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Cybermourning:
Reclaiming Ritual and Negotiating Care for the Dead Online

(Still from 'Cut Copy Me' music video by Petula Clark)

Solveiga Zibaite
10157344
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I am indebted to all of the cybermourners whose stories I've read and especially to those whose journeys I follow in this thesis. They have inspired and grounded me, even if they might never know that.

I am grateful and indebted to my parents, always.

Abstract

The practice of online memorialisation and academic interest in cybermourning has been flourishing in the past two decades. This thesis contributes to the many interdisciplinary studies on online memorialisation by examining the extent to which cybermourning is consistent with pre-digital memorialisation and commemoration practices and which aspects of cybermourning are stemming directly from unique affordances of cyberspace. This goal is achieved by examining the key features of online memorial message content and discourse, as well as tracing the contours of cybermourning as a process. I follow three poignant cybermourning journeys from the start of participation towards its uncertain conclusion. This temporal aspect of inquiry allows to consider the ethical challenges that this practice presents the bereaved with in terms of striving for care for the deceased as the memorial becomes less frequented. I locate the largest influence of extensive technological affordances of internet and cyberspace on cybermourning precisely in this negotiation of separation. The practice of cybermourning presents the bereaved with previously unseen possibilities to highly personalise, continuously edit and deeply interact with the memory of the deceased within a public sphere. It also reconfigures the notion of community based on geographical proximity. Nevertheless, in some of the features of cybermourning, such as enabling cohabitation of living and the dead through technological advances, and in continuities from material engagements with death and memorialisation (physical memorials and keepsakes expanded to digital forms) we can locate some characteristics from previous historical death mentalities. Building on the contemporary virtue of documentation of life, I argue practice of online mourning is a reintroduction of post-mortem ritual into private sphere in secular Western society which otherwise does not readily provide the bereaved with socially prescribed mourning regulations, leaving some of them to turn to this vernacular and democratic construction of memory in cyberspace.

Keywords: cybermourning, internet, cyberspace, ritual, ethics, online ethnography.

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INTRODUCTION

"I can't believe there are load of nosy fecks reading my private thoughts and messages to you, how dare they"– just like that, my inconspicuous cover has been blown. I've been pulled out from a trance, the mundane flow of navigating through online memorials has now been disrupted by this moment of awareness of readership that the widow, introduced in the second part of the thesis, experienced. I can feel my face getting red as I've been called out by her rage crystalised in words typed over three years ago. She does not refer to me, yet she does – even though susceptible to a server shutdown, the supposed immunity to the decay of words in online universe is able to elicit a reaction in every reader, no matter how much time has passed. Yet, nothing happens. I am still anonymous to the widow, she won't know I am reading her correspondence with her husband. This particular widow is currently living on borrowed time and her husband's memorial will remain unedited for the rest of its existence as she was its sole contributor besides rare messages from her sons. I ask myself: am I a nosy feck? This is not the epithet I desire to be called, but in this case, I am indeed one of the gang of shadows, lurking in the background, registering only as additional profile views. She won't know how long I've spent meditating upon her fear of driving a car alone for the first time, with her husband's picture in the seat next to her, she won't know that I know the sweet nickname she used to call him when they were young. Not because she is dying but because I barely leave a mark. Like a fly stuck on the wall with an aching back and a numb behind I am reading her grief as she tells it herself, just as I did in hundreds of other memorials. I am tracking her cybermourning journey, noting whether it is at the hope of dawn or in the comfort of midnight she and the others are compelled to pour their hearts in the flickering blue of the computer screen. Reading this pain I feel detached as a researcher and too intimate as a human being. My biggest hope is that I can connect these two conflicting parts into an empathetic and compelling read that does not undervalue experience and strength of the bereaved. This reading of grief and mourning online has enabled me to accomplish the ambitious goal of this thesis that I will now turn to introduce - to examine the extent to which cybermourning is consistent with earlier, pre-digital commemoration practices and which aspects of cybermourning are stemming directly from unique affordances of cyberspace.

The practice of cybermourning is largely based and reliant on extensive technological innovations of internet and cyberspace and presents the bereaved with previously unseen possibilities to highly personalise and deeply interact with the memory of the deceased

within a public sphere. Nevertheless, in this thesis I argue that in some of the features of cybermourning, such as enabling cohabitation of living and the dead through technological advances, and in continuities of material engagements with death and memorialisation (physical memorials and keepsakes expanded to digital forms) we can locate several characteristics from earlier historical death mentalities and practices. It also reconfigures the notion of community, based on geographical proximity, simultaneously partially bringing back the preindustrial modes of public mourning, coupled with tensions between notions of public and private in the cyberspace.

I was hesitant to dedicate space to writing about my experience of conducting this research as, considering the heaviness of their experiences, I felt it to be quite disrespectful to ponder upon how I felt as a researcher. After all, I am extremely lucky to not have experienced loss at this stage in my life and I cannot truly align myself with the experiences of the bereaved – this puts some added pressure to my narratives of personal tragedies to be as honest and empathetic as possible. Also, while I still feel that my own feelings of guilt and intrusion are trivial personally, I will admit that this might be important to consider as internet research is becoming increasingly popular. Guidelines for consent for online data use are blurry. One might say that as 'send', 'publish', 'enter' icon or button is pressed, the content does not entirely belong to a person anymore. Lange (2007) writes about YouTube content being "privately public and publicly private". This conceptualisation of content within the cyberspace and the tension between these two concepts is fully revealed in online memorials and will echo throughout the entirety of the thesis as while grief is becoming more public with the rise of acknowledgment of para-social and disenfranchised grief i.e. grief that is not socially acknowledged (e.g. secret relationship, former partner, online gaming partner), especially in online sphere, the offline experiences of death and bereavement are still sequestered and problematised. Gustavson (2015) was presented with a nearly identical situation of data use ethics when studying Norwegian and Swedish online memorials. He avoided a sensitive ethical issue by limiting his research to those memorials that do not require a login access and are open to the public. I followed suit and observed a publically available online memorial website. In this thesis, all of the names within the stories were changed, no pictures used to protect the anonymity of the bereaved as much as possible. Taking into mind the relatively easy searchability of the data, the name of the website will also not be disclosed, but it is crucial to state that the users of this website are mostly white British working class people (more females than males) exhibiting popular Christian orientation, their education unable to be determined, except from language (grammar, eloquence) – but all of this can be contested and the possibility of emotional outpouring affecting the typing process

must be taken into account. Throughout the thesis I utilise Kastenbaum's (1977) definitions of bereavement, grief and mourning. Bereavement here is the state of having had a loved one die. Grief is the emotional reaction to the loss, including not only emotional reactions, but also physical, cognitive, and behavioural symptoms, alongside some social and spiritual aspects (Corr, Corr, & Nabe, 2006). Lastly, mourning is a behaviour and usually refers to taking part in socially sanctioned, public rituals. In the next few following pages I will attempt to situate my research within the academic literature.

i.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

When referring to death mentalities, I evoke Aries' historical exploration of changes in the Western attitudes towards mortality through millennia following the early medieval period. He presents these changes as four stages – 'tamed death', 'death of the self', 'death of the other' and 'forbidden death', a succinct consideration of each will suffice for the purpose of introduction. During the period of 'tamed death' people dwelled in close proximity to the dead, fully aware of their own impending demise, with dying and mourning being public events where the local community would come to one's deathbed to give their final farewells. Around eleventh/twelfth centuries, a shift to the period of 'the death of one's own' occurred, with increasing focus being put towards the individual and the moment of death being when the judgement of life ocurred. By the early eighteenth century, this phase was replaced with "death of the other' that now shifted to the experience of losing someone loved and to 'a new intolerance of separation" (Aries 1974:59). He states that this was the time when mourning culture flourished and showing emotions of sadness emerged as a response to death as a greedy enemy. 'The death of the other' period corresponds with the romantic period in the West and widely researched Victorian culture of death. Although it was a period of so called celebrations of death, it was also a start of the demise of publicness of death and mourning, a retreat of modern death to the outskirts of life. According to Aries, modern trends of individualism and secularity have diminished our competency to gather a community around those dying and in mourning. Dying is transformed into illness, and an 'untamed death' is made invisible or forbidden. It is important to note at this point that Aries' work will not serve as a direct guideline for my thesis. I will use his insights to analyse how the current climate of grief and mourning, experiences of which I attempt to grasp through the messages posted in online memorials (and also consulting academic literature), alongside with how the practice of

cybermourning itself might be changing that said climate, both might be seen as intermingling features of several death mentalities. Admittedly I found more adherence to some mentalities and practices than others, especially with Victorian death attitudes (around the time of 'death of the other' period). It is most possibly due to the fact that I am approaching my analysis from a standpoint of technological influences of grief and mourning, which had truly begun to take its shape with the advent of photography. Lutz (2015) writing on changes following Victorian period, noted that dematerialisation and disembodiment of death mementos occurred partially because of changes in technology. Walter (2015a) outlines how the presence of the dead within a society depends in part on available communication technologies, specifically speech, stone, sculpture, writing, printing, photography and phonography (including mass media), and most recently the internet. In the same vein, new communication and archiving technologies introduced new ways that the dead can 'haunt' the living – through photos, sound recordings, motion pictures. Kittler (1999:13) suggests, that "the realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture".

A note on traditional personal memorialisation and commemoration practices is necessary. Cann (2014:16) writes that memorials function as replacements for the body since it cannot be kept among the living and they must be reinscribed in public space, in material remembrance. Hallam and Hockey's (2001) historical analysis of physical memorials in the West can be summarised as follows. Before the eleventh century in England, memorials were only erected for the wealthy. Partly based on the religious obligation to make wills (Aries 1983), graves of the 'ordinary' stated to be marked around that time. Three centuries later, memorials usually contained name, date of death, praise, profession, rank and status. By the fifteenth century inscriptions revealed familial relations and around the seventeenth century started serving as biographic statements and recordings of life's accomplishments. Newspaper obituaries became prominent in the nineteenth century, importance of photograph as a memory technique will be considered in detail later. The massive losses of two World Wars prompted more significant focus on public, official, carefully planned forms of expression than on intricate personal memorialisation. In the years after World War II, vernacular memorials, broadening the memory work of memorialisation, became more prevalent (Shanken, 2002). Ghost bikes, memorial tattoos, roadside memorials are several examples of these vernacular forms of memorialisation.

Over the last two decades, increasing number of authors from different disciplines engage with the newly emergent trend of digital memorialisation (Roberts and Vidal 2000, de

Vries & Rutherford 2004, Carroll and Landry 2010, Brubaker & Hayes 2011, Haverinen 2014, Brubaker, Hayes, and Dourish 2013, Giaxoglou 2014 to name a few), but they are largely focused on descriptive analysis of online memorials as newly emergent grief outlets (Brennan, 2008; Hanusch, 2010). Among the few who show interest in continuities between commemorative practices, most significant are Brubaker and Hayes (2011), who find that online memorialisation melds existing post-mortem practices and communication with new technologies to share memories and maintain connections with the deceased, and Giaxoglou, who writes that "web 2.0 mourning is found to be a largely 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" (2014:25). Focusing on rhetorics, Hess (2007:813) argues that online memorialisation is a "unique form of communal and vernacular discourse".

While online memorialisation can be considered an innovative way to communicate grief and go through mourning, the motivations and desires of the bereaved are deeply rooted in the universal existential quest for meaning and in ritual practice. Romanoff & Tenezio (1998) notice that traditional mourning rituals nowadays are often minimised or altogether avoided, while post-funeral rituals as time passes are even rarer. Following Ramshaw (2010:172) we see a cultural postmodern shift in focus from the community to focusing on the individuality of the deceased person in mourning rituals. Winkel (2011) writes that as there occurs a break in the value of the communal ritual in the society, the traditional rituals do not engender meaning in people 'personally' so these rituals actually do not benefit the person in any way – it needs to speak to the personal aspect. The rituals are also becoming less formal. Vale-Taylor (2009) sees the importance of informal rituals in that they occur and serve to sustain people in the context of their daily lives. The practice of online mourning is a reintroduction of post-mortem ritual into the public sphere in Western secular society which otherwise does not provide the bereaved with socially prescribed mourning regulations, leaving some of them to turn to vernacular and democratic construction of memory in cyberspace. This conclusion is reached by highlighting the key features of online memorial message content and discourse. I follow three cybermourning journeys in order to trace the contours of cybermourning as a process, investigate the points of starting participation and withdrawing from it. This temporal aspect of inquiry also allows to consider the challenges that this particular practice presents the bereaved with in terms of striving for care for the deceased as they negotiate the appropriate departure from their online memorial presence. I conceptualise care in online memorials as interest in perceived well-being of the deceased (both in a non-rhetorical existence based on afterlife beliefs and in the memorial as a

surrogate for the person) by showing affection and attention, continuous engagement and considering how one can best withdraw participation. Interactions with the representation of the deceased and the conclusions of online memorial use will be examined by evoking Derrida's ethical reinterpretation of mourning. In order to more clearly illustrate the progression of cybermourning discourse, I include dates and posting times after each message. Examples from other memorials are not dated. The message language is not edited.

My research aims to fill the gap in literature concerning a more extensive analysis of the lifespan of and discourse developments within online memorials, attempting to locate possible resolutions of mourning and points of disruption. Finding continuities, reversals and ubiquitous computing induced novel impulses in mourning is another addition to existing literature. Discussing possible problems in providing care for the deceased in online memorials during participation and negotiating the decision to withdraw from it, i.e. ethics of cybermourning, is my last contribution.

i.2 NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

The approach I adopt has assumed various different formulations in academic literature, e.g. Hine's (2000) 'virtual ethnography', Androutsopoulos's (2008) 'discourse-centred online ethnography', Robinson & Schulz's (2009) 'cyberethnography', formulations like 'ethnography of virtual spaces' (Burrel 2009), 'netnography' (Kozinets 2009), etc. Lacking strict guidelines, I arrive at 'cyberethnography' as the formulation of my research approach, which is 'the writing of the culture(s) of the computer-mediated, tele-sociality of the physically disconnected '(Churchill, 2015:1) and is fully applicable to cybermouners. In my conceptualisation, cybermourners can be considered a community only in the sense that online shoppers on the same website can. I would refer to this phenomena as a culture, because here, people, affected by similar experiences gather in a dedicated space to engage in a particular behaviour – writing tributes, sharing images, both for the purpose of memorialisation and further consumption by the authors and other visitors. They follow similar textual conventions, personalise the same default memorial – they engage in a cultural practice not bound by a community in a conventional sense. Attempts to produce a community are definitely seen in many instances, but the first impulse to create an online memorial remains to memorialise the deceased; other practices, establishing connections occur or do not occur depending on the

mourners' needs. I am more focused on individual mourning journeys (and of similarly invested family members in the same memorial) as online communities of the bereaved and interactions in online support forums have been studied extensively (e.g. Capitulo (2004), Carroll and Landry (2010), Hard af Segerstad & Kasperowski, (2014), Paulus and Varga (2015)). Professional literature on grief and bereavement was consulted in order to deepen my own understanding and to support the observed discursive practices (e.g. Neimeyer (2000), Stroebe and Schutt (1999), Worden (2009), Kübler-Ross &Kessler (2005).

Hine (2000) discusses production of authority in ethnographic accounts (travel to a field site, experience of the field site and sustained interaction with respondents) in terms of online ethnography. Most importantly here, the absence of physical travel to the field is replaced by 'experiential displacement', where the researcher experiences a form of travel through computer-mediated environment and becomes acquainted with the values of the space in question (Hine, 2000:45). In legitimising the data produced during an exclusively online research, I follow Garcia et. al. (2009) who state that if in some types of groups, participants' only contact with each other is via computer-mediated communication, ethnographers can study the social life of these cultures solely by examining their online behaviour. While in the first chapter I follow one family's cybermourning journey after the same loss, meaning that they are close offline, I do so while taking cybermourning to be one part of mourning process and because it takes place exclusively online, I am able to draw credible conclusions on the features and process of cybermourning itself.

At the start of the research, in order to examine general grief expressions and commemorative strategies in online memorials I observed, recorded, noted reoccurring motives and took inspiration from computer-mediated discourse analysis – a set of methods embedded in linguistic discourse analysis (Herring, 2001, 2004), which nevertheless remained largely qualitative and interpretative. As discourse analysis uses language as a lens for understanding human interaction, this approach aided in identifying the discursive practices and their linguistic manifestation so that it would become possible to capture the essence of narrativised grief. Additionally, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that textual analysis of public texts, such as blogs, allows researchers to examine ongoing discursive phenomena; this emphasis on individuals' voice maintains the authenticity of the study. Rosenblatt's (1983) monograph exhibits an attempt of grief theory building through textual analysis of 56 nineteenth-century U.S. and Canadian diaries. This inquiry into personal documents provides data that is 'uncontaminated by a framework imposed by the researcher' (1983:5), thus enabling the researcher to examine the perspective of the diarist.

Sole focus on written discourse enabled me to trace the general contours of cybermourning journey in terms of discourse at the start, progression and possible conclusion of participation in online memorials. The need for this has been touched upon by Giaxoglou (2015) who addressed the gap in attention to the uses of narrative in social network sites by providing an analysis of entextualised moments of mourning on Facebook. DeGroot and Carmack (2013), conducted a textual analysis of Amy Ambrusko's personal blog in which she communicates her experience of parental grief in three ways: (a) (re)questioning reality, (b) experiencing discursive and corporeal guilt, and (c) rationalising a 'new normal' (2013:456) – they do not explicitly accentuate the temporal aspect of changes in her online grief discourse as they follow her journey. Differently, my research focuses on the traceable aspects of cybermourning which can uncover the limits and affordances, uniqueness and familiarity of the activity itself, instead of outlining how computer mediated communication aids in grief sharing and coping. Nevertheless, the authors' rhetorical-critical approach to qualitative textual analysis is essentially what I adopted in the second half of my research where I focused on selected case studies. I examined specific cases in-depth as exemplars (with awareness that each case is individual but will exhibit some patterns visible in other cases), in order to understand their uniqueness as well as to provide insight into a specific phenomenon or rethink a theoretical approach (Stake, 2000). In the body of the thesis I will present three main stories through which the reader will become familiar with some of the ways online memorial can be utilised.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. I start chapter 1, 'Embarking on a cybermourning journey', by discussing how people create or come upon online memorials and how they start participating. In the second part of chapter 1 "'rip romio n juliet together foreva xxxxx': dealing with family tragedy", I focus one family's cybermourning journey after death of a young couple here named Layla and Keith. This story will give us an insight into the offline situations the bereaved are presented with (pressure to maintain composure in social situations, follow the 'normal' progression of grief, seek professional counselling) that drive them to participate in Layla's cybermemorial to continue their communication with her and foster the couple's shared memory as Romeo and Juliet, supported by attention from other visitors. This story guides us to a discussion on the expansion of keepsakes of the dead (from physical keepsakes to digital legacy) and later consideration on ethics of continuous care for the deceased online. In chapter 2, 'Ongoing mourning of two widows' I present two stories of very different expressions of grief and dealing with mourning, as well as using online memorials for different purposes. In the first part, "'Withering away without your touch': grief that requires physical intimacy", I present an ongoing cybermourning journey of a widow in whose grief we can

recognise certain aspects of deep, even erotic yearning of physical intermingling with the deceased, becoming one not in spirit, but in death, similar to some of Victorian mourning mentalities. I also discuss the neglected meaning that sorrow after bereavement grants survivors with and how it is unnecessarily treated as pathological. In the second part of Chapter 2, "'If only I could dance with you, especially on my birthday': disrupted mourning of a happy widow", I discuss how the use of an online memorial can be continued, transformed under certain circumstances even as the mourning is reaching conclusion (as expressed by the widow herself). In the story I also locate the importance and virtue of memory in contemporary Western society and how forms of memory, facilitated by technology can inform us about the ability of online memorials to evoke the same cohabitation between living and the dead as spirit photography and spiritualism séance did. In Chapter 3 'Language, spirituality and community in online memorials: key features of engagement', I present important features of the three modes of engagement that are central to online memorials. I focus on how language is affected by computer mediation, differences in discourse based on familial relations, expressions of spirituality, attempts to situate the dead in a certain afterlife, and return to the contested term of cybermourners as community. In the final chapter 'Accommodating loss/Withdrawing care: Ethics of cybermourning' I approach the question of possible resolution of cybermourning and consider the challenges this form of memorialisation presents the bereaved who strive for continuous care for the dead. I utilise Derrida's ethics of mourning for this task and Frankel's and Hartman's psychoanalytical conceptualisations of cybermourning.

Chapter 1. EMBARKING ON A CYBERMOURNING JOURNEY

One starts a cybermourning journey by creating or writing in a dedicated personal online memorial on a dedicated website (this is the case in my research – Facebook memorials are also prevalent, but I will remark on how they are different in due course) and before discussing the trends of creation and start of participation, I shall briefly remark on the ways online memorials are consistent with physical grave markings. It is important to note that I hold cybermourning to be *a supplement* to mourning and memorialisation, expanding, instead of replacing traditional forms of these practices. Markings of the final resting place of the body (where applicable) are still primary evokers of memory due to their proximity to the remnants. I consider cybermourning to be an expansion of these surrogates for the deceased, as one is attempted to locate within that context as well. Online memorials bear markings of birth and death, just as traditional grave markings, however most often they are more expansive and display an array of photos and music. It is usual that clicking a poster's profile one can see the familial or friendship relation to the deceased. The mourners here identify themselves and in some cases there are several memorials linked based on the relations of the deceased. Open displays of kinship are a part of traditional memorialisation.

The following analysis of trends comes from a sample of 40 memorials from each year since 2005 (website's establishment) to 2016, a total of 480 memorials. The age of people for whom the memorial is created varies immensely with people over 50 making up a larger part. Slightly more memorials are dedicated for males than females. Throughout the past decade, this activity has evolved from being a novelty, an additional way to memorialise those departed long ago, to a more immediate reaction to death, a convenient and legitimate form of memorialisation. From approximately 2009 there is a surge of memorials created on the day of the death or several days later, which demonstrates that online memorials become a way to connect with the deceased before the funeral. This trend of providing the deceased with an online memorial in under a week after death still holds strong today and some might even exhibit an urgency to do so as a show of care for the dead: *How sad that only 9 months later James had a site of his own...* According to the poster, who remarks on a death in 2007, this is an unfortunately long time for someone to be without a memorial. Online memorials thus are created consciously post-death, categorises as intentional as opposed to unintentional forms of memorialisation (Haverinen, 2014). They do not bear physical proximity to the final resting place of the body, neither are they the digital remnants of the person, like a Facebook memorial, or what Philips calls a snapshot of the user's life just before their death (2011), is. Online memorials are brought into existence by the bereaved who

wish for a dedicated *space* (the safety of this space is contested and will be discussed later) for solace. This brings into question the essential feature of online memorials that makes them unique – their democratisation of remembrance and grief that enables users to engage in mourning in their own pace, with easily customisable features and dedicated personal territory.

Another important aspect is the relation of the memorial creator to the deceased. They are overwhelmingly mothers, sisters, daughters, nieces – female family members. This replicates Roberts and Vidal's (2000) and de Vries and Rutherford's (2004) findings that women authored more online memorials. De Vries and Rutherford concluded that the patterns of cybermourning are just one more manifestation of a gendered society. On the other hand, Musambira et.al (2006-2007), studying message content among bereaved parents in the memorials of their children, found that gendered bereavement communication styles diminish in cyberspace. Gendered grief expressions might be more prevalent in specialised websites (e.g. for AIDS victims, miscarriage grief etc.). My researched website is not a specialised website and the fact that the longer cybermourning journeys I presented here are of females, might support the argument that females in online memorials are more inclined to express emotions of grief and continue to be invested in this bond with the deceased for a longer period of time than males, as I was not successful in locating male cybermourning journeys of similar scope.

From around 2010, there is a growing trend of friends creating memorials and participating in them regularly, which attests to the rise of pervasive social media culture, where friend circle expands vastly and friends feel legitimised to create online memorials whereas earlier it was more of a family affair. There are different ways people come to participate in already created online memorials. Most frequently mourners are family members and close friends for whom creating an online memorial means finding a meaningful avenue to memorialise and remember their loved ones. People who create accounts after finding out about a particular death from media outlets make up a significantly smaller portion of mourners. These people offer their condolences, most often clearly stating where they found out about the death from. DeGroot (2009) terms online voyeurs who visit Facebook memorials of strangers or distant acquaintances to read what others write and to post their own messages as *emotional rubberneckers*. I will continue to use the term *passerby* as I encountered this self-conceptualisation on several occasions within the website. They don't have any personal connection to the deceased and their families, most often they visit memorials of people whose deaths have been shared online or televised. Generally, in order to gain media attention these deaths tend to be more unusual or tragic in nature. This type of person is quite different from members of 'online family', who show support by posting on memorials of people who have suffered the same destiny as their loved ones.

'Online family' members share their stories alongside with offering condolences, often stressing the similarity of their experiences as a thread that should connect the hearts of the afflicted – this is indeed a form of community.

Posts from passersby are most often simply *RIP, sleep tight*, often the lack of connection is explicitly acknowledged (*I didn't know him, but I read your story…*). Attention sometimes is welcomed, but that depends on particular situation of the family. There are also people who stumble upon the online memorials of the people they already knew a long time ago after spontaneously googling their names.

I met Jane through playing online games at ____.com. She loved to chat with each game move and I very much enjoyed her friendliness and sense of humor. I miss playing Triple Boatzee with her.

Another poster even remarked that he had no idea that Jane's death was the reason why she was not returning his emails. Two further examples from another memorial: *She was my penpal years ago and i just googled her name and found this page. Even though i never met her i am relly shocked.I am surprised that the death of an "internet-friend" can make me feel so sad...........*

I remembered her name for years now because it is the same name as a supermarket when i was young. So i googled it. Maybe i should not have googled it.....

The poster's remorse about having googled his long lost acquaintance shows that he regrets quite unnecessarily inflicting uncomfortable feelings upon himself and that he could have lived in blissful ignorance (which he will probably return to in a few hours at most) is quite narcissistic and enlightens us not only about the incredible reach of internet, but also that online memorials are avenues for expressing disenfranchised grief (internet friends, ex-partners, etc. – relationships usually not socially acknowledged as primary grievers).

In the case of inaugural tributes in personal memorials, they most commonly exhibit a great deal of shock and initial hesitations on how to start formulating the message, especially if it was created very soon after death. The majority of these messages start in a way that makes it easy to imagine the slightly gaping mouth and glazed eyes of a bereaved, stunned by the quickness of death: *I am speechless, what can I say…/ I don't know how to start* - this kind of confusion and speechlessness is not usually seen in the inaugural tributes in memorials that have been created after a certain longer time after death, but the sense of shock and disbelief periodically manifests in the posts around birth and death anniversaries through such statements as *I can't believe it's been six years since you left / it seems like only yesterday we were together'*

After discussing how people (also, what kinds of people) come to participate in online memorials, I will now move on to analyse a particular story that will provide the reader with the first closer look into a cybermourning journey.

1.1.   'RIP ROMIO N JULIET TOGETHER FOREVA XXXXX': DEALING WITH FAMILY TRAGEDY

Above is a post from a passerby. In this case the person saw the story I am about to discuss in an online media outlet. Here, a passerby perpetuated the myth presented in the media, he/she might have even be moved to tears and decided to pay their respects in a digitised manner.

Romanticising tragedy, cocooning the familial calamity in an everlasting myth can be a way of making sense, an avenue to construct the events as inevitable for the affected family. Romeo and Juliet was an epithet used in the articles published online about the tragic faith of Layla and Keith. We start the story on 28th August 2007 when Keith hanged himself after a row he had with Layla, his partner of four years, about their dog being allowed in the bedroom. He was outlived by two daughters from a previous relationship, Layla and her eight-year-old son Jack. I located Keith's memorial and the messages Layla left for a year after his death, but the main focus will be on Layla's family's cybermourning journey, which can be traced to New Year's Day of January 2014. This story will present the reader with the landscape of problems the bereaved face in terms of controlling their grief expressions in offline contexts, the need to create a meaningful narrative after traumatic bereavement, similarities between digital and physical keepsakes and struggle to provide adequate care for Layla in the online memorial. These discussions aid in conceptualising cybermourning as a reintroduction of post-mortem (vernacular and self-proclaimed therapeutic) ritual in society, otherwise indifferent to the mourner's condition.

 For Layla, writing in Keith's memorial is not the first thought on her mind to cope with Keith's death, but she confesses: *for some reason i cant stay from this site and writing here i feel asthow u are [reading] this...mad i know (*Dec 27, 2007 12:00 AM).

This compelling urge to write as if the deceased reads is met with some reservations not by Layla alone. It is especially clear when posts are directed to older people to whom social media and computer usage have not become a second nature and their imagined posthumous

presence in cyberspace, or as posthumous users of internet is questionable. A girl writes to her grandmother:

> *it is funny but not one of the family realise that you could not use the computor in real life and you could not read unless it was to do your horses,so why would you read this,I think it gives us all comfort to write to you as it feels that your still here.*

So, some mourners acknowledge the fact that their loved ones are not actually reading their messages as they would not be able to access the words that are supposed to reach them in the same medium due to their lack of digital literacy. However, I found that some mourners at least to some extent (as consolation or a metaphor) assume that afterlife has a similar cultural logic and constitution as the world of the living. Consider this gift left by a friend:
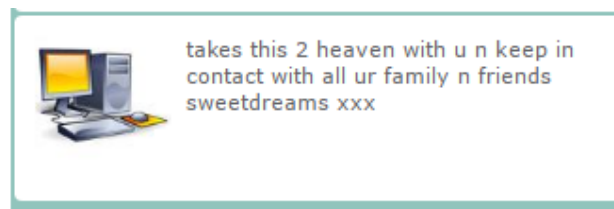
Indeed, for some posters the ability to communicate with the dead is not a rhetoric, as evident from a number of studies (Kern et al. 2013: 66; Kasket 2012; Staley 2014), though the precise logistics remain a mystery. Here we even find a communication attempt to bargain in the face of ominous presence:

> *Hi Dad, its been 10 weeks since we lost you. We miss and love you very much Dad but you need to stop hurting (daughter). What you are doing to her is cruel and uncalled for Dad. We hope that you finally do find the peace you've been for but first you need to [stop] hurting [daughter] PLEASE.*

While it is not certain if Layla believes in Keith's afterlife and posthumous awareness, certain are her attempts to locate Keith. But unfortunately his physical presence is eliminated:

> *i stood at ur grave and u wer not there, i felt nothing all i cud feel was the rain on my face and the warm tears down my cheeks..but i cudnt feel u.* (Dec 27, 2007 12:00 AM)[1]

Here we can feel Layla's inner conflict – she desires to be comforted by the sense of Keith's presence, but she treats her own attempt to write to him with hesitance and disbelief. With the rising popularity of online memorials we are witnessing the increase in discussions upon sensed apparitions of the deceased, most often in passing sensations, breath on the face etc.: *I*

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[1] several Layla's posts in a row show the same messaging time – I assume it is a glitch

knew it was you! You gave me a wee fright but Im so happy! - even if it is exclusive to these safe spaces online. Ongoing relationship with the dead has been recorded extensively in anthropological literature (Hertz (1960) [1907], Huntington and Metcalf (1979), Danforth (1982), Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou (2000), to name a few), but as mourning was framed within secular and psychological discourses in the twentieth century West, talking to the dead had become increasingly confined to the privacy of their home or alone at the graveside. I argue that the ongoing communication online, addressing the deceased directly in social media (Hastings, Hoover, & Musambira, (2005), Brubaker & Hayes, (2011), DeGroot, (2012)) while being aware of the readership, signals that previously private practice becomes increasingly socially accepted.

As mentioned before, I hold the physical location of the remains to continue to be the primary place for identification with the deceased, but writing in an online memorial provides a more permanent way to communicate than thought or spoken word. A message often is sent soon after grave visitation i.e.: *we went to your grave yesterday it looks wonderful* or *i love going to see u its so nice just to sit and talk to u wen i need to, i hope u liked ur other letter and poems* – one could have expressed these hopes at the graveside, yet writing and sending the message appears to be an attempt of real life interaction, instead of one being focused in thoughts, especially due to computer mediated communication beings so engrained into everyday forms of communication.

As Layla's and Keith's relationship was very turbulent and unofficial, Layla was not acknowledged by Keith's family as a rightful mourner and even blatantly blamed for his death. She gradually became more and more reserved in disclosing personal details about her life and emotions, her last message was posted on the first anniversary of Keith's death and she claimed to be destroyed by his departure. Two days later she overdosed by Keith's grave, was rushed to the hospital, resuscitated and released despite promising to attempt to take her life again and eventually going through with a copycat suicide at home. Layla's torment and suffering in Keith's online memorial was reserved, focused on attempted redemption in the eyes of Keith's family. There was an outpouring of shock and mixed emotions in Layla's memorial, created two days after her death, in which her mother and sister are main participants:

Mother*: Ive been sat here for over 2 hours just staring at this memorial, not knowing what to write to yoy. Everytime i try i just start crying (*Sep 2, 2008 11:56 PM).

Sister: *Its wiered because i am so cut up about this but i am sooo soo sooo happy for you that you are with keith....* (Sep 4, 2008 04:09 PM).

Following the tragic conclusion of both lives, to be able to see Layla's death as meaningful, her family and friends praised the re-unification of star-crossed lovers, rendering their love to be worthy of a higher plane, too pure for this world. The family accepted the copycat suicide as Layla's ultimate sacrifice, the most superior show of love for Keith and it was Layla's mother who insisted on the Romeo and Juliet epithet to be used in the online article. Neimeyer and Klass (2014) argue that grief (or mourning) is not primarily an interior process, but rather one that is intricately social, as the bereaved commonly seek meaning in this transition in not only personal and familial but also broader community and even cultural spheres. In their social constructionist view, mourning is a situated interpretive and communicative activity charged with establishing the meaning of the deceased's life and death, as well as the posthumous status of the bereaved within the broader community concerned with the loss. The wider public appraisal is indeed extremely important for Layla's family. After their story was published 10 days after her death, traffic in Layla's and Keith's memorials increased significantly. A good example of a generic post by a passerby on Layla's memorial:

i read the story in that's life this morning and have been on this page since, i have been reading all the tribute messages and it has all bought me to tiers...such a sad story.

Another example: *i hope im not intruding here but i felt compelled to leave a tribute, i realise its the old gimmick of 'i read your story' thing but it really touched my heart.*

This passerby states that his intentions are more honest and he recoils from engaging in this 'cliché' activity – yet it appears that the passerby sees some positive aspects of showing care to strangers in this way, or else one wouldn't bother to comment.

In Layla's memorial we see how her family members conceptualise their grief and why they write in the memorial. Generally, there is a concern about the normal progression of grief and for Layla's family it is extremely important to make sense of the overflowing feelings and to make sure that they are following some sort of pattern.

Best friend (female): *Im finding things really really difficult at the moment, and im letting it affect the relationships that mean alot to me. But people just dont understand. I might not show im hurting, I might seem like im coping on the outside.. but Im not :(:(* (Mar 24, 2009, 11:08 pm)

Mother: *Its 11 months since you left.... i just cant believe it... It only seems like yesterday that you Keith and Jack were larking around in the back garden. This year has gone so fast, I keep very busy so i dont have to feel :(I love talking about the both of you.. but hate feeling it.. so i dont feel i just carry on as normal.* (Jul 29, 2009 07:22 PM)

Her mother tries to resume her routines and tries to gather herself in public.

*I am just going around doing my normal daily things as though nothing has happened, but i know that it is denial and one day im gonna realise that you have really gone. (*Sep 19, 2008 07:19 PM)

Dont wanna cry infront of the others, as dont want to upset them. (Sep 24, 2008 07:08 PM)

Through these words we can peek into the social expectations the mourner faces during his/her tribulations. Moller (cited in Gilbert 2006:259) states that the trivialisation of bereavement and pathologising of mourning curtail public expression of grief-related suffering in order to preserve the public sanctity of a pleasure and entertainment ethos. As Gilbert (ibid: 248) noted, there is a certain mourner's shame in the current social climate: "when bereavement is itself nearly as problematic as death, however, it's no wonder that sufferers feel freest to air their feelings of loss when they're most alone – at the glimmering computer screen. And it shouldn't surprise us either if words of consolation are easiest to utter when they're articulated in silence, on a keyboard" (ibid: 247). The moments in lone introversion indeed spur the stimulus to write:

Mother: *Sat here working late getting a bit of peace and quiet and thinking about you xxx I keep getting this strange feeling lately.... like im waiting for something... but i dont know what !!??? its very odd. Its something to do with you but i cant quite fathom it out!! Its like i think im going to see you or something.... cant explain it lol xx (*Jan 20, 2009 11:58 PM)

Grandmother: *Just wanted to come on and have a moan as im feeling a bit down at the moment, don't feel like talking or listening to anyone just feel like locking myself in a room till i feel more like my old self again. (*Mar 17, 2009 05:53 PM)

Gorer (1965) wrote, applying the observation applicable to all English speaking countries with a protestant tradition, that "death and mourning at present are being treated with the same prudery as sexual impulses were a century ago." C.S. Lewis (1961), also observed the distaste with which his lover's sons reacted when he tried to approach the subject of her death. In lieu of Gorer, Elias (1985) commented on embarrassment felt by the living in the presence of dying people and in turn the bereaved due to the lack of appropriate language resources. Bauman (1992) writes that in our secular and science-oriented society the only vocabulary we are trained and allowed to use is the "vocabulary geared to the collective and public denial and concealment of death itself, thus we may offer the dying only a language of survival, a language of therapy, the language of self-help books and second opinions". It is this optimistic vocabulary that evokes anxieties about fulfilling societal expectations for the bereaved as well.

It is a very common practice for the bereaved to refer to writing tributes as therapy.

Girl writing to older sister who died at the age of 24: *Hey beautiful have just found myself on here, i was telling auntie i don't feel that urge to write as much on here any more, i have finally accepted your gone and that i must carry on and live a life you would be proud of. Writing has been my therapy i guess and it really has helped, the fact that i have stopped doesn't mean i love you or miss you any less but am sure you know that, i don't even know why i am explaining myself yet here i am,*

Layla's mother: *I think writing to you is possibly my therapy for getting my thoughts out of my head and is a coping mechanism too.* (Sep 23, 2009 08:57 PM)

Here we find a remarkable adherence of some online memorial content to grief managing strategy of creating a meaningful narrative (a durable biography, produced, shared and continuously reaffirmed by the mourners as Walter (1996) conceptualises it) to reduce cognitive strain and help make sense of the loss in the event of bereavement (Neimeyer 2000) and I further argue that this is a form of vernacular self-care, a personal ritual in a public sphere, and what is most appealing to cybermourning is that the self-awareness and acceptance of loss can be done at one's own pace, without rigid professional guidance.

Layla's sister: *I think im the same as mum. I can only talk about how i really feel on here. We all talk about you all day everyday. But its not the same as dealing and talking about what happened.* (Oct 14, 2008 10:32 PM)

Mother: *Ive got the letter about going for counselling, but dont want to ring them because they may make me realise the truth, and i still dont think im ready for the reality of it all. My emotions change so much during the day its unreal, but i cant show any of them, so i seem fine to everybody, but im not really. I dont know whats going on in my head... maybe this is normal?? I dont really know!!!* (Nov 4, 2008 07:18 PM)

Sister: *I Need to get mum back to councilling, I no it really helped her just the way she spoke about it. I Dont think it helps at all, nice to talk about you, I could do it all day everyday, but really really done like it when she talks about how much i miss you, and what we used to do together, our childhood etc etc, Talking about you not being around anymore makes my belly turn and my eyes water, any mention of grieving for you and I just want to cry a river :'(* (Apr 6, 2009 03:56 PM)

The hesitation to get professional help or to doubt in its effectiveness can both be seen as a personal fear of inability to cope and a negative aspect of institutionalisation alongside the general climate of death and bereavement. One of the most controversial recent advances in psychiatry that further proved the medicalisation of grief was the removal of the bereavement exclusion in the diagnosis of major depression in *DSM-5* (APA, 2013). This means that the person, suffering from psychosomatic symptoms after bereavement will not be excluded from

being diagnosed as suffering from major depressive disorder, reinforcing the perception that grief is problematic, rather than a natural human reaction to loss. The doctor's office has taken the place of community rituals and traditions that in the past created space and support for grief and mourning. What has previously been a cultural or religiously prescribed ritual now, in the hands of emerging popular profession of grief counsellor becomes a psychologically prescribed process.

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Just as pictures on her computer create constant painful reminders for Layla about Keith (*everytime i turn on my laptop i see the picture of me and you, everytime i go on msn i see the thing i have wrote for you.i just feel stuck as thow time is at a standstill*), her loved ones consciously choose moments of her digital presence to be their keepsakes.

Best friend (female): *I keep wanting to buy a new phone but don't wanna cos i have all of your txts, i can't delete them, how sad am i?? lol..* (Oct 20, 2008 12:32 PM)

Sister: *I still have the e-mail you sent me 10 days before you died-im never gonna delete it.*(Mar 26, 2009 08:26 PM)

As increasingly large parts of our daily life go online or become digitised, digital keepsakes are rapidly becoming secular relics, post-modern personal traces and artefacts with time stamps. Hallam and Hockey (2001) write that sensations of proximity to deceased relatives and friends in contemporary Western societies are often achieved through the written word. It is the materiality of writing that is key in its memory making and locating a remnant of a person through physical traces - shapes and unintelligible marks, a particular swish of a hand holding a pen by the loved ones. What then can be said about emails and text messages? They do not have physical contact with the deceased, all typed text looks the same (unless a person uses a rare unusual font) what they do carry is intellectual contact – a part of the deceased's intellect is kept in the quick wit of a response to a chat message, an advice to a problem that has been meditated upon and carefully crafted into an email. The intellect can travel through space and time in typed words thus providing the bereaved with a trace of unique thought process, expanding the scope of secular, personal pre-digital relics. However, this is rarely seen in online memorial: Layla's family are able to read her messages in Keith's memorial where her words intermingle with theirs thus allowing to find some authenticity.

Following this short discussion on digital texts expanding the notion of post-mortem keepsakes, it is useful to return to the conceptualisation of cybermourning as a

reintroduction of vernacular, personal post-death ritual in inherently public space in order to see how ritual and discourse come together. Giddens (1991) argued that the decline of formal rituals and knowledge of performative scripts concerning death rituals was partially influenced by the post-modern focus on increasing individualism. Walter (1994) furthers this discussion in stating, that the neo-modernist[2] individual does not seek out ritual in the same manner as previously, when the ritual was rooted in the community as a socially approved way to symbolically express emotion at the time of crisis but ritual is replaced by discourse and emotions are expressed by talking, e.g. in therapy of grief groups (1994:177). Based on written discourse, creative personalisation and multimedia uploads, online memorialisation partially satisfies four steps of effective post-death rituals, defined by Kollar (1989), which are 1) entering into a special time or place; 2) engaging in a symbolic core act; 3) allowing time to absorb what has occurred and is occurring; and 4) taking leave. The ability to instantaneously access online memorials, continuously monitor them without physical travel, akin to Kollar's entering a special place is a defining feature of online memorials that is influencing cybermourning process:

Sister: *I might not write much, but i am constantly on this site! Can't keep away. I brought myself an iPhone, and i keep checking throughout the day when Im not home to see whats going on on here.* (Oct 14, 2008 10:32 PM)

There is a sense of continuous vitality as one keeps refreshing the page and finding a newly posted message or a lit candle (which is a feature that only allows a small number of words of accompaniment – some prefer this form of tribute, others prefer engaging in more detail in message window). Psychoanalyst Hartman states that what makes cyberspace access different from earlier innovations in technology is that the internet is not understood to be a conduit to real interaction, nor as a resource but, as 'space' (2012:461). According to Tække (2002:33) it is a space "where we do not only see and listen to broadcast communication, but participate in communication, create things and satisfy needs." Continuing from this instantaneous satisfaction, Hartman writes that in cybermourning the emphasis is not on reparation to the loss but on transforming the structure of experience. "The vector is not from melancholia to mourning, from holding on to letting go, but from one version of a cherished experience to the next. The object's vitality relies on its capacity for reuse" (2012:461). Constant re-remembering and re-embedding the dead in online memorials with the use of easily

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[2] Walter (1994) writes on the late modern and post-modern revival of death which he conceptualises as *neo-modern*. It is also an attempt to revive certain aspects of traditional death, so may also be termed *neo-traditional*.

manipulated and constantly shared, forwarded and commented on visual, textual, audio content is capable of transforming the visceral experience of commemoration.

Layla's family is aware of their denial of loss, fear of dealing with devastation and simultaneously, they feel that the fact that they are blocking thoughts about Layla's death somehow negate her presence, that wherever she is, she is neglected by the bereaved, as evident from these examples:

Mother: *Sorry not wrote for a while.. feel really guilty , almost like im ignoring you... but sometimes i love coming on here and having a good old moan and a natter and sometimes i just cant face it.* (Jan 26, 2009 07:23 PM)

*Ive been avoiding this site like the plague for the last few weeks and feeling so darn guilty cus i dont want you to think that im ignoring you, though if there is an afterlife then you will know exactly how ive been feeling lately :-((*Apr 17, 2009 08:13 PM)

Let's consider some broader literature on features of online memorials to further the discussion. Hutchings writes, that among a variety of other benefits to be gained from online memorialisation (global access, quick erection site, easy storage and editing, etc.), there is a sense that they are also immune to dangers of physical decay (Hutchings 2012:49), which is a point remarked by several other authors (Sherlock (2013), Lagerkvist (2014)), yet while online memorials are indeed non-corrosive, the possibility of instant loss of content in an event of irrevocable server failure calls this concept of durability into question. In addition, I do not see why the features mentioned above are considered benefits. The possibility of interaction and easy instantaneous access to the memorials and posted tributes might hinder the mourning process by continuously opening up the wounds*: I haven't been on here for a year and now I am sitting here reading the messages that I have left you and feeling the pain all over again.* It makes the grief pervasive, seeping from all devices, reminding about the deceased waiting for confirmation of love. The interactive essence of online memorials might heighten senses of guilt and neglect. Especially if one is tempted to look at other memorials and compare. Comparison of the quality of care in memorials based on personal criteria (as there are no formal conventions established), seeing the outpouring of love, many photos, creative banners etc., might truly become a problem for the bereaved. This might be similar to the difference between properly cared for and unkempt resting places in cemeteries. If there is a bouquet of flowers on a grave, there is no way of knowing who and how long ago put them there (unless they're decaying), but in online memorials, each post is authored and dated, so it is much easier to evaluate participation. This has been touched upon philosopher Stokes (2015), who claims that the dead persist as moral

patients and their digital remains entrust upon us a moral duty of care. He considers deletion to be akin to second death. Here he is concerned with personal profiles, traces of live person's activity, while online memorials are spaces that the bereaved created thus are entirely responsible for engraining meaning within it and providing upkeep. Layla's family are indeed feeling guilt not only for not writing what they deem is often enough, but also in not dealing with their grief through professional channels.

Continuing on Kollar's aspects of post-death rituals, the second aspect-engaging in a symbolic core act - is presented throughout the thesis as memorialisation, commemoration and communication with the deceased. Concerning the third aspect - allowing time to absorb what has occurred and is occurring, I have remarked that there are no regulations on the pace and amount of time the bereaved are required to orient themselves towards, or indeed, there is no goal at all. Lastly, online memorials do not satisfy the taking leave aspect due to their easy access and continuous engagement – this argument is central to the discussion at the end of the thesis. To summarise, this chapter focused on the start and the first year of Layla's family's cybermourning journey. In their messages, I located some expressions on how the bereaved are expected to control their emotions in social situations and deal with grief in 'appropriate' pace and channels – this is characteristic to the contemporary context of grief and mourning in Western largely secular societies. Messages are always posted in private settings, either assuming the similar cultural logic of the afterlife or writing with the knowledge that there is no chance the deceased will read the message, as a self-proclaimed therapy. The construction of Romeo & Juliet narrative aids the bereaved family in justifying Layla's actions and making sense of the tragedy. Her family was proud that the epithet was continuously used by passersby and they welcomed their attention, the public opinion helping to reaffirm narrative of the deceased. This example shows that online memorials are helpful avenues for durable biography (Walter, 1996) and meaning reconstruction (Neimeyer, 2000) frameworks, prominent at the cusp of twenty-first century. Such digital keepsakes like emails and text messages expand the scope of pre-digital strategies of keeping remnants of the dead by incorporating intellectual traces. Cybermemorials themselves, I argue, do not carry the same kind of connection to the deceased and make it hard to interact with the actual memory of the deceased. We also saw that the failure to keep up with the levels of care (which are not established formally in any way) in an online memorial can cause adverse feelings of guilt within the bereaved, similar to the upkeep of physical graves, but much more pervasive and visible. We now leave Layla's family in the midst of their cybermourning journey - their story and the possibilities of resolution of mourning will be revisited towards the end of the thesis.

Chapter 2. ONGOING MOURNING OF TWO WIDOWS

2.1 'WITHERING AWAY WITHOUT TOUCH': GRIEF THAT REQUIRES PHYSICAL INTIMACY

Searching behaviours are inherent to grief, but in this chapter I will present a story in which we can recognise certain aspects of deep, even erotic yearning of physical intermingling with the deceased, becoming one again not in spirit, but in death, similar to some of the Victorian mourning mentalities. This story will illuminate the limits of cybermourning in providing a relationship of desired level of intimacy. I also note that healing from grief's depression, presented as an overarching goal for the well-being of the deceased is not always personally required (Klass, 2013).

A large number of both classical and recent sociohistorical studies support the Victorian concern with death rituals (e.g. Curl (1972), Jalland (1996), Pearsall (1999), Lutz (2011), (2015)). The context of obsession with death can be described succinctly as influenced by religious scepticism, convention of social display, advertised by the rising undertaking business, the physical immediacy of death, and romantic literary influences. Mourning in Victorian England was highly regulated, even oppressive, with complex rules on propriety of mourning (Walter (1999), Hallam and Hockey (2001)). Victorian death relics, most commonly jewellery with human hair, teeth, as well as remnants such as a finger bone were personal, secular and private artefacts, most popular during the nineteenth century. Lutz (2011) notes that there are also second-hand, or contact relics - clothing, letters, manuscripts (sweat, blood, tears, carrying the essence of the body), as well as artefacts from porous materials, such as wood. On the one hand, nineteenth-century relic culture seems to shield a person from the finality of death as the material relic might act as a proof of further existence, but on the other hand, the relic only gains its meaning through death, so the fact of death is pondered upon exhaustively. In short, Victorian culture can be said to have facilitated engagement with death and its materiality, the relics provided a connection with the body of a loved one, a sense of continuity, not of life as one knows it, but of the permanence of tangible presence. The relic culture disappeared shortly after the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. What followed was that the death in modern Western society has been hidden, isolated, privatised, bureaucratised, medicalised, hospitalised and 'dehumanised' (Prior 1989:15). Jalland (1996:299) notes, that "criticism [of Victorian mourning artefacts] tends to judge surviving artefacts by later twentieth-century standards and assumptions. It neglects the significant role of

visible symbols of remembrance in the natural dynamics of grief." Indeed, the morbidity with which holding on to a preserved part of beloved's body would be looked upon nowadays is astonishing. It seems that wearing loved one's clothing or accessories would be the closest one gets today to bearing a Victorian death relic. However, the concrete materiality of death, the insufficiency of presence in spirit, the need of tangible presence has not left the ring completely and might attest the need for direct physical remnants to therapeutically maintain a sense of physical contact with the deceased, with online memorial simply not being connected to the person enough.

Mark, a 72-year-old man had died on March 17th 2014 after numerous hospital blunders. He was first admitted after inhaling a piece of pear, but after 6 weeks of mistreatment he caught swine flu from another patient and died. He was outlived by his wife of 49 years Helen, no children of their own. Helen sued the hospital for negligence and has dedicated the remainder of her life for the sole purpose to get justice for the unnecessary death of an otherwise healthy senior, the love of her life, with whom she was delighted to 'have another good 5 or 10 years'. The memorial is solely Helen's domain, the only other person posting on anniversaries is a close family friend of a similar age. The memorial is still active with Helen posting monthly.

In her posts, she makes sure to comfort her husband who she perceives to be as lost without her as she is without him. She often references their special bond: *like you I knew we were two peas in a pod.* She often uses confirmations such as *just like you, as I know you do,* as if giving him a voice or putting into words his feelings to reassure him that she knows how he feels without his wife. She yearns to be with her husband *'in body as well as in spirit'.* The presence of his spirit, of which she is convinced, is simply not enough for her, the yearning for physical intimacy, touching, bathing, whispering, laughing, cuddling is mentioned in many of her tributes.

I miss you so much I don't know how long I can go on without being with you physically (Jan 18, 2015 02:19 PM). It is as if she has either resigned to death as a fulfilling nothingness or she holds a belief that death, or afterlife, has materiality.

I love and miss you terribly and you know this as you are here with me nearly all the time and when you want to say something to me you always do something to show me your thoughts in movement or in bed as you are still warm blooded and I know when you are in the bed with me spiritually as the bed is warm besides me.not being able to get close to you anymore only in spirit and it is not the same my darling. (Apr 10, 2016 11:22 PM)

The supposed materiality of the afterlife, enmeshment of two people's flesh in passion and death echoes with the story of yearning for the deceased loved one told in Victorian

novel Wuthering Heights (Bronte, 1847). The main protagonist Heathcliff searches for his dead love Catherine not in her spirit: he desires to peer into what is happening to her body, to touch the wood of her coffin, to intertwine with her in the midst of death. By touching her dead body Heathcliff might just be able to become one with her. In one episode of despair Heathcliff storms into Catherine's death chamber and puts a piece of his hair in the locket around her neck. He does not take a reminder of Catherine, instead he wishes for a part of him to crossover with her – to become one. Lutz writes: "He desires his presence to linger, synecdochically, in the place she is, somewhere on the other side of death. He comes to be 'swallowed in the anticipation' (325) of the fulfilment death will bring him" (Lutz, 2011:135). In another episode he had bribed the sexton to remove one side of Catherine's coffin so that his body can be placed there and that they could truly become one. Heathcliff, just as Helen, does not resort to the idea of heavenly reconnection, they both desire for a touch in an undisclosed physical dimension.

Helen and Mark become mirror images of each other, unable to touch, but Helen knows that if the roles were reversed, Mark would be feeling the same way. Helen needs to fight the battle for her husband, until then she cannot leave to be with him. She frequently complains about her computer not working, thus hindering the flow of conversation: *was talking to you, but got cut off.* Her 'above as below' attitude also extends to the website navigation. As she lights a candle in a dedicated separate section, she writes: *talk in the main page, love*, as if Mark receives the messages in the exact same manner as she writes them, which has already been remarked upon.

Mark we had a wonderful life together and will again soon. Must say goodnight now my darling wonderman but I cant live much longer without you. You and me go to bed everynight and we kiss and hug and have a chat like we used to before we said nighty nite. (Feb 6, 2016 12:13 AM).

She is still fighting the fight, writing digital love letters every month.

Grief is especially intense when a loss experienced is a loss of a primary confidant, an integral part of a life-story unit. When part of the unit crosses over, there is no substitute for that person in terms of providing the same level of emotional support and companionship, which then calls for nothing other than continuing the same intense bond with the deceased. This corresponds with the current view that grief is individualised (Neimeyer, Keesee and Fortner (2000) and there are prolific ways the bereaved might continue bonds with the deceased (Klass, Silverman and Nickman, 1996). However, in the context of modernist psychology this continuous sensed presence and communication would be considered pathological. The most prominent theories in modernist grief psychology largely involved mechanical movement through stages (Bowlby, 1961), phases (Parkes, 1971), or tasks (Worden, 1983), adhering to cultural

modernism with core concepts of goal, rationality and efficiency. This is a crude generalisation of modernist psychology, nevertheless it is essentially true that the main message was that the bereaved need to let go and accomplish a goal of detachment to a certain extent. Barthes (2009) critiques Freud's (1917) dichotomy between mourning and melancholia as unfounded and unnecessarily excluding melancholic introspections from self-aware and honest mourning. Successful mourning, according to Freud, will lead back to an uninhibited, detached self, while in contrast, melancholic situation denies death and absence and the other is kept alive with all psychic energy that is connected to it (Lotz, 2004:39). Freud wrote this analysis during the Great War which had an immense impact on cultures of death and mourning due to massive loss of life that touched nearly every family. Nevertheless, Winter (1996) challenges the notion that the Great War signified the rupture between 'traditional' and 'modern' as the mourners turned to traditional modes of cultural imagery to commemorate their deceased. The generational experience of war and peace (Walter, 1999:ch.2 in Walter 2007:128) could very well be a factor for engaging in cybermourning. Experiencing the horrors of two World Wars produced a stoic generation, containing their unspeakable grief within. Generations maturing in peace will not be aware of the immediacy of death and when it occurs at a time that is not considered appropriate for expiration, that is, very old age, see it as tragic and avoidable (Walter, 2007:128), which elicits the need to lament the loss intensely. Most users in the researched website are 20-55 years old, with obvious exceptions, as the two widows in the stories are around 70. Computer non-literate older baby boomers are excluded from utilising this medium, however when this habitual use is internalised, this medium becomes a legitimate way to express emotions. I argue that it is partly because of these conditions affecting the younger generation, that grief is moving online to vernacular platforms - consider the controversy of funeral selfies, which as Gibbs et.al. 2015 argue, shows that, young people especially, don't have other resources to express grief and mourning.

Returning to Helen, I find Klass's (2013) argument that "in its focus on finding positive outcomes, bereavement research has neglected or denigrated central phenomena in intense and long-term grief: sorrow and solace" very enlightening in considering the ability of cybermourning to sustain a relationship that is not necessarily focused towards 'healing' (evolving, transforming – many other adjectives can be used). He argues that the positive resolutions of grief toward which bereavement research is pointed are good goals, but sorrow nevertheless remains present and into that sorrow, characterised by yearning for the dead person and grief's depression, comes solace. With Mark only gone for two and a half years, Helen's mourning is ongoing, her messages from the start are consistent in length and content and

exhibit intense sorrow and physical yearnings. Mark manifests to her not only in spirit but also in the physical warmth of his being, her attachment to him is indestructible and it is this sorrow and quest for justice is what's keeping her in this world. The online memorial is a place for Helen to reproduce the intimate jovial language between the couple, to reassure her husband that the flow of time works in their favour, bringing the meeting moment increasingly closer, to encourage him to seek support from his family members that are there with him. She does not feel that their relationship can be reproduced in any way through this medium, thus she does not seem too invested in showing care in the memorial as Layla's family does (for them the memorial was the main point of connection with Layla, they post frequently, their posts are more informational in nature, photos are added frequently). She is annoyed by the glitching website, even though it is only a supplement for her continuous engagement with Mark through sense, warmth and thought. The reason I analysed this story using the Victorian framework of grief expressions, dangerously susceptible to romanticisation and morbidity was to engage the reader in a consideration of resensitisation of death and destigmatisation of grief's depression. A Victorian mentality of materiality of death is evoked and cherished. What we see in Helen's story, which I may only dare to assume is not unique, is that cybermourning aids the elderly widow by providing her with an additional avenue to communicate with her husband and feel his presence after the demise of a very spiritually intimate relationship.

2.2. 'IF ONLY I COULD DANCE WITH YOU AGAIN, ESPECIALLY ON MY BIRTHDAY': DISRUPTED MOURNING OF A HAPPY WIDOW

I wish to contrast Helen's story, highly charged with eroticism and materiality with a story of a different widow and her grief journey. This is a story of Pauline, a widow of a 61-year-old man, Richard, who died in 2007 from undisclosed causes in his sleep. Pauline tried to resuscitate him in the morning and besides recounting the dreadful morning hours on every anniversary, her cybermourning journey in Richard's memorial is marked by focus on her own future which starts to be threatened in 2015. I will argue that her discourse exhibits 'feeling at peace' as she even contemplates a final log out from the memorial as the years go by and in 2015 her reason for writing in his memorial changes to venting of existential fears she has nowhere else to express. At the start of her grief journey, Pauline writes of her desperation of being left alone, but focuses on her husband's legacy – their children and grandchildren, she speaks fondly

about memories that survive and later she turns to contemplating the existential meaning of memory, the importance of which in postmodern Western society is inextricably linked with digital technologies and will be discussed late in this part of the chapter.

The most significant difference in the ways these widows experience the absence of their husbands is in their yearning. Helen longs to be with her husband in body and flesh, but not in this world. Pauline, differently, wishes for her husband's comeback so that they would continue living on Earth together. Only during the first days after his death, Pauline expresses the wish to meet him in Heaven someday.

Please help me go forward - Pauline writes in mid-2008 as she reflects on her accomplishments. *You are now laid to rest in a proper memorial grave with your photo safe in marble. Front garden is now finished, as we planned over a year ago. I feel now that I have completed everything that was important to you and me. Our family are growing stronger.* Jul 5, 2008 11:00 PM).

Pauline takes pride in trying to reach closure by finishing the material parts of Richard's memorialisation. As almost three years pass, she reveals more about what the website means to her.

I haven't written to you for a couple of weeks now. Perhaps it will stop all together one day-there will no longer be a need for it. Just the thought of that makes my eyes sting and the tears come. Sometimes I can't bear this time going so fast, speeding by, stamping on your smell. If it's possible the missing you is becoming worse. I keep reminding myself that I have you inside my heart, you are always with me. (Jul 18, 2010 09:39 PM)

The need for constant reminders signals doubt about posthumous existence of her husband and she is very aware that this is a coping strategy for her, evident from the following message as well:

Sometimes I feel so stupid writing to you, but I need to do it, tell you all you are missing, our girlies growing up beautifully, our [granddaughter] going through all her worries and happiness. I've got no one else to tell. (Jul 18, 2010 09:39 PM)

If there was some slim hope for her belief in afterlife and that she could in some way connect with Richard through the memorial or in a different way, it has disappeared, her husband is mostly remarked for his absence. *Sorry Rich, sometimes I have to let it out and you can't answer back. I really need you to talk too* (Jun 21, 2010 08:52 PM). What then is the reason for Pauline to keep writing in the memorial if she does not believe in afterlife? I argue that she continues to participate because of her loneliness, loss of primary confidant and the easy accessibility of the site. Let's continue to see how she conceptualises online memorial as a space.

What's life about Richard? To me it's memories, family, our children and grandaughter's. It's not about money. I wish this site was private so I could speak to you honestly, instead of speaking to you in your garden. (Jul 25, 2009 09:06 PM)

Two years after Richard's death, Pauline exhibits unawareness of the possibility to make the memorial private and she does not welcome attention from passersby (which evidently is only manifested by the increasing number of profile views as there are no candles or posts from others, except for two of their sons). She is explicit that the memorial is strictly for her closest family members to commemorate Richard, she has no interest in building a community and merely desires a safe, convenient space to put her feelings into narration. But how *safe* is this space? After all, the private thoughts are easily accessible through a simple scan of the website. I argue that while online memorials offer an uncomplicated, free or low-cost way to memorialise their loved ones that corresponds with the trend of seeking authenticity and personalisation, these democratic forms of memory making are subject to a form of control that has been at play throughout the history of humanity – gossip. Gossip is more characteristic to small tight-knit communities than to largely anonymous megacities. Writing in an online memorial in some cases offers an insight into the poster's most personal feelings, similar to reading a diary so the choice for such intimate disclosure might easily provoke confusion and disapproval from people who know the poster offline. As Walter (2015:19) writes, the more that grief, memories and commemoration are shared, whether in the pre-industrial village or online, the more potential there is for conflict. In online memorials this conflict can be brought up by unknown readership (as I already remarked extensively in the introduction) but also by explicit examples of *trolling (*see Philips, 2011) and badmouthing, such as the following example: *Thank fuck this piece of shit is dead I should've stabbed him in the heart many years ago Hope he burns in fucking hell today is a fine day for me I'm going out to celebrate his death fucking no good piece of shit.*

Indeed, while online memorials have much larger numbers of inconspicuous visitors than other types of personal commemoration practices, which is due to the easy access and anonymity the internet affords the user with, the potential for gossip and rumours is as exponential as when all community surrounding the bereaved was involved. This also touches on the gossip about the primary mourner who pours one's heart online, which to some observers might be a sign of weakness, as we see in Pauline's case.

I think I have reached the end of my tether, I am fed up of thinking about other people and how they may react to my pouring out my heart, so I shut up! (Mar 25, 2013 06:39 PM).

She continued to post in the memorial with the knowledge and disapproval of readership. The overspilling of memories from one's internal storage to an external drive or a 'cloud' characterises both the infinite and immediate access to memories and extension of human care to devices. Consider a case of personal computer's drive being wiped out, or it being stolen. What follows the erasure is a sense of absence, what follows stealing is a traumatic sense of loss of personal privacy, the nauseating feeling of harassment. The website itself for some is a field of conflict through constant interface changes and glitching.

Im still trying to download your music on here thow its pissing me right of now stupid thing just keeps kicking me out.

HELLO SON I HOPE YOUR OK I DON'T LIKE THE WAY YOUR WEBSITE PAGE HAS BEEN DONE IT WAS BETTER THE WAY IT WAS I NO PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO HELP BUT ITS NOT HELPING ME COME TO TERMS WITH LOSSING YOU. I DON'T COME HERE MUCH NOW COZ EVERYTIME I DO SOMETHINGS BEEN CHANGED ON HERE LOVE YOU AND MISS YOU SO MUCH SON

Psychoanalyst Lingiardi (2008) writes about a peculiar case of getting an email from his patient in analysis:

"At that time, I had never before got an e-mail from a patient in analysis, and my first reaction was a sense that I'd been 'tracked down' and ambushed in my own private place: Melania walked out of the door of my office but then she figured out how to climb in through the 'window' of my computer!/.../This unexpected e-mail seemed exotic, erotic and hazardous. A phone call from a patient is different: it's more urgent, and there's usually a question involved. The patient is physically there, with the tone of his real voice. But an e-mail pops onto your screen, flashing there amid the other thousand things in your life: the lecture you're preparing for your class, the article you've just downloaded, your vacation photos, a love letter you're having trouble writing".

His account of unexpected feelings after receiving an email is similar to the invasion of privacy online mourners feel with spam, unwanted visitors in their memorials and lurking readership.

I feel I have reached a milestone in my life. I can now SMILE because you lived (memories) and I can open my eyes and see all that you left (your family). I have made decisions on my own, silly ones really, but I bought a new bed for me on my own. I feel really proud that I am at last making decisions on my own. /.../ I feel at last at peace. I now know I could'nt do anything to save you my darling. I am moving forward now but I will

*never forget you, you live in my heart forever and in our children. There will always be you and me. WAIT FOR ME BUT NOT YET! What is the worst thing is that I have so much to say to you, as if you were still here (I never stop talking) but other people are reading my ramblings. Sod them I will say what I want. (*Nov 17, 2009 04:17 AM)

This is the second time Pauline states her life is overwhelmingly constituted by memories and indeed this focus on memory is extremely important in cybermourning. Nora has proposed that modern memory in Western contexts is located at material sites, such as museums, archives, libraries and national monuments rather than in bodily gestures that were once, in pre-modern or non-Western societies, important means of experiencing and transmitting memories. He argues that "the less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs" (1989: 13). In his view, if we are preoccupied with memory, this is because it is no longer the involuntary and collective repetition of customary and embodied traditions that it once was. "True memory has been replaced by history, the rational, dutiful recovery and recording of a distanced and often vast materially based memory site" (Nora, 1989). The internet, however, is vernacular, interactive and participatory, like pre-modern memory. According to (Haskins, 2007:405) "the capacity of official memorials and museums to share memory work with ordinary people pales in comparison with digital memorials and archives". Garde-Hansen et.al (2009:1) observe, "the digital suggests that we may need to rethink how we conceive of memory, that we are changing what we consider to be the past, that the act of recall, of recollection, of remembering is changing in itself." Indeed, it seems the inability to forget, the desire to collect moments that supposedly attest and confirm one's experiences is a backbone of our days. Forgetfulness has moved from being a virtue for ancient Greeks to a sin, akin in character to nihilism for digital natives. The speed with which new death are memorialised is incredible, this especially pertains to deaths in the media, they are up within hours after the event. This speaks to the desire to not let a moment pass unacknowledged, undocumented, unwitnessed.

Lagerkvist's (2013) discussion of the concept of existential security as a feature of cyberspace content that provides a sense of cohesion, meaning, continuity is extremely enlightening. She finds that there are three tensions that constitute contemporary digital memory cultures and these tensions are visible in the use of online memorials. Firstly, users' identities are shaped through increasingly *fragmented and versatile forms of individual and collective remembering*. The second tension is that networked publics that group around memories of individual and collective trauma and grief for instance, contribute to an accelerated *evaporation of the public and the private*. Third, when our lives become increasingly digitised, we are haunted by the fear of *information loss*.

This constitutes a fundamental tension in our contemporary existence between remembering and forgetting, keeping and losing, saving and deleting (Hoskins 2009a; Garde-Hansen et al. 2009). In the following excerpt Bennett and Huberman (2015) write on the American way of symbolically overcoming death, but in my view this can be applied to other Western societies. Their view is that it has been profoundly transformed by the development of digital media technologies that have allowed Americans to obsessively document their life experiences, store the resulting memory traces in a timeless medium, and electronically share the personal mythologies manufactured from those traces with a virtually limitless number of people. "After death, these same acts and objects of personal mythologies allow the living to continue communing with loved ones who can be almost magically resurrected in electronic form with the touch of a button" (2015:351). The investment of selves and trust in technology that people exhibit in uploading their photographs in clouds, sharing their lives online, posting updates on social media, in a way create independent memories, their disembodiment attesting to their ability to be modified, thus to have a future, and interactive memory serves as a vital consoling force in online memorials. Online memorials present the user with the almost inexhaustible possibilities to present, edit and interact with selected deceased's character traits, images, other traces of representative personhood. For example a deceased has a finite number of pictures from his life, not all of them will ever be uploaded, but there are infinite possibilities to superimpose the deceased's face onto a landscape, or a more extreme example of a miscarriage after which a grieving mother uploads numerous pictures of the same generic baby from web image search but superimposes it on a bed of flowers, next to a teddy bear, etc. - they all create new content that represents the deceased, or even are gifts of appreciation. These possibilities, utilising finite resources for infinite possibilities, focus not even on what could have been, as in imagining the future life of the deceased, or what will be – a reunification after death, but with the constant reconfiguration of a deceased trapped in present. These are interactions with his interpretative representations, submissive to desires of the content creator, not with his actual memory and his actual being. This is fundamentally different from both printed conventional photographs and Victorian death relics. As a result, the deceased remains social actors with personalities, evolving under the fingertips of and called up by the press of a button by the bereaved who engage in sharing collective and personal memories.

This highly selective interactive process is very important for highlighting unique affordances of cyberspace in cybermourning and will be elaborated in the next few pages after a brief return to Pauline who seems to be on a very healthy healing path (a hugely contested term,

but one can hardly assume differently from her optimism) with acknowledgment of both devastating and comforting memories. As she herself states, she is on the way to creating her life as a capable and happy widow. Unfortunately, in early 2014 she started suffering from profuse nosebleeds and was diagnosed with terminal cancer in July 2015. Pauline's posts after her diagnosis became at least twice as frequent as before, some coming as close as several days apart, several times a month as opposed to the usual monthly checking in. She felt she had reached a resolution in her life and was finally at peace with her husband being gone and to her they were clearly separated. Now, as she has become closer to crossing the boundary between life and death, she has started to write to her husband again, both feeling the need for his support and also venting over the existential fear of death. Her contact with Rich again became closer though not without extensive protests by Pauline.

Results day today and I am so scared of what the doctor will say. I don't think I am frightened of dying it is more trying to get my head around that I won't ever see our children or grandchildren on earth again. although I know I will see you again, which makes me happy, but please god not yet, but maybe we can look down together and see them grow. Just be there with me today, put your arms around me and help me to be strong for our kids. I want more time on earth. (Jan 21, 2016 04:26 AM)

Further along the treatment: *Rich, I love you, but don't want to join you yet-or ever. Cant sleep, too upset, so have put my feelings into words to you. If only I could dance with you again, especially on my birthday.* (Feb 1, 2016 12:19 AM)

On February 5th, 2016 Pauline wrote that she decided not to accept any more treatment and is given six months on average.

*I look at our kids and think what will they be doing in 7 months. I won't know! Will I? I was sorting new photos this pm and I suddenly thought what was the point I won't be here to look through my albums in six months time. Will anyone else be interested in photo albums? (*Feb 5, 2016 10:25 PM)

There is indeed a noticeable general trend to visit a memorial quite often after having a moment looking at pictures of the deceased. The shock and speechlessness upon gazing at the pictures are often followed by the need to release the emotions and ponder. Examples from other memorials:

I just sit and stare at you photos and stil doubt that what is the Truth is the truth because its just unbelievable; its beyond Vocab!

I look at our pictures and I cant even tell that its me in there.

The realisation of 'having been there' is disrupted, as if one's own face is not recognised, rather presented as a stranger without knowledge of what's to come, simply a blob of shades and colours on photo paper – which is the only thing that the other person, now dead, is at this very moment. The 'then' time has been extracted from the past-future-present sequence and become mythical in a sense that it is located beyond any other realm of existence except for unreliability of memories. As Barthes writes in Camera Lucida: "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: She is going to die: I shudder… over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (1981:96).

As Pauline ponders upon seeing her face immortalised in the physical unchangeable images alongside her children's, she engages in her own post-death world where she is reduced to an image that the children will grieve for, remembering the life that was present at that moment. What is impossible in the conventional photograph – a cohabitation of living and the dead – I argue is possible in online memorials and this is a partial reversal to the technologically induced attempts to bridge the gap between the worlds of dead and the living in the Victorian era. Victorian spirit photography was a grieving practice for the bereaved, extending the practice of post-mortem photography. The composition of the spirit photographs exhibits similar conventions: a still person in portrait mode with a spirit lingering, suspended above or on whichever side of the mourner. The watchful presence of the spirit upon the mourner contrasts with the genre of post-mortem photographs and even traditional slightly extravagant funerals where the deceased is the focal centre. As grief produces intense awareness of mortality of the self, the mourner is eternalised in his grief and at the same time consoled by the existence of an afterlife. Paola Cortes-Roca writes that the intensity of spirit photography lies in the "effect caused by the coexistence of life and death in the same space" (2005:160). In addition, spirit photography offers insight into the fact that the deceased may retain his bodily integrity, an idea that has been under a lot of uncertainty previously. At the time of declining religious faith, a construction of credible afterlife was at stake and the science of photograph allowed people to be convinced, to put trust not in obscure religion, but precise science that still retained a mystical aspect but was documenting, asserting the cohabitation of living and the dead. Just as spirit photography aided the struggle to accommodate afterlife spirituality in rapidly modernising society, cybermourning is attempting to do the same. I argue that the format of cybermourning resembles both Victorian photography and spiritualism séance. It is more akin to spirit photography in both being a record, a witness of interaction after posting a message, while the

act of posting, sending is an attempt to call out, evoke the dead through the logic of science similar to the attempt of spiritualism séance.

*

I look at my boys and girls and inside I break down cos I won't be here to see them get older, reach milestones, get married and to also help our kids if they get ill, to be a great grandmother to our grandchildren's children. It breaks my heart. You were lucky, you didn't have the time to dwell on these things, like I do now. I'm going to live forever was my motto! Now, I know I am not and am trying to cope with this. Sorry, sorry, sorry xxx

Her thinking that Rich's quick departure from this world was a better way to go than her long illness further proves her disbelief in afterlife. Yet she still keeps engaging with the memorial, mourning not for Richard, but for herself. The memorial for her becomes an outlet for her existential fears as she has become increasingly withdrawn and is uncharacteristically glad that the house is empty after Christmas of 2015. August of 2016 marked the sixth month since Pauline's decision to withdraw treatment and I am yet to find out whether she has died.

This story shows how cybermourning can be a self-aware coping mechanism – Pauline is proud of her milestones and achievements, she strives to bring her family together and is focused on her future. She does not truly believe in Richard's posthumous existence, yet continues to update him about developments in the family and venting about her problems, she doesn't ask for advice. As her posts decline in frequency as time goes by, she begins engaging with Rich after her diagnosis and during her treatment much more frequently and is using the memorial mainly to write about her fear of death, due to her loneliness and inability to express her feelings to anyone else. As she notes after each event with family, she always has fun and is very happy during these outings so I assume that if she seems as if she is coping with the diagnosis from the outside, when her sons read her fears they will also be greatly emotionally affected. Most importantly in this part, I discussed how in online memorials we witness the same cohabitation of the living and the dead as in Victorian spirit photography: they both exhibit trust in technologies to unveil the secrets of the afterlife. Pauline's view is sceptical about this kind of possibility, yet she continues to engage for different reasons: possibly as a ritual, a moment of introspection and focusing on positive aspects of her life. Finally, while in the technologically afforded quest for spirituality in an uncertain world cybermourning is similar to Victorian spirit photography and the attempt to connect to the deceased of spiritualism séance, the practice is characterised by an inherent conflict of irrevocable memory of a singular being and interactive remembering that enables the deceased to remain social actors and evolving personalities.

Chapter 3. LANGUAGE, SPIRITUALITY AND COMMUNITY IN ONLINE MEMORIALS: KEY FEATURES OF ENGAGEMENT

This short chapter is intended to provide the reader with important information on the influence of computer-mediated communication on online memorial language, as well as provide more insights into the differences in discourse based on familial situation and authorship. I will also discuss the prevalent conceptualisations of spirituality in online memorials and what motivates people to participate in online communities. Overall, this chapter will serve as a broader look at the general trends of online memorial use before approaching the final part of the thesis dealing with ethics of withdrawing care from online memorials.

3.1. LANGUAGE IN ONLINE MEMORIALS

The reader has already become fairly well acquainted with the language used in online memorials throughout the thesis, but it is necessary to elaborate further on how it is affected by this technological advance in communication. Conducting a comprehensive study of linguistic features, style of posts on the website according to their content and discourse is both beyond the scope and not the focus of this thesis, but I will present my general findings on the tribute language and discourse. Here I am more focused on differences in discourse based on familial relations as the temporal progression on discourse is the main focus of the thesis. Language in online memorials (mostly in Facebook and MySpace) has been analysed by DeGroot (2009), Brubaker and Hayes (2011), Brubaker et.al (2012), Klastrup (2015), Giaxoglou (2014, 2015) among many others. Most extensively, DeGroot (2009) has provided a comprehensive, non-exhaustive list of themes of messages on Facebook memorial: shock, technology-related references, original and non-original prose, spiritual references, lamentations and questions, phatic communication, memories, continued presence and reminders of past presence, updates, and emotional rubbernecking. Her concept of emotional rubberneckers coincides with my concept of passersby. My contribution to this list would be splitting lamentations into two types: self-aware grief work and melancholic introspections. Considering the often alternating timing of these two types of messages - the former focused on integrating loss within one's life and the latter characterised by sorrowful retrospect, I argue that here we can see the support for the dual process model of coping with bereavement by Stroebe & Schutt when a person oscillates between loss and restoration orientated worldviews and tasks. If we take into account the

circumstances upon which the messages are written and posted: often in the evening, alone, in the privacy of one's home, it can be argued that they are indeed spurred on to be posted by changes in mental attitudes towards loss, whether it is another questioning of a cruel destiny or tales of moving on. In this sense, messages of an invested person in an online memorial can reveal certain patterns of processing loss.

Computer-mediated asynchronous communication is democratic - every voice is present as overlapping and interruption are not possible. The most obvious feature of language in the memorials is that a large portion of it is textspeak, which is an abbreviated form of English where full words are shortened to the shortest number of letters needed to express a message (DeGroot, 2009), e.g. 'you' transforms into 'u'; 'your' or 'you're' transforms into 'ur'. In this type of language, grammar and punctuation are often disregarded (Crystal, 2008). A significant number of posts are written in all caps, without any punctuation. The ability to post in the spur of the moment, visit for a however brief moment affects the memorial language greatly. Textspeak is mostly used in shorter tributes, more heartfelt and longer tributes usually exhibit greater care in developing thoughts, but this is not a definite rule. Consider the comparison of the two following tributes to two young men (19 and 16):

It was hard for me to write a tribute because of all the mixed emotions I was feeling at the time that I was given the news. I went from disbelief, to immediate anger, to sorrow, then right back to anger. But now that I have come to terms that he is gone, I can honestly say that Liam was the most loving cousin that I ever had. He was a breath of fresh air, had such a light, and was full of life. Liam, I will always remember that and keep your memory close.

Hello joe hete we are again anotuer yr without u miss and love u so much be a good lad hope ur doing ok where ever u are always loved. Forever remembered love mum xxx xxx xxx xxx

The eloquence of the first post exhibits more attention to content, punctuation, grammar, awareness of emotions and is more similar to a classical form of tribute, maybe a condolence card - an example of writing in contemporary Western culture which can be kept for future reference as shared moments of intense grieving, as presented by Hallam & Hockey. In the second post, bearing in mind the proximity of *t* and *r*, *u* and *h* keys on the keyboard, mistakes can be seen as due to lack of proofreading, lack of punctuation also signals that the post was produced in a hurry, maybe it captures a mother's wail, which would also highlight different ways users treat online memorials.

Under pictures that are uploaded to update the deceased, the pronoun *your* is used. For example, writing '*your* granddaughter 5 min old' under a picture of a newborn is quite usual when the deceased becomes a grandparent (or an uncle, brother, etc.). In most of the memorials for people who have died over the age of 50 there were pictures of their new grandchildren uploaded in their galleries. The texts under these pictures usually directly refer to the grandparent (*your* grandchildren), whereas if the picture is older, depicting the deceased and their offspring (now grown up, then a child) the annotation says e.g. Dan and son. So I assume that new information is directed to update the deceased, while the events that already have been experienced and pictures that might have been seen by the deceased are presented more as a representation of life, a tribute.

It is not always the person under the username that supposedly authors the post. Consider these interesting examples:

> *Dear daddy!*
> *We are so sick of this female moaning!*
> *you said you would train us to pee and poo outside, we are still getting wrong for messing on the floor!*
> *These women are impossible!*
> *We await for the day you walk us again.*

This is a humorous message from the dogs. I find this similar to including pets in a live conversation through phone or through video chat online. Another example:

> *'Hello Grandad,im big 3 now and mummys little terror,im always naughty and have big tantrums but im really cute,so i get away with it, Mummy shows me pictures of you but im too small to understand.I love motorbikes and cars just like you so i know we would have been best mates,i know you love me and i love you too,all my love, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx'*

Here a mother writes on behalf of the child in what appears to be an attempt to let the grandfather know he is remembered and loved, and even though it is clear that the child will not have any recollection of the relative, the mother seeks to continue the bond she wishes her son would have had with her father. Grandparents here are usually guardians and figures of wisdom. It is usual to make requests, asking general protection of the family, yet sometimes we stumble upon specific requests that require tangible agency to fulfil, for example: *if you can from heaven find out who took mums wedding rings which belonged to sara and make them return it'*. If these somehow succeed, the credit goes to the dead, without a failure to note it in the message. Differently, in a memorial of a girl who died at the age of 26, unmarried and without children

with her primary role being daughter and sister, she is remembered for her jolly character, never asked for advice and her memorial is full of inside jokes, posted without any opening or ending words, standing alone as if posted as flashbacks of an old joke, e.g.: '*always be a unicorn*' , '🕊 *chick, chick, chick, chicken ..... please lay a little egg for me :)'*. I excluded memorials for unborn children and toddlers firstly because there is only a small number of them in my researched website, secondly because their content *in this website* is repetitive, generic (unoriginal poems, text art) and does not further my thesis argument.

Another feature of language in the memorials is emoticons and emojis. The most frequent internet symbol, dispensed without limit is kiss (x). Text art in my case was found in about half of memorials, but in that half it was utilised very often (see Fig. 1 and 2)
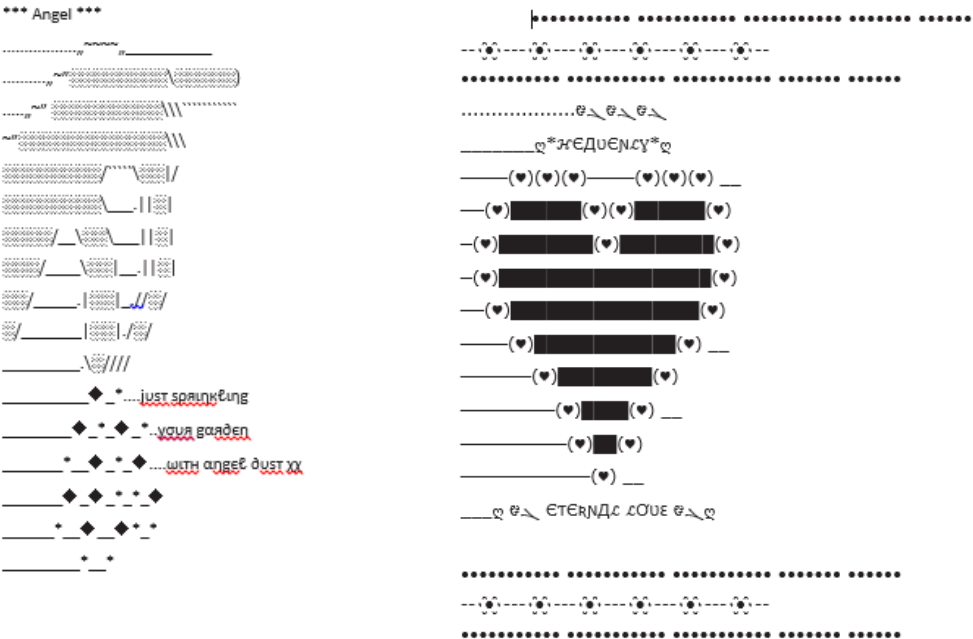
Fig. 1 & 2

The vast majority of posts include phrases *I miss you, I love you* at least once, often several times, used in a similar fashion to a greeting or a farewell, in a smaller portion of the posts the feelings are elaborated. This is an example of phatic communication, which as defined by Malinowski as communication with the exclusive function to perform a social task; it does not distribute information and is important to relationships, as it establishes and maintains social bonds (1923).

The language in online memorials is affected in the same way as other forms of computer-mediated discourse and corresponds to the widely examined trend that literacy is being redefined by computer-mediated communication. Fairclough has studied processes of

informalisation and technologisation of discourse underlining that in modern discourse practices there are more and more "mixtures of formal and informal styles, technical and non-technical vocabularies, markers of authority and familiarity, more typically written and more typically spoken syntactic forms" (1995:79). The reintroduction of oral patterns is visible in online memorial language, it is supplemented by versatile multimedia use, as well as not bounded by time and space. It is a self-conscious integration of oneself in a culture (or group) of cybermourners. Based on these features I argue that Ong's secondary orality, which is a mixture of literate, oral, and electronic cultures in contemporary discourse (1982:11) is at work. Further discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, however several authors have remarked on microblogging and social media sites as areas of secondary orality (e.g. see Bounegru 2008, Stewart, 2016).

3.2. WHERE ARE THE DEAD? POPULAR SPIRITUALITY AND ANGEL BIRTHDAY PARTIES

Religion and/or spirituality are among the psychosocial resources that can help the bereaved to cope with their loss, and according to Shuchter & Zisook (1993:32), religious faith is 'one of the most frequently used and effective means of coping with death'. Studies looking at the role of religiosity in bereavement outcomes (Becker et al., 2007; Wortman & Park, 2008) confirm this observation. In an attempt to explain why online memorialisation is being embraced, Sherlock (2013) suggests that contemporary disenchantment with traditional religious and spiritual practices has left many people with inadequate ways of understanding death and mourning. Increasing numbers of individuals in secularised Western countries reject organised religions, but seek spirituality after the occurrence of loss. In online memorials there is a general belief in an afterlife. Such concepts as God, angels and heaven are prevalent; similarly death anniversaries are referred to as angel birthdays, maintaining the stance of an optimistic afterlife. Lichtenthal et al. (2013) found that many bereaved parents "reported a belief in afterlife, where their child was safe" (331) – the same case as in Layla's and Keith's love story where the two lovers remain jolly together forever. The most common image of the deceased's location expressed by posters in online memorials is either, *Heaven, up there* or *wherever you are*. The latter conceptualisation simultaneously exhibits doubt and hope, and reminds of the Golden record on the Voyager sent into space with the hope of contact.

Similar to the rise of spiritualism during the Great War (Winter, 1995) we might consider cyberspace a place for certain 'occult' activities, i.e. communicating directly with the dead. Walter et al. (2012:292) conceptualise the Internet esoterically, as a place that "mimics our metaphysical experience of the dead as being neither there but somehow everywhere yet nowhere in particular." This expands the discussion on similarities between spiritualism and writing tributes in online memorials; I add skipping any kind of official institution (e.g. church) as another point. It might be said that writing in online memorials attempting to locate the dead is indeed an endeavor of colloquial spirituality, successfully utilising the seemingly mystical aspects of cyberspace, such as its intangibility and unboundedness, magnificent reach and infinite storage.

After their death, the deceased are supposed to meet with their long lost relatives, find new friends in heaven and overall enjoy their posthumous existence.

Good morning mate, hope you are enjoying this lovely weather and havin a cheeky drink at heavens bar lol, just wanted to drop in and say hey, miss you lots and lots xxxxxxx

The dead are resuming their lives: '*Happy new yr, 'Don't get too drunk, hope you're living it up large up there'* What is clear is the assumption of bodily integrity in heaven (as opposed to a detached intangible soul living on) that is able to mirror all of the earthly experiences. This bodily integrity also applies to overwhelmingly widely used characterisation of the dead as angels, which is consistent with Walter's (2011) findings. While all of the dead children are referred to as angels, as well as the vast majority of females, middle-aged men are being referred to as angels less often, though still over a half of them are. This might be due to an overwhelming visualisation of angels in popular culture as children or motherly figures. I noticed grandparents are more often referred to as angels in heaven than middle-aged men, but I also saw a case where a 32-year-old man with criminal past and drug addiction was consistently imagined and referred to as an angel as well.

Another interesting aspect is posts written on behalf of the deceased. They are mostly poems, 'letters from heaven', a short excerpt of which follows:

To my dearest family, theres some things i'd like to say,
but first of all to let you know that i arrived OK.
im writing this from heaven where i dwell with the angels above
where there's no more tears or sadness,there is just eternal love,
do not be unhappy just because im out of sight
remember that im with you every morning noon and night.

Another feature that goes along with speaking on behalf of the dead is 'angel friends'. Posters often offer condolences and support from themselves and their deceased relatives now collectively referred to as 'my angels', offering for all of the deceased (involved by default from the poster's involvement in the online community) to get together in Heaven. An example of invitation to a birthday party:

```
***IT'S PARTY TIME *** !!!!
__000000___00000
_00000000_0000000 * YOU ARE INVITED TO *
_0000000000000000
__00000000000000…* CHRISTOPHER'S *
___00000000000
_____00000…* BIRTHDAY PARTY *
_____0
_____*?*
_____*_000000___00000 * * * ON SUNDAY 20TH MAY *
_____*_00000000_0000000
_____*__0000000000000000
_____*____00000000000
_____*_____00000 * IN GODS GARDEN *
_____*_____0
_____._*?*
_000000___00000___* * 12noon ONWARDS *
00000000_0000000__*
0000000000000000___*
_0000000000000____ * * ALL ANGELS WELCOME *
__00000000000____*
_____00000_____* * YOUNG & OLD *
_____0_____*
_____*?*
_____*_000000___00000
_____*_00000000_0000000
_____*__0000000000000000 * ALSO BRING A FRIEND *
_____*___00000000000000
_____*___0000000000000
_____*_____00000
_____*_____0
_____.*_____*?*
_____._____*
_____*____*
_____*_____* * LOTS OF * FOOD & DRINK *|
_____*___*
_____*___*…* NO PRESENTS REQUIRED *
_____*__*
_____._*_*
_____*?* * HOPE YOU CAN ALL MAKE IT *
```

I found that in terms of religious content and orientation, the bereaved in the online memorials on the researched website predominantly exhibit consolatory discourse of popular Christianity. They utilise the vocabulary of hope for reunification, optimistic Heaven and continuous jolly existence, as well as make use of common symbolic resources, such as sky, gates, flowers in customising the appearance of the memorial. I suggest that online memorialisation is more focused not on following certain religious canons of commemoration, as already remarked through concepts of democratisation of memory and grief, but on a rather more universal concept of ancestral veneration. In his doctoral dissertation, Heathcotte's (2015), situates Vietnamese online mourning in website Nghia Trang Online within the cultural practice of ancestral worship in Vietnam, which is the dominant relationship Vietnamese have with the dead. It demonstrates that online interactions with the dead which may seem new and untraditional are profoundly embedded in ancestor worship and that the practice of ancestor worship itself is one which has transformed through political, technological, economic and cultural changes. Similarly

in online memorials, writing to the dead, asking for their contributions as if they have agency, offering symbolic care are all aspects that would attest seeking a more general spirituality, that of persistent joyfulness and reconnecting with long lost relatives.

3.3. RECONNECTING WITH THE LIVING

Not all posters seek to become a part of an online community (Pauline, for one), but I found that the likeness of actively participating in a community directly correlates with the type of loss – it is people who have suffered exceptionally traumatic loss who are more open to collaboration. It is far less common for a person who has created a tribute for his/her parent or grandparent to communicate with otherwise unknown online others, but people who share similar types or traumatic loss, such as that of a child, or bereaved by violent and sudden deaths tend to be more active in supporting others and seeking support from them. These people refer to themselves as 'online family' or simply 'friends'.

52 year old female writes in her daughter's memorial about her son-in-law: *I had Javier figured out all wrong (...) I know this IS supposed to be your memorial but I just wanted the other people to think twice about him.* Here we find that this person is aware of the readership, writes in order to inform and warn her offline social circle as there is only a rhetorical chance that passersby will meet this person.

For some, community is a big part of their support system and they rely on their website friends to show care for their angels when they are not able:

Thank you for all you have done for my Angels while I have been away to Benidorm, also sorry that I have not been lighting candles for your Angels, my friends funeral is tomorrow, so hopefully I can be back to light candles, after the weekend,

According to Walter et.al. (2011), pre-modern societies tended to produce a bereaved community, modern societies tend to produce bereaved individuals, and post-modern mutual help groups (online or offline) produce a community of the bereaved, that is, connections with previously unknown others who have suffered the same category of loss - the death of a spouse, of a child, etc. (in Walter et.al. 2012:13). I argue that the return of bereaved community can be witnessed in Facebook memorial pages, especially those built on the actual Facebook profile, which then simultaneously informs all members of deceased's Facebook community, as also

noted by Walter (2015a:14). This is not seen in online memorials, created and used mainly by several people – it is indeed either the late modern model of bereaved individuals not seeking participation in community, or the community of the bereaved, their only connecting point being a similar type of loss.

Online memorials are not always explicitly used for para-authentic communication with the dead and social communication with the others. They might very well act as a space for reconnecting displaced living after the loss of the same figure. I observed a case of a father of eight children from three different mothers who had died in 1991 aged 49 years. Memorial was created in 2007 by one of his daughters. The oldest daughter had moved out of the country with her divorced mother when she was a young child. She came in contact with the father when she was 17/18, later severed all relations again. She only found out about her father's death in 2006. However, she is starting to get to know her father's children through his online memorial. She writes:

dad i didn't keep in touch when i left,so i didn't know you had passed away.i didn't know you were ill,please forgive me i'm so sorry,i'm very stubborn when i want to be,wonder who i get that from.

Most of the time the siblings are communicating through email and phone, some of them have never met in person. So this kind of communication in form is very similar to their whole extent of communication, it is a way of building relationships, creating a sense of togetherness. The oldest daughter struggles to be acknowledged as she has been only a minuscule part of her father's life according to some of her siblings.

hi dad. It's me your eldest daughter,i just can't understand why people have to be so mean, just found out one of your other daughter's think's it nice to tell people you and mum adopted me, mom think's it sick and so do i,not only did i grow up without you in my life,and have to know you looked after the two daughters you had after you and mum divorced,then you married Jill and had 6 children with her.All my lovexx

For the eldest daughter this memorial is a way to cement her right as an offspring to carry a memory of her father, to try and make up for the lost time with him. She is incredibly hurt and resentful of the fact that her father turned to be a quite loving parent for the majority of the other children. It seems like the middle children, now grown-ups, have been very close to the father and they do not hold back in sharing heartfelt poems, like the one that follows:

I miss your warmth, I miss your smile,
I miss your gentle guiding hand.
You taught how to hold a bat,

When to walk, to run, to stand.
To this day, I rejoice my fortune,
Knowing I was a lucky one;
To be born of a loving and gentle man,
Who reached out and touched his son.

With over 20 years difference between them, oldest and youngest daughters share the father's absence in their lives. For the youngest daughter, the memorial is the only way to express her feelings for the father as he died around one year after her birth:

okay i'm 19 now and it's nearly 18 years you've been gone. not that i remember. how can i miss someone i don't know. it feels like you abandoned me. all my other brothers and sisters felt your cuddles and remember their kisses goodnight. o well i love you that counts i guess talk to you later dad. ღ ღ ღ

Nearly 20 years now, :/,and yet even tho I'm part of you I still feel like you are this big secret that noone knows anything about, I know I was only 1 when you died, but us kids feel we belong to an imagery person, I love you but i need to know the truth and i wont find out who i am til i know.

Both daughters struggle with the feeling of never getting to know their father. By revealing her sentiments about the father as 'an imaginary person' the youngest daughter acknowledges the myths that surround the complex personality. In this sense, just as conducting complete friendships through Facebook or other social media sites feels completely real, without actual prior remembrance of the living breathing person, writing in a memorial is the one and only avenue available for a daughter who has no real attachment to her father and who for her is a myth, to try and ascribe real human qualities and engage in mourning as her older siblings do, remembering their quite loving father.

This short chapter provided the reader with some broader points on the online memorial culture through focusing firstly on language and how it is affected by computer mediated communication and differences in discourse based on familial relations, second - on the features of spirituality, general optimistic stance on afterlife, prevalent in online memorials and third - how online memorials are used to create online communities of the bereaved when desired and in some cases act as the only avenue to communicate with both living and the dead. This discussion provided the reader with a broader understanding of features of engagement in online memorials thus allowing to return to a following more theoretical discussion in which I locate the aspects of cybermourning that stem directly from cyberspace's particular affordances.

Chapter 4. ACCOMMODATING LOSS, WITHDRAWING CARE: ETHICS OF CYBERMOURNING

In this last chapter I consider the final stages of interaction within online memorials. I will base my theoretical discussion on both interactions with the representation of the deceased and withdrawing participation from online memorials largely on Derrida's ethical reinterpretation of mourning, in which one has to "protest against the amnesia of mourning and to accept melancholia as an ethical obligation to the deceased other" (Davis, 2007, p. 148). Offline, cultural norms typically include time limits after which mourning should cease (Gorer, 1965, in Walter 2015b:9). Walter notices that although there are no universally shared time norms in contemporary white English society, individuals often have strong expectations of how long it is normal and proper to grieve, expectations which they readily use to censure others and sometimes even themselves (Walter, 1999, Walter, 2015b:10). I am yet to find such expectations in online memorials, yet I was able to locate some aspects of engagement that allow to conceptualise changes in the process of cybermourning.

In most of the memorials, there is a transformation of mood as time goes by. Some memorials do not have any or too few posts to be able to credibly assess time or emotional investment, thus in them the transformation cannot be traced. What first serves as an emotional outlet, a place where heartache is outpoured, questions asked and unanswered, over time becomes a more reserved place to ponder upon the memories of the deceased and express more rhetorical attempts to locate the commemorated person. As the time goes by a lot of tributes start to gain a certain quickness. *Just popped in to say…just logged in to…etc.* Opening and closing lines start to disappear and messages start without introduction. *Just letting you know we haven't forgot / just a wee line to let you know ur are always in my heart and thoughts every minute of the day and i will always love and miss you at all time.* This is not a conventional, rich in content message, it does not inform the deceased about new situations, it is a line of text posted several times a year, mostly coinciding with important occasions such as birthdays, death anniversaries, Christmas etc., expressing the fact that the deceased is not forgotten.

These postings keep the memorial from 'emptiness', create continuous content that is similar to the care and attention given to the maintenance of the grave. The number figures stating how many candles are lit and messages posted are quite large and on the main page of the memorial, thus possibly inducing pressure to interact and write more to show care. But there are

also memorials with no tributes, so the very fact of memorialisation must have been important for the creator.

1. Sending love xxxx,
2. Thinking of you xxxx
3. xxx

These are the examples of extremely short generic posts that typically begin dominating the online memorial landscape as its use draws to a conclusion. I do not claim to locate any resolution in the mourning process, I reiterate that this is an analysis of cybermourning as a supplement to mourning. While I find that the general trend is the diminishing visit frequency, increasingly short messages and increase of generic content, content of cybermourning after a traumatic event usually remains unchanged for much longer period than a rough average of one year of intensive participation and two-three years of less participation.

At this moment it is necessary to revisit Layla's family's mourning journey which exhibits what can be considered a possible cybermourning resolution. One year after Layla's death her mother writes:

Im typing quietly so as not to wake you up :) You never were much of a morning person. This last year has flown by soooo quickly, and i have been absolutely dreading this first anniversary :(The days are still ticking by as normal, the world still revolves around us all as usual.....but even though i STILL cant get it into my head that youre not coming home, my heart knows youve gone. I have such happy memories of you and Keith together, and we all talk about the both of you a lot. I really hope you have found what you were both looking for up there and that you are happy together (Aug 30, 2009 06:14 AM).

The first death anniversary often evokes grand emotional response and mark a turning point in posting frequency in many other memorials. From around 2010 all the way to January 1st 2014 when the last message was posted by her grandparents, the content of the messages for Layla also takes a different turn: about half of them inform her about Jack's growth, his anger management, schoolwork, other half is generic content: poems, text art etc. The very last recorded activity is a candle from a passerby lit on July 10th 2016 – it has come over a year since last activity, which was also a post by a passerby. Layla's online memorial did not receive posts during her birthday and death anniversary, or any other special occasion this or last year, which signals that the most important dates become preferred to not be commemorated online anymore.

Friends: *hi beautiful girl, oh how time has flown and we miss you so much, we would give anything just to see your beautiful face one more time, you were amazing, our world is a darker place without you and Keith but we hope your safe in each others arms. Goodnight our Romeo and Juliet sweet dreams miss you always forget you never cause you are both too good to ever forget xxxxxxxxx* (Aug 30, 2011 08:20 PM)

Grandparents: *Saying goodbye was the hardest thing to do.*
We never thought we would, especially not to you.
A million times we needed you, a million times we cried.
And if love alone could have saved you, you never would have died.
Forever in our hearts, (Jul 10, 2013 09:32 AM)

Here we see that past tense is used to refer to Layla, she is not referred as an active reader as opposed from her mother's last message on the memorial posted in 2011, after almost a two-year gap in posting: *Three years today baby girl :(And it still hasnt sunk in yet that you have gone. I have a little cry then just get on with things as best as i can, but youre always there in my head and in my heart xxx (*Aug 30, 2011 07:50 AM*)*

These changes, alongside with the slowly decreasing amount of posts and more prevalent brevity and genericness of content prompt me to suggest that Layla's family's cybermourning journey might have reached the end in this online memorial. The attainability of conclusion of mourning is questionable in all contexts and spaces, but I argue that in the practice of online memorialisation the question is especially contested. It is not clear if the content of posts would become increasingly shorter and poorer in the vast majority of cases. One can withdraw care by simply not logging in and stopping contributing when one does not feel the need to write anymore. This decision might also present itself more urgently than a steady decline in participation. Roberts (2012) remarks on her student, who created an elaborate, extremely active and frequently visited MySpace memorial for her boyfriend who died in a traffic accident in 2007. As the popularity of MySpace declined, all of the visitors moved their social lives to Facebook, and the girlfriend decided not to bring the young man's memory to Facebook. The memorial was still there, but lurking on a site situated outside the friends' preferred networking form. Here arises the question of reintroducing and reintegrating the deceased into a new format, an expanded social circle, which allows to question the extent to which the deceased's social agency and desirability for presence among the living is perpetuated. In dedicated online memorials, I found only a few instances where the deceased had memorials on several sites: *This is not my daughter's main memorial site. I have a site that I paid a lifetime membership for and it really is my*

most used. This is a justification for the lack of updates that nevertheless shows care. However, in many cases it is impossible to state that the memorial is not being continuously visited as remarked by Layla's sister who often visits it on her smartphone and does not contribute (*i do read it all the time. I just don't know what to say*). It is also impossible to tell if a new post will pop up tomorrow or the week after. This invisibility of participation and the perceived permanence of online memorialisation and ability to continuously alter, edit, interact with the representation of the deceased is what guides me to the last part of my discussion in which I argue that it is within the complex decisions to withdraw care from the online memorial that I locate a novel mode of engagement stemming directly from cyberspace as a distinctive phenomenon. The affordances of cyberspace, discussed below, are crucial in order for us to be able to consider the meaning of cybermourning not only for the living, but also for the dead. However, I argue that this dilemma presents itself fully for those people who are extremely invested in the online memorial, because, as I remarked, a significant amount of memorials do not have content or show any investment of time.

Writing on the Internet, psychoanalyst Frankel notes "its fundamental paradox that at the very same time it offers connection and engagement with the other, with humanity, making the world a more relatable and coherent place, but in virtual space, personal subjectivity is always in charge and in control of all occurrences. It is a position of omnipotence that is sustained by promises to the self that its longings and desires for people, for things, for sex can instantly materialise" (2013:15). Cyberspace is both enabling connectivity and alienating, both submissive and overruling. Frankel uses Freud's early twentieth-century voice to trace out the psychic implications of our twenty-first-century capability to digitally preserve the lost object, motivated by the universal human desire to avoid loss: "Freud might describe the Internet as a wish-granting machine in its hallucinatory ability to graphically reproduce the object. This is another dimension of how virtuality promotes a regression to primary narcissism: the infinite malleability of the virtual eerily echoes the primary process world where wishes are immediately gratified without the need of a real 'other'" *(*ibid).

Cyberspace is inherently playful, it allows to create worlds from scratch, everyone is entitled to claim a piece of personal space. An extremely relevant account to our discussion is authored by Frankel's colleague Hartman, who finds how cyber-reality features overcome the experience of loss: "loss is increasingly lost. You and I understand each other online, not through acceptance of limits of self and other, but through infinite play and reconfiguration" (2012, 458). The editability of the content and instantaneous access also support Frankel's original interpretation of Freud's writings and Hartman's psychoanalytical view of cybermourning. This

can also be seen in a spontaneous desire to summon the presence of a long lost acquaintance (putting her name in a search engine) and supressing it immediately after finding out that she had died (p. 12). This conceptualisation of cyberspace as a user operated vehicle both submissive and unyielding, pervasive and haunting, constructs it as ontologically unique configuration of space-time and user input, the playful rules of engagement in which present the user with dilemma of one's own unstable and uncertain apparition within the cyberspace for others (for example, the aforementioned man's in page 12 post for him is his alive reaction, but for any reader it is a mere collection of words authored by a foreign name). Being a certain master of cyberspace and using it to fulfil one's desires conflicts with the fact that everyone, including the author himself, appear in online memorials as a form of written words and two-dimensional pictures. What follows is that in asynchronous communication in cyberspace all users are reduced to the same single type of apparition and this extends to connectivity with the apparitions of others. In our case it is in connectivity with the dead, where the cyberspace is narcissistically used for one's desires to continue an animated bond with the deceased and at the same time negates the author's primary desire to be acknowledged as one cannot strive to be anything more through typing in an online memorial than anyone else is. In cybermourning, especially as one re-reads his/her journey, or a complete stranger, like me, does, the text belongs to the author and the addressee (the deceased) and to cyberspace. Now, one can pick whether everyone in cyberspace is alive or dead or both at the same time.

Communication with the dead in online memorials is twice mediated by object para-authenticity. Firstly in the general sense of the word in computer communication studies, which means objects that are mediated versions of actual objects (email or chats). Second mediation comes from utilising the same object (a keyboard typed message) to use in a context that directly mimics the responsive mechanism to construct a para-authentic sense of presence in the shape of text readership. The one-sidedness of conversation, absence of response that characterises communicating with the dead in all contexts, in cybermourning becomes the key to the relationship. It is similar to *seen* feature in Facebook, WhatsApp and other applications that allow the sender know not only that the message was received but also apprehended. The reply is dependent entirely upon the other interlocutor, the sender has done one's part and is allowed to wait. This lack of response precisely corresponds with Derrida's concept of death, which is not, first of all, annihilation, non-being, or nothingness, but a certain experience for the survivor of the 'without-response'. But in the case of cybermourning this 'without response' is already a reach out to the dead. 'Without response' already provides a certain level of satisfaction in a 'I did what I could' way. The attempts, or the outpours of the grieving heart are seen by online visitors,

however many there are, however present they make themselves in the online memorial. The para-authentic encounters with shadowy others in cyberspace aid the preservation of the dead as witnessing, it attests the cohabitation of living and the dead in the same space (or living-living, dead-dead, depends on one's viewpoint) – a space without answers but with undeniable, technologically enabled and mediated presence, same as Victorian spirit photography and the spiritualism séance did.

In his funeral oration on Levinas (1999), Derrida hesitates to say *adieu* to his friend by moving through a contemplation on what the addressee is. Because the addressee is missing, his speech is just an expression of words, which might or might not be directed towards the mourning community starting the mourning process. But mourning then would be a reflexive discourse that would end up coming back to the mourning community. I already argued that in online memorials we see community of the bereaved instead of bereaved community, and this more so aids in conceptualising online memorials as a practice of self-therapeutic consolation in continuous engagement with interpretative representations of the deceased and, if desired, with others of similar destiny, instead of an attempt to be involved with furthering the distinctive irreplaceable otherness of the deceased. For Derrida, mourning must be impossible, its success lies in its failure. One must incorporate, assimilate the deceased within oneself, simultaneously acknowledging the other as irrevocably other.

I argue that Derrida's 'entrusted responsibility' upon the bereaved after someone's death – to continue the inner dialogue with the non-responding cannot be achieved in cybermourning in online memorials. Derrida considers it unethical to 'manoeuvre, to speculate, to try to profit or derive some benefit, ... to draw from the dead a supplementary force to be turned against the living, to denounce or insult them more or less directly, to authorise and legitimate oneself' ('Roland Barthes', 51). He writes on texts of eulogists, but I argue that as self-consolation, another defining feature of cybermourning, also extends to both reversal to the community of the bereaved and "a solipsistic use of the other's death as a means to expiate one's own guilt" (Tumolo et.al 2014:113), as well as utilising the deceased's image for further vital consumption, recalling its representations upon the screen when one desires. In April 2016, after the unexpected death of Prince, the para-social grievers on social media were at a loss about how to express their pain as one couldn't simply tweet a link to a music streaming site or YouTube due to the artist's strong stance on freely available music online. Uploading myriads of bootlegs only for them to be taken down for copyright violations, a strategy taken by many online mourners in the face of what has already become a convention of compulsive sharing of admired content as a star dies, negated Prince's stance against online presence. One journalist touches on

this: "are we still obligated to honour Prince's preferences if he's no longer here to object, or do our personal relationships to his music now define his narrative arc? In the vibrant performance clips Prince looks so alive, which makes it easier to pretend that maybe he's just hanging out at Paisley Park" (Zaleski, 2016, May 4). I am no way arguing that by creating and participating in online memorials the bereaved go against wishes of the deceased. However, it is useful to think how interactive consumption of the representation of the deceased and the ease with which "remembering can slip into a nostalgic imagination of the dead as fully present to the survivors" (Tumolo et.al, 2014:124), thus enabling them to act as if the deceased was still able to respond to interaction, can elicit certain questions on ethics of cybermourning.

Derrida's *Work of Mourning* is a collection of elegies for his friends, extraordinary thinkers and he is able to have their writing in front of him to reread and engage with their oeuvre. Philosopher Peters (2007) suggests how we can engage in Derridian mourning for people who do not leave body of writings. He composed a piece of music for the funeral of his friend, deliberately including a number of sentimental musical clichés that replace text in terms of being "an attentive reading not of her writing but of her own reading, her loves, inspirations, interests and obsessions, all of those different texts that pulled her in the different directions that ultimately constituted the movement of her own singular identity" (2007:73). So the survivor needs to speak for and with the deceased, but in terms, ways, moods that the deceased would. Thus, "the survivor must speak *with* and *for* the dead friend, but not necessarily in their words or one's but in the appropriate forms, the figures that they themselves would have chosen to witness the uniqueness of their being" (ibid). Memory, stored and cared for in online memorials in contemporary Western society, paired with the particular submissiveness and malleability of the cyberspace fails to acknowledge the fundamental finality of presence and distinctive otherness and encourages continuous playful interaction with the selected features of the deceased.

Therapeutic benefit of writing and building online communities are essential features of cybermourning that help alleviate the shock of death and are easily accessible avenues for grief expression and unregulated mourning, yet while online memorials are becoming an increasingly popular form of memorialisation, the features that I have discussed (perceived permanence, high levels of personalisation, ability to edit content, instantaneous and ubiquitous access) makes it especially susceptible to false sense of presence and vitality. Hartman's statement that "loss is neither the focus, nor letting go is a task of cybermourning" (2012:465) captures my thoughts at the end of this research completely and I believe that my thesis indirectly serves as a proof for it. Indeed, I have found a certain uprising against fully acknowledging the irrevocability of loss as the dead persist as an animated presence constructed by online others.

CONCLUSION

Concluding this research is hard due to its immersive nature and easy access of updated material. As the time approaches for Helen to post her monthly love letter, I find myself frequenting Mark's memorial. I have typed Pauline's name into a search engine alongside her town of residence and the word 'obituary' several times during these months. I also searched for Layla's son's Facebook profile – he's supposed to be around 16 now. This experiential immersion is not felt by ethnographers who leave their geographical fields with a finite set of data, thus provides a novel way of continuous engagement, anonymous or not, within the growing field of internet research. The main goal of this thesis, solely focused on computer-mediated written discourse that spanned over several years, was to examine the extent to which cybermourning is consistent with earlier, pre-digital commemoration practices and which aspects of cybermourning are stemming directly from unique affordances of cyberspace. In order to provide a coherent, immersive and personal narrative, I followed three poignant cybermourning journeys in an attempt to trace the contours of cybermourning as a process with beginning and end stages, which in itself is a contribution to existing literature. I asserted that cybermourning is a reintroduction of post-mortem ritual into individualistic, secular Western societies, otherwise thin on ritual and institutional and spiritual guidance. From some of the messages I was able to peek into offline social contexts and situations that present the bereaved with challenges, characteristic to the contemporary context of grief and mourning in said societies – controlling emotions and grief expressions, recovering at a 'proper' pace, utilise professional grief counselling, etc. In some cases, in an otherwise not-forgetting society, deep bonds with the deceased, care for the departed exhibited in online memorial communication, is considered excessive and subject to gossip offline. However, cybermourning is a form of continuing bonds, adhering to the currently popular framework in psychology, also a practice among the contemporary proliferation of vernacular forms of memorialisation.

Cybermourning can firstly be considered a natural continuity from pre-digital memorialisation and mourning practices based on the humanity's success of appropriating technology for communication and spiritual practices since the dawn of time (evoking Kittler (1999) and Walter (2015a) noted in page 6 of the thesis). In more detail, we can see the expansion of physical keepsakes by adding treasured digital legacy (emails, texts) that carry traces of intellect, instead of material remnants of the body. The physical location of the remains to continue to be the primary place for identification with the deceased and I stress that cybermourning is only a

supplement to the mourning process. The total elimination of physical mementos as elements of mourning outside the physical location of the deceased allowed a mystification of dying and the materiality of death and bereavement in this content has evaporated into a 'cloud'. In Helen's cybermourning journey we saw an overwhelming yearning of cohabitation that simply is not satisfied by the presence in spirit. As Victorian death relic was replaced by the photograph as a way of trusting technology to unveil the secrets of the physical and spiritual world, the tenfold increase in the cult of machines can be seen in cybermourning. I suggest that online memorials are able to construct space for cohabitation of the living and the dead, akin to that of Victorian spirit photography and spiritualism séance. One might say that I contradict myself here with the choice of cybermourning stories, as for Helen online memorial is simply an additional way to communicate with her husband as he is with her in other ways all the time; and for Pauline, who doubts posthumous awareness, her husband's memorial serves as a place for venting, escaping loneliness, putting her thoughts into a narrative. Nevertheless, perceiving an online memorial as a legitimate mourning strategy and being brave about it (as Pauline said, *sod them for what they think*) still carries a certain hope. It might be a hope of eventual reunion or of show of care, somehow received by the deceased, or of a reader of similar fate. Layla's family placed more importance on the memorial as a significant avenue to locate her, updating her more often, more openly sharing with her how each family member deals with missing her. The displaced daughters in Chapter 3, who did not know their father, write to him significantly more often than sons who had a happy childhood with him – they are indeed trying to locate him, ask questions, while mourning for their lost time.

Cybermourning accomplishes an important task of providing space for formally unregulated mourning (i.e. no pressure for the bereaved to 'heal' at an appropriate pace), self-consolation that is beneficial to the short-term well-being of the bereaved and gathering of social resources for coping if required. It is also subjected to the tensions between public and private, as evident from the distaste for readership and gossip. Grief in dedicated online memorials is less public and performative than in Facebook and other social networks, yet every memorial is readily available if the host does not make it private.

Some of cybermourning's features, stemming directly from cyberspace cause crisis of representation of and responsibility to the deceased. This vernacular form of memorialisation is able to possess the mourner with its ubiquity and easiness of access by eliciting feelings of guilt if there is not enough care showed for the deceased in the online memorial. But then it also removes the socially prescribed rules of visiting and proper care, which leaves the mourner at a loss, both consoled and unconsoled by this constantly accessible form of ritual and its perceived

vitality. It is precisely within the complex negotiations of withdrawing care within the memorial that I locate a novel mode of engagement in mourning strategies stemming directly from cyberspace as a specific phenomenon.

I built upon psychoanalytical conceptions of cybermourning by Frankel and Hartman, who suggest the cybermourning practice to be a narcissistic endeavour, to argue that the continuous ability to edit and interact with the interpretive representations of the deceased, submissive to desires of content creator and not with his actual memory and being confuses the bereaved with a false sense of presence. I follow Derrida in stating that this interaction and communication reverses attention to the community of the bereaved and does little to continue the inner dialogue with and fulfil the entrusted responsibility for the deceased in Derridian terms, which requires robust engagement *with* the other without claiming them to ourselves and speaking *for* them.

Returning to the question of death mentalities, this thesis might be utilised as a supplement to further Jacobsen's (2016) argument that the concept of 'spectacular death' should replace Aries' 'forbidden death' as a period that witnesses the gradual return of death after forbidden death period as widely publically discussed and visible, also commodified and made into a "bizarre object of consumption and entertainment" (2016:1), which, "coupled with contemporary scientific and technological possibilities—creates several paradoxical tendencies making death linger uneasily between liberation and denial as well as between autonomy and control"(ibid). Indeed, the immateriality, perceived vitality and permanence of the cyberspace memorials, afforded by ubiquitous technology and pervasive sharing culture that values memory more than anything is detrimental to acknowledging the true value of life that makes it so precious and worth of intense mourning – its finiteness.

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