Remains in the System: The diversity of mourning online

Wednesday 11th March @ IOELC

Selina Ellis Gray // PhD Candidate
Hello
I’m Selina

Digital Media Designer & PhD Candidate

@nina_ellis
www.digitaloss.net
www.lossmedia.co.uk

HighWire
A doctoral centre for radical innovation in the digital economy at Lancaster University.

Advocates an interdisciplinary approach which spans computing, management and design

http://highwire.lancs.ac.uk/
Remains In the System

What I will be discussing:

- Introduce backdrop of the doctoral study
- Focus on relaying findings about mourning online
Runs under numerous names: Digital Death, Digital Legacy, Technologies of End-of-Life, Death Online

Technologies intersecting into the EOL: Digital estate and legacy software, live funeral streaming, online memorials, digital grave furniture, digital afterlife tools...

Designing everyday technologies that are considered to be ‘death sensitive’ or Thanatosensitive (Massimi)

Emphasis in my study on designing for bereavement support
Bereavement is not simply the experiencing of grief (although this is a key part of it). Bereavement can include many different activities: taking on new roles, learning how to engage with outsiders, managing the deceased's assets, creating and organizing mementos, finding support, and so on. This thesis argues that these needs, among others that the bereaved encounter, are viable and valuable sites for technological intervention and support” (Massimi, 2012)

- Avoiding problematizing grief
- Being aware of imposing orthodoxies
- Continuing Bonds literature
While it is true (but trite) to say that we cannot know death, we can certainly look on dying and bereavement with the knowledge that all of us will experience both of them (Small 2001).
The appropriation of technologies had been first acknowledged by PhD candidates Michael Massimi and Andrea Charise in their call for Thanatosensitivity and later become the focus of UC Irvine PhD candidate Jed Brubaker. Brubaker had undertaken the first empirical studies on the use of Facebook and Myspace by the bereaved (Massimi and Charise, 2009; Brubaker and Vertesi, 2010; Brubaker and Hayes, 2011).
// Methodology

- Grounded study
- Multisited ethnography online
- Situational Analysis

Adele Clarke, ed. Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn. Sage, 2005.
Chapter 3: When loss Remains

Insight into 25 years of Mourning online

1990-2015
The Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, normally shortened to The WELL, is one of the oldest virtual communities in continuous operation.

TheWell attracted a certain group of people: baby boomers in their late 30s and early 40s, smart and left-leaning without being self-consciously PC, mostly male, many with postgraduate degrees.
Ok: br 1.29

item resp header

1 102 Welcome to the Plants and Gardens Conference  expurgated & scribbled
2 57 Seed and plant trading post  expurgated & scribbled
3 72 PLANT TREES  expurgated & scribbled
4 71 The Well  expurgated & scribbled
5 22 The House Plant Dirt item  expurgated & scribbled
6 9 Toddlers and Houseplants  expurgated & scribbled
7 10 Malachite questions  expurgated & scribbled
8 28 Dinosaur trees  expurgated & scribbled
9 13 The Houseplant Dirt Item  expurgated & scribbled
10 5 The Silly Plant Names Item  expurgated & scribbled
11 14 How do you like to get your plants?  expurgated & scribbled
12 8 Hibiscus planting ideas  expurgated & scribbled
13 73 Home Plant-happenings  expurgated & scribbled
14 10 Springtime - landscaping fun
15 11 WANTED:
16 7 Periwinkle, aka Myrtle or Vinca
17 34 Decorative ponds
18 7 Caladium help wanted  expurgated & scribbled
19 20 Moving Plants Indoors  expurgated & scribbled
20 30 Fluorescent Lights?  expurgated & scribbled

Ok: help
Welcome to PicoSpan: a Unix-based Conferencing Program (version T3.3)
PicoSpan Commands you can get help on:
Item commands:
  Read Enter Browse Remember
Other ways to communicate:
  Mail Chat Who
General commands:
  Unix Step Bye Help Join Next Display Set Define Source Echo
Other help keywords:
  INTRODUCTION morecommands system keys conferences
  etiquette editor faq responsiveness summary dates

To get more help on a specific topic, type HELP <topic>
where <topic> is one of the above keywords.  Note that most
commands can be abbreviated; i.e., "b a" for "browse all", "r5"
for "read 5"...

You can also type HELP at any point, including the "Respond, Forget or
pass? " prompt, and the "Join, observe..." prompt, as well as at
the "Ok: " prompt.  Don't hesitate to ask somebody if you
still can't figure out something!

Ok:
California man symbolically took his life by using a computer program to seek out and destroy the contributions he had made over the years to a continuing electronic conversation run by a computer group called the Well. Several weeks later, he followed this "virtual" suicide by killing himself in the real world.

His friends have tried to assuage their grief by what may be the first electronic funeral. Shortly after his death, they created a new computer file including all of his old writings, which, it turns out, had been saved on a backup disk. They have also compiled a eulogy, hundreds of pages of testimonials available on the system.
1993 / ZiffNet


ZDNet dates back to PCMagNet, the Ziff-Davis PC Magazine bulletin board, launched in 1985 as a service on CompuServe. It was renamed ZiffNet and also made available on Prodigy and its own service. Renamed ZDNet, it evolved to the Web as did most online services of the era.

http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/55191/zdnet
Cyberspace neighbours consoled each other over the senseless loss of a mutual friend. And in their collective grieving, they demonstrated an impulse for togetherness that is as modern as the digital age and as old as humankind’ (Lewis, 1994).
Transitioning to the World Wide Web or WWW & Internet Browser

Dedicated sites for loss appear i.e. ‘Cybercemeteries’ or ‘Virtual Memorials’

Communities of interest – around loss or particular types of loss emerge

Creating sites of mourning

Creating data about the deceased – biographical texts, photographs etc
“First of all and no matter what has happened, I always have and always will love you with all my heart, son! This Thursday, November 7, 1996 is your birthday. HAPPY BIRTHDAY SON! You would have been 21 if you had not chosen to cross over into the Spirit-World. Now you will be young forever. As you may already know from the "other-side", on a regular day or time I would be having a heck of a time trying to cope with my pain and anguish for your loss, and I would "just" be going through the motions of life. In this particular time, however, just before your "first" birthday after your "departure", I am doing even worse: Much worse!”
“November 12, 2012,
We did not enter any updates in June for your b-day. We are still both struggling with joint issues and other pains as well. We did manage to go to Massachusetts as we did 25 years previously, it was a small gift to ourselves”

“November 12, 2013,
17 years and still overwhelmingly sad. Oft times I think of how our lives would have played out had you still been here and alive and kicking, but I don't go there many times, it is too painful”

“November 12, 2014
It is very hard to fathom that it has been 18 years. One more year and dear daughter you will have been gone as long as you were on the earth. We miss you and know that each day we are one step closer to seeing you again”
Willow
Suicide

Tribute site on
Angelfire
Geocities

Biography
Image gallery
Guestbook[s]

Highly active
Letters
Birthday

1997-2014

Name:
How did you find this Web Site?
Where are you from?
Comments:

Come back every year
England

Although I often think of you, today I think of you and the people you've left behind even more.

Your photo still sits in my lounge where I get to see you everyday.

I always light a candle for you on this day and take an extra moment to spend some time thinking about you and your family.

Sending you and everyone big hugs and my loving thoughts.

FAQ

Be First to Post a Reply

November 12th, 2014
09:00:29 AM
2000

Dot com bubble
Web 2.0

Communities of interest – around loss or particular type of loss continue

Guestbooks phased out
Sites became more sophisticated
Advertising prominent

More inclusive in term of diversity in people, more locations
Appropriating spaces for loss

Early social networks ie- Bebo, Myspace, Facebook

Continuation of creating spaces and data (ie photographs, texts, video files etc)

Seeing the data that’s left behind after social media use ends
GeoCities
Closed- October 26, 2009
were an estimated 38 million user-built
MySpace users threaten to sue after years of blogs deleted

MySpace’s remaining loyal fanbase is up in arms after nearly a decade’s worth of content is deleted to make way for site relaunch.

Suit & Tie

The new single from Justin Timberlake featuring JAY-Z

Justin Timberlake’s long-awaited return to music is here. Simply sign in to hear the first track from his forthcoming album.

By Rhiannon Williams
4:07PM BST 11 Jul 2013
Social Network Bebo Has Filed A Voluntary Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Petition

Posted May 10, 2013 by Ingrid Lunden (@ingridlunden)

Looks like Bebo, once an early star in social networking, is progressing to the next step in the long and messy struggle between majority shareholder Criterion Capital Partners and minority shareholders that include co-founder Michael Birch, Hecker Consultancy and SV Angel: Bebo.com, Inc. has filed a voluntary petition for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in the Central District of California. First spotted by the blog Chapter 11 Cases, this appears to be the latest development in a case that was first filed in February of
2010+

Primarily practices of appropriation of existing networks – but becomes observable across a much broader range like Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube, through to Kickstarter campaigns.

Contemporary death, highly visible, public and diverse in approach.

Consistency with creating data and media – through photographs, video, texts.
Living with the dead: emergent post-mortem digital curation and creation practices
Springer
October 30, 2013
Co-authored with Paul Coulton

The Diversity of Mourning Practices Online
Digital Futures: The Third Annual Digital Economy All Hands Conference
October 2012
2011-2014 // The Gaps

The Memory Remains: Visible Presences within the Network (2014)
Thanatos Journal
1990-2015// To Summarise

- Early 1990’s  Experiencing death within communities of interest
- 1995+ Communities of interest built around loss : people beginning to create and link sites of loss together
- 2005+ Creation of sites and the early appropriation of social networks – Practices of loss are typically broader and more diverse
- 2010+ Primarily the appropriation of networks for loss - an aspect that is being supported and developed
- The bereaved having to think about curating data left behind too
Looking towards people who died before their time, traumatic deaths, accidents, murders, missing people.

The 19 year persistence of some practices of loss: Echoing Douglas Davis in ‘Death, Ritual and Belief’ (2002) in how some experiences affect life in such a profound way that people are never the same again (Davis, 2002).

As Davis states: ‘To speak of recovery is to talk about a kind of backwards change, an undoing of what has been done, an unliving part of a life. and this is impossible’ (Davis, 2002).
Online mementos, photographs taken with digital cameras or camera phones, memorial web pages, digital shrines, text messages, digital archives (institutional and personal), online museums, online condolence message boards, virtual candles, souvenirs and memorabilia traded on eBay, social networking and alumni websites, digital television news broadcasts of major events, broadcaster websites of archival material, blogs, digital storytelling, passwords, computer games based on past wars, fan sites and digital scrapbooks. All of these are examples of new media at the beginning of the 21st century and all are fulfilling an age old function: to ‘control time, recollection, grief and trauma’ (Broderick and Gibson, 2005, p. 207)
Thank You

www.digitaloss.net
www.lossmedia.co.uk