



Remains in the System:

The diversity of mourning online

Wednesday 11th March @ IOELC

Selina Ellis Gray // \\ PhD Candidate

Hello I'm Selina



Digital Media Designer
& PhD Candidate

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

HighWire

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

Advocates an interdisciplinary
approach which spans
computing, management and
design

<http://highwire.lancs.ac.uk/>

Remains In the System



What I will be discussing:

- ✘ Introduce backdrop of the doctoral study
- ✘ Focus on relaying findings about mourning online

//Death and Technology Studies

- ☠ Runs under numerous names :- Digital Death, Digital Legacy, Technologies of End-of-Life, Death Online
- ☠ Technologies intersecting into the EOL: Digital estate and legacy software, live funeral streaming, online memorials, digital grave furniture, digital afterlife tools...
- ☠ Designing everyday technologies that are considered to be 'death sensitive' or Thanatosensitive (Massimi)
- ☠ Emphasis in my study on designing for bereavement support



//Designing for Bereavement Support



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



- ✱ Avoiding problematizing grief
- ✱ Being aware of imposing orthodoxies
- ✱ Continuing Bonds literature



//Motivations

“

While it is true (but trite) to say that we cannot know death, we can certainly look on dying and bereavement with the knowledge that all of us will experience both of them (Small 2001)

”



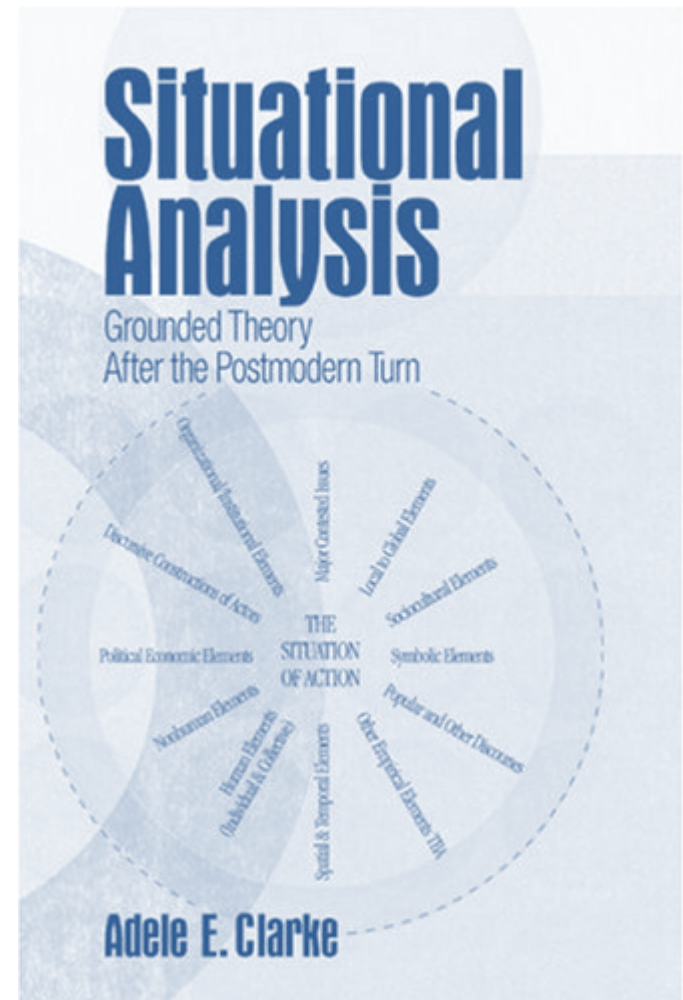
//Limited pool of literature

The appropriation of technologies had been first acknowledged by PhD candidates *Michael Massimi* and *Andrea Charise* in their call for Thanatosensitivity and later become the focus of UC Irvine PhD candidate **Jed Brubaker**. Brubaker had undertaken the first empirical studies on the use of Facebook and Myspace by the bereaved (Massimi and Charise, 2009; Brubaker and Vertesi, 2010; Brubaker and Hayes, 2011).



//Methodology

- 🎲 Grounded study
- 🎲 Multisited ethnography online
- 🎲 Situational Analysis



Adele Clarke, ed. *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Sage, 2005.



Chapter 3: When loss Remains

Insight into 25 years of Mourning online

1990-2015

//1990/TheWell

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



“

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

<http://archive.wire>

”

//1990/TheWell

Ok: br 1-20

item nresp header

```
1 102 Welcome to the Plants and Gardens Conference! <expurgated & scribbled>
2 57 Seed and plant trading post <expurgated & scribbled>
3 71 PLANT TREES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
<linked item>
4 22 Seed Catalog Reviews <expurgated & scribbled>
5 10 Kalanchoe questions <expurgated & scribbled>
7 28 Bonsai trees
8 13 The houseplant dirt item <expurgated & scribbled>
9 9 Toddlers and Houseplants
<linked item> <expurgated & scribbled>
10 5 The silly plant names item <expurgated & scribbled>
11 14 How do you like to get your plants? <expurgated & scribbled>
12 8 Hibiscus pruning woes <expurgated & scribbled>
13 75 home plant-happenings <expurgated & scribbled>
14 10 Springtime - landscaping fun.
15 11 WANTED:
16 7 Periwinkle, aka Myrtle or Vinca
17 34 Decorative ponds
18 7 Caladium help wanted <expurgated & scribbled>
19 20 Moving Plants Indoors <expurgated & scribbled>
20 30 Fluorescent Lights? <expurgated & scribbled>
```

Ok: help

Welcome to PicoSpan; a Unix-based Conferencing Program (version T3.3)

PicoSpan Commands you can get help on:

Item commands:

Read Enter Browse Remember

Other ways to communicate:

Mail Chat Who

General commands:

Unix Stop Bye Help Join Next Display Set Define Source Echo

Other help keywords:

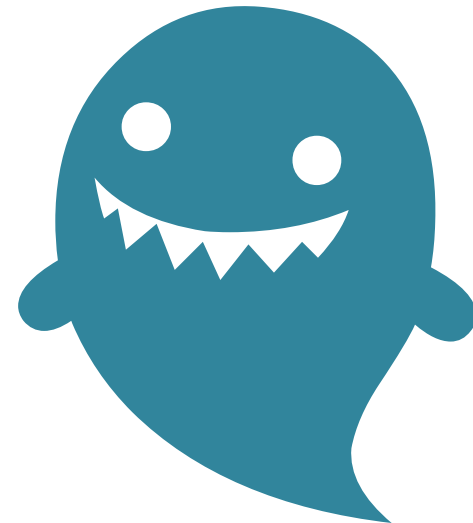
INTRODUCTION morecommands system keys conferences
etiquette editor fairwitnesses summary dates

To get more help on a specific topic, type HELP <topic>

where <topic> is one of the above keywords. Note that most
commands can be abbreviated; ie, "b a" for "browse all", "r5"
for "read 5"...

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

Ok: █



NYT

IDEAS & TRENDS; Programmed for Life and Death

By JOHN MARKOFF

Published: August 26, 1990

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

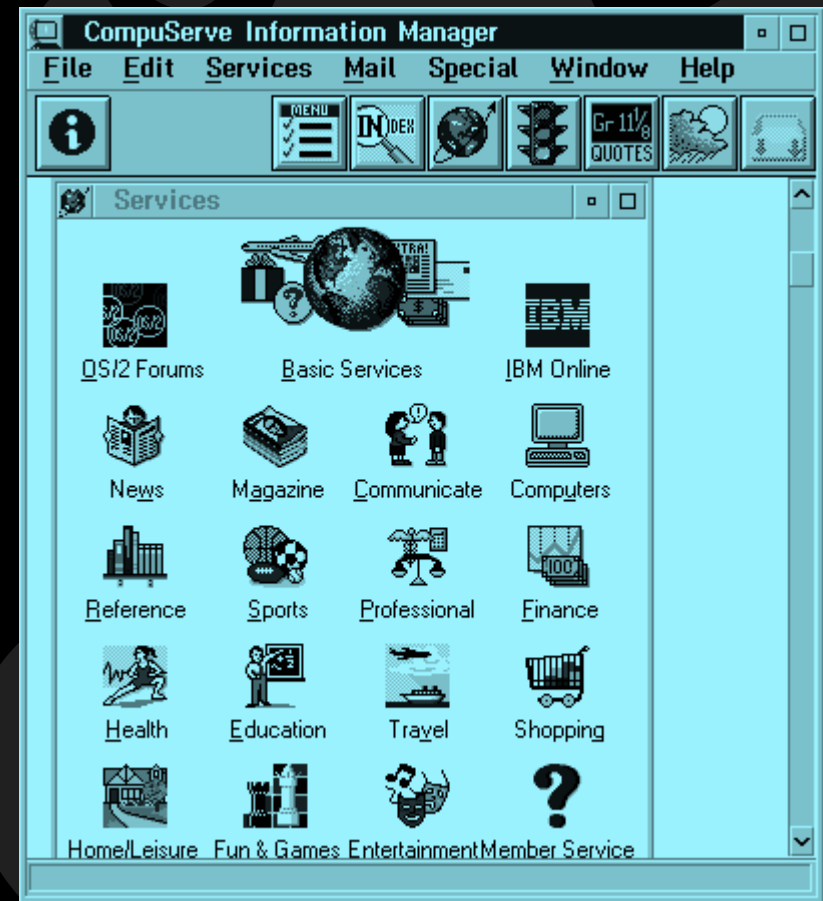
“ his friends have tried to assuage their grief by what may be the first electronic funeral. Shortly after his death, they created a new computer file including all of his old writings, which, it turns out, had been saved on a backup disk. They have also compiled a eulogy, hundreds of pages of testimonials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



1993 // ZiffNet

“ (ZDNet, Cambridge, MA, www.zdnet.com) A technical portal for PC users from CBS Interactive Inc. (www.cbsinteractive.com). ZDNet contains news, white papers, product reviews and links to a wide variety of shareware, trial downloads and public domain software on the Internet.

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



”
<http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/55191/zdnet>

1994//Cybermind

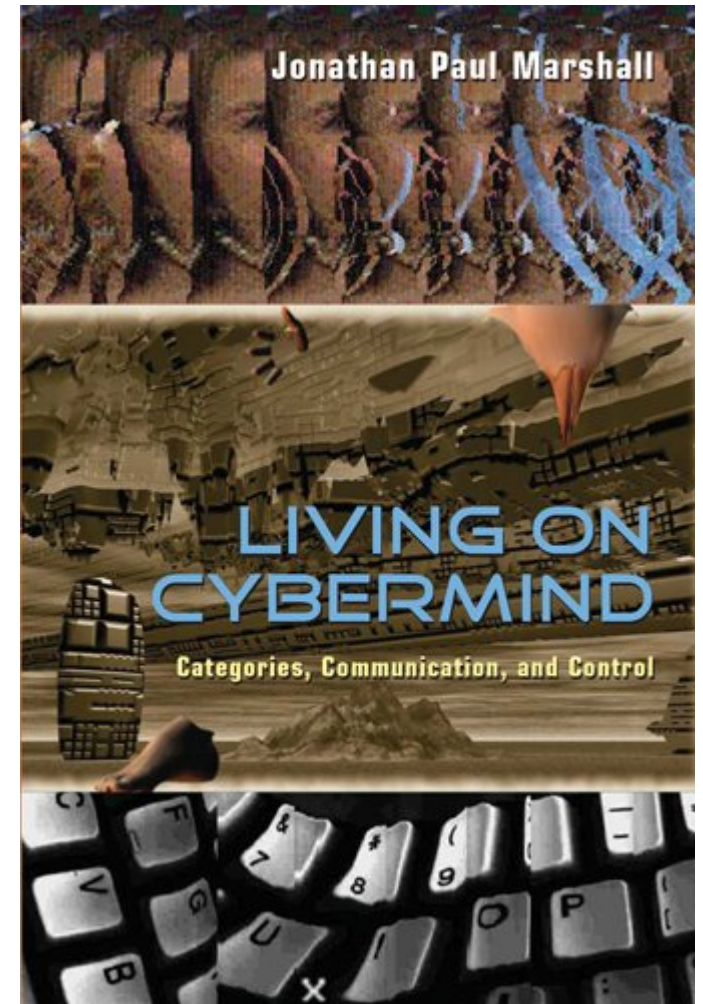
“

Cyberspace neighbours consoled each other over the senseless loss of a mutual friend. And in their collective grieving, they demonstrated an impulse for togetherness that is as modern as the digital age and as old as humankind' (Lewis, 1994)

”



- ✘ Insights into dying online
- ✘ 'last words' on TheWell / Cybermind
- ✘ 1995: Socialbot



Argyle, Katie "Life After Death", in Rob Shields ed. *Cultures of Internet: Virtual Spaces, Real Histories, Living Bodies*. Sage, London 1996.



1995

Transitioning to the World Wide Web or WWW & Internet Browser

Dedicated sites for loss appear ie 'Cybercemeteries' or 'Virtual Memorials'

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

Creating sites of mourning

Creating data about the deceased – biographical texts, photographs ect

1996//

Adam



Suicide

'Official'
Memorial
c1997

Personal
memorial
c1996

Updated
yearly

1996- 2014

"First of all and no matter what has happened, I always have and always will love you with all my heart, son! This Thursday, November 7, 1996 is your birthday. HAPPY BIRTHDAY SON! You would have been 21 if you had not chosen to cross over into the Spirit-World. Now you will be young forever. As you may already know from the "other-side", on a regular day or time I would be having a heck of a time trying to cope with my pain and anguish for your loss, and I would "just" be going through the motions of life. In this particular time, however, just before your "first" birthday after your "departure", I am doing even worse: Much worse!"

1997//

Willow



Suicide

Tribute site on
Angelfire
Geocities

Biography
Image gallery
Guestbook[s]

Highly active
Letters
Birthday

1997- 2014

*"November 12, 2012,
We did not enter any updates in June for
your b-day. We are still both struggling with
joint issues and other pains as well. We did
manage to go to Massachusetts as we did
25 years previously, it was a small gift to
ourselves"*

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

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

1997//

Willow



Suicide

Tribute site on
Angelfire
Geocities

Biography
Image gallery
Guestbook[s]

Highly active
Letters
Birthday

1997- 2014

November 12th 2014
05:21:23 PM

Name: _____

How did you find this Web Site? Come back every year

Where are you from? England

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

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

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

Sending you and everyone big hugs and my loving thoughts.

Email

[Be First to Post a Reply](#)

November 12th 2014
09:00:29 AM

1996//

Adam



Suicide

'Official'
Memorial
c1997

Personal
memorial
c1996

Updated
yearly

1996- 2014

Willow



Suicide

Tribute site on
Angelfire

Biography
Image gallery
Guestbook[s]

Highly active
Letters
Birthday

1997- 2014

Markus



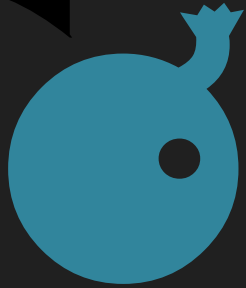
Accident

Official
Memorial

Personal
memorial

1997- 2012

Creator: S
2013



2000

Dot com bubble
Web 2.0

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

Guestbooks phased out
Sites became more sophisticated
Advertising prominent

More inclusive in term of diversity in people, more locations

2001 //

Victor



1990

Personal
memorial

2004- 2014

Charlie



Accident

Personal
memorial

2001- 2014

Margaret



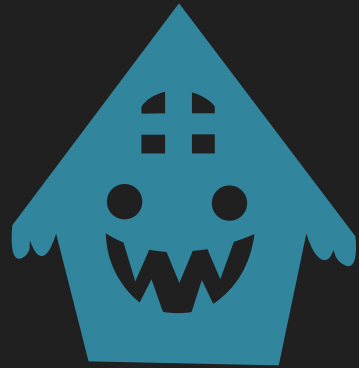
Murder

Official
Memorial

Personal
memorial

Online
News

2002- 2014



2005+

Appropriating spaces for loss

Early social networks ie- Bebo , Myspace, Facebook

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

Seeing the data that's left behind after social media use ends



status update: batch #5 active, 2375555 accounts, 31734835 files

INSTALL FIREFOX LINK FIXER

Welcome To ReoCities...

If this is your first visit here, please sign the [petition](#)

Here lies what we could salvage from the ashes of GeoCities.

Yahoo! has done an amazing thing by keeping GeoCities alive for as long as they did, but we feel that it is a waste to leave the Internet with a hole of this magnitude. At a minimum, Yahoo! could have simply left GeoCities as a monument to the early days.

Maybe close it off from editing and simply make it static after getting rid of the spam pages once and for all.

Behind this minimalistic page stretches a wealth of Internet history. If any of it was yours and we have successfully recovered it, then we hope it makes you happy to see it restored.

We've rebuilt the walls to the Cities and the streets where a large part of the early settlers of the World Wide Web used to live in. You can still find them where they were before, but not all of the houses have been rebuilt yet.

As time passes, we will try to recover more and more of what was lost, at least as much as is technically possible.

If you have a website that links to old GeoCities content, and we've managed to restore that content, we would like to ask you to change the links from [Geocities.com](#) to [Reocities.com](#). It's just a one letter change and it will help the Internet to hang together that much better.

GeoCities
Closed- October 26, 2009
were an estimated 38 million user-built

HOME » TECHNOLOGY

MySpace users threaten to sue after years of blogs deleted

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

Suit & Tie

The new single from Justin Timberlake featuring JAY Z

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

Join

Sign In




Justin Timberlake is a major investor in MySpace and has been the face of its relaunch



By **Rhiannon Williams**

4:07PM BST 11 Jul 2013

 Print this article

 Share



Got a tip? [Let us know.](#)

[News](#) ▾ [TCTV](#) ▾ [Events](#) ▾ [CrunchBase](#)

Follow Us [f](#) [t](#) [g+](#) [in](#) [fb](#) [rss](#) [e](#)

Search



Popular Posts

Social Network Bebo Has Filed A Voluntary Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Petition

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

[Like](#) 0 [Tweet](#) 497 [Share](#) 0

Next Story



Looks like [Bebo](#), once an early star in social networking, is progressing to the next step in the long and messy struggle between majority shareholder [Criterion Capital Partners](#) and minority shareholders that include co-founder Michael Birch, Hecker Consultancy and SV Angel: Bebo.com, Inc. has filed a voluntary petition for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in the Central District of California. First spotted by the blog [Chapter](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

[11 Cases](#), this appears to be the latest development in a case that was first filed in [February](#) of

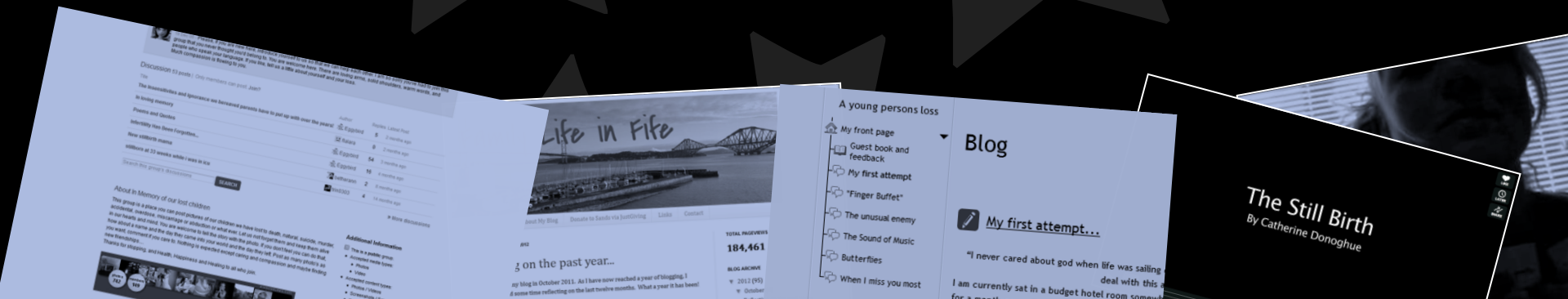


2010+

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

Contemporary death, highly visible, public and diverse in approach

Consistency with creating data and media – through photographs, video, texts



Living with the dead: emergent post-mortem digital curation and creation practices
Springer
October 30, 2013
Co-authored with Paul Coulton

The Diversity of Mourning Practices Online
Digital Futures: The Third Annual Digital Economy All Hands Conference
October 2012



February 12, 2015

Adding a Legacy Contact



LIVESON®

Your social afterlife

Sign up with Twitter

Current population



Have a question about Google Accounts?



Accounts > Help > Managing your account > Editing your account

About Inactive Account Manager



Home



About



Legacy Builder



Preparing



Bereaved



Resources



News



Contact Us

data or notify someone if they've been inactive
[/google.com/settings/account/inactive](https://google.com/settings/account/inactive) and click



Google Account. These include your last sign-ins, Android check-ins.

that account (e.g., Blogger, AdSense, Gmail),
on your account on the Google Dashboard. If you
You'll also be *unable to reuse your Gmail*

Legacy contact?

authorized contact can actually download your data.
from unauthorized people who might get hold of



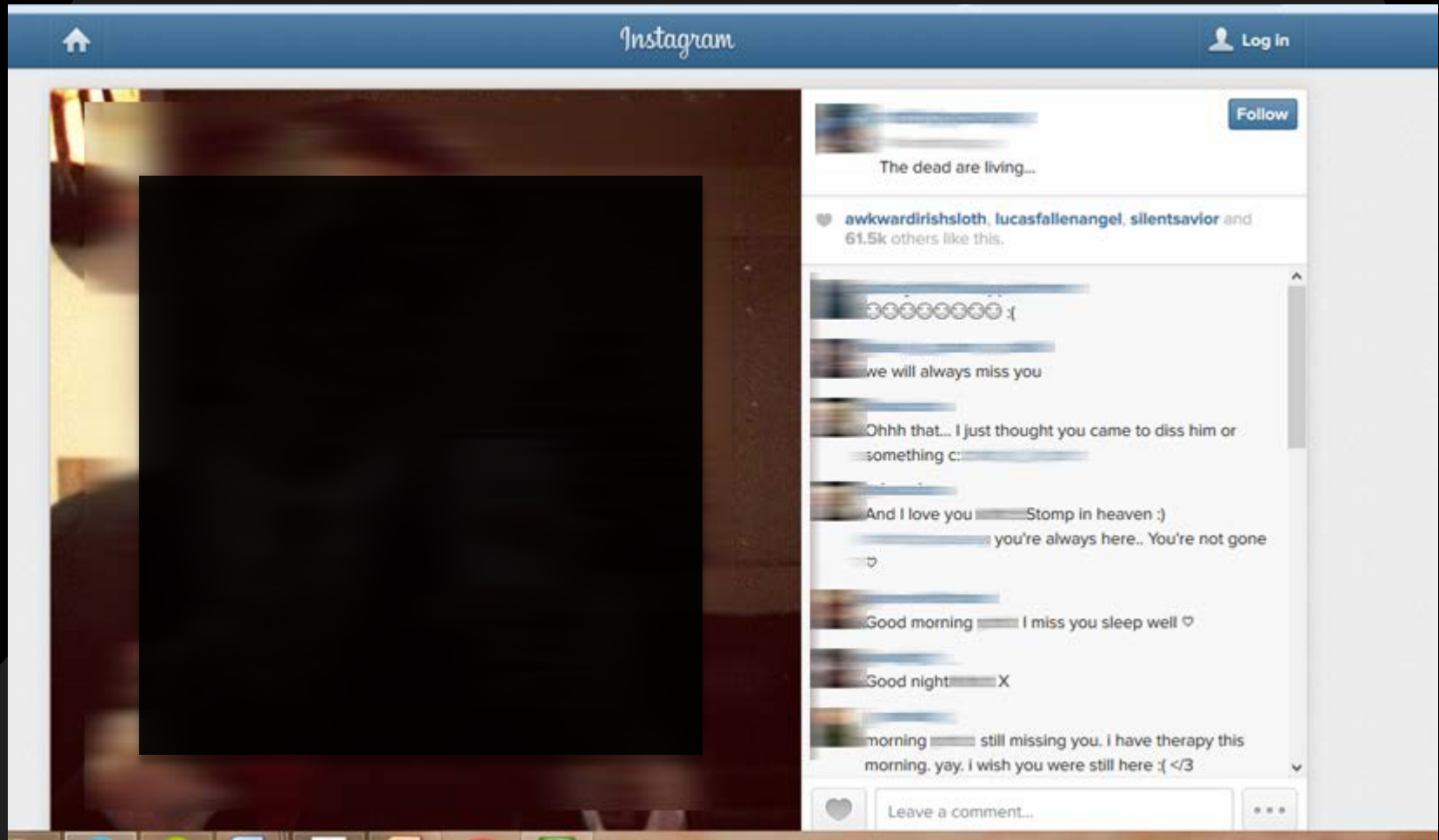
Create secret "goodbye" messages that are only published once deceased

End of life planning tools and services for the connected and creative.

Prepare for a Digital Death & build your Digital Legacy

DEATH SWITCH

2011-2014//The Gaps



*The Memory Remains: Visible Presences within the Network (2014)
Thanatos Journal*

1990-2015// To Summarise



- ✘ Early 1990's Experiencing death within communities of interest
- ✘ 1995+ Communities of interest built around loss : people beginning to create and link sites of loss together
- ✘ 2005+ Creation of sites and the early appropriation of social networks – Practices of loss are typically broader and more diverse
- ✘ 2010+ Primarily the appropriation of networks for loss - an aspect that is being supported and developed
- ✘ The bereaved having to think about curating data left behind too

1990-2015//Persistence



Looking towards people who died before their time, traumatic deaths, accidents, murders, missing people

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

As Davis states: 'To speak of recovery is to talk about a kind of backwards change, an undoing of what has been done, an unliving part of a life. and this is impossible' (Davis, 2002).

//20011-2014/ Reconsidering Data



Online mementos, photographs taken with digital cameras or camera phones, memorial web pages, digital shrines, text messages, digital archives (institutional and personal), online museums, online condolence message boards, virtual candles, souvenirs and memorabilia traded on eBay, social networking and alumni websites, digital television news broadcasts of major events, broadcaster websites of archival material, blogs, digital storytelling, passwords, computer games based on past wars, fan sites and digital scrapbooks. All of these are examples of new media at the beginning of the 21st century and all are fulfilling an age old function: to 'control time, recollection, grief and trauma' (Broderick and Gibson, 2005, p. 207)





Thank You

www.digitalloss.net

www.lossmedia.co.uk