term, as well as a possible sense of continuing bonds with the deceased and shared community between mourners". Especially in combination with memorials on Facebook, where the timeline of the deceased plays into the narrative of continuation, continuing bonds is often used as a relevant framing of the activity (DeGroot 2012; Getty et al. 2011; Kasket 2012; Nielsen et al. 2014).

Likewise, Gray & Coulton (2013) combine an awareness of continuing bonds with the emergent practices of digital curation and creation.

However, one can easily conceptualize online memorial spaces without relating the research to continuing bonds. For example, Veale (2004) combines research on bereavement with a categorization of a diverse web memorial activity, concluding that " cyberspace is an available and effective space for memorialising the deceased". This is confirmed 10 years later by Jakoby and Reiser (2014) in their chapter of the anthology "Internet and Emotions" (Bensky and Fisher 2014). Karppi (2013, 1) examines Facebook's policies on the dead and goes from there to a broader picture on how life and death are embedded within social media platforms. Brubaker et al. (2012) uncover the online language of grief and distress through computational linguistics analysis on MySpace comments, while Vealey (2011) uses cognitive scientist Andy Clark's extended-mind model to grasp Facebook "as a cultural embodiment of public grief" (Vealey 2011). Riechers (2008) looks at online post mortem baby photos and their inclusion in sanitized/enhanced memorials, and Roberts (2012) examines how different memorial settings enable different formats of remembrance. In a more spiritual context, Sofka (2012) looks at New Age narratives in blogging, Gustavsson (2013) analyzes expressions of faith in online memorial sites in Sweden and Norway, Hutchings (2014) combines emotions around death, digital media, and religious dynamics, while Whitehead (2014) writes about "the story God is weaving us into" at U.S. women's blogs dealing with infant loss.

As touched upon in the Ante Mortem paragraph, there are lots of yet unsolved issues regarding digital assets and heritage. Into the pool, just to muddy the water, we have national differences as well as commercial interests. "Who owns the right to your digital assets after your death" is in fact a question very hard to answer. Even though the story about Bruce Willis wanting to sue iTunes (Sears 2012) turned out to be false, both Stutts (2013) and Wong (2012) use the attention-grabbing gossip to examine the consequences of EULAs (End User License Agreement). These licenses disallow transfer of digital assets as, e.g. books and music, also in case of death and inheritance. Edwards and Harbinja (2013, 115) highlight the facts that digital assets are harder-than-usual to define in legal terms, and that the current situation in unsatisfactory: "... the area is mainly controlled by privately ordered rules of contract, i.e. the terms and conditions of different service providers, rather than by the general law of property and succession". For the same reasons, the whole anthology 'Digital Legacy and Interaction - Post Mortem Issues' (Maciel and Pereira 2013) merits a mention. Furthermore, the intriguing perspective of perpetual copyright on unpublished work is discussed by McCallig (2013).

The last area within this Post Mortem subcategory is design, where a score of primarily HCI (Human Computer Interface) related conference proceedings outline possible scenarios. Brubaker and Vertesi (2010) make recommendations for design of web 2.0 applications to ensure a post mortem techno-spiritual practice, and Odom et al. (2010) look into digital persistence with interactive technology for the bereaved. Likewise, Foong and Kera (2008) wish to make a reflective design for interactions on digital memorials. Digital design for the bereaved are also in focus for Massimi and Baecker (2010) and Massimi et al. (2011), and (overlapping with the loss-specific subcategory) Mori et al. (2012) use a specific case of a murdered American teenager to analyze memorial affordances on three different online platforms.

Basically, the universal approaches in the Post Mortem category cover about everything not platform- or loss-specific. Not to leave anything out, we can put a few fortune tellers into the melee as well: Steinhart (2007) invokes artificial

intelligence to secure survival as a digital ghost, while Stokes (2011) takes a more philosophical view on surviving as a bodiless identity on social media platforms. Adding some kind of body back into the equation, Bainbridge (2013) discuss the potential for memorializing people through online avatars, which might not be far from Braman et al.'s (2011) work on digital legacy in 3D virtual worlds.

Platform-specific approaches

With the extensive personal profile building and social networking in especially Facebook and MySpace, it should be of no surprise that issues around the individuals physical death surface with a certain visibility on those platforms. Case studies on digital memorials and remembrance practices are abundant; paying to the fact that today part of our social life is lived online. Apart from the earlier mentioned upkeep of relations to the deceased (continuing bonds), many researchers discover that the mourners (those visiting the digital memorials) also interact about their loss. Forman et al. (2012) write about public participation and the creation of community on Facebook R.I.P. pages, and drawing on the same data set of 550 R.I.P.s, Kern et al. (2013, 2) conclude that Facebook is "a place to honor, memorialize, and engage in dialogs with the deceased". Likewise, Brubaker et al. (2013) call Facebook a new site for public mourning, and Church (2013) see the ongoing communication on a memorial site as a certain dynamic between writing with the deceased and the other bereaved at the same time. Benavides (2013) address the "collapse between public and private modes of grief", somewhat in line with Pennington (2013, 2014) and her studies of bereaved college students and their shared grief on Facebook. Giaxoglou (2014) and Marwick and Ellison (2012) take a broader perspective on the public displays of grief on Facebook, the latter authors going into certain areas of disorder. Their point about possible trolls are underlined by Phillips (2011) on the emergence of R.I.P. trolling, where similar but less abusive behavior lay behind the emotional rubberneckers coined by DeGroot (2013) and the many people mourning perfect strangers on R.I.P. pages, analyzed by Klastrup (2014). Adding MySpace into the set, Carroll and Landry (2010) write about social network sites as discursive surfaces for grief and bereavement, while Brubaker and Hayes (2011, 123) find "interesting practices surrounding issues of authorship and audience, temporal patterns in posting, and continued social networking with the dead" in their analysis of post mortem MySpace comments.

In sum, the platform-specific case studies mentioned here (and for that matter, in the earlier categories as well) all show how the more-or-less-public visibility of individual memorials on social network sites do add a digital and communal dimension to the traditional studies of loss, grief, and bereavement.

Loss-specific approaches

Maybe as a supplement to expressing sorrow through public shrines, as describe by Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998) and Santino (2006), the web is widely used for memorials dedicated to either a well-known other, a public known celebrity, or a certain day in history, loaded with public tragedy. These three distinctive memorial activities are touched upon in this last subcategory, uneasily pairing the most heartbreaking private online grief with the far more public mourning around celebrities and in regard to the 9/11 attack on US in 2001.

Analyzing a Danish memorial site with individual pages, Christensen and Sandvik (2013) focus on grieving parents and their struggle to re-establish life and narrate a sense of meaning after the loss of a child. Somewhat parallel, af Segerstad and Kasperowski (2014), study a closed Facebook group for bereaved parents dealing with the loss and establishing a supporting context for expressions of sorrow. Interactional patterns and structures in dealing with the loss of loved ones are described by McCallig (2014), while the online grief related to the suicides is addressed by

Giaxoglou (2014). A bit earlier than these case studies, Musambira et al. (2007) used messages on a bulleting board for bereaved parents to determine that societal gendered patterns of bereavement to a certain extend are neutralized in cyberspace, a perspective challenged by the findings of Georges et al. (2014). Nager and Vries (2004) look at online memorials for deceased mothers, placed by their adult daughters, while Sanders (2011) focus exclusively on supporting websites for bereaved children and young people.

Seemingly, being famous and dead does include having your own mediated memorial. Jones and Jensen (2005, xvi) states: "...when fans mourn dead celebrities, they are symbolically negotiating authenticity, ownership, memory, and identity, all within the institutional processes of mass mediation". This description fits well with Gibson (2007b) study of the aftermath of the death of the popular Australian wildlife adventurer, TV personality Steve Irwin. Looking at several platforms, Sanderson and Cheong (2010, 328) track the communication of grief following Michael Jackson's death, seizing the "rich opportunity to investigate how grieving manifests online, including how people use postings and tweets to express the different stages of grief and engage in discourse about death and religion". Michael Jackson's legacy is also receiving attention from Sumiala (2013) who digs into mediated rituals from an anthropological perspective. Radford and Bloch (2012) track the expressions of grief on internet message boards after the death of race car driver Dale Earnhardt, Sr., while Harju (2014) goes directly after an icon in digital culture: Steve Jobs and his memorials on YouTube. The last mention in this section goes to Sherlock (2013, 164) who takes a discursive view on symbolic immortality and digital resurrection. She argues "that digital technologies add a new dimension to the many parallels that can be drawn between celebrity culture and religion in what are becoming increasingly secularised societies", thus hinting at a possible re-enchantment.

The 9/11 attack (in 2001) on the Twin Towers and Pentagon produced shockwaves through the global mass media, including the web. Foot et al. (2005) analyses eight websites dedicated to memorialize the victims from the World Trade Center, and suggest a framework for future research into web memorials. Hess (2007) is looking at approximately the same empirical matter, from a more rhetorical point of view. Haskins (2007, 401) is into the rhetoric field as well, however not on online memorials as such, but in regard to the September 11 Digital Archive. She uses this huge collection to discuss "the increasing influence of new media on today's remembrance culture", a formulation that also nicely sums up the documentation in this review and therefore is chosen to mark the end.

Conclusion

As a research area, Death Online is alive and kicking. Guided by a simple timeline of Ante, Peri, and Post Mortem this review have superficially touched upon studies from a rich diversity - there are a plethora of perspectives, methodologies, disciplines, frameworks, and countries involved in the field. The short mentions does not reflect the scholarly effort put into all these studies, however the review offers an inspirational starting point to further investigation. As showed, the studies of dying, death, and bereavement has an online dimension not to be ignored in our digital society.

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Thanatos

The Memory Remains: Visible Presences within the Network[1]

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Abstract

Bereavement practices with the material legacies of the dead are known to be deeply complex, multifaceted and tap into a rich cultural imaginary around the desire to honour, remember and aid the dead to persist on. Since the mid 1990's, scholarships have begun to acknowledge the changing nature of people's material legacies after death. Through increasing engagement with different technologies, the deceased are now leaving extensive digital legacies within the internet. Empirical research has revealed how memorials and social networking profiles offer the bereaved a positive focus for loss and community building. Furthermore, empirical work has investigated how memorial sites and Facebook can invoke the social presence of the dead. However, there are a range of remains and social presences online that have surfaced during my doctoral inquiry that are missing from this developing discourse, such as the dead seeming to like things on Facebook, advertise products, become trending topics, remind us of our birthday commitments, appear in search listings and congratulate us on our new jobs.

Within this review I provide an overview of the current literature around the themes of digital legacy and the digital afterlife that has emerged out of the developing intersection of death and technology studies. By outlining the current debates, I begin to challenge the current thinking by introducing an interdisciplinary approach from New Media studies, in order to reconsider online remains and how evoked social presences in online environments may actually complicate grief instead of aiding, as many research results suggest. This review concludes by reflecting on how sometimes the dead can live on, but potentially as unwelcomed and unwanted presences within the sensitive context of loss and bereavement.

Introduction

The state of absence and loss brought about by the intervention of death into the daily flow of life can cause the living to turn towards what remains present. What is lost inevitably causes the living to question what remains behind as "Loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained" (Eng & Kazanjian 2003, 13). These remains include what remains of us, our bodies, the clothes that covered us, the places where we lived and things that filled those spaces.

Scholarships within death studies serve to remind us that material remains play a very important role within bereavement and in mediating loss (Hallam & Hockey 2001, 19; Hallam, Hockey & Howarth 1999, 13; Gibson 2008, 2). As material legacies that become abandoned in death and are left to the bereaved to manage, they also become part of the processes of remaking of life and remembrance (Hallam & Hockey 2001, 19; Gibson 2008, 2; Odom et al. 2010, 1832; Massimi & Baecker 2011, 1002). The bereaved have to deal with the pragmatics these remains cause. The shifting, recasting, (re)organising and the subsequent (re)distribution, discarding, crafting and selling of remains, which is often managed in line with the perceived value by those left in control or the direct wishes of the dead (Gibson 2008, 15; Ellis Gray 2014, 2). Remains can hold value in a multitude of different ways to people, including being prized for the capacity to provoke nostalgia, and help the bereaved to reminisce about that which has been lost (Hallam & Hockey 2001, 20; Gibson 2008; 2 Odom et al. 2010,1832; Kirk & Sellen 2010, 1).

Due to the increasing uptake of digital technologies, people are creating new and often extensive digital legacies across different digital devices. People leave behind a great amount of digital assets and data fragments, such as status updates, digital images, blogs, GPS locations, search histories and social networking profiles. Scholars from a wide range of disciplines have begun to investigate empirically how the bereaved use these remains in the remaking of life in the context of bereavement and honouring. Likewise, studies have begun to look at digital remains, their ability to invoke continuing bonds and the social presence of the dead (Bos 1995,7; Jones 2004, 83, Kasket 2012, 62 ; Massimi et al. 2011, 987; Odom et al. 2010,1832, Moncur & Waller 2010, 1; Sherlock 2013, 164; Graham 2013, 133; Stokes 2012, 363; DeGroot 2012, 195; Brubaker 2013, 152; Ellis Gray & Coulton 2013, 36.)

However, there are a range of online presences that have emerged during my doctoral inquiry, which are currently missing from this emerging field. Unlike previous examples discussed in the literature, these presences have emerged from data fragments which remain active in unforeseen ways, such as the dead reaching out across LinkedIn social networking website to reconnect with the living, or the difficult last moments before death which are persisting online. Therefore, this review reports on the main work in the field and discusses the current debates in order to give a current overview of how to approach this subject.

By drawing on literature from New Media studies, I will move to introduce interdisciplinary scholarships in order to reconsider the notion of (digital) remains and the materiality of the internet. This will trouble the (in)visibility of what currently remains present online when someone dies and will begin to gesture towards the deeper range of presences in the Web that are currently unrecognised within the research literature. I will continue to outline how presences can emerge from last Tweets, Tumblr posts, video capture and Instagram shots with the potential to manifest the dead online in ways that may distress the sensibilities of the bereaved and have the potential to interact with the bereaved in ways that can be troubling and upsetting.

Material Remains

As part of their ability to provoke feelings of nostalgia and help the bereaved to remember, remains are also known to play a very important role in invoking and mediating the social presence of the dead. Material legacies can appear ingrained by deep residues, perceptible in ways that become profoundly evocative to the memories of the living and can mediate bonds with the dead (Gibson 2008, 183). Through engaging with remains, the dead can become more present than they ever were in life, reminding us how, in death, people do not simply switch from being alive to being socially and physically dead. Instead, aspects of our persona and identities can transgress this binary state of being alive or dead (Gibson 2008, 185; Hallam & Hockey 2001, 2; Hallam, Hockey & Howarth 1999, 214; Davis 2002, 175). Through social and material arrangements, some deceased can continue to live on 'in memory', and be socially alive outside of the body's physical boundaries (Davis 2002, 175; Hallam, Hockey & Howarth 1999, 14). Deceased individuals can haunt the bereaved and continue to shape lives through bequests and become socially mediated through their remains (Gibson 2008, 37). Ghostly presences, sights, smells and sounds of the dead make themselves known to the bereaved, especially in the acute early weeks following a loss (Gibson 2008, 186; Walter 2008, 3). Material remains outlive the death of the owner and visibly carry the marks of use and time such as chips in cups, scents on clothes or dips in chairs, that help the dead to socially manifest and become known to the living (Gibson 2008, 187; Davis 2007, 3).

In the process of managing these remains, the biographies, identities and the social presences of the deceased become fractured, (re)configured, (dis)assembled, condensed and (re)negotiated through ongoing engagements (Ellis Gray 2014, 3; Gibson 2008, 37). This is a feature in the nexus of the remaking of life and living with loss that occurs within a diverse and divergent range of socio-cultural bereavement practices (Davis 2002, 6). It is also becoming an increasingly legitimised phenomenon due to the western scholarship known as Continuing Bonds with the dead. Within death studies, the Continuing Bonds thesis emerged in the mid 1990's to begin acknowledging the complex interplay of relations and challenge notions of closure and letting go of the deceased (Klass & Silverman 1996, 3). Ongoing work around continuing bonds still reveals the complex arrangements around how the dead can stay as a lifelong feature in the private lives of individuals (Walter 2008a, 3; Hallam et al. 1999, 3).

Digital Remains and Digital Legacy

In the mid 1990's an intersection between death and technologies studies opened. By 2008 the developing field had attracted a number of interdisciplinary academics, industry partners and public stakeholders across Europe and the US. Their work began to acknowledge the increasing presence of technologies across the End-of-Life period. From living wills, funeral planning, directives, legacy software and social media use, technologies were increasingly being deployed to offer support to the dying. Unique innovations for the post-mortem interval, such as the mobile verbal autopsy tool were in development (Bird et al. 2013, 1489; Moncur et al. 2012, 531). Funeral homes were noted to augment ceremonies, through online condolence books, videos, mobile phones and PowerPoint slides (Massimi et al. 2011, 988). Headstones had become embedded with QR Codes or touched by augmented reality (Walter et al. 2011, 276). Also, there has been recognition that there are many grief related websites, memorials, virtual worlds and spaces that are being appropriated to help in remembering and honouring the dead individually and communally, such as memorialised profile pages in Myspace and Facebook social networking sites (Bell 2006, 142; Massimi et al. 2011, 987; Walter et al. 2011, 277).

Within this emerging field, the themes of digital legacy and digital afterlife are the oldest strands in the field. The first academic work to touch on the issue of remains, their complex role within bereavement and ability to invoke the presence of the dead, emerged in 1995. Computer scientist Edwin Bos wrote a speculative paper for the Human Computer Interaction (HCI) field titled Making the Dead Live On: An Interactive, Talking Picture of a Deceased Person (1995). His work discussed the complex interplay between physical, analogue and digital remains, presences of the dead and the practices of remaking of life with things (Bos 1995, 7). It was until over 13 years later in 2008 when death and technology studies returned to this issue of remains (Kirk & Banks 2008, 1). This revisiting emerged out of tangential but interesting research projects around sustainability, home archiving and technological heirlooms. As the first empirical work on the issue of remains, it was primarily focused on people's engagement with material legacies and turned to digital remains in order to question how items could be left behind, appropriated, bequeathed, digitised or created by the bereaved (Kirk & Banks 2008, 1; Kirk & Sellen 2010, 1; Odom et al. 2010, 1832.)

From 2011 onwards the issue of remains have become increasingly visible through discussions around data. As alongside traditional material legacies, the bereaved can now increasingly engage with laptops, mobile telephones, games consoles, music players and tablets. Devices have become entwined with digital assets, such as music files, purchased movies online, e-books and virtual forms of currency. In addition, there are dead data remnants to be considered, such as banking logins, files stored in the cloud[2], emails, blogs posts, status updates and broader shadowy traces of people's engagement online, which can be traced such as search engine histories. When combined with the data kept about us (i.e. cookies[3]), Global Positioning System (GPS) locations, device sensors (i.e. accelerometers, magnetometers, etc.), Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and server logs[4], we can portray a rich picture of a person's online engagement. The death of the physical body is now "followed by a slow decay of a massive body of information" (Kera 2013, 178).

While the majority of research emerges around online bereavement continues to empirically focus on memorials, or on activities occurring within the social network spaces of Facebook or Myspace[5], scholarships that look towards the practices of bereavement or the issue of digital remains begin to note:

> Studies on communicative processes tend to involve living users and their interactions, be it with the system or via the system. Yet it is worth stressing the datum itself is not posthumous, as it was produced by the user when alive. 'Posthumous' is the interaction occurring with data belonging to someone already dead (Maciel & Carvalho Pereira 2013, 86).

Tentative 'Posthumous' research which has begun to emerge considered more broadly data remains and digital legacy outside of memorials and Facebook activities (Pitsillides 2012, 1; Haakon, Gulotta & Forlizzi 2012, 1; Gulotta et al.

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[2] Cloud storage is where people can save their data to an off-site and remote storage system that is usually maintained by a third party, rather than storing information to a computer's hard drive.

[3] Cookie or web cookie is a small piece of data acquired when visiting a site, which can track user habits.

[4] IP addresses are binary codes assigned to a device in a network, as a way of identifying the device and its location. Server logs are automatically created files that contain details such as the requests made to the server.

[5] See i.e. Massimi & Charise 2009, 2459; Simmons 2010, 1; Getty et al. 2011, 997; Kasket 2012, 62; Brubaker & Vertesi 2010, 1; Marwick & Ellison 2012, 378; McEwen & Scheaffer 2013, 64; Lingel 2013, 190; Pennington 2013, 617; DeGroot 2012, 195; Church 2013, 184.

2013, 1813; Maciel & Carvalho Pereira 2013, 86). More specifically and in my doctoral research, it looked towards data practices and how data was being appropriated and used to mediate loss across a wide range of online spaces and platforms (Ellis 2012, 1; Ellis Gray 2012, 1; Ellis Gray & Coulton, 2013, 38,). In addition, fresh discussions of the bereaved creating remains or data around the dead began to emerge, as seen within accounts of post mortem photography around infants (Riechers 2010,1) or the use of search engines by the bereaved (Ruthven 2012, 120).

These studies have begun to resonate with previous work by media theorist professor Steve Jones, who in 2004 discussed the deep histories of people appropriating and creating remains from media (Jones 2004, 83). Like Jones, other scholarships continued to emerge in the field that continued to explore the complex relations between bereavement and remains, emphasising how the bereaved do not always engage in acts of creation or appropriation in order to provoke an internalised cognitive memory process or to memorialise (Odom et al. 2010, 1883; Jones 2004, 83; Kirk & Sellen 2010, 1). In fact, bereavement practices with the things that remain are deeply complex and tap into a much richer history and cultural imaginary around the desire to live on and being remembered.

Digital Presence

In 1995, when Edwin Bos introduced the complex interplay between remains and bereavement, part of what he explored was related to how people can live on socially through remaking life with remains (Bos 1995, 7). Within bereavement studies this notion of living on is best exemplified within the theory of Continuing Bonds (Klass & Silverman 1996, 3). Continuing bonds theory pointed out that the bereaved may choose to keep bonds with the deceased rather than looking for closure and people could find ways to keep the dead within their ongoing lives and communities (Klass & Silverman 1996, 3).

Within the death and technologies intersection, Continuing Bonds has increasingly become a strong presence throughout the field and has dominated other perspectives such as grief work (Van den Hoven et al. 2008,1) and attachment theory (Nager & De Vries 2004, 43). In turn, the social lives of the dead have also begun to appear in the literature, firstly within death studies (Roberts 2004, 57; Roberts & Vidal 2000, 521; Rutherford & de Vries 2004, 5) and later within HCI research. Jed Brubaker & Janet Vertesi have used the terms 'ghosts' and 'hauntings' in relation to the presence of the dead emerging within their empirical Facebook study (Brubaker & Vertesi 2010, 1). The capacity of Facebook for continuing bonds and mediating relationships with the dead lead it to be deemed as a "modern–day medium" (Kasket 2012, 62). Equally, studies have highlighted how Facebook is also capable of attracting unwanted attention in the light of the strong moral and cultural responses that the interaction with the dead can incite such as gathering negative comments or sustained trolling activities (Riechers 2012,1).

Digital Afterlife

The notion of living on or at least finding a form of continuation socially taps into a bigger dialogue that situated around the development of the internet in the early 1990's. Within the death and technology studies, this type of approach is perhaps exemplified by the futurist and transhumanist thinker Timothy Leary. As an early adopter of technologies and the internet, Leary's terminal diagnoses of inoperable prostate cancer in the mid 1990's lead him to begin thinking around the topic of dying and technologies. In his book Design for Dying (1997) Leary presented a futuristic vision of a disembodied mind roaming free in the face of death and told his readers "IF YOU WANT TO IMMORTALISE YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS, RECORD AND DIGITISE"(Leary & Sirius 1997, 7).

This belief of immortality thorough digitisation is an early and reoccurring theme that permeates through the early research literature as well. According to media theorist professor Steve jones, it is a representative of a deeper history of how the latest technologies have been repeatedly appropriated by people through time for inscription practices, to record, store, archive and leave behind remains (Jones 2004, 84). Likewise, media had been long considered haunted and able to mediate the dead, who could gain forms of disembodied presence through them (Jones 2004, 83). As the theme and literature around data remains began to develop, the phrases digital afterlife and digital legacy became more commonly deployed, in relation to the massive corpus of data remains. This happened primarily due to wealth of user generated media and the growing acknowledgment of people leaving increasingly large amounts of data in death, that in some form, enabled some presence ofourselves to remain behind (Pitsillides 2012, 1; Haakon, Gulotta & Forlizzi 2012, 1; Gulotta et al. 2013, 1813; Maciel & Carvalho Pereira 2013, 86). As highlighted by Rebecca Gulotta, Hakkon Faste and Jodi Forlizzi in a workshop paper Revelado: Exploring the preservation of our digital data (2012), "people share more information online, and form deep attachments to digital data and artefacts, these virtual objects are becoming more deeply integrated into our lives, and subsequently our legacies" (Gulotta et al. 2013, 1813).

Unlike academia, the internet and mobile industry has been quick to think about data remains and supporting the notion of the digital afterlife. Consequently, a range of software has been developed which can help people to socially live online after death, such as DeathSwitch, DeadSocial or LivesOn, which intelligently mediate and deploy content after the death of an individual. In a similar vein, scholars began to investigate notions such as privacy, control, ownership and broader issues of digital legacy such as bequeathing or stewardship (Pitsillides 2012, 1; Locasto, Massimi & DePasquale 2011, 1; Moncur & Waller 2010, 1; Brubaker et al. 2014, 4157). This work finally provided a recognition that the bereaved are past the point of being manually capable of comprehending the sheer amount of data remains we collectively have (Pitsillides 2012, 1).

Digital Material

While I have given an overview of the current debates and key approaches in the field, I now want to turn to New Media theory in order to introduce a different perspective into death and technology studies. This reconsideration is primarily focused on the materiality of remains and the network they exist within, in order to disturb a common assumption that has dominated popular discourse: the immaterialisation of online culture. This notion of immateriality was situated around popular internet discourse in the 1990's, which conceptualised the internet as the ultimate new frontier, one which possessed amazing qualities that would radically transform the way people could live forever (Van den Boomen et al. 2009, 8).

Visions of virtual realities, cyberspace and hypertext worlds signified – from an utopian perspective – the emergence of a new economy, democracy and novel ways to learn, love and live online. From a dystopian angle, society was being warned about the ever increasing digital divide and the Y2K bug infected our new digital world with apocalyptic visions (Van den Boomen et al. 2009, 8). While very different in their agendas, these different perspectives rose from the same line of technological deterministic thinking, based on the assumed immateriality of the online world (Ellis-Gray & Luján Escalante 2014, 3).

New media was envisioned as offering computer users a way to shift from "the material to the immaterial", where disembodied minds could roam free from material concerns, like decaying and sweaty bodies (Van den Boomen et al.

2009, 8 ; Ellis-Gray & Luján Escalante 2014, 3). It was proclaimed that people were leaving behind atoms for bits, or matter for the mind.

> These lines of reasoning were characterized by what we may call digital mysticism, a special brand of technological determinism in which digitality and software are considered to be ontologically immaterial determinants of new
> media. New media and their effects were thus framed as being 'hyper', 'virtual', and 'cyber' – that is, outside of the known materiality, existing independently of the usual material constraints and determinants, such as material bodies, politics, and the economy. Though this kind of discourse was criticized right from the start as a specific ideology (Barbrook and Cameron 1995), it proved to be persistent, and traces of it can still be discerned in the current academic discourse. (Van den Boomen et al 2009, 8.)

Within the last 10 years, academic discourse in New Media studies has increasingly moved away from speculative cyber discourse and is now critical of this technological deterministic position (Fuller 2008, 5; Van den Boomen et al. 2009, 8). Instead, the focus has switched to understanding how new media and digital cultures are embedded in entangled ways into everyday life and society (Fuller 2008, 5; Van den Boomen et al, 2009, 8; Mejias, 2011, 1). The internet is no longer considered as existing somewhere disconnected from the world, but is seen instead as being "here and amongst us" (Van den Boomen et al. 2009, 8). In other words, the internet and the digital material is no longer considered immaterial but instead is understood to be in-the material or "In-material", and "intrinsically embedded in physical carriers and containers" (Van den Boomen et al. 2009, 8). Within this reframing, digital remains cannot and do not recognisably live in isolation and disconnected from the material world, but are stored within physical carriers such as hard drives, servers, USB sticks and memory cards.

These material things need power, brought by cables, which connect to laptops or other devices that run programs that can make these remains accessible. Remains exist in this sense within the broader technological systems, not the unified whole of the internet, and therefore exist as part of the "material assemblages of hardware, software, and wetware" (Van den Boomen et al. 2009, 8). Within these systems and networks, the debate of whether technology shapes society or society shapes technology is settled. Instead, we can begin to consider remains as working from an entangled position within a network and ecology, where technology and society mutually and continually determine each other (Mejias 2011, 1).

Within death and technology studies the topic of remains, the materiality of remains and the visibility of the networks in which they are embedded within have particularly suffered from immaterialist discourse, which is why the digital remains have typically remained invisible. Within this reframing, I shall continue to explore the notion of digital remains within the network and noting their ability to invoke the presence of the deceased, for example, the remains created in and around the time of death online, by both the deceased themselves and by others. In the following chapter I will also consider how remains live within a network of software, hardware and wetware that has the capacity to manipulate and reanimate them in unexpected ways.

What Else Remains?

As previously noted, to date there has been considerable discussion around how the bereaved interacts with online memorials or social networking profiles. Yet, if I begin to consider the entanglement of remains existing more broadly,

and consider the larger pool of digital remains left behind, how and when they are created, how they become visible, and in what circumstances, then I can start to envision a complex picture around what actually persists online. This will begin to point towards the presence of data created by the living person just days or hours before their demise, including remains that may have been created in quite difficult or traumatic circumstances such as accidental death, suicide or murder.

In the light of the ease and regularity in how people can generate content through micro-blogging activities on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and even micro-videos with applications such as Vine, it is perhaps unsurprising how a large amount of auspicious media based remains can be found online from only cursory searches.[6] Encountering these types of remains intensifies when you realise they have been deliberately posted and shared in the hours and minutes before people have taken their own lives[7], accidentally died or were murdered. People link and share these contents and the original material becomes untraceable.[8] These in-material – social presences – can and do attract large amounts of online press and social media attention, as they often exist in spaces that make them easily accessible and open to the public viewing.[9]

The general array of material that is created and abandoned in less auspicious circumstances such as the social profiles, Instagram shots, blogs, Spotify playlists, emails, tweets, location check ins, SMS messages, Flickr albums and charity pages, can raise the contentious issues of etiquette, taste, decency and sincerity in how the living choose the engage with what remains (Ford 2014, 1; O'Connell 2014,1). Yet, as days turn into weeks, the difficulties and tensions found around still encountering these kinds of remains may increase, especially in the light of social presences continuing to coexist with the living online for months and years after physical death, encountering them unexpectedly can surprise or shock the living. For example when the dead begin emailing from beyond the grave, or the deceased are suddenly encountered on social media channels (BBC 2012, 1; Wortham 2010, 1).

This only becomes more acute when presences can seem to slip back into the flow of daily online life. These social fragments and remains easily interfere and disturb the living, especially when they reach out through programming to ask us to be friends online and to reconnect with them such as in Facebook or other social networking websites (Wortham 2010, 1; Ostrow 2010, 1; Cashmore 2009, 1; Hollon 2001, 1). Some presences may begin to like things on Facebook, advertise products, become trending topics, remind us of our birthday commitments, appear in search listings and congratulate us on our new jobs (Meisler 2012, 1; Larson 2014, 1; Garber 2012, 1). This highlights the

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[6] There are a number of projects that specifically capture and archive these types of materials. See e.g. thetweethereafter.com or thefamouslasttweets.com (accessed 22nd of May, 2014.)

[7] There are numerous news stories where people have turned to social networking platforms to post their final messages. See e.g http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/jan/05/facebook-suicide-simone-back (accessed 22nd of May, 2014.)

[8] See e.g. photographic material has been known to be lifted and repurposed in ways that can be highly distressing http://www.theweek.co.uk/us/52766/adam-holland-down-syndrome-meme-larry-crain-sue-WHPT-FM (accessed 22nd of May, 2014.)

[9] The media has notably discussed this phenomenon around the last posts of celebrities who have died See e.g http://www.channel4.com/news/peaches-geldof-death-social-media-last-tweet-instagram (accessed 22nd of May, 2014.)

notion that, online, the social presences of the dead do not just appear but are continually reloaded, reanimated and even co-opted to do the bidding of where they are stored online.[10]

In reflection, these remains are often very easy to discover and typically live within platforms that are public, searchable and easy to access. They can contain distressing content, if for example they have been created in tragic circumstances and provoke painful memories of things people would rather forget, such as in the case of accidents and violence. This is why I ask, what is the potential of remains to impact upon the bereaved? Unlike previous empirical work of online memorials and mourning in social networking sites, these remains come loaded with the possibility to disturb, disrupt and cause intense emotional pain.

Since the material is engaged within the internet, it means they can be reanimated and controlled in ways that can seem strange and unexpectedly disturb people's sensibilities within the sensitive context of loss. Such as in the case of grief trolling, where individuals harass the bereaved with disturbing material about the deceased.[11] These examples gesture towards the deeper complexity surrounding in-material remains and their potential to mediate between the living and the dead online, and, also, the struggles that occur when the dead appear publicly and in ways that can disturb sensibilities online. It is important that these difficult encounters become visible and accountable within the sphere of death and technology studies in order to give voice to other forms of encounters and experiences the bereaved may have with the dead, but also to help gain an understanding of how the capacities of technologies themselves become visible and their infrastructure is implicated in mediating and shaping these ongoing relations.

Conclusion

While there is an emergent research looking at how remains have the ability to provide a positive focus for loss, provoke memory and invoke the social lives of the dead, there is a range of digital remains and presences that have emerged during my doctoral inquiry that are currently missing from these debates. With this in mind I have aspired to reveal the leading work that has been completed to date on the topic of data remains.

By outlining these current debates, I have moved to challenge the current thinking through introducing interdisciplinary scholarships from new media studies. This has primarily worked to reconsider the notion of digital remains and introduce their materiality within the network. This move has challenged the (in)visibility of what currently remains online when someone dies and introduces the in-material nature of digital remains and their very important role in the lives of the bereaved. This complex entangled picture between digital legacy, mourning practices and grief has been outlined alongside a tentative range of online presences that currently exist but are unrecognised within literature.

This work raises the question: Should research begin to take into account not just of practices of loss, but practices of loss with remains? To think through the in-materiality of remains scattered across the internet and their consequences – both negative and positive – in relation to the lives of the bereaved? Not only would this be a shift away for thinking

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[10] In death, data can still be used and sold in line with the Terms and Conditions or End User Licence Agreement that a persona agreed to in life. See e.g. http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2013/07/economist-explains-12(accessed 22nd of May, 2014.)

[11] See e.g. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-08-12/news/ct-met-rip-trolling-20130812_1_trolling-rip-tinley-park-family, (accessed 5th of May, 2014.)

of the internet as an immaterial space, it would also be a move to consider the In-material remains as a complex entangled phenomenon around bereavement and mourning.

Biographical note

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Thanatos

Srebrenica burial ceremonies on YouTube: Remembering the dead and the missing in a contested political situation

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Abstract

In this paper, I analyse a body of YouTube videos depicting the annual reburial cum memorial ceremony in Potočari, Bosnia-Herzegovina, which commemorates the victims of the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre. The 8,000 victims that went missing after the assault on Srebrenica are among the totality of victims of the 1992–1995 Bosnian War. Around 100,000 people lost their lives in the conflict, but in addition to this grave figure, there is also a peculiar group of victims – the 30,000 people who remained missing after the war had ended. The complicated process of locating and identifying the missing has taken years, creating a situation where remembering and commemorating the dead merges with remembering and commemorating the missing. Moreover, the difficult political legacy of the war has created a situation where remembering the dead and the missing is often understood within a heavily politicized atmosphere. The intensity of the Srebrenica tragedy, as well as the international media attention it receives, makes the Srebrenica victims more visible than the other victims in Bosnia, both nationally and internationally. The widespread presence of this remembrance online is part of this visibility. There are dozens of video clips on YouTube showing various stages of the annual ceremony in Potočari: sometimes they are long shots showing the unfolding of the ceremony in real time, while other clips are heavily edited collages of the event with added music. In this paper, these practices of online remembrance are interpreted through the concepts of liminality, witnessing and cultural memory. I argue that the internet has become an effective site to circulate and put forward witness accounts as testimonies. They enable the creation of specific communities of memory across spatial distance.

Introduction

Unusual deaths (Robben 2004, 6) require unusual forms of remembrance, and deaths that are embedded in politically tense contexts often give rise to forms of commemoration that reach beyond the remembrance of the individuals who have passed away. In this research report, I look at one such case – the remembrance of the victims of the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre, which took place during the 1992–1995 Bosnian war.

I examine a body of YouTube[1] videos depicting the annual reburial cum memorial ceremony in Potočari, Bosnia-Herzegovina, which commemorates the victims of the Srebrenica massacre. I consider why these videos are on the internet, and offer some tentative keys to reading their social, political and cultural dimensions as forms of remembrance.

My particular interest in remembrance practices on YouTube has grown from my larger ethnographic research project on the question of missing persons in Bosnia-Herzegovina and beyond. In my larger project, I am interested in the political and cultural dimensions of when a large number of people going missing, the *liminality* (Turner 1977) of the missing persons, and the ritual appropriations of the missing in Bosnia (Huttunen forthcoming). I understand the forms of internet remembrance as acts embedded within a larger framework of political projects aimed at coming to terms with the violence of the 1990s in Bosnia, and furthermore as projects searching for accountability and justice. Moreover, I suggest that for individual family members, the YouTube material is part of actual rituals of remembering.

The context: The Bosnian war, the fall of Srebrenica, the dead and the missing

The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s gave rise to violent conflicts in the area, most notably in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The armed conflict, entailing violent assaults on civilian populations, took place in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995. When the war ended, there were approximately 100,000 dead, and around 30,000 missing. The 8,000 victims that went missing after the assault on Srebrenica are among the totality of victims whose destiny was unclear at the end of the war. As it has turned out, most of those missing were dead, many of them buried in mass graves in northern and eastern Bosnia (Wagner 2008; Stover & Peress 1998). Moreover, some two million people were forced to leave their homes because of the hostilities in Bosnia, and approximately one million of these left the country, creating a worldwide diaspora. I suggest that the context of the diaspora is significant in understanding the YouTube material at hand.

The complicated process of locating and identifying the missing has taken years, creating a situation where remembering and commemorating the dead merges with remembering and commemorating the missing (see Huttunen forthcoming; Wagner 2008). In addition, the difficult political legacy of the war often frames remembrance of the dead and the missing within heavily politicized discourses.

Srebrenica, a small town located in eastern Bosnia in the Podrinje region neighbouring Serbia, has become a symbol of the brutality of the Bosnian war. The town, declared a safe area by the UN, was an enclave to which thousands of civilians poured from the surrounding countryside. It was attacked by Serb forces on 11 July 1995; over the following

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[1] The YouTube is a video-sharing website, launched in 2005, on which users can upload, view and share videos free of charge. See https://www.youtube.com/?gl=FI&hl=fi.

two weeks, over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim or Bosniak[2] men and boys were brutally executed, while women and children were deported from the area. (Wagner 2008, 21–57) The assault on Srebrenica was the most violent single attack on civilians in Europe since WWII, and the leaders of the campaign, Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, are on trial for genocide at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague.

The search for the 8,000 missing persons from Srebrenica – and the identification of their remains – has been an enormous project requiring huge investments, both in material and human terms. The details of the identification work that has been ongoing for over a decade is beyond the scope of this report, but it is clear that as the missing started to be found in mass graves and later identified through new DNA methodologies, the families of the deceased could start burying their loved ones and begin the mourning process (Wagner 2008).

A large memorial centre with a cemetery for the victims of the assault on Srebrenica was built in Potočari, some five kilometres south of Srebrenica proper. Newly identified victims from the mass graves are buried at the cemetery during the annual commemoration ceremony on 11 July. Between 200 and 700 bodies have been buried in the ceremonies, which is attended not only by mourning family members, but also by other Bosniaks from the area and beyond who wish to participate in the commemoration. The ritual repeats a similar form every year, combining Muslim burial ceremonies, commemoration of the victims, speeches by local and international politicians, and music.

The liminality of the missing

In anthropological approaches, death is understood as the final transition in the course of human life, regulated by those left behind through ritual practices (e.g. Hallam & Hockey 2001; Metcalf & Huntington 1991). As is well known, Arnold van Gennep (2004 [1909]) introduced the understanding that all rites of passage are organized in a temporal continuum, with a tripartite structure consisting of the separation stage, the transition or liminal stage, and the incorporation stage. In death rituals, the deceased is separated from the community of the living, then goes through the liminal stage and is re-incorporated, after a proper burial, as a dead person or dead ancestor back into the social structure. In this process of transition, the living family members also renegotiate their relationship with the deceased and also with one another.

Those who are missing for extended periods remain at the liminal stage: they are not properly buried, and the ritual cycle is not complete. Even when it is most likely that the missing person is dead, without a body, there is no certainty. This is a harrowing situation for those left behind because they are tied to the unfinished, liminal stage for an indeterminate time.

Victor Turner (1977) further developed the concept of the liminal, suggesting that liminality is both a threatening and enabling condition. Below, I will consider the ways in which the liminality of the missing may resonate with the forms of online remembrance.

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[2] Bosnian Muslims are increasingly referred to as Bosniaks in post-war Bosnia and among the Bosnian diaspora. For closer discussion on ethnicity in Bosnia, see e.g. Jansen 2005; Huttunen 2005.

YouTube material on Potočari

One can find a surprisingly large amount of online material about the ceremonies at Potočari. On YouTube alone, there are hundreds of video clips showing various stages of the ceremony. Searching with the words 'Srebrenica burial' produces around 1,210 hits, 'Srebrenica commemoration' 490 hits, and 'Potočari burial' around 190 hits (accessed 29 April 2014). There is footage from the burials at Potočari dating from at least 2003, and repetitive footage shot on consecutive years shows the continuity of memorial practices as well as the growing number of people at the event.

The video material falls roughly into three categories. Firstly, there is raw, unedited footage showing the unfolding of the ritual and events around it in real time. Secondly, there are heavily edited clips, combining still photographs and moving images, with added texts and music. Thirdly, there are news reports from various TV channels, including the BBC and Bosnian television. There are significant differences in the ways in which each of these categories addresses death, mourning, commemoration, and the political frame around them in Potočari.

Some clips of the unedited footage are just a couple of minutes long[3], while others last for up to two hours and attempt to cover the whole burial and commemorative event.[4] This footage shows the unfolding of the ritual, including elements such as the music performance that opens the ceremony annually; the rows of green-shrouded coffins awaiting burial; family members and other close ones kneeling next to the coffins, often praying, sometimes crying and wailing; empty graves awaiting the coffins; coffins being carried to graves while the names of the deceased are read aloud; the lowering of coffins into graves, the shovelling of soil into the graves; the imam leading a Muslim prayer ritual; and ambassadors and foreign and local politicians giving speeches in the nearby hall. This footage brings home the disquietingly large number of bodies being buried and the repetitive form of the ritual. The music, images of sorrow, and ritual repetitiveness, together with the recital of the names of the dead, invite the viewer to imagine herself as a participant in the ritual, and also invite her to remember, commemorate, and mourn. However, there are also elements that break the ritual-like spell of the footage. In juxtaposition to the formal ceremonial aspects, some footage also shows groups of relaxed people sitting in the shade, talking to each other, and young boys waving to the camera. This footage has a documentary feel to it – and an aura of authenticity – as some of the recordings are technically of a rather poor quality. Such images point to the other dimension of this commemorative practice: this is an event repeated annually, and for some participants it is not about burying their own loved ones, but rather a social event, an opportunity to meet others and possibly to make a political statement through their participation.

The edited clips also vary in their duration, as well as in the subtext or connotative tone that they produce. Many of them include a combination of still photographs of the ritual in Potočari, moving images from the same events, and sorrowful, evocative background music. Rather often, these pictures are interlaced with images of the assault on Srebrenica, the mass graves, and/or refugees fleeing from Srebrenica in 1995. Sometimes a written commentary is added, most often telling about the assault to Srebrenica, the death of 8,000 men and boys, the project of ethnic cleansing, and the established tradition of the memorial ceremony in Potočari. Mostly, the textual commentary is limited to only a couple of simple assertive sentences. As such, these clips produce a much clearer political and moral

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[3] See e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGCwmCMcdTA&NR=1&feature=endscreen, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJ2FA-s41FQ, [accessed 29 April 2014]

[4] For longer shots, see e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsyKiQswNPk, [accessed 29 April 2014]

frame to the ritual than the raw footage; they move further away from commemoration towards political commentary.[5] Sometimes, however, these edited clips are so skillfully made that they produce a strong sense of online ritual commemoration: they have a strongly aesthetic approach to mourning and remembering, turning the horror of the genocide and the mass graves into a peaceful, beautiful farewell.[6]

The moral commentaries, such as references to the Holocaust through borrowing the musical theme from the movie *Schindler's List*, are implicit rather than clearly explicated in this genre. Some other edited clips, however, are far more disturbing, and much more explicit in foregrounding a political message connected to the burial and commemoration practices. For example, in one such clip, a voice of a child screaming in horror is mixed with music while photographs of the 1995 onslaught are shown.[7] Such a framing shatters expectations of a peaceful mourning and disturbs the viewer, forcing her to confront the horrific events behind the pictures of burial and remembrance.

The TV reports produce a clear, outspoken political frame to the events. They detail the number of bodies being buried and always refer to the events of 1995. The news reports also often foreground the voices of family members[8], as many of them feature short interviews with family members.

The genre of the news report brings an aura of objectivity to these clips; however, the putative objectivity of the news reports differs from that of the raw footage. While in the latter case, the sense of objectivity arises from their unedited nature, in the former case it grows from our trust (or lack thereof) in certain news corporations, such as CNN and BBC, and their reports. These reports fix the commemoration within a frame of political relations reaching beyond the local Bosnian context. This genre is furthest removed from being a ritual performed online and closest to political commentary on the events that produced the need for these massive commemorations.

Witnessing, announcing or mourning: How to read the material

Watching this material evokes many questions: how does one understand this material? Why is there so much material on YouTube? Why do individuals upload this material onto YouTube? How is it understood by onlookers? What sorts of effects do the various types of visual material have on the individuals and the collectives that see them? How do they affect those with connections to Srebrenica and those persons being buried; those with connections to Bosnia but not personally to the events in Srebrenica; and finally those without such connections, encountering the material intentionally or unintentionally?

Many of these questions are not answerable within this report, or with the available data. However, even beginning to ask these questions suggests that this is a multi-faceted phenomenon, relating to issues of violence, death,

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[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAInMXApYVo, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPE0gMBDPuM, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLNow-Z02Eg , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4vfVNNoF4s , [accessed 29 April 2014]

[6] e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nr8-QUtQkJE, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e14fSONEs4o, [accessed 29 April 2014]

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3C3Aypjqb8, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DR2f0tS0MbQ, [accessed 29 April 2014]

[8] e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhoh6fq_upE, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0hJZqn4a4o, [accessed 29 April 2014]

remembrance, and mourning, but also to issues of voice, politics, and community-building. Below, I give some tentative suggestions for reading this material and for developing an analytic perspective on this material.

Anna Haverinen, who has conducted research on virtual death and mourning rituals, has suggested that simply announcing (i.e., telling about) the death of the loved one is one motivation behind virtual forms of remembering (Haverinen 2011, 60). In the case of the Srebrenica-Potočari rituals, rather than announcing a death, the material circulating online announces that these persons, who have been missing for up to 18 years, have now been identified and buried, thus finally closing the period of excruciating uncertainty and threatening liminality (see Huttunen forthcoming). By the same token, the material tells about the context of the deaths, or at least implies it. This is especially the case with the edited clips; the added photographs from 1995 and the written commentary make this clear, whereas in the raw footage this dimension is less clearly pronounced. The raw footage works as a form of ritual remembrance to be shared with those who already know what the event is about, while the purpose of the edited material is to inform and invite new audiences to learn about and understand the horrifying events and their continuing significance.

The memorials studied by Haverinen are individual memorials, while the YouTube material on Potočari rarely singles out one person, but rather seeks to commemorate the Srebrenica victims collectively. Even those clips that single out a named person represent that individual as one among many similar victims. Commemorating a single person is thus always embedded within the commemoration of this larger group, some of whom are still missing.

Lucas Hilderbrand (2007) suggests that YouTube is an important site for creating and reproducing *cultural memory*. The volume of uploaded material about the Srebrenica-Potočari memorials suggests that this is exactly what is taking place: a cultural memory of both the tragic events of Srebrenica and the annually repeated memorial ceremony is being created and circulated in the virtual space, with new items introduced each year. For a geographically dispersed group such as the people who left Bosnia as refugees during the Bosnian war, the internet is an ideal place for creating and reproducing a community of memory (cf. Malkki 1997) across spatial distance. While creating a site for cultural memory for the families of Srebrenica victims and other Bosnians who identify with the violence, this material also invites others to listen, share and understand the fundamental significance of the events. This points to another dimension of the contemporary circulation and presentation of audio-visual material, that of *witnessing*.

Several scholars have suggested that witnessing is one of the central communicative modes of modern media, and that electronic media has broadened the scope of witnessing (e.g. Ellis 2000). A witness is present at a particular significant event or place, and tells others what she sees. The internet has become an effective site to circulate and put forward witness accounts as testimonies.

The existence of the video material on the Potočari rituals becomes meaningful through the concept of witnessing. The material testifies to the burials taking place – these are funerals for those that have awaited a proper burial for years – but maybe, even more importantly, they witness the exceptionality of these funerals as well as the tragedy of Srebrenica. The edited clips and the news material in particular put the rituals into a political frame and point to the political and moral culpability of those responsible for the violence in 1995.

I therefore suggest that the witnessing function of this material works in two registers. For individual family members who upload footage of their relative's burial, the material is part of the process of closing the ritual cycle, of making public the fact that his or her family member is properly buried after an unbearably long liminal phase. In this sense,

they are part of the actual ritual, inviting onlookers to partake in the ritual. On another level, all of this material works to give repetitive witness accounts to the unforgettable tragedy of Srebrenica.

Haverinen suggests that all internet memorials may be understood as *cenotaphs*, i.e. memorial monuments without actual physical remains (Haverinen 2011, 57). The Srebrenica-Potočari memorial acts as a cenotaph for those missing who are not (yet) located or identified. The YouTube memorializations of the ceremonies in Potočari spin this dimension further: they are practices of virtual commemoration for those still missing, in other words, they are virtual cenotaphs of the actual cenotaph in Potočari.

Discussion

Katherine Verdery (1999) suggests that burials always create an audience of mourners that recognizes the dead and their significance. Circulating burials online as YouTube video clips may be understood as an effective way of creating an audience for the funerals. In the case of the annually repeated memorials in Potočari, there are at least two kinds of audiences created. Firstly, the internet is an excellent way of uniting the geographically dispersed Bosnian diaspora to mourn and commemorate their dead. Secondly, the political and moral framing of the edited material clearly seeks to create new audiences beyond the diaspora Bosnians and to convince outsiders of the political importance of the event.

Above, I suggest that for individual family members, the video material may work as a form of remembrance, and as a form of publicly completing the ritual circle by interring previously missing loved ones after their long liminal state. The raw footage and the aestheticized edited clips in particular work as virtual rituals of mourning and remembrance, while the news clips and the explicitly political, edited clips with outspoken references to the genocidal violence of 1995 work rather as political witness accounts, combining memorialization with demands for accountability.

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Thanatos

New Media Use in Mitigating Existential Fear

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Abstract

Much of the existing literature concerning death and internet technologies has focused on how Social Networking Sites (SNS hereafter) construe and cope with the "digital dead." Both academic and popular sources have noted and discussed recent modifications on Facebook, for instance, that allow family members to memorialize deceased relatives' profiles (Landfair 2013, 9). While at first SNS tended exclusively to immortal tenants, in that, profiles were not designed to deactivate once an individual deceased, today the human condition (life and death) is recognized and reflected in the design of these platforms.

While developments like those mentioned on Facebook further prove the relevance and timeliness of this fertile ground for death in online research, the current article intends to diverge slightly from the primary vein by attending to the ways in which the living use SNS, like Facebook, in order to cope with, and subconsciously escape, anxieties related to their own pending mortality.

By drawing from research in Terror Management Theory (TMT hereafter) and applying this to a framework adopted from literature across disciplines, this essay will outline the ways in which SNS can be seen as platforms on which the human condition is made further ambiguous and the mitigation of mortality related anxieties can ensue. By granting humans extension and disengagement with physical limitations, upon a platform that allows one to leave a clear "digital trace," SNS foster an environment upon which one can attain a sense of meaning, perceived permanence, and move from a mere animal-like to more god-like existence. The mitigation of existential anxieties and the achievement of symbolic immortality through SNS are of primary importance in this essay.

Introduction

Much of the existing literature concerning death and internet technologies has focused on how SNS construe and cope with the "digital dead." Both academic and popular sources have noted and discussed recent modifications on Facebook, for instance, that allow family members to memorialize deceased relatives' profiles (Landfair 2013, 9). While at first SNS tended exclusively to immortal tenants in that profiles were not designed to deactivate once an individual deceased, today the human condition (life and death) is recognized and reflected in the design of these platforms.

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The Human Condition

Cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker's (Becker 1973, 53) fundamental claim that, "the human animal is characterized by two great fears that other animals are protected from: the fear of life and the fear of death" was originally met with criticism, but empirical data demonstrates that many behaviors are influenced by mortality salience even when they have no obvious connection to death. This suggests that death-anxiety, even if repressed, exists in our unconscious (Solomon et al. 1998, 35). Being cognizant of the impermanence of life, while also being aware of the superiority of human intellect, creates the greatest paradox of the human condition. We are perceived as intellectuals yet humbled by our confinement to a physical body that decays and defacates just as any other. We exist as animals yet have a perceived obligation due to our mental capacity to function beyond our naturally defined physical limits. We are, as Freud would assert, "psychologically living beyond our means" (Freud 1918, 71).

The uniquely human awareness of one's inevitable death creates a great deal of discomfort in life, and this discomfort must be mitigated. The reason for this discomfort is likely due to the fact that death directly challenges any claims to ultimate meaning and, without meaning, life becomes impossible to bear (Anton 2010, 13). Fischer succinctly asserts that "death is a particular evil for humans because it deprives us of the freedom we desire to shape our own meaningful lives" (Cohen et al. 2011, 88).

To cope with the supreme awareness of our finite nature, meaning systems have been an essential and enduring part of human existence. Research shows, for instance, that when confronted with the realities of death, by exposure to a mortality salient prime, individuals react by strengthening their worldviews (their meaning frameworks) in order to maintain their livelihood (Solomon et al. 1998, 29). This suggests that by strengthening convictions (if even superficially) one can mitigate anxieties provoked by death awareness. While it may seem that the dilemma of the human condition is outside of the bounds of our control, in that we have no known control over death (similar to our lack of control over our need to breathe air), there is much to gain in understanding how humans conceptualize death and how its subsequent anxieties manifest themselves in new digital environments. There are several well-documented modes for achieving a sense of significance, thus alleviating anxieties that arise from the mortal condition, each to be discussed in stride.

Heroism

One method for alleviating death-related anxieties is through the attainment what Becker termed heroism, essentially an individual's effort to attain significance. Heroism can be achieved in many ways (e.g. warriorism, art, creating kin) (Becker 1973, 172). Perhaps the most recognized method of achieving heroism is by creating or associating with something that will surpass the impermanence of physical life (Becker 1973). For centuries artists, writers, and scientists have sought to create great works that would make an impact on society, capture attention, and leave traces of their greatness as superior earthly individuals. Those fortunate enough to create something valued were recorded, and thereby immortalized, by historians and biographers. The average person could not accomplish this with the ease of the privileged, however, because they were more concerned with immediate needs of survival (e.g. food, shelter, health). It is by achieving a sense of heroism that the individual's mind can move into a state of ease regarding their mortality.

It is important to note that today heroism is largely the job of the individual. As communication scholar Corey Anton states, "individuals increasingly attempt to take themselves and experience themselves as if they were of their own making. Individuals increasingly feel as if they are or should be their own cause" (2010, 20). The drive for self-sufficiency in all aspects of Western culture has created a deeply embedded sense that we must take care of things on our own; buffering the anxieties that surface as a result of mortality through heroism or what we will later refer to as symbolic immortality, is no different. It seems that one must create their own trace in order to survive or, even, to exist. This would amount to a heavy burden if it were not for the multi-layered system we have developed to overcome this fear.

Terror Management Theory

Perhaps the best explication of the mitigation of death-anxiety is presented by TMT. A psychological theory based on the main claims of Becker, TMT provides a framework for understanding the uniquely human motivation to buffer death anxieties through the pursuits of meaning and self-worth (Sullivan et al. 2013, 22). A fundamental component of this theory is the recognition that humans seek to buffer anxiety, be that death or otherwise (Strachan 2007, 1138). Moving beyond Becker's heroism, TMT suggests that death anxiety is best managed through the socialization process by the development of cultural worldviews, the pursuit of personal significance, and involvement in community (Solomon et al. 1998, 13; Solomon et al. 2004, 16; Strachan et al. 2007, 1138). Research suggests that "cultural worldviews facilitate effective terror management by providing individuals with a vision of reality--in ways that imbue the universe with meaning, permanence, and stability and give hope of symbolic or literal immortality". Studies in which individuals' worldviews are threatened are in line with this conception in that individuals respond negatively to those who have different worldviews and once threatened cling more strongly to their own convictions. For example, in one such study judges were found to retaliate to worldview attack by giving individuals harsher punishment or longer sentences (Solomon et al. 1998, 13; 27). Death related anxieties (that arise due to our unique condition) can be mitigated by a variety of meaning and support systems.

Self-Esteem: Identity and Community

Along with meaning systems, a necessary component of the socialization process (developing worldviews, pursuit of personal significance etc.) is the development, and maintenance, of self-esteem. Although originally self-esteem was more readily accepted as a desired trait in Western cultures, it is currently recognized as an important component of healthy individuals in the East as well. Terror management theorists suggest that "people seek self-esteem not only to escape anxiety that they are currently experiencing but also to avoid the anxiety that is inherent in their knowledge of their mortality" (Pyszczynski et al. 2004, 437). Several studies have shown that following temporary elevations of self-esteem individuals report less unease after being exposed to depictions of death (Solomon et al. 1998, 22). These findings support the notion that self-esteem reduces anxiety in response to threatening situations and that "self-esteem is the primary psychological mechanism by which culture serves its death-denying function" (Solomon et al. 1998, 22).

Self-esteem is essentially comprised of identity and community membership. It is first important to understand the main aspects of identity and community and later we will apply them more closely to the scope of this paper. Perhaps the most recognized identity scholar, sociologist Erving Goffman, proposed that we are constantly presenting ourselves as if actors upon a stage (Goffman 1959). Thus, presenting oneself is to put oneself on display for others to evaluate and validate. In these performances, as Goffman (1959) calls them, it is not essential that the presentations are accurate, in fact, it is part of the human artifice to believe these presentations are the reality even if they are not. In addition to the need to present oneself, assessing others' identities also proves important in managing the human condition (Sullivan et al. 2013, 24). Sociologist Anthony Giddens provides a nice working definition of identity as "something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual . . . it is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (Giddens 1990, 52). As Giddens asserts, individuals create an identity based on the feedback they get from others about their identity. It is a natural process of exchange, understanding, and creation that we constantly partake in as we move through our daily lives. Sullivan describes that "interpreting others' identities and actions is an essential part of maintaining a stable perception of everyday reality, and thus according to TMT helps to uphold the distal defense structures which let us deny death" (Sullivan et al. 2013, 24). Distal defense structures refer to largely unconscious ways of dealing with the inevitability of death (e.g. cultural worldview, sense of self, complex meaning systems) (Pyszcynski et al. 1999, 837).

Given that identity is formed, in part, by other's perceptions, community membership is essential. There have been heart wrenching studies that have examined individuals who were deprived of human contact and found this deprivation to have had permanent consequences. The famous case of Genie, a feral child who had spent the first thirteen years of her life confined to the basement of her family home, proves the irreversibility of contact deprivation. Once Genie was discovered and removed from her parents' home she was introduced back into society and proved to be unable to live life as a normal functioning member of society (Curtiss 1977). Community, and membership, are absolutely essential to well-adjusted human life.

Research shows that heroism, cultural worldviews, self-esteem (identity and community), and other meaning systems help to successfully mitigate anxieties surrounding the human condition, at least temporarily. There are, however, seemingly overlooked platforms on which all, or many, of these components are achieved together. The remainder of this essay will draw from the aforementioned research to examine SNS as an accessible, yet overlooked, platform on which existential anxiety can be mitigated. Facebook was chosen as a point of reference in this discussion because of its popularity and apparent inclinations towards presentation of identity, community membership and disembodiment of text. This is not to say, however, that other SNS do not possess the same affordances.

By examining the ways in which SNS, like Facebook, further confuse the human condition, that is, by granting humans god-like capabilities through extension and disengagement with physical limitations, the reminder of this essay will outline the ways in which SNS use can relieve existential fear and provide individuals with a sense of symbolic immortality. As a framework it will be best to look at the affordances of SNS as divided among two types of meaning characterized by Becker and others: 1) Everyday Meaning (which has been already well-documented above) and 2) Ultimate Meaning (Wong 1998, 405).

SNS and Components of Everyday Meaning

The components of everyday meaning that are afforded to us through SNS are overt and well-documented. Broadly speaking everyday meaning involves the cognitive "micromanaging" of the social environment (Sullivan et al. 2013, 18). This micromanaging takes several forms on SNS, namely SNS allow us to command multiple environments while developing identity and building community membership. Identity, defined as the part of the self "by which we are known to others," (Altheide 2000, 2; Zhao et al. 2008, 1817) is easily created through redaction and experimentation on SNS personal profiles and self-affirmation can ensue (Papacharissi 2010, 207; Toma 2010, 1749).

What is particularly appealing about the process of community involvement over the internet, as in the case on SNS, is that it allows a sense of disembodiment, and saving face, as Goffman calls it, the process of managing humiliating circumstances, seems more manageable (Goffman 1967, 12). While face-to-face interactions require one to simultaneously interpret another's reaction to comments and presentation, online there is a broader window for assessment. The asynchronous nature of Facebook allows for a management of potential vulnerabilities. In addition, the empowerment individuals acquire from presenting identity and getting feedback from online friends is a practical way to boost self-worth (Toma 2010, 1752). While identity is essential to the human condition, one would have little use for identity if they were not part of a larger community.

We have already established the importance of community in human life and managing death anxiety. Traditional communities such as religious organizations, schools, and work groups provide individuals with a sense of belonging and meaning outside of their own individual sphere. It has been noted, however, that the primary community, the local neighborhood, has become increasingly out of reach for individual support (Barney 2004, 63). Furthermore, the increase of accessibility and integration of the internet in daily life has naturally led to the desire for, and development of, a complex online social sphere. Sociologist Barry Wellman (1999, 186) notes that "companionship, emotional support, services and a sense of belonging are abundant in cyberspace". He adds that varying degrees of activity and intimacy "provide the very communal resources and experience that local neighborhoods do not: support, sociability, information and a sense of belonging" (Wellman 1999, 16). In this vein it seems that SNS may be an adaptation in which one can build their own "local community" that is not limited in the ways previous neighborhoods were-namely spatially and temporally. This can be seen in Facebook, which was originally designed to connect an academic community, but quickly developed into a social and commercial community with members across age ranges. In addition to providing a sense of community SNS actually help restore "users' sense of self-worth by reminding them of the important aspects of their lives: their connections with friends, their identities and group membership" (Toma, 2010, 1752).

Moreover, the accessibility and commodification of community through SNS allows us to be simultaneously part of several distinctive communities at once. In this respect, one can have several different online communities active at any moment (temporal expansion) and communicate simultaneously across all different platforms (spacial expansion). Herein lies a key point in the current discussion: as communication leads to connection and connections increase while utilizing various social platforms, so too, does the traceability of the individual communicating. Leaving behind a trail of information, or "digital traces," seems to be a very commodious way of attaining a sense of permanence, meaning, and, thus, symbolic immortality.

The components that make everyday meaning accessible on SNS, sense of identity and community, are vital in overcoming the dilemma of the human condition. In addition, the expression and reassurance of worldviews that is common on these sites can provide a solid support system upon which other needs can be met or realized. It is, however, important to note the darker side of SNS as it is not uncommon for one to have their cultural worldviews threatened on these sites. Threat occurs in a similar way online and offline, however, the difference lies in the ease of managing these threats online. When one comes into contact with a threatening post on Facebook, for instance, they can ignore and remove that person (or post) from their feed with an ease not available in the physical environment. While identity and community membership serve to meet with our "everyday needs" in developing meaning and managing death anxiety more is required to successfully develop a buffer against death anxieties. Moving on we will look at the affordances of SNS more akin to ultimate meaning, or pursuit of immortality, symbolic or otherwise (Sullivan et al. 2013, 18). The final affordances of SNS use in alleviating existential fear are: perceived control, disembodiment/disengagement with physical, and perceived permanency.

SNS and Components of Ultimate Meaning

All cultures create ritual forms that enable members to symbolically transcend their sheer materiality and organismal being, but cultural forms not only extend organismal boundaries and amplify routes for the pursuit of self-esteem, they also whet the appetite for some kind of immortality (Anton 2010, 12).

Symbolic immortality has been discussed in various texts across disciplines. Through proper mitigation of existential anxiety by creating something eternal, one can arguably achieve this sense of immortality. Similar to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, one must first take care of the necessities at the base, those of everyday meaning, then one can move on to the necessities that are higher in the pyramid, those that lead to ultimate meaning. Whereas the affordances that fall under everyday meaning aid in the mitigation of death anxiety the following discussion will make a case for SNS use in establishing a sense of symbolic immortality through ultimate meaning.

Ultimate meaning differs from everyday meaning in that it arises from "macromanaging" our lives in the context of the broader community and spiritual realm (Sullivan et al. 2013, 18). Ultimate meaning refers to the meaning systems we put in place to allow us to buffer anxieties in the face of pending annihilation. The ways in which SNS support ultimate meaning are more difficult to define as they are pervasive, but are also equally, if not more so, pertinent to the current, and future, discussions on death studies. These are less subject to empirical debate and are more akin to qualitative methods and cultural interpretation but remain a vital component in the explication of this mitigation process online.

Before proceeding it is important to make clear that it is not my intent to champion SNS use as a healthy or sustainable means for alleviating death anxiety. My hope is rather to explicate the ways in which SNS may be employed as a scapegoat to the real human vulnerabilities that plague our everyday life. It is through this scapegoat that the human artifice prevails. We alleviate anxieties through the affordances SNS offer— this term, borrowed from psychology, is not positivist but rather plainly literal. Social networking sites, as a practically integrated tool in society, impressively weave together many components necessary for the mitigation of the human condition. Facebook perhaps most transparently explicates this mitigation process and the sense of symbolic immortality through its structure.

Perceived Control

Social networking sites allow an individual control over personal presentation and community. There are certainly aspects of SNS that allow for little control, such as website design and structure. This is increasingly the case now that Facebook is publicly traded and a host of various personalized advertisements. What individuals do have control over, and what is most relevant for the topic at hand, is identity (including face and vulnerability management) and the presentation of one's story or "virtual autobiography". The lack of control we have over the human condition is the primary issue we face as beings, thus we strive to mask it at all costs. We do this, as already established, through developing strong cultural worldviews and ascribing to certain religious beliefs, but we can also do this by controlling other aspects of our lives. SNS offer us the ability to control our presentation in the form of a disembodied identity — which could be transcendent in a way that our body never will be because it has already been proven to decay as animals. There is little mystery left in the organismic structure of humans- our identity, however, is what has some possibility of transcendence.

In addition to the control we have over our presentation, Facebook members are allowed to block friends with whom they do not wish to receive news. This user control adds an ease to worldview maintenance on these platforms because one can both rein in exposure to, and expression of, worldviews. On Facebook one can select to have friends who prescribe to certain beliefs show up on their feed while others are, for all intensive purposes, "blocked," or to be seen only when one desires their input. This control is important in the maintenance of death anxiety as Terror Management proves worldview threat to result in conscious existential anxieties that must be mitigated (Sullivan et al. 2013, 22). This is not to say, however, that unexpected or undesirable exposure to alternative worldviews and images/ text with mortality salient primes are completely avoidable. In fact, depending on one's set of friends and the feeds that one subscribes to, one might be constantly haunted by the nature of death in the human condition- though this would likely be rare as it is undesirable and quite easy to avoid at least in large quantities.

Moreover, it is important to note the perceived control we have over reach. As media scholar Marshall McLuhan noted, new technologies often extend our bodies and minds (1964, 64). By extending the human body and senses through the control and reach we have on SNS, we arguably become less embodied and more god-like. Both traits will be explored below.

Disembodiment/Disengagement

In addition to control, the nature of SNS make it easy for an individual to disengage with the physical world, and its limitations, as well as experience identity disembodiment. Both will be discussed in stride. When we are on the Internet we can consume information and exchange without concerning ourselves with the physical world in which this

information is bred and manifested. This could be seen as a complex coping mechanism that distances us from the physical world and makes us less likely to think about the fragility of our human condition. The information that we share over SNS essentially becomes a commodity in that it is routine, expected, consumed. Interestingly, Barney noted "the commodity is not so much, or not solely, an object of exchange but a quality that serves to disburden its possessor of the material difficulties of being in the world" (Barney 2004, 59). It is as if real world objects, digitized, have already undergone death-- they are no longer illuminated with the same life energy humans are and mortality is less salient.

Disembodiment refers to the way we exist on SNS as beings without physical bodies. When transferred to the digital realm we transcend corporeal limits (i.e. reach, space, depth). From a TMT perspective the human body is perhaps the biggest reminder of human mortality.   The body is vulnerable, temporary, and in some ways embarrassing (Becker 1973, 51). Zhao asserts that, "as the corporeal body is detached from social encounters in the online environment it becomes possible for individuals to interact with one another on the Internet in fully disembodied text mode that reveals nothing about their physical characteristics" (Zhao et al. 2008, 1817). This disembodiment may be attractive because in the absence of our bodies we are less bothered by our condition. Many Eastern philosophies and practices such as Zen Buddhism, meditation, and yoga have also paid particular attention to the disembodied existence. It is through achievement of "nirvana" or "actualization" that we can be freed of the chains of human reality (our mortality). Sherry Turkle, MIT Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology in the Program in Science, notes this disembodiment online writing that, "when reality is too painful people may feel that they have left their bodies and are watching themselves from above. Leaving the self is a way not to feel something intolerable" (Turkle 2011, 235).

In addition to the disembodiment of persons in virtual space death, itself, is disembodied. Recent research has acknowledged the increased visibility of the dead online (Landfair 2013, 85). Facebook, for instance, immortalizes a person after death in that a person's profile remains active until other action is taken by friends or family members. Writer Alexander Landfair suggests that, "death's unfixedness online suggests we don't quite yet live in an Internet culture . . . and we won't until social media accommodates the whole of human life, of which death is a fundamental part" (2013, 83). This again is not a new phenomenon but one that should be taken into careful consideration with SNS and other new media technologies. English scholar Walter Ong wrote about the ways in which early technologies served as aids in the paradoxical nature of human existence. He wrote, "such is the virtue of texts that their ability to absorb death makes death somehow less threatening. As already noted, the text assures a kind of life after death, which can readily be disguised as life without death" (Ong 1977, 238). It is through the separation of body and identity, body and death, that we are able to feel as if our bodies-- the mortal problem-- is resolved or solvable.

Before moving on to the next section it will be useful to touch on research that has deemed the internet magical. Communication and technology scholar Darin Barney wrote, "the very appeal of network technology for most of its users is precisely that, despite the brilliance of its communication and information capacities, it still manages to leave darkened the tangible reality of just exactly how it appropriates the world" (Barney 2004, 61). Humans having created technologies that are in some ways ambiguous (or cast shadows as Barney implies) is not surprising.   In fact, it is this ambiguity that requires us to have faith. The mysterious nature of internet is similar to what we find, and take comfort in, in romantic relationships, love of kin, religion, and community bonds- all of which are means to alleviate death-related anxieties. Furthermore, reality cannot be confirmed unambiguously— one must always rely on faith (Solomon 1998, 15). This faith allows us to transcend our corporeal limitations while feeling a sense of power, or superiority. The

human condition is augmented by internet technologies- both the reach and the breadth of our connections are extended on a platform that is traceable.

Perceived Permanence

The ephemeral nature of human life is disheartening. An affordance of SNS is the perceived permanence of their record or digital trace. As Turkle (2011, 260) writes, "delete" and "erase" are metaphorical online; the internet never forgets. While the main purpose of SNS may not be to create a permanent record- in fact, many members are fearful of this component- it is a current reality. On these sites one is "invited to tell stories about themselves, and the stories told are made of words digitally traceable, re-mixable, and broadly accessible" (Papacharissi 2011, 13). Of course, the ability to tell stories and explain ourselves is not unique to the internet, and has been available to us through other means since the beginnings of humanity. What is important to note, however, is the traceability of these stories and online creations. If individuals are using these stories to construct and project their own virtual identity, then is their identity, too, not traceable, re-mixable, and accessible? Leaving behind digital traces seems to reassert our livelihood in a way that postpones fear of death. In fact, one study found that members post with purpose and it is considered a "waste of time" to send private messages (Turkle 2011, 251). It is interesting to note that the importance of SNS shifts from a means to communicate "things" or to connect to people and becomes a recording technology with a means to leave behind digital traces for oneself or others.

Political theorist Hannah Arendt once said that the most important task of the human artifice "is to offer mortals a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than themselves" (Arendt 1958, 152). Pre-internet media forms were vulnerable, in some way, to destruction. Print could easily be burned, recording devices could be smashed, and even the most primitive media, our ears and eyes, decline in accuracy overtime. The internet, however, is an electrical impulse, a connection of durable networks, that requires only access to take full advantage of its unique properties. Exchanges on the internet are backed up and stored away on multiple servers. It is a network that is constantly passing information back and forth and, therefore, this information is traceable at the moment in which it is input and accessible in the future. In the Western world we rely on the internet in the same way we rely on other taken-for-granted technologies such as electricity and heat. I would argue that it is this reliance and faith in the ever-existence of the internet that, in part, subconsciously motivates us to make accounts on SNS.

God-Like Existence

The last, and perhaps the most complex, affordance of SNS, and internet-based technologies in general, is in allowing humans to move from a more animal-like to more god-like existence. The best way to explicate this position is to imagine existence along a continuum with animals on one end of the continuum and "gods" on the other. Humans would naturally be situated in the middle. I propose that SNS allow us to move along that continuum and toward the attainment of a more "god-like" status (for similar claims see e.g. Sullivan et al. 2013; Ess 2012; Turkle 2011).

In fact, Landfair states that "Facebook wasn't designed for mortals" (Landfair 2013, 86). He goes on to explain that this is because mortality was not visible, or acknowledged, on the site until around 2007 (Landfair 2013, 86). It seems mortality was not considered in Facebook's original design, likely because it was an online community for college students. As it grew in popularity, however, it became open to different age-groups, some of these groups being closer to death. Since expanding its demographic, the site has an even more interesting, and complex, relationship with death. It is a place where we are disembodied and immortal, yet exist in space with those who have deceased. Online

we are not mortal, alive, or dead but, perhaps, something else. It may be that SNS allow members to create a digital projection that is not vulnerable to death in the same way the body is.

Turkle writes, "..I've entered the web to get lost....lovely surrender, the web swallows my certitude and delivers the unknown" (Turkle 2011, 275). The idea that one can "get lost" on a SNS is not new. The fact that humans spend so many hours lost, however, is perplexing as productivity is the backbone of the Western culture. Escaping or evading the reality of death becomes an activity that we participate in, whether intentionally or not, online. Social networking sites, in particular, uniquely engage us in the creation of personalized digital traces. We are, thus, creating a text or autobiography of our life while evading the weight of the terms of human life.

In another line of research, scholars look at technology as a symptom in that it "carries knowledge that a person fears would be too much to bear. To do its job, a symptom disguises the knowledge so it doesn't have to be faced day to day" (Turkle 2011, 283). If this is so, it seems that the symptom of the human condition is technology and technology disconnects us from our real struggle: our mortality.

As technology is increasingly integrated into daily life we are both more aware of, and become less accustomed to, being confined by our corporeal and cognitive limitations. We use paper and pencils or a computer for reminders; we rely more on technologies because our natural limits are no longer acceptable. Social networking sites serve this purpose too. People record daily activities and grand feats on SNS like Facebook in order to share with others, receive feedback, and also to record something that otherwise might be easily forgotten in the feeble minds of others. Sullivan asserts "modern technologies, as overcoming death and labor, will thus free modern humanity from these ultimate punishments and elevate humans to a God-like status" (Sullivan et al. 2013, 282).

Concluding Remarks

The connections drawn in this essay illustrate how SNS hold space for the development of both everyday and ultimate meaning. In addition they place terror management into conversation with one of the most common new media technologies. My hope was to draw these two fields together for a discussion of the possible ways in which internet death studies can be expanded. Media theorist Douglas Rushkoff notes, "The things we use do change us. —We should probably be less immediately concerned with the cause-and-effect consequences of digital activity than with the greater implications and requirements of living in the digital environment. It's not about how digital technology changes us, but how we change ourselves and one another now that we live so digitally" (Rushkoff 2013, 73). These words, which in part inspired the preceding discussion, suggest that we might want to turn our attention to how humans, and the human condition, are changing. It is not so much about our control over technology, but rather how we adapt and evolve as a result of our creations. Turkle, for instance, writes that, "we build technologies that leave us vulnerable in new ways" (Turkle 2011, 235). Perhaps the changes we are going through and the vulnerability we now face is in realizing the human condition is simply that: a condition in which we have been taught to begin with. Whether or not the human condition is real or simply part of the spectacle – that is what we have been told to believe – is irrelevant in this argument. It may indeed be that the human condition is really just the way humans have been conditioned to think about themselves as separate existences or as beings apart from a larger whole. The truth is we have been convinced and conceive of our existence as that and so we shall assume that our anxieties about death shall be treated as anxieties that the human condition is fraught to overcome.

In conclusion, this essay suggested that SNS use could serve to alleviate existential anxieties surrounding death and mortality. By examining the ways in which SNS endow us with everyday and ultimate meaning and by granting humans god-like capabilities through extension and disengagement with physical limitations, this essay provided a review of existing literature to form a theoretical framework for viewing SNS as a means for us to achieve a sense of symbolic immortality, thus, relieve existential fear.

While further elaboration on any of these characteristics might strengthen this argument, the allotted space served to provide a preliminary descriptive framework upon which future research can elaborate. Future research will need to provide quantitative data regarding users' conception of death and how these may differ from those without online accounts. In addition, this area of research could benefit from experimentation with measuring of death thought awareness post networking. I hope that this essay may be seen as an explanation of how SNS provide a synthesis of necessary characteristics in alleviating death related anxiety while also providing a sense of digital immortality.

> ### Biographical note:
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Thanatos

Death and Digi-memorials: Perimortem and Postmortem Memory Sharing through Transitional Social Networking

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Abstract

Impending death and the event of passing can leave one in a state beyond bereavement, leading to a penchant for rationalizing the entire process. Increasingly people turn to social media not only as a community of mourners who come together to share their grief, but also to create chronicles of hope for the deceased's life-before-death through acts of sharing emotional narratives, prayers of faith, as well as relational visuals awaiting the passing away. These digital networking communities have displayed the power to hold onto the fleeting. Social media possess an inherent quality of conceptual permanence that make them transitional public conduits for talking about the possibility of miracles to halt imminent death, fluidly followed by discussions of the transience of life.

This essay critically evaluates extant literature on peri- and postmortem research with a focus on how the transitional narrative of sustaining hope and shared grieving is said to have been created on social network sites. We argue that digital acts of sharing prayers and intimate memories during the transitional phase (the period connecting the before and after mortem phases of a loved one) as done within social networking sites such as Facebook, conflates and complicates our accepted notions of social presence by reinforcing the digital enactment of what people do in offline grieving spaces.

Introduction

Loss of a loved one, or impending loss, has friends and family seeking support from each other and offering prayers of hope and, in cases of death, words of grief to the deceased and each other. As social media have become increasingly

intertwined with our relationships and daily lives it is natural that grief-related behaviors and practices are enacted on these sites as well.

Most scholarship studying how people cope with death, grieving communities and end-of-life reconciliation stems from research relating postmortem and obituary studies to psychology, anthropology, clinical and palliative studies, social work, journalism, and new media (Brubaker, Hayes & Dourish 2013; Marrone 1999; Nakashima & Canda 2005; Thorne, McLean & Lawrence 2004; Williams, Munson, Zupancic & Kirpalani 2008). There has, however, been less research on how people are interpreting the Internet and social media as a space for exploring immortality from perimortem and transitional perspectives (near time of death). With social media, people who are transitioning toward death have an online space to interact with friends and family, receive messages of hope and prayer, and perhaps even construct their own postmortem legacy.

We argue that digital prayer offerings, status updates, memory-sharing and other such narrative constructions during the transitional phase, as done within social networking sites such as Facebook, provides a legitimate space to conflate and complicate our accepted notions of social presence by reinforcing the digital enactment of what people do in offline grieving spaces. Negotiating death in the context of social network sites (SNSs) raises complex questions about the meaning of social presence and its ability to become everlasting in these online spaces.

Grieving and Sharing

The expansion of postmortem legacy-building and memory-sharing activities to digital community networks like Facebook, have become intertwined with everyday narrative practices that weave complex "trajectories of social engagement around death," along with the practices of updating, commenting on and 'liking' mundane and monumental status messages on social media (Brubaker, Hayes & Dourish 2013, 152).

Researchers have given primacy to the deceased's legacy and/or the dying's need for closure and comfort. Williams et al. (2008) write about "compassionate bereavement" (335) as a communal form of emotional and physical support during an end-of-life event. This process encourages certain perimortem caregiving considerations within the hospice environment, including "support for parents and family to say goodbye […] [and] the making of tangible memories" (337) through the sharing of personal stories with the near-deceased. Making memories such as the "creation of keepsakes (footprints, handprints, good quality photographs, and name bands)" is also a crucial part of the psychological reconciliation and social memory-building process (Williams et al. 2008, 338).

Psychologists researching death and memorialization have underscored the importance of narrative exchange as a way to reflect on the "meanings of lived experience" for the dying and their communities of loved ones (Thorne et al. 2004, 514). Nakashima and Canda (2005) argue for a holistic psychosocial approach to terminal care that would benefit stakeholders experiencing impending loss and grief through shared prayers and the "creation of meaningful narratives of living and dying" (120).

Scholars of death studies have for a long time endeavored to explain the "stages, phases and tasks related to the processes of human grieving and mourning" (Marrone 1999, 498). The essence of grief has been defined as "both an emotional reaction to loss and an active process for dealing with loss" (Merten & Williams 2009). While the process of grieving makes the stakeholder express bouts of pain, loss and "short term forms of cognitive assimilation," the rituals

of mourning include episodes of grieving and distress, thereby expediting "new and profound forms of cognitive accommodation," as well as "eventual comfort, a sense of personal reintegration, and for some, spiritual transformation" (Marrone 1999, 502).

Death and impending death have been known to bring people closer together by helping them prioritize their affective and relational attachments, not just with the near-deceased, but also with others within the deceased's social circle. Perimortem and postmortem negotiations reinforce the strength of already strong ties within the closed relational network by "enabling them to continue their relationship until its inevitable death" (Granovetter 1973; Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles 1999). They also create opportunities for otherwise weak ties to become strong ones by socially sharing such life-to-death transitional journeys (Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles 1999).

The process of grieving for the survivors begins from the time the loved one has been diagnosed with a terminal illness, mostly in anticipation of what the grim future holds (Glick, Weiss & Parkes 1974; Keeley 2007). This form of bereavement, also known as "anticipatory grief" (Moller 1996), focuses more on preemptive loss, spiritual realizations and reconciliatory practices of close friends and relatives (Parkes & Weiss 1983; Keeley 2007). As lack of enough literature in the area reflects, the process of perimortem reconciliation for the stakeholders should be given a lot more weight than it is because it is "essential for preparing survivors emotionally for their impending loss of their loved ones" (Glick et al. 1974 as cited in Keeley 2007, 228). The offline context fails to provide an ideal set of behavioral norms for those about to lose their loved ones, let alone creating a prescribed communication pattern for them to follow in their "social role of the anticipatory griever" within the digital social paradigm (Moller 1996; Keller 2007, 228).

Scholars and practitioners of nursing have studied how the identity crisis that is usually present in individuals facing death have better negotiated their own roles as survivors and as prolonged grievers as a result of heightened perimortem interactions. Studies have also shown that relational survivors most often "found themselves examining, reevaluating, and at times redefining themselves," because they were able to socially share their grief with others invested in the life and legacy of the near-deceased (Moller 1996; Keeley 2007).

Perimortem communication is a critical bonding ritual where near-deceased and their loved ones "turn toward death together" (Keeley 2007, 226). This seems an important observation in favor of encouraging the possibility of turning toward death together through social media channels. What is still not very clear is the nature of these conversational constructions, their content and the functions they serve (McQuellon & Cowan 2000; Keeley 2007). Answering some of these questions will create opportunities for us, who have lost loved ones in a digitally ubiquitous age, to find more accessible and acceptable channels for sharing memories, finding strength and social support through transitional stages of peri- to postmortem bereavement.

Social Network Sites

Social network sites (SNSs) are a series of linked online pages that afford varying levels of interaction and socializing among connected members. Specifically, they are defined as, "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd & Ellison 2008, 211). The first SNS appeared in 1997 (boyd & Ellison 2008) and they have since become a regular part

of many people's online experience and activity. boyd (2010) identified four unique features of social media: persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability. That is, social media are constructed of messages that are recorded and stored, they are easily duplicated, the potential audience for social media messages is great, and those messages are accessible for searches (boyd 2010). Research on social media, and SNSs in particular, is a robust area of communication research, investigating topics such as: self-presentation and identity negotiation (e.g. boyd 2007; Rettberg 2009; van Dijck 2013), social capital (e.g. Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007), privacy (e.g. Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes 2009; Vitak 2012), politics (e.g. Wojcieszak & Smith 2014; Williams & Gulati 2013), and more.

On social network sites, users create a page that reflects aspects of their lives, including interests, accomplishments, major life events, mundane life activities, opinions, et cetera. SNSs are a form of self-presentation on a potentially global scale, depending on the privacy levels that individuals set for their page. Interestingly, due to the nature of these sites, users must manage and negotiate "context collapse." Context collapse is the phenomenon identified on SNSs wherein an individual's many social contexts (family, college friends, high school friends, acquaintances, co-workers, etc.) become "collapsed" into a single "flat" category of "friends" (Marwick & boyd 2011). Users make decisions about what to share, write, et cetera based on their understanding of their audience. For example, teenagers may face the dilemma of whether to appear "cool" to peers online, or to present a more conservative identity that would be acceptable to adults (boyd 2007). Sometimes one's audience consists of people known in real life and people unknown outside of the network. Marwick and boyd (2011) found that on Twitter, a SNS launched in 2006, users imagine their audiences, interact with them, follow their activity on the site, and construct an online identity in "collaboration" with this audience. This vague, imagined audience "becomes visible when it influences the information Twitter users choose to broadcast" (Marwick & boyd 2011, 130). In other words, we can see evidence of audience influence on a user's presentation based on the decisions he or she makes about what messages to share.

These SNS-based communicative behaviors and practices, in particular these findings about context collapse and identity negotiation, are important to consider when trying to understand how people manage grief and death on these sites. Every culture has rituals that shape expected grief and mourning behaviors, but as more and more people incorporate SNSs into their lives and relationships, inevitably the question of how to navigate death, grief, and mourning online becomes important to investigate.

Social Network Sites and Grief

A number of studies have explored these questions. Themes that emerge out of that research include the role of SNSs in facilitating social support for those who are grieving, rituals that people enact on the sites, how loved ones manage the public impression of the deceased, and regulation and control of the sites. These works primarily focus on the postmortem period and how loved ones cope and adjust to their loss.

Social network sites, in the context of death, afford the opportunity to broaden the mourning process in terms of time, space and social involvement (Brubaker, Hayes & Dourish 2013). Rather than perceive the practice of mourning on SNSs as an interruption or disturbance of traditional grieving practices, Brubaker, Hayes & Dourish (2013) argue that it is an adaptation of public mourning practices incorporating these online communities that are already a part of many people's daily lives. Using Facebook, the deceased's loved ones are able to "interweave" death and mourning "into the everyday" rather than simply at the traditional funeral and memorial services (Brubaker, Hayes & Dourish 2013, 160). Moreover, considering the scalability feature of SNSs (boyd 2010), it is logical that Brubaker et al. (2013)

found that the process of mourning can happen from a distance and can include a wider social network when it occurs through a SNS.

However, there are not established rules or expectations about acceptable behavior on SNSs with regard to death. People form their own understandings based on a combination of culturally acceptable grieving behavior and SNS behavior in general (Brubaker, Hayes & Dourish 2013). Acceptable online grieving behavior is a contested area, as Phillips (2011) has found in analyzing the practice of RIP trolling. She found that trolls see themselves as critics working from within dominant media and hegemonic social structures to critique "grief tourists" who, the trolls believe, are simply attention-seeking faux-mourners rather than authentic mourners (Phillips 2011). Unfortunately, in this process RIP trolls wind up offending and hurting the friends and family of the deceased. They are not opposed to the practice of grieving, but to the trolls publicizing grief at all, let alone on a SNS, is a disingenuous way of expressing grief, and is "always the wrong place and always the wrong time, especially when you're dealing with real-life tragedy" (Phillips 2011).

Text and language on SNSs are accessible and rich sources of data for understanding mourning behaviors in this unique environment. Interestingly, researchers have found an inclination for mourners to address the deceased directly on these sites. In analyzing comments on deceased MySpace users' sites, Brubaker, Kivran-Swain, Taber & Hayes (2012) found that while most people used "funerary-style language" others demonstrated "emotional distress writ[ing] in ways indicative of self-focus and isolation, despite the public nature of the SNS" (49). That is, SNSs may facilitate connection with others who are mourning, but for some particularly troubled and/or isolated individuals grieving online may be an inadequate source of social support.

Kern, Forman & Gil-Egui (2013) also analyzed users' language on social network sites. Their sample of Facebook memorial pages included those designed to remember deceased individuals that were predominantly young and had passed suddenly and sometimes violently, meaning that loved ones were unprepared for this loss. The authors found that these pages "provide a place to 'visit' with dead loved ones […] [and] provide [a] platform where individual conversations with the dead are permanently recorded and publicly displayed" (Kern, Forman & Gil-Egui 2013, 8). The SNS feature of persistence (boyd 2010), then, also becomes a factor in understanding mourning behavior in this environment. While the deceased cannot communicate back with a mourner on a memorial page, the mourner seems to believe that it is "a place to commune with the dead in a space where the communication may actually be 'received'" (Kern, Forman & Gil-Egui 2013, 9). The opportunity for ongoing communication between the grieving and the dead created through digital memorialization is what renders the deceased's social presence timeless (Church 2013).

Given the public nature of SNSs and the fact that the deceased is no longer able to negotiate his/her self-presentation, the communities of mourners take on the task of impression management. Who within that community has the authority to do this relates to the "hierarchy of legitimacy," meaning immediate family members have the most authority, then close friends, then acquaintances, et cetera (Marwick & Ellison 2012). Impression management becomes complicated when a stranger to the deceased creates a memorial page for him/her because the page creator has the power to delete posts, comments, users, et cetera leaving close friends and family powerless within the context of that particular memorial page (Marwick & Ellison 2012). In analyzing the memories that people shared, Marwick & Ellison found that while "positive memories went uncontested, we saw explicit negotiation whenever anything negative

was said about the deceased" (2012, 393). Impression management of the deceased, then, involves a collective negotiation on how to remember him or her.

Lingel (2013) highlights the uneasiness that exists between SNS users, SNS policies and institutions, mourners, and the deceased. That is, who owns an online identity – the SNS institution or the user? Moreover, who owns the online identity when the user has passed? The digital social network, as the debated platform of "ownership, meaning making, and social ties," becomes the site where these disparate, yet interconnected relational processes converge (Lingel 2013, 194). The purposes and processes of grieving have become more adaptable and fluid through the incorporation of SNSs. Yet we are still trying to understand "how meaning is ascribed to virtual bereavement practices even as the processes themselves are being shaped" (Lingel 2013, 194).

The question of how we want to remember people, or be remembered ourselves, arises in Odom et al.'s (2012) study of how families manage digital artifacts and family archives. The authors designed a device that would archive a person's tweets, status updates, and other social networking artifacts as part of the family history. This device was controversial with family members because of the SNS effect of context collapse. Family members did not want offensive, mundane, or otherwise undesirable artifacts collected in the family archive. The authors explain, "participants made key distinctions between the thoughtful recording of one's life believed to be reflected in their ancestor's diaries, and their own practices of posting less mindful social networking content targeted at multiple audiences, often outside the family" (Odom et al. 2012, 345). The notion of essentially creating one's own legacy and having a say in one's own impression after death is one that has yet to be explored in the research on SNSs and death. In fact, these questions about having control over one's own digital identity suggests a "sobering digital mood" in relation to death (Munster 2011, 69). Munster (2011) explores the development of the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine as an example of taking control over one's digital ethos by erasing it. The Web 2.0 Suicide Machine is a computer program that automatically disconnects users from social networks sites (Munster 2011). As explained on their homepage, the program will "delete all your energy sucking social-networking profiles, kill your fake virtual friends, and completely do away with your Web 2.0 alterego" (Web 2.0 Suicide Machine 2014). Digital algorithms such as the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine create opportunities for us to reconstitute how we think, maintain and/or obliterate our identities. Users of such automated social disconnection programs are erasing the scope for creating their digital legacies, yet ironically, establishing authority over how their identities are projected.

Death online is about managing social presence. Orchestrating online death as a way to control and mitigate digital legacy is also a means to manage social presence. Whether users consciously disengage their presence from social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, et cetera, or leave behind online keepsakes of their identity for posthumous social networking, they are, in both cases, exercising control over the presentation of their digital ethos.

Social Network Sites and Perimortem to Postmortem Transition
Based on extensive literature in social media and postmortem grieving, as well as weighted perspectives on perimortem bereavement in the areas of clinical and social studies, psycho-spirituality and palliative care, we believe that the practice of sharing affective narratives by survivors during the peri- to postmortem transitional period in SNSs gives new meaning to the ideas of social presence for the deceased and recreates strong ties among communities of survivors. It allows them to digitally enact what they would have done through face-to-face health updates, offline obituaries and funerals, concrete tombstones and/or physical memorials. The difference lies in that the addictive,

ritualistic and immediate nature of digital socialization renders the creation of peri- and postmortem social presence as an ongoing process. As a result, anyone from within the deceased's SNS friend circle can at any time, and with much informality and accessibility, post living conversations such as "I just wanted to say I miss you," on the deceased's SNS profile. They can also post anticipatory grief messages like "my prayers are with you all the time," tagging other SNS friends in a communal effort to show support before the passing event (Keeley 2007; Sample self-created quotes 2014).

The narrative practice of transitioning from concern, to prayers of recovery, to support through regular health updates, to grieving on loss, and back again to support for coping together is being noticed a lot on social media profiles of those who recently lost their lives (Levitt 2012). These sites enable "the family to give updates about the condition to thousands of people at once" during the period of illness or accident-recovery, and at the same time, "[t]he victim can also receive supportive messages from friends and strangers" (Levitt 2012, 78). The stages of mourning over impending death on social media starts much in advance, as an "active process for dealing with the grief of the accident" or the terminal illness, where the related social agents communally support the healing process and publicly grieve the demise of their beloved with a narrative candor much unheard of in the past (Levitt 2012).

Even for those SNS deceased-user profiles', where the content is not moderated by others or where the site has not been converted to dedicated digital memorials like Sanctri, DeadSocial, If I Die, and LivesOn et cetera (Farkas 2013), friends and relations from the deceased's inner social circle are constantly posting affective narratives on their un-moderated wall in an attempt to keep their memory alive. Websites like Sanctri are creating avenues for "posthumous social networking," through continued social media presence by allowing users to: update status messages, tweets, pictures, et cetera on related SNS accounts to be released posthumously, or record videos perimortem for the sole of purpose of sharing it after the event, or even post tweets in the voice of the deceased user. These commercially encouraged digital-legacy creations reiterate that "the intentionality and premeditation required for participation in social networks after death indicates an interest in ongoing impression management or identity work," ironically by and for the deceased him/herself (Farkas 2013). Not only that, but the deceased's user profiles that are continually tagged in pictures capturing the major milestones in the lives of their survivors, pictures that then show up in the deceased's SNS photo albums, stand almost in defiance of expectations of physical mortality.

The notion of social presence of the dead is not conceptually oxymoronic for the digitally socialized survivors, who are more than doing their parts as a community of active mourners to keep the dead very much alive and socially engaged. They are as invested in their communal bidding for the lives of the near-deceased through empathic, spiritual and religious messages posted on the terminally ill user's SNS profiles. What's more, in a recent attempt to update its policy on privacy settings for deceased users' memorialized profiles, Facebook decided to maintain its social functions the way it was when the user was active on it. For example, if a user set his/her profile's privacy settings to public, then the Facebook page would remain set to public after his or her passing, with the expectation of visibility being expanded beyond an invested circuit of Facebook friends. Facebook's Community Operations Team wrote in a blog post announcing the change, where users would now be able "to see memorialized profiles in a manner consistent with the deceased person's expectations of privacy," through the SNS's timely attempt to respect "the choices a person made in life while giving their extended community of family and friends ongoing visibility to the same content they could always see" (Price & DiSclafani 2014).

Moreover, in what could be a solution to the challenges that Odom et al. (2012) encountered with incorporation of social media data in families' archives, Facebook is also enabling the creation of "A Look Back" video for deceased users. "A Look Back" videos are one-minute montages, set to nostalgic music, of a user's most memorable moments on Facebook since he or she joined the site – e.g., photos and status updates with the most "likes" and comments. Facebook offered the opportunity for users to request personalized "A Look Back" videos as part of the company's ten-year anniversary celebration in early February 2014, and the videos quickly became a popular item to share on one's page. These videos are described as "an experience" (Facebook 2014) and as a way to "thank" users for sharing their lives on the site (Rodriguez 2014). Rather than compile all of one's digital activity, these videos highlight the most interactive, social moments in our social networking lives, inviting us to reflect on our individual recent past. The videos also present an opportunity for friends and family to remember these moments, which, in cases of loss, can be a powerful memory-sharing, narrative activity supporting the grieving process. The videos are, in a sense, "memorial keepsakes" that loved ones can request on behalf of the deceased within an environment that the deceased has created and, to some extent, lived out his or her life and relationships, thus offering grieving loved ones some sense of continuity and lasting social presence despite their loss. The renewed meanings of life and relationships that loved ones of the dying and deceased are finding, co-creating and reliving through such virtually-mediated group conversations, aural memorabilia and visual nostalgia creates complex interpersonal possibilities of "turning toward death together" (Keeley 2007; McQuellon & Cowan 2000) within transitional digi-memorials like Facebook.

Conclusion and Future Research

The affective networks that are created around peri- and postmortem digital narratives of the recently departed represent a social process of continuity and change, first as a collective prayer to heal the terminally ill – a social and spiritual strength in numbers if you will, and then to find emotional, postmortem support in each other through shared discourses in bereavement. The anticipatory grieving (Keeley 2007) serves a bonding function similar, yet different from the mourning that occurs after the terminal event. The former's recourse to the intimate social networking community is to find support for the restoration of life and is directed as much to the one suffering, as it is to the rest of the close community. The latter also provides strength to the network of related survivors, but is more heavily attuned to the restoration of peace after death for the departed soul and encourages digital codependence in the process of grieving and coping.

We have argued that digital acts of sharing prayers and intimate memories during the transitional phase, as done within social networking sites, conflates and complicates our accepted notions of social presence and strengthens what may have once been weaker ties within the deceased's SNS friend circle by reinforcing, normalizing and ritualizing the digital enactment of what people do in offline grieving spaces. Perhaps, at times, to a disturbingly normal and mundane extent.

As has already been established, research in these areas has primarily focused on the postmortem, but impression management possibilities and self-legacy creation by the terminally ill has raised some interesting questions. Marwick & Ellison (2012) talk about the survivors' negotiations of managing the deceased's legacy and impression in his/her absence, but future research needs to turn attention to those scenarios where a SNS user knows death is impending and takes steps to set up his/her own legacy impression online. The little empirical research that has been conducted in comparable areas has mostly focused on perinatal death mourning and the Internet's role in the "processing of bereavement after a perinatal death," or as "an example of a situation in which there is a discrepancy between the

social self – defined by how others see you – and the individual's perception of the self" (Pecchinenda 2009 as cited in Micalizzi 2013). More empirical research should be organized that could perhaps offer a content-analysis of audiovisual identity markers that may have been created and posted by the near-deceased, such as poems, art work, spiritual posts, letters to loved ones, podcasts, Youtube videos, et cetera created perimortem by the one afflicted, and left as self-legacy on SNS for others to see postmortem. Selective surveys and focus-group interviews should also be administered for gathering quantifiable and in-depth information about the potential psycho-physiological impact of transitional online grieving and bereavement on invested social media users.

Of course there will be concerns about the veracity of finding support in an online forum, where people are constantly posting messages that are, for the most part, inconsequential, mundane and frivolous. Should there be normative limitations on the kinds of textual and multimedia behavior that people usually exhibit on such social networking platforms, keeping in mind that a bulk of their user base are increasingly turning to its communal, transitional and healing properties to grieve death, find support and fathom that which lies beyond? There is no surprise that the digital boundaries between these contradictory practices are becoming increasingly blurry, not to mention how our beliefs regarding public and private grieving and support are being continually reframed in the context of a Facebook-saturated society. Future studies should thus anticipate and address issues of how one can be sensitive while conducting empirical and ethnographic research related to digital social behavior, intimate memory sharing and online death studies by SNS users/consumers.

Recent research frenzy that has brought to life the continuity, mobility and affective rituality of networked grieving practices taking place on communally-viable digital mourning spaces, serves to offer effective answers to the question "[w]hat happens when memorials are no longer only memory but are present and interactive, essentially able not only to evoke old memories but make new ones?" (Jones 2013). However, the next step may be to address issues of transience, not just in the context of death studies and social media, but also for questioning the longevity of these digi-memorial sites. In narrating the textual-cultural history of electronic communication in North America from the early 19th to late 20th centuries, Sconce (2000) talked about the communicative powers vested in the spiritual telegraph, "an early example of the cultural construction of 'presence' in electronic media" (13). These turn of the century tales about "lovers separated by death but reunited through wireless" and several such metaphors of estrangement, death and reunion, as well as disembodiment and telepathic encounters represented by the "electronic presence of wireless hovering in the ether" (Sconce 2000, 14–15) is reminiscent of behaviors surrounding death and social media today. The fact that these technologically preserved memorials and narrative keepsakes facilitated through Facebook walls, Twitter feeds and Sancrti-like digi-memorials are exactly just that, channels of real (time) and ethereal communication among digitally-networked friends, family and members of the fifth element, all with a view to 'catch up' on life, and take 'a look back' as it passes us by, is what makes the entire process technologically-transitory and anachronistic. However, what doesn't change is the present affective power of social media that have allowed its networked communities to spatially and temporally transcend the boundaries of online grieving to a somewhat fluid area where users (those invested) can find strength, empathy and solace as a group, both before and after death, making it a compelling transitional space where the norms of communal participation surrounding death have become equally fluid, codependent and mobile.

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book reviews

Thanatos

Tieteen kääntämisen sietämätön ihanuus

Anna Haverinen
Turun yliopisto

> Matti Peltonen (toim.): Ariès ja historian salaisuus. Turun historiallinen yhdistys ry./Painosalama, Turku 2013. 206 sivua.

Helsingin yliopiston politiikan ja talouden tutkimuksen laitoksen professorin Matti Peltosen toimittamassa teoksessa *Ariès ja historian salaisuus* (2013) tarkastellaan kuolemantutkimuksen klassikkoteoreetikkoa Philippe Ariès'ta. Historiantutkimuksessa Ariès tunnetaan myös lapsuuden, yksityiselämän ja seksuaalisuuden mentaliteettihistorioitsijana. Ariès'n merkitys suomalaiselle kuolemantutkimukselle ei ole näkynyt pelkästään tutkimusviittauksissa vaan myös kriittisemmissä tarkasteluissa, joissa hänen ranskalaista ja suoraviivaista lähestymistapaansa kuolemankulttuurien historiaan on niin ylistetty kuin kritisoitu.

Peltosen toimittama teos koostuu johdannon lisäksi kuudesta tutkimusartikkelista, joista Peltonen on itse kirjoittanut johdannon lisäksi kaksi. Teoksen lopusta löytyy myös Ariès'n tutkimusten valikoitu kirjallisuusluettelo sekä kirjan muiden kirjoittajien kuvaukset. Teoksen muut kirjoittajat ovat Suomen Akatemian tiedeasiantuntija FT Jyrki Hakapää, Helsingin yliopiston historiantutkija FT Johanna Ilmakunnas, Jyväskylän yliopiston historiantutkija VTT Ilona Pajari sekä Helsingin yliopiston sosiaalihistorian dosentti VTT Marjatta Rahikainen.

Henkilökohtainen on poliittista

Ariès'n helmasyntinä kuolemantutkimuksen saralla on pidetty hänen raakoja yleistyksiään. Häntä on myös kritisoitu vain Ranskaa koskevien todistusaineistojen käyttämisestä. Nämä seikat myös Peltonen (2013a, 15) nostaa esille. Lisäksi Peltonen pohtii Ariès'n henkilöhistorian vaikutusta siihen, miten tämä on usein jätetty pois mentaliteettihistoriaa käsittelevistä teoksista, kuten esimerkiksi Peter Burken (2004) *What is Cultural History?* -teoksesta. Taustalla on voinut Peltosen mukaan vaikuttaa Ariès'n epäakateeminen tausta sekä poliittisesti oikeistolaiset mielipiteet ja kirjoittelut. Peltosen mukaan (2013a, 17) Ariès oli oikeistolaisuudessaan enemmänkin rojalisti, joka ihannoi vankasti perinteisiä tapoja. Tämä taas aiheutti konflikteja muun muassa Ariès'n omissa opinnoissa tasavaltalaisten opettajien parissa.

Ariès'n maailmankuva, joka oli vahvasti oikealle kallellaan, väritti vahvasti hänen tutkimuksiaan. Onkin perusteltua kysyä, kuinka moni klassikkotutkimus on ollut esimerkiksi poliittisten mielipiteiden tai asenteiden suodattama. Miten paljon tutkimustuloksiin vaikuttavat tutkijan oma maailmankuva, moraali, asenteet tai mielipiteet? Kuinka paljon myös tutkimuspoliittinen ilmapiiri vaikuttaa siihen, mitä, miten ja missä tutkitaan? Sosiologi Marja Alastalo on väitöskirjassaan *Metodisuhdanteiden mahti* (2005) tutkinut, miten kyselytutkimus on suomalaisissa yliopistoissa arvottunut viime vuosikymmenien tutkimuspoliittisissa päätöksenteoissa hyvin eri tavoilla. Kunkin vuosikymmenen tutkimusilmapiiri on vaikuttanut hyvin vahvasti siihen, kuinka kvantitatiivista kyselytutkimusta on käytetty, arvosteltu tai sovellettu eri tutkimusteemoissa. Alastalon tutkimus on erinomainen esimerkki siitä, kuinka tieteen niin kutsutut trendit vaikuttavat kunakin vuosikymmenenä oman aikansa tutkijoihin ja tutkimusintresseihin.

Marjatta Rahikainen tuo artikkelissaan esille, että Ariès oli myös tutkimusintresseissään aikansa (epäarvostettu) pioneeri. Siinä vaiheessa, kun Ariès 1950-luvulla kirjoitti teostaan, historiantutkijoiden kiinnostuksen kohteisiin ei kuulunut lapsuuden, perheen, arjen tai yksityiselämän historia. Siksi lapsuuden tai nuoruuden historiantutkijat ovat perimmiltään yhä Ariès'lle velkaa tutkimuskohteensa. Heidän keskuudessaan on kuulunut asiaan osoittaa, että Ariès'n esittämä tämä tai tuo tieto oli virheellinen, tämä tai tuo väite ei ollut kunnolla perusteltu, tämä tai tuo tulkinta ei ollut uskottava. Aika on kuitenkin jäytänyt monien tällaisten huomautusten kiinnostavuutta. (Rahikainen 2013, 46.)

Antropologisessa tutkimuksessa (ja niin ikään myös digitaalisen kulttuurin tutkimuksessa) tutkijan persoona on saanut näkyä tutkimuksen tekemisessä sekä siitä syntyvissä julkaisuissa jo pitkään. Olennainen osa etnografiaa on ollut osallistuvan havainnoinnin menetelmä, jolla tutkija on pyrkinyt tavoittamaan natiivin kokemuksen, eli toisin sanoen *emic*-näkökulman yhteisöstä lähtien. Vuoropuhelun *etic-* ja *emic*-näkökulmien eli etäännyttämisen ja lähentymisen välillä on tarkoitus luoda mahdollisimman objektiivinen tarkastelu tutkimuskysymysten avulla. Itsereflektiivinen tutkimusote ei kuitenkaan ole perinteisesti ollut yleisen historian tutkijoiden harjoittama, vaan objektiivisuus on otettu oletuksena. Tulkinta – myös historiallisten aineistojen – on kuitenkin aina suhteellista. Tietyt näkökulmat voivat kokonaan puuttua tai olla tutkijan itsensä pois lukemia. (Geertz 1973.)

Humanistiset tieteet eivät ole kovia tieteitä, joissa pätevät luonnontieteelliset lainalaisuudet ja matemaattiset periaatteet, minkä vuoksi humanistisissa tieteissä on aina inhimillisyyden mahdollisuus. Tutkittaessa inhimillisyyttä on muistettava myös tutkijan itsensä inhimillisyys sekä monimutkainen vuoropuhelu subjektiivisuuden ja objektiivisuuden välillä.

Käännöskukkasia

VTT Marjatta Rahikainen käsittelee omassa artikkelissaan "*Ariès lapsen ja perhe-elämän historiasta*" erinomaisesti Ariès'n ranskankielisen alkuperäistekstin semanttisia merkityksiä, jotka ovat usein muuttuneet käännöksissä hyvin erilaisiksi tai jääneet usein jopa kokonaan kääntämättä.

Englanninkielistä käännöstä lukeneet sosiologit ja historiantutkijat olivat taipuvaisia tekemään varsin yksisilmäisiä tulkintoja Ariès'n moneen suuntaan polveilevista pohdiskeluista. Heidän tulkintansa Ariès'n teoksen englanninkielisestä laitoksesta ilmestyivät laajalevikkisissä ja tehokkaasti markkinoiduissa angloamerikkalaisissa julkaisuissa. Näitä Ariès-tulkintoja ja tulkintojen tulkintoja on lukenut varmasti monin verroin suurempi joukko sosiologeja ja historian tutkijoita kuin kokonaan Ariès'n 500-sivuisen ranskankielisen alkuteoksen. (Rahikainen 2013, 45.)

Rahikaisen huomiot painottavat alkuperäiskielen tuntemisen merkityksiä. Kuinka paljon menetämme merkitystasoja ja tutkimusten ulottuvuuksia käännösten yhteydessä? Nykyään myös Suomessa tutkimuskirjallisuutta ja etenkin opinnäytteitä julkaistaan eniten englanniksi, jolloin herää myös kysymys kuinka paljon tutkimusten merkitysulottuvuuksia ja nimenomaan semanttisesti tärkeitä analyyttisiä termejä menetetään vieraalla kielellä kirjoitettaessa. Vastaavasti voidaan myös väittää akateemisen suomen kielen rapautuvan, jos tutkimukset julkaistaan ensisijaisesti jollain muulla kielellä. Rahikainen lainaa Ariès'ta itseään kirjoittamalla: "Historioitsija kuuluu omaan aikaansa: Se on hänen vahvuutensa eikä heikkoutensa. Eikä hän voi itseään silpomatta varmistaa objektiivisuutta. Riittää, että hän on rehellinen mikä ei ole sama asia." (Ariès 1948, 11; Ariès 1979, 13; Rahikainen 2013, 55.)

Matti Peltonen esittelee artikkelissaan seksuaalisuuden historian tutkimusta ja Foucault'n ajatusten vaikutuksia Ariès'n tutkimuksiin. Artikkeli jää ohueksi ja irralliseksi muusta kokonaisuudesta, vaikka Ariès oli ajan hermolla 1960-luvulla seksuaalisen vallankumouksen aikana ja myöhemmin 1980-luvulla kiinnostuessaan homoseksuaalisuuden historiasta. Foucault vaikutti syvästi Ariès'n ajatteluun, mutta tämäkin on Peltosen mukaan ollut lukijalle melkein mahdotonta havaita (2013c, 185). Muun muassa 'biopolitiikka' on tunnetummin Foucault'n käyttämä käsite, joka juontaa 1600–1700-luvuilla syntyneisiin käsityksiin alamaisista "väestönä", jonka fyysinen hyvinvointi nousi valtiolliseksi agendaksi. Peltosen seksuaalisuutta käsittelevä osio ei kuitenkaan istu rooliinsa teoksen viimeisenä artikkelina, vaan se olisi palvellut kokonaisuutta paremmin hiukan aikaisemmin. Ariès'n kontribuutiot lapsuuden, perheen ja kuoleman historioihin tunnustetaan laajemmin, jolloin ehkä Peltonen halusi omalta osaltaan tuoda esiin myös vaietumpia tutkimusaiheita – niin Ariès'n kuin tutkimusalan näkökulmasta.

Sen sijaan Johanna Ilmakunnaksen artikkeli Ariès'ta yksityiselämän historioitsijana on kiinnostava läpileikkaus koko Ariès'n tutkimusnäkökulmasta: arjesta ja yksityisestä. Tähän näkökulmaan nivoutuvat niin perhe-elämä, lapsuus, seksuaalisuus kuin kuolemakin.

Kuoleman historioitsija

Marjatta Rahikaisen analyysi Ariès'sta lapsuuden ja perhe-elämän historioitsijana kattaa teoksesta melkein puolet, mutta tuo mielenkiintoisen lisän tietämykseemme kuolemantutkijanakin usein tunnetusta mentaliteettihistorioitsijasta. Kuolemantutkimukseen Ariès keskittyi 1960-luvun alusta alkaen teoksissaan *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*[1] (1974) sekä *Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death over the Last One Thousand Years*[2] (1981). Ariès'ta kuolemanhistorioitsijana tarkastelevat Jyrki Hakapää sekä Ilona Pajari, joista Hakapää esittelee Ariès'n varhaisia vaiheita ja Pajari Ariès'n vaikutusta nykyiseen kuolemantutkimukseen.

Pajari (2013, 147) sotahistorian asiantuntijana huomauttaa, että Ariès jättää melkein tyystin huomiotta 1900-luvun alun sotien vaikutukset länsimaiseen kuolemankulttuuriin sekä miten terveydenhuolto edesauttoi 1800-luvun lopulta alkaen eliniän pitenemistä. Ariès'n tavoite oli kuvailla länsimaista kuoleman historiaa ymmärtää, miksi kuolemaa 1950-luvun jälkeen käsitellään länsimaissa siten kuin käsitellään: miksi tavat ja tottumukset, rituaalit ja perinteet ovat häviämässä tai jopa tyystin hävinneet? Hakapää (2013, 122) taas muistuttaa, että 1950-luvulla kuoleman historian tutkimus oli keskittynyt sosiaalisiin ja taloudellisiin struktuureihin, kun taas Ariès oli enemmän kiinnostunut "kuoleman käsittämisen ja kokemisen" historiasta, mikä ei edesauttanut Ariès'n suosiota. Ariès'n tavoitteena oli hahmottaa, miten

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[1] Laajennettu ja täydennetty ranskankielinen teos *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident: du Moyen Âge à nos jours* julkaistiin vuonna 1975.

[2] Alkuperäisteos *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident: du Moyen Âge à nos jours* julkaistiin jo 1975.

länsimaiset asenteet kuolemaa kohtaan ovat muodostuneet, jolloin hänen motiivinsa on ollut itse asiassa hyvin antropologinen: mitä ihmiset tekevät, miten ja miksi?

Hakapää (2013, 117) kirjoittaa, kuinka Ariès kohteli lähdeaineistojaan arvottamatta ja tasa-arvoisesti luodessaan kuoleman historiaansa, sillä hän pyrki tavoittamaan lähteistään tiedostamattoman ja ääneen lausumattoman itsestäänselvyyksien sijasta mahdollisimman pitkällä aikavälillä. Samaa otetta on sovellettu kauttaaltaan myös Peltosen toimittamassa teoksessa, jossa Ariès'n aikalaisten tutkimuksia ja tutkimusten välisiä vuoropuheluja on verrattu toisiinsa tarkasti ja analyyttisesti.

Ariès'n jälkeen julkaistuista tutkimuksista ja käytetyistä näkökulmista huolimatta hänen vaikutuksensa on kiistaton. Sen sijaan tulkintojen – niin Ariès'n kuin nykytutkijoiden – vertailu ja toisiinsa peilaaminen ovat tuottaneet monia hedelmällisiä näkökulmia kuolemantutkimukseen. Hakapää (2013, 119) muistuttaa, että Ariès'n tutkimusprosessi oli hyvin pitkä ja julkaisuprosessi erilainen kuin nykyään, minkä vuoksi Ariès'n teosten erilaisuudet (ja joskus jopa ristiriitaisuudet) tulisi ottaa huomioon samalla tavalla kuin nykytutkimuksia arvioitaessa.

Olen itsekin käyttänyt Ariès'n kuolemantutkimukseen keskittyviä teoksia omassa internetiin suuntautuvassa kuoleman ja sururituaalien tutkimuksessani. Peltosen teoksen suurinta antia on erityisesti Ariès'n henkilöhistorian merkitys hänen aikansa tutkijayhteisössä sekä mikä merkitys tällä on ollut myöhemmin Ariès'n teosten käännösten laadussa ja tutkimusviittausten määrässä.

Kontekstuaalisuuden merkitys – ketkä tutkimuksia tuottavat?

Ariès'ta on arvosteltu muun muassa siitä, että hän on niputtanut sekä länsimaisen kuolemankulttuurin että seksuaalisuuden kaksituhatvuotisen historian yhtenäiseksi jatkumoksi. Nämä arvostelut tuodaan esille teoksessa kiihkottomasti ja konteksteihinsa asettaen. Tiedemaailmassa myös henkilökemiat saattavat vaikuttaa kritiikkiin. Tutkimusviittauksissa on myös aina muistettava, ettei pelkkä yhteen klassikkoon viittaaminen aina riitä (Hakapää 2013, 118) ja tutkimusten julkaisuvuosi vaikuttaa oman aikansa mentaliteeteillaan myös tutkimustuloksiin (Pajari 2013, 150). Arvosteluista huolimatta – tai ehkäpä juuri niiden vuoksi – Ariès'ta ei niputeta yksiulotteiseksi tutkijaksi ja henkilöksi, vaan hänen henkilöhistoriaansa ja tutkimuksiaan käsitellään monipuolisesti ja kattavasti. Kirjoittajat ovat selkeästi Ariès'n asiantuntijoita, jolloin lukijalle piirtyy kuva kiistanalaisesta, mutta lahjakkaasta historioitsijasta, joka samaan aikaan on inhimillinen ja ikonimainen. Teoksen kieli on kaunista, huolellista ja teoksen kirjoittaneiden tutkijoiden ääni kuuluu vahvana. Tämän tapaisia teoksia myös esimerkiksi suomalaisista klassikkoteoreetikoista tulisi olla lisää.

Kirjoittaja:

Anna Haverinen on digitaalisen kulttuurin jatko-opiskelija, joka väittelee elokuussa 2014 tutkimuksellaan *Memoria Virtualis – death and mourning rituals in online environments.* Tutkimuksessaan Haverinen on tarkastellut virtuaaliantropologisten menetelmien avulla miten yksityishenkilöt surevat omia läheisiään eri rituaalein verkkoympäristöissä, kuten sosiaalisessa mediassa ja verkkopeleissä. Yhteydenotot: anna.haverinen@utu.fi

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Vanhaa suomenruotsalaista kuolemankulttuuria

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Bo Lönnqvist: Dödens ansikte. Tro och sed bland herre och folk. Scriptum, Vaasa 2013. 216 sivua.

Suomalaisen kuolemankulttuurin historiaa koskeva kirjallisuus on moninaista. On yleistajuisia laajempia esityksiä, kuten myös yksityiskohtaisempia akateemisia tutkimuksia. Kuolema päätyy ehkä helpommin maisteritasoisiin opinnäytteisiin kuin väitöskirjoihin tai myöhempiin tutkimuksiin; aihetta pidetään vaikeana, eikä ehkä haluta ottaa riskejä tällaisiin aiheisiin leimautumisen suhteen. Tästä syystä emeritusprofessori Bo Lönnqvistin teos suomenruotsalaisesta vanhasta kuolemankulttuurista on erityisen tervetullut.

Myös Lönnqvist mainitsee kuoleman vaikeaksi aiheeksi teoksensa esipuheessa. Hänen 1960-luvulla tekemänsä haastattelut ovat päätyneet teokseksi vasta nyt. Muuna lähdeaineistona teoksessa ovat runsas kirjallisuus ja aiemmat tutkimukset. Ottaen huomioon sujuvuuden ja kokonaisnäkemyksellisyyden, joilla Lönnqvist käsittelee kuolemaa ja kuolemanrituaaleja, tätä viivettä ei voi pitää pelkästään pahana asiana. Aiheen vaikeudesta olen osin eri mieltä, mutta aivan varmasti kuoleman tutkimukselliselle käsittelylle on hyväksi, että asioita saa pohtia rauhassa ja kenties antaa elämänkokemuksenkin vaikuttaa näkemyksiin, samoin kuin kirjallisen taidon ja tutkimuksellisen osaamisen. Näin tosin lienee kaiken ihmistieteellisen tutkimuksen suhteen.

Suomen ruotsinkielisen kulttuurin ottaminen tutkimuksen kohteeksi voi monesta suomenkielisestä suomalaisesta tuntua marginaaliselta. Voidaan jopa ajatella, että suomenruotsalaisuus ei edustaisi mitään oleellista suomalaisuudessa. Käsitys on kuitenkin monella tapaa väärä, ja näin on erityisesti kuolemankulttuurin suhteen. Ensinnäkin samat lait ja uskonnolliset velvoitteet ovat koskeneet suomalaisia äidinkielestä riippumatta. Tapakulttuurin rajat eivät ole noudattaneet kielirajoja, vaan kuolemankulttuurin kysymykset ovat monisyisempiä. Lönnqvist tekeekin merkittävän kulttuuriteon esitellessään vanhaa luterilaista suomalaista hautajaisperinnettä; vastaavaa yleisesitystä en ainakaan minä tiedä aiemmin julkaistun.

Ruotsinkielisen Suomen kuolemanrituaaleissa tai hautajaisperinteissä ei olekaan ratkaisevia eroja suomenkieliseen nähden. Aste-eroja on kyllä paljonkin. Menneiden vuosisatojen säätyläisten, erityisesti aatelin hautajaiskulttuuri löytyy pääosin ruotsinkielisistä lähteistä. Suomenruotsalainen kuolemankulttuuri tuntuu yleisemminkin olleen jossain määrin ritualisoidumpaa ja yksityiskohtaisempaa. Koska Lönnqvist ei rajoitu vain "kansan" kuvauksiin, vaan käyttää lähteinään myös säätyläiselämän kuvauksia, saamme huomattavasti monipuolisemman käsityksen siitä, miten

Suomessa ihmisen kuolemaan entisaikaan suhtauduttiin, millaisia yhteisöjä se koski ja millaisia kulutustarpeita se synnytti. Entisaikain kuolemankulttuurista syntyy usein se mielikuva, että kaikki tarvittavat esineet ja ruokalajit valmistettiin kokonaan kotona. Seuduilla, joilta oli vaikea lähteä alle viikon varoitusajalla ostosmatkalle, näin varmasti olikin. Eteläisemmässä Suomessa ja kaupunkien läheisyydessä – ja luonnollisesti itse kaupungeissa – turvauduttiin kuitenkin jo satoja vuosia sitten eri alojen ammattilaisiin, oli kyse sitten ruumisarkun, hautajaisherkkujen tai suruasujen hankinnasta. Näin oli erityisesti selkeämmin rahatalouden piirissä elävien, eli ylempien säätyjen kohdalla.

Monet tavat ja tottumukset eivät olleet ainoastaan suomalaisia, vaan säätyläistö otti mallia muualta maailmasta; ylimpien kerrosten kohdalla suhteet olivat monesti henkilökohtaisia. Kaikkien yhteiskunnan ryhmien kohdalla voidaan havaita liukumaa varsinkin ruotsalaisiin hautajaisperinteisiin nähden. Monet samat tai samankaltaiset tavat ovat kuuluneet hautajaisperinteisiin eri Pohjoismaissa, mutta niiden yksityiskohtaisuus on vaihdellut. Esimerkiksi surutalon koristaminen havuilla tunnetaan niin Ruotsissa kuin kaikkialla Suomessakin. Kuitenkin koristeluun paneuduttiin Ruotsissa huomattavasti enemmän kuin Suomessa: tästä kertoo Louise Hagbergin teos När döden gästar (1937). Hagbergin mukaan havuista saatettiin sommitella monimutkaisia kuvioita pihalle ja myös kirkkomaalle johtavalle tielle. Lönnqvistin käyttämä ruotsinkielinen suomalainen muistitieto kertoo sekin havuristien tms. muotoilemisesta pihamaalle, mutta isompien kuvioiden tekemisestä se ei ilmeisesti kerro.

Mistä nämä sinänsä pienet erot kertovat? Lönnqvist ei tee kovin tarkkoja vertailuja eri alueiden kesken. Jossain määrin syntyy sellainenkin vaikutelma, että varsinkin Ruotsin vallan ajalla voidaan Pohjanlahden kummankin puolen kuolemankulttuuria käsitellä yhtenä kokonaisuutena. Alussa mainitsemistani syistä ajatus ei ole mahdoton, mutta nyansoidumpi näkökulma olisi kiinnostava.

Samoin sääty- ja luokkaerot olisi voinut tuoda esille vielä voimakkaammin ja analyyttisemmin. Se, että yläluokan kuolemankulttuuria ylipäänsä käsitellään yhdessä muun kuolemankulttuurin kanssa, on tietenkin ansio itsessään. Eivähän alempien säätyjen edustajat ja rahvas olleet suinkaan tietämättömiä siitä, miten kartanoiden väki haudattiin. Vaikka vastaavia tapoja ei voitu eikä ollut varaakaan noudattaa täydelleen, ne loivat kuitenkin mielikuvaa mahdollisista kuolemanrituaaleista. Ja koska parempi väki saattoi hankkia esimerkiksi paremman hautapaikan – vielä 1700-luvulla sisältä kirkosta – ei sen tapakulttuuria sopinut kovin väheksyä iäisyysasioihinkaan nähden. Vaikuttihan siltä, että eliitin tapoja noudattamalla saattaisi päästä taivaaseenkin vikkelämmin.

Näistä varauksista huolimatta Dödens ansikte on kuolemankulttuurista kiinnostuneelle lukijalle fantastinen kirja. Sen runsas ja kiinnostava kuvamateriaali jopa haittaa lukemista, koska kuvia unohtuu helposti katselemaan ja pohtimaan; samoin pitkät "tietolaatikot" sisältävät kiehtovia tarinoita entisajan kuolemanrituaaleista. Varsinainen teksti on hyvin kirjoitettua ja hienovireistä. Joskus kuolemaa käsitteleviä kirjoja syytetään synkiksi, mutta tämän(kin) teoksen painopiste on eläviä varten suoritetuissa rituaaleissa, jotka sisältävät paljon kaunista ja myös suoraviivaisen käytännöllistä. Parhaimmillaan tekstin lukeminen lähenee hyvää kaunokirjallisuutta, oli kyse sitten kartanon neitien tai kalastajaperheiden hautajaiskuvauksista. Viehättävänä lisänä teoksen loppupuolella kuvataan tutkimushaastatteluita ja haastateltavia.

Lönnqvist käsittelee aineistojaan taitavasti, peilaten erilaisten seutujen ja perheiden tapoja kohdata kuolema. Teoksen ote on nimenomaan kertova; teoreettiset pohdinnat voisivat olla huomattavasti yhtenäisempiä ja keskustella uudemman kuolemantutkimuksen kanssa. Milloin laajempia kuoleman kysymyksiä käsitellään, ne taustoittavat asioita hyvin yleisellä tasolla. Suomalainen kuolemankulttuuri sietää kuitenkin vielä runsaasti yksityiskohtaista tutkimistakin. Tähän Dödens ansikte antaa hyviä ideoita, aineistovihjeitä ja parhaimmillaan myös tutkimuksellisia ajatuksia.

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