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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 sequestered 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 sequestered. 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 cater 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 webbased 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 losing 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 is 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.

Biographical note:

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