

*TU Delft AR2A011*  
*History Thesis*

## **Public Mourning:**

*Materiality and prospects during restrictions  
caused by pandemics*

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*April 30, 2021*

## Abstract

This article takes the perspective of the materiality of mourning to research and discuss the development of mourning and the restrictions on the methods of mourning during the COVID-19 period as well as some possible approaches to address them. Through a definitional and historical approach, this article argues that the materiality of mourning can be an essential factor in determining the efficacy of mourning. Following this, the article compares and discusses several models of mourning with case studies. The paper proposes several ways in which digital mourning complements or replaces physical mourning as an alternative to restricted physical mourning during pandemics. Ultimately we find that digital mourning with a dedicated memorial page is a more effective way of mourning, but it has to be acknowledged that each mode of mourning has certain advantages and disadvantages and needs to be selected on a case-by-case basis. What is foreseeable, however, is that digital mourning can work well as an alternative to physical mourning under current technological conditions. In the future, it will be necessary to complement the strengths and weaknesses of the different mourning methods, so that people can receive immediate and efficient mourning assistance as soon as possible after the loss has occurred.

### Keywords

The materiality of mourning, Mourning development, Contemporary, Grassroots mourning, Digital mourning, Media, Epidemics, COVID-19

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

As the COVID-19 situation intensifies worldwide, widespread travel restrictions make collective activities in public places, including public mourning, challenging to implement. The situation has prompted the need to find new forms of public mourning to prevent the disruption that may occur when grief and mourning are not appropriately handled. Sigmund Freud argued that mourning was necessary for the bereaved to avoid depression, which could cause people to lose focus and not correctly view their loss, while Laura Tanner later emphasized the importance of the “materiality of the body” in the mourning process. Tanner suggested that Freud’s model of mourning denies the material aspect of the bereaved person’s needs and that the bereaved person “witnesses loss again and again as our brains construct the absent presence of the body, which we can no longer hold through untouchable images”<sup>1</sup>. The discussion on the use of mourning to deal with grief was an intense and important one, despite which it was agreed that having no outlet for sadness may result in a significant negative impact on people’s psychological health.<sup>2</sup> Generally, in recent decades, when disasters

<sup>1</sup> S Tanovic, “Memory in Architecture: Contemporary Memorial Projects and Their Predecessors,” (2015): 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief*



Figure 1 Salcedo’s precise and firm engraving of chisels, debris, and scars for daily use made the figures of the victims of the Civil War unpredictable, whose bodies once occupied these seats.

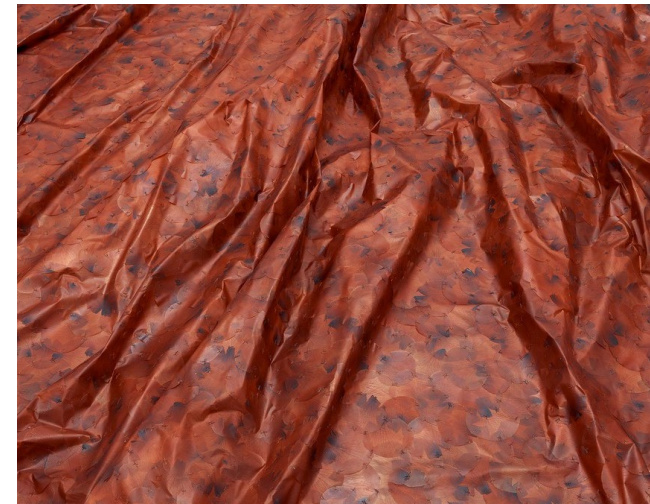


Figure 2 Salcedo described Flor de Peir as a shroud, providing flowers to Colombian nurses kidnapped and tortured to death.

and loss occur, people spontaneously choose a specific place (usually where the event took place or in proximity to the original place, for example, a nearby square, wall, and other elements and bring some memorial or mourning objects that allow them to express their grief. These mourning activities are often described as Grassroot Memorials.<sup>3</sup>

Grassroot memorials are often accompanied by human interaction expressed through mourning objects and their materiality.<sup>4</sup> Bogotá artist Doris Salcedo's sculptures and public installations derived from this materiality of mourning, such as her work *Flor de Piel* (Figure 2) as well as some of her chair sculptures (Figure 1), which reinforce the impact and weight of the materiality of mourning.<sup>5</sup> This materiality is the characteristic that distinguishes these objects in public mourning from their daily meaning, so it is the main parameter of the following analysis.

## 1.2 Significant studies

With the development of digital manufacturing and technology, the importance of public mourning has expanded to a much broader scope, from traditional grassroots mourning where people place their flowers, balloons and clothes, and candles to a temporary mourning site, to digital mourning, which now encompasses more modern forms of mourning, including online and digital media tools.

As the COVID-19 spread across the globe, the rising death count and necessary safe distances not only limited people's daily lives but also contributed largely to the chaos of ceremonies of death and mourning.

*through the Five Stages of Loss* (Simon and Schuster, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death* (Berghahn Books, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson, *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Schneider Enriquez, Doris Salcedo, and Narayan Khandekar, *Doris Salcedo: The Materiality of Mourning* (Yale University Press, 2016).

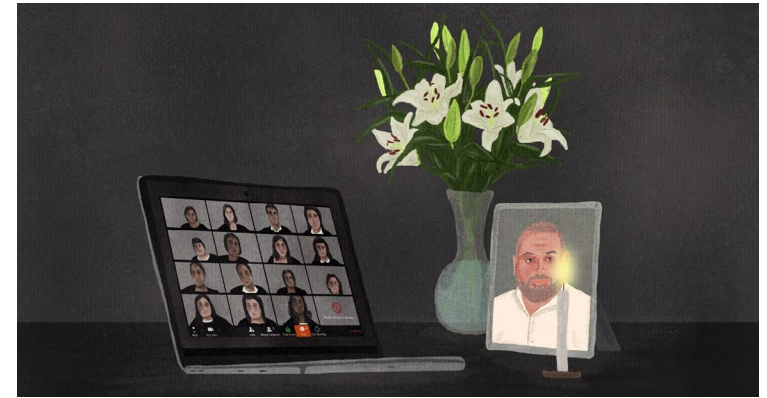


Figure 3 an image from the Internet that shows the mourning via ZOOM

People no longer had much freedom to handle their grief with others, which meant that dealing with loss shifted from public mourning to handling grief alone. Many hospitals and chaplains were unwilling and scared to comfort those affected by the disease through hand-holding and touching, and those with serious illnesses had no choice but face their death alone in quarantine. One hospital on Long Island offered small terra cotta molds with the victims' fingerprints simply as mementos to send to relatives; in New York, the bodies of patients who died from the virus were stacked in refrigerated trucks owing to the overload of deaths. "People are more afraid of being alone and facing death than suffering," said Carol LeCompte, a hospital chaplain from North Carolina. To deal with grief, some hospitals began to use creative methods to address the problem, such as using screens, iPads, and other devices to provide patients with an environment of quarantine where they could keep in touch with their families virtually.<sup>6</sup> However, the absence of family members and the difficulty of carrying out funerals and mourning has left people to deal with everything alone, including death, illness, and

<sup>6</sup> CRAIG WELCH, "How Should We Mourn When Coronavirus Keeps Us Apart?," *National Geographic* (2020). <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/how-should-we-mourn-when-coronavirus-keeps-us-apart>

grief. Although the effect of the virtual environment does not seem to be satisfactory at the moment, we can only attempt to exploit the potential of virtual digital tools to cope with all these dilemmas. Therefore, an analysis of the possible future forms of mourning and the potential of digital mourning is now a necessary study.

Among the many recent dissertation studies related to digital mourning, Gibson Margaret, in his article *Death and mourning in technologically mediated culture*, discussed the differences between people's experiences of death in the media and individual deaths by studying a series of media events and communication technologies. In *Beyond the Grave: Facebook as a Site for the Expansion of Death and Mourning*, Rubaker Jed R. et al. explained the continuation of the online identity of the person who died and the potential for the expansion of public mourning online; also, it can be seen that Lisbeth Klastrop listed six R.I.P. pages on Facebook, discussing the news media concerning the virtual mourning practices represented by these pages in *"I didn't know her, but...": parasocial mourning of mediated deaths on Facebook R.I.P. pages*. While there has been a variety of discussions about digital mourning, a new dilemma has exploded the demand for digital mourning to replace or supplement physical mourning due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This paper builds on these studies and presents an analysis and outlook on the current, more restricted state of mourning, comparing different types of digital mourning in the context of existing technological conditions and the types of digital mourning available to provide a various entry point to inform the possibility of how digital mourning might evolve in the future. To support the potential development of digital mourning, we need the historical development and laws of mourning as evidence to define public mourning and digital mourning.

In the development of mourning, the connection between the public and private mourning and memorial architecture is presented in Sabina Tanovic's research, such as the article *"From Temporary to Permanent:*

*Public mourning and the Architecture of Memorials"* and a book *Designing Memory: The Architecture of Commemoration in Europe, 1914 to the Present*. Furthermore, in *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, scholars Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero argue through several case studies distinct from private and permanent mourning, grassroots mourning characteristics as a form of temporary public mourning are illustrated. Furthermore, To establish a metric to determine the impact of different forms of mourning, we introduce the concept of mourning's materiality. In their book *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, Zahra Newby, Ruth Toulson, and others describe the materiality of mourning, which is considered to be the most crucial feature of mourning, especially at the grassroots level. Moreover, Brubaker, Jed R., Hayes, Gillian R., Dourish, Paul et al.'s book *Beyond the Grave: Facebook as a Site for the Expansion of Death and Mourning* mentions how digital mourning on virtual platforms can contribute to and detract from mourning and analyses the characteristics of digital mourning through several online examples.

### 1.3 Research goal and methodology

This study focuses on public mourning and the development of its materiality. By stating the multiple aspects of the concept of the materiality of mourning, the article further develops an understanding of the materiality of mourning in the current era. The study aims to understand the implications of the materiality of mourning and whether, in the COVID-19 era, the materiality of digital mourning can be compared to physical forms of public mourning, or what forms of digital mourning can be incorporated to aid or even replace physical public mourning.

To achieve this research aim, we first start with the development of public mourning and analyze the scope and manifestations that the

materiality of mourning has encompassed throughout history. The materiality of mourning is defined as the basis for our later evaluation of the effects of mourning rituals. Secondly, the materiality of digital mourning and its combined physical mourning is analyzed by examining the current situation and the primary forms of virtual digital mourning in the digital age with the rise of the Internet. In order to examine the practical effects, three case studies are used to explore which combination of the materiality of mourning is most valuable in relieving people's grief, and ultimately to conclude that a more appropriate way to allow the limited physical mourning of the COVID-19 period to be partially complemented by digital mourning. The three case studies are the Madrid train explosion, 2004; Memorial to Kobe Bryant, 2020; and Greek transportation accident in Tempe, 2003. In each case, we will introduce the physical or digital forms of mourning and their combination and then analyze how the materiality of mourning is expressed in these cases. The advantages and disadvantages of the combination in each case are then examined, culminating in comparing the three forms of digital and physical mourning and recommendations for the future development of digital and mourning.

## 2. The development of public mourning

### 2.1 The purpose and necessity of public mourning

After a sudden and unexpected loss, a person inevitably experiences a state of grief in which he or she needs some way to relieve the emotions to avoid further psychological damage. Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*, explored the five most common emotional stages to loss:

*Anger—Denial—Bargaining—Depression—Acceptance*

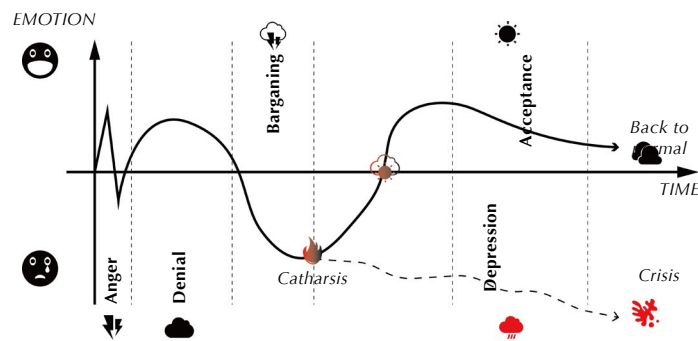


Figure 4 Five stages of death(Redrawn)

Kübler-Ross initially referred to the five emotional responses as the “five stages of death” but has since adapted her model and expanded it to include other types of loss. This model also applies to crises or tragedies, which are the focus of this thesis. After the “anger stage,” people need an outlet to vent their frustrations. Sigmund Freud first proposed mourning and sorrow and believed that mourning is a good emotion and a way for human beings to resolve the psychological trauma of loss, which is also confirmed in Kubler-Ross’ concept of the grief process. People vent their emotions through a series of mourning acts, such as monuments erected after significant events, such as the establishment of Lenin’s Mausoleum after Vladimir Lenin, who was a great Soviet revolutionary, died on 21 January 1924, as well as Kosciuszko Mound, which was built in honor of Tadeusz Kościuszko, the national leader of Poland. People gather in front of a monument with a two-fold purpose: to pray for the dead and express their memory of the dead, and on the other hand, through mourning, to expect a self-soothing response to the trauma of war. In this way, people use material symbols such as bouquets as a medium to find a relatively comforting and logical outlet for their loss, especially when the essence of this way is that a large number of strangers are gathered in the same place for the same event, and the collective emotional resonance of this grief is magnified in a short time. It is also easier to relieve the stress and loss of emotions in a public mourning ceremony than in a personal mourning ceremony.

Public mourning can be interpreted as a group of people, a community, or an individual who by agreement or coincidence (as sometimes no one initiates the event, but coincidentally chooses the exact location to perform the mourning) create a series of low-threshold memorials in which most people can participate without cumbersome procedures. This process of mourning expresses grief and social discontent and represents a form of social action. Moreover, the temporary grassroots mourning memorials created by these events momentarily connect a community, or even a larger



group, by helping them deal collectively with the disorientation and grief of the anxiety stage following a traumatic event.

## 2.2 The history of public mourning

Created as objects and symbolic forms, monuments, and funeral rituals first-served politics and the state as a way of merely materializing a record of history to commemorate victories or as official forms to glorify noble meanings such as freedom, nationhood, and revolution, rather than to establish a place of public mourning or commemorate mass-loss severe events<sup>7</sup>. Examples include the Statue of Liberty in the United States, the Victoria Memorial Tower in London, and the Independence Monument in Kiev, which is mainly presented in traditional obelisks - tall and thin.

In James Young's research, these monuments were seen as stern representations of a form that restricted people's experience and interaction with place<sup>8</sup>. The end of the Second World War marked a period in which the number of disasters and war losses to be commemorated increased, coupled with the fact that the subject of the damage caused went beyond small-scale human-made or natural events into acts of aggression in the name of the state. People began to become confused because no one could say who and on which stand these monuments should be erected. This official monument to victory gradually departed from the traditional forms of propagating official victory and expressing political intentions, and the newly erected monuments gradually turned from commemorating victory to memorializing loss. The official memorial buildings also began to provide places for mourning, meditation, and gathering, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial designed by Maya Lin in 1982 represented a new form of memorial. The

<sup>7</sup> Ignacio Brescó and Brady %j Estudios de Psicología Wagoner, "The Psychology of Modern Memorials: The Affective Intertwining of Personal and Collective Memories/La Psicología De Los Monumentos Modernos: La Implicación Afectiva De Los Recuerdos Personales Y Colectivos," 40, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>8</sup> James E Young, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2016).



Figure 5 grassroots mourning memorial in memory of a classmate who died lightly from stress, Delft, photo by Yifei Zhang



Figure 6 Another grassroots mourning memorial in Delft, photo by Yifei Zhang



memorial did not represent an overall victory or political intention but began to form a collection of mourning through the emphasis on personal loss. Therefore, the object of commemoration is no longer the victory or defeat of the war itself but the soldiers who died in it<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, its intimate interface with the park environment created the opportunity for people to begin interacting with the memorial<sup>10</sup>. In this transformation, participation in official commemorative events and public mourning became a form of collective emotional relief on a global scale.

However, it often takes a long time for such a demanding structure or building, such as an official monument or memorial, to be completed on 30 May 1922. During these 57 years, those affected by such emotions have no other ways to seek empathy in the gap between such pre-building, so the time between the 'anger stage' and the 'acceptance stage' is often quite long. During this time, mourning rituals are usually conducted only on a private or small scale, with the intervening 'bargaining phase' becoming too long for fragile emotions to be easily crushed at specific points.

To enable this well-established form of public mourning to be expressed and practiced earlier. In recent decades, 'grassroots public mourning' emerged - usually shortly after a sudden catastrophic incident such as a terrorist attack, accident, natural disaster - where people spontaneously went to a place, ordinarily close to the incident, and brought bouquets - flowers, candles, and other traditional prayer objects - for a short period of mourning. Sometimes, if the object of mourning was an individual or a small group, people bring specific items of mourning that are iconic or symbolic, and these mourners then quickly pile them up in public locations to form a mound or array of memorials. These events enabled public mourning rituals to occur soon after the anger phase, often allowing the accumulated panic and grief to be relieved much earlier.

9 Daniel %J Critical Inquiry Abramson, "Maya Lin and the 1960s: Monuments, Time Lines, and Minimalism," 22, no. 4 (1996).

10 Constance de Saint-Laurent et al., "Collective Memory and Social Sciences in the Post-Truth Era," (SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England, 2017).



Figure 7 John Lennon's memorial in Central Park, New York City

On Monday, 18 December 1980, John Lennon was shot in his residence in Dakota, in New York City, just after returning from a recording session with his wife. His death was announced shortly after he was taken to a hospital and was reported urgently to a national audience by A.B.C.'s Monday Night Football hosts. Moreover, with Lennon's death, people gathered near the hospital where he was treated and the home where he was attacked in Lennon's hometown of Liverpool. People from other parts of the world also came together spontaneously in some areas, bringing tributes and mourning Lennon in a ten-minute silence. Sadly, three Beatles fans committed suicide after the massive mourning ceremony, unable to relieve their emotions.<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult to say precisely whether mourning after Lennon's death was the first identified act of mass public mourning in history, but this is the

11 PHIL BOWMAN, "15 Creepy Details About the Demise of John Lennon," *The Richest* (2017).

first time that a public grassroots mourning on this scale was recorded.<sup>12</sup> In his article, Peter Jan Margry notes that such grassroots memorials seem to have become a recurring template for widespread acceptance since 1980, with informal and official mourning events and accompanying mourners acting as an invented tool to be used by those affected in the aftermath of unexpected events.<sup>13</sup> These informal and official mourning events and associated mourning objects were produced as an invented tool to be used by those affected in the aftermath and expressed their grief and discontent directly. As Margry writes:

*On 13 October 2008 ...In the City of London, a memorial was created on a lamppost in front of the Bank of England. It was constructed with flowers, stuffed animals, and crosses and topped with a plaque representing a circle of bleeding roses and the text "In Loving Memory of the Boom Economy." Letters were attached expressing grievances about what had happened and what was yet to come, like "R.I.P., Rest in Poverty." It was a grassroots memorial, a phenomenon that arose in its modern form in the 1980s and that has become a globally known, mentally inscribed, and practically instrumentalized ritualized expression<sup>14</sup>.*

Doss Erika suggested that this ritualized expression of public mourning could be considered as a dynamic model of experiencing memory, which enabled grief and collective bereavement to become a common public behavior<sup>15</sup>. With its increasing presence in the media and sites of traumatic loss - traffic incidents, school shootings, terrorist attacks. - grassroots forms of public mourning presented as an informal form of grief around the world. After that, the development of public mourning has primarily focused on the development of media and materials. These changes are derived from

12 Kostas %j museum Arvanitis and society, "The 'Manchester Together Archive': Researching and Developing a Museum Practice of Spontaneous Memorials," 17, no. 3 (2019).

13 Ibid.

14 Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, vol. 12 (Berghahn Books, 2011).

15 Erika Doss, *The Emotional Life of Contemporary Public Memorials: Towards a Theory of Temporary Memorials* (Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

the escalation of media and communication mediums, the conflict between the ways of mourning and the conditions of the physical environment, and changes in the forms of mourning and the elements of mourning themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Changes in forms of public mourning have focused on the globalization of media technology and the Internet. The real-time nature of modern media and the over-centralization of information has given the mourning of the general public a more time-sensitive attribute, which means that modern media can easily record sad news such as a death, memorial service, or funeral, bringing public emotions to a crescendo<sup>17</sup>. However, at the same time, new news and events can quickly replace a recent batch of information, shifting the audience's focus quickly to the next batch of news<sup>18</sup>. In the U.S., for instance, the latest news and information will be pushed to people on social networking applications such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as the electronic versions of news media like CNN and FOX. However, when the users refresh the page a few seconds later, the homepage is almost replaced by a new stream of information. Electronic media allows news to be updated more frequently than the traditional daily newspaper. In the meantime, attention is quickly attracted to other activities or events due to the constantly updated news. If this happens just after the experience of loss and the tragic news that brings a sense of sadness, there is no time to mourn and relieve emotions before an explosion of other news hits people. When people jump too quickly from one news bulletin to another, emotions are quickly piled up without leaving enough time to think and relieve the previous emotion. At the same time, however, the potential impact of the incident will not fade as the news disappears from people's homepages, as

16 Jack Santino, "Performative Commemoratives: Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death," in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (Springer, 2006).

17 Jed R. Brubaker, Gillian R. Hayes, and Paul Dourish, "Beyond the Grave: Facebook as a Site for the Expansion of Death and Mourning," *The Information Society* 29, no. 3 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2013.777300>.

18 Lisbeth Klasttrup, "'I Didn't Know Her, but...': Parasocial Mourning of Mediated Deaths on Facebook Rip Pages," *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 21, no. 1-2 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2014.983564>.

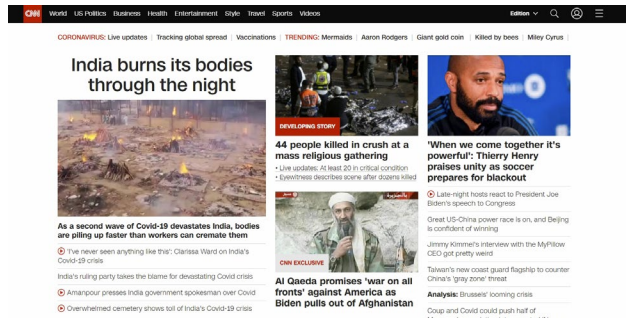


Figure 8 Homepage of CNN news



Figure 9 Homepage of FOX news

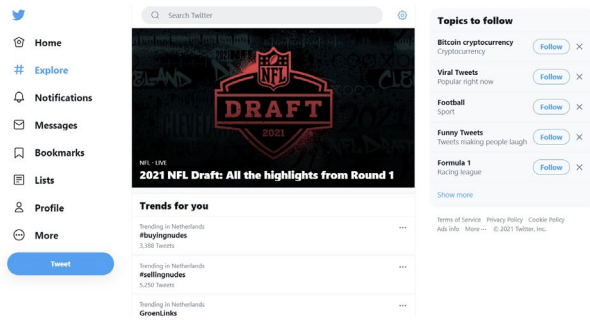


Figure 10 Explore page on Twitter

those closely connected to the deceased and those shocked by the news will remain in a state of grief. That is why people are trying to replicate mourning on the Internet in alternative ways to give people who are also affected by the grief a chance to bond, for instance, by organizing online mourning events on social media or creating a dedicated discussion group for the event to communicate further.

### 3. The materiality of public mourning

#### 3.1 Materiality

In the social sciences, the term materiality is usually interpreted as the particular effect of some activities on a physical object, to be specific, when some particular substance is affected by human activities or actions, it will exhibit specific properties beyond its physical nature, and these new properties are materiality. For case in point, when we see a table, the size, weight, color, temperature, material, smell are all properties inherent to it, but when one picks up the table, uses it, cuts, chisels or piles, it together to form some landscape, the fingerprints left by these uses, the debris caused by the destruction, then create a new layer of properties that cannot be directly perceived. In other words, these physical properties of size, weight, color, temperature, material, smell are reconstructed and transformed through human action into specific emotional and symbolic expressions<sup>19</sup>. G. W. F. Hegel coined the term World Spirit to refer to the inherent nature of all things in the universe. He regarded the process of social and historical development and progress as the activities of the World Spirit and argued that the World Spirit is the ultimate reason and driving force behind the

19 Daniel Miller et al., *Materiality* (Duke University Press, 2005); Daniel Miller, *Materiality* (Duke University Press, 2020).

development of human society and history<sup>20</sup>. Materiality, just like World Spirit, is a form of knowing non-real activity in terms of real things. By creating the materiality of an object, one can express an emotion, a spirit, or something difficult to express through physical substance, that is, the World Spirit embodied by the interaction of human and substance in a new context.<sup>21</sup>

In communication science, materiality is the interaction of readers, editors, and transmitters with physical matters such as newspapers and magazines.<sup>22</sup>The paper's physical properties through printing and reading and the information it carries constitute the materiality of communication tools. With the advent of virtual media and the Internet, information and spirit that needs to be expressed through human intervention can be presented on Internets or data devices, which means that materiality can also be presented on virtual media and no longer needs a physical carrier. At this point, we think of materiality as existing separately from the physical; or we can say that we use screens, sound systems, and other display devices as alternative carriers for creating materiality. However, it is clear that with virtual media and screens and sound systems as carriers, one retains only the auditory and visual aspects of materiality while abandoning the physical properties of touch, taste, smell, temperature, accurate size, pain. Thus the virtual medium's materiality as a carrier is flawed compared to the term 'materiality' as defined in the previous section.

#### 3.2 The materiality of mourning

As mentioned above, people's emotions can be materialized through people and physical matter as the carriers of expression, creating materiality. In the process of mourning, this materiality is reflected in the fact that

20 Robert C Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

21 JeeHee %| The Chicago School of Media Theory Hong, "Material, Materiality," (2003).

22 Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J Boczkowski, and Kirsten A Foot, *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society* (MIT Press, 2014).

people attach their emotions to a particular physical object, sometimes a relic of the deceased or sometimes a symbol. It should be mentioned that both 'materiality' and the 'materiality of mourning' refer to the spirit behind the material rather than the material itself. It acts as a medium between the material and the emotional, the physical and the virtual, providing a way for the living to feel that they can connect with the deceased.<sup>23</sup> Although this form of communication is a unilateral act constructed by the living to alleviate their grief, mourning, a collectively sanctioned way of facing the dead and the disaster, the mourners create a material medium to anchor their emotions. The living can face the tangible remains and relics of the deceased and the scary reality of death without considering other realities, thus temporarily detaching themselves from the material world and performing a series of acts that translate intangible emotions into tangible actions and rituals. The transmission of emotion and the embodiment of emotion that results from this process is the "materiality of mourning."<sup>24</sup> This process is essentially a part of the process of mourning - people's feelings are relieved from their grief by being expressed through tangible objects. In the absence of the material carrier through which this materiality is expressed, emotions such as grief cannot be concretely touched and sent, and mourning becomes less effective in relieving grief emotions.

The materiality of mourning can take many forms, the first being the deceased's relics' materiality. In 2016 when a major flood occurred in Louisiana<sup>25</sup>, journalists reported that a woman was most saddened by the destruction of a recording of his father's voice, and she realized she had never felt losing his father before then; and at the same time, a woman risked rescuing and refinishing what appeared to be a worn and cheap table

23 Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson, *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018).

24 Ian Kuijt et al., "The Good Death and the Materiality of Mourning: Nineteenth-to Twentieth-Century Coastal Ireland," (2020).

25 S-Y Simon Wang, Lin Zhao, and Robert R %J Geophysical Research Letters Gillies, "Synoptic and Quantitative Attributions of the Extreme Precipitation Leading to the August 2016 Louisiana Flood," 43, no. 22 (2016).



Figure 11 Film Coco: Miguel and the deceased met in another world

because it was a relic left by her great-grandmother.<sup>26</sup> The materiality of these objects was transferred to them through physical objects, such as films with photographs of the deceased, tables with traces of use by the deceased, and bracelets that retained the scent of the deceased. The value of these objects' materiality is also magnified because the deceased's death becomes evidence of the deceased's few remaining existences.

The materiality of mourning takes on different forms and carriers in different cultural contexts. The animated film *Coco*, produced by Pixar Animation Studios, tells the story of Miguel, a young boy who accidentally found a guitar left by his great-grandmother Coco's father and was abruptly sent to the land of the dead, and then being helped to return home by his dead family members. The story ties together the family's memories and stories through a guitar, making the family miss and remember once again an honorable family member. The whole film's central idea is in saying that people do not die physically, but after they are entirely forgotten. The film is based on the perception of death in the Mexican cultural context, where

26 Rebekah A %J Papers on Language Taylor-Wiseman and Literature, "Beneath the Flood: Robert Penn Warren's Homage to the Environmentally Displaced," 52, no. 4 (2016).



relics are used as a substitute for the dead, and the perception of relics and mourning rituals reflects the materiality of mourning in the Mexican cultural context.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, in the Japanese culture of death, it is believed that the dead and the living can be linked through certain materials. For instance, in the Obon Festival, the day people believe that the spirits of their ancestors will return to meet their families, so the living will wipe the dust off the gravestones and pull out the weeds on this day to connect the spirits of the living and the dead<sup>28</sup>. In addition, the Wind Phone, designed by garden designer Itaru Sasaki, became a place of solace for the families of the victims who died or went missing during the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011. It is a phone booth set in a field of reeds, consisting of a black rotary dial phone with no wires and a book next to it for people to write down a few words they want to say. Some of the tsunami disaster survivors have lost their beloved children in the disaster, while some have lost all their family members but themselves. They opened the door to the phone booth, went in, dialed a number in their hearts, said what they wanted to say, and then walked out calmly. The phone booth stood alone in an environment that seemed already sad and lonely, the shelter of simple plate glass making it act like a meditation room in a church, allowing mourners to temporarily enter a realm of isolation from daily experience, linking the real world to the world of death<sup>29</sup>. Despite knowing that the phone line was disconnected, people wanted to believe that the deceased could hear themselves and release their missing and ever-repressed emotions in this cramped space of barely one square meter. After the Wind Phone was reported, numerous imitators emerged worldwide. In 2017, artist Jordan Stern replicated a wind

27 Mónica Cruz and Abílio Oliveira, "Finding Coco: Remembering the Meaning of Death and Life, in a Song" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Control and Computer Vision, 2019).

28 Ben Naka-Hasebe %j Prairie Schooner Kingsley, "Obon, Festival of the Dead," 91, no. 1 (2017).

29 Jessica Hester, "The Phone Booth for Japanese Mourners," *Bloomberg CityLab* (2017).<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-01-10/japan-s-wind-phone-is-a-site-to-mediate-on-life-and-loss>



Figure 12 A man who lost his child in the tsunami is talking to his dead child via the wind phone



Figure 13 In the wind phone, there is a disconnected dial phone and a notebook

phone in Oakland, California, in memory of the 36 people who died in the Ghost Ship warehouse fire<sup>30</sup>. In 2021, on Aspen Mountain in Colorado, an anonymous artist built a similar wind phone to give the people who died in COVID-19 a place to mourn alone<sup>31</sup>. Among these wind phones, the phone booth was merely a medium, considered its physical properties as a means of contacting others, but through the action of making a phone call, the disconnected phone became one that many people would not receive but the dead, creating materiality full of emotion and symbolism.

Meanwhile, in other cultural contexts, the possessions and relics of the deceased are destroyed. The transition of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead is considered incomplete in Tiwi's funeral rites if there are no personal belongings accompanying the body and their belief that the belongings of the deceased keep the living in a state of grief by evoking constant pain. The elimination of material presence, including the ritual act of symbolically killing objects associated with the dead, paves the way for transforming the relationship with the dead.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it is because of this act of destruction and erasure that the living must reorient their loss.<sup>33</sup> This process does not leave death forgotten but instead reinforces the loss and memory of the deceased through the destruction of possessions. This ritual represents a farewell and prayer to the real world and the dead, resulting in a transformation of the materiality carried by these objects and possessions.

Besides, in some cultural contexts, mourning does not take the deceased's relics as the carrier for creating materiality but instead borrows external objects. The Grottarossa doll of early Roman culture is an excellent

30 Leah Garchik, "Wind Telephone Enables Communication with Ghost Ship Victims," (2017). <https://www.sfchronicle.com/entertainment/garchik/article/Wind-telephone-enables-communication-with-Ghost-11010294.php>

31 "The Drop-In: Finding the Phone of the Winds on Aspen Mountain," *aspenimes* (2021). <https://www.aspenimes.com/news/the-drop-in-finding-the-phone-of-the-winds-on-aspen-mountain/>

32 Charles Percy Mountford, "The Tiwi: Their Art, Myth, and Ceremony," (1958).

33 Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson, *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018).121-122

example of this. When a Roman girl died of a severe illness in B.C., relatives would place an elaborately carved ivory doll, or Grotta Rossa doll, inside the girl's coffin. The doll was created for prayer as it was immortal, and the family believed that the doll, which looked like the girl, carried the girl's soul and vitality and acted as a companion in her death.<sup>34</sup> In this way, the materiality of mourning was expressed through the emotion carrier, giving peace to the living and minimizing the loss.

### 3.3 The materiality of mourning in artworks

While the above examples illustrate private mourning and its materiality in the funeral process, such as the death of a family member, we can gradually give a more specific definition of the materiality of mourning - the process by which people place their emotions and hopes on the objectively existing matter as a carrier to visualize their feelings and alleviate their grief. These emotions and hopes are usually non-realistic and spiritual, such as wishing for the resurrection of the deceased. The materiality of mourning is both an internal emotional experience and an external symbolic display, widely recognized through various activities and social practices and with certain cultural constraints or differences. This materiality of mourning is a response to the grief one feels when facing bereavement and loss, as well as a reflection of the process of mourning from recognizing loss to soothing emotions to alleviating them; on the other hand, the materiality of mourning can also be expressed through a painful or evocative use of memory, allowing those who have not experienced it to realize the value of loss and grief anew. This materiality, which affects more people in reverse, is often used by artists and activists to remind more people to understand loss.<sup>35</sup> Artists such as Doris Salcedo<sup>36</sup>, born in Bogotá, Colombia, after

34 A Ascenzi et al., "The Roman Mummy of Grottarossa," in *Human Mummies* (Springer, 1996).

35 Mike Brennan, "Mourning and Loss: Finding Meaning in the Mourning for Hillsborough," *Mortality* 13, no. 1 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270701783082>.

36 Mieke Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).



witnessing civil unrest and violence, conflicts, and killings within the country, began to create artworks that helped give voice to the victims who died in silence during the violent and political conflicts in Bogotá, recognizing and mourning the unburied dead and neglected victims through sculptural installations. In her work, often using ordinary furniture as a base on which to carve broken scars, or twisted stacks, or embedding distinctive elements, she uses the everydayness represented by daily elements and a series of movements and elemental combinations to create materiality based on everyday objects that are metaphorical and at the same time explicit, calming but also prickly.

Adept at using sculpture to deal with political violence, Salcedo installs entities that seek to evoke the nameless victims of oppression. As an innate witness to violence, Salcedo uses the materiality created by such sculpture to express mourning and guide the lost, striving to use her work to make everyone think about the impact of such violence on relatives and all those in the community. In place of gruesome bodies, faces, particular names, and moments, Salcedo's works are often pieces of furniture that can be found everywhere on a human scale in everyday life, often scattered seemingly effortlessly and simply in museum galleries where people wander through them as if they were in someone's home. Nevertheless, when the viewer gets closer and examines it more carefully, he or she can see that it is covered with women's torn tops, men's torn cuffs, and seemingly random scratches and signs of aging. These details allow the viewer to detach themselves from the daily events suddenly and to sense a great contrast in this anomaly that stirs up emotions; In some instances, Salcedo will abruptly insert a long, thin bone into the furniture to break the regular rectangular lines of the furniture, a sense of dissonance either from the broken lines or from being outside of ordinary experience creates an instant impact; in another piece, Salcedo turns two tables upside down, a seemingly simple action that creates a coffin-like shape, and the impression of a coffin is reinforced by the grass growing between the gaps on the back of the tables; Most

impressive is the work entitled *Flor de Peir*, a rose-filled shroud for a nurse that was tortured to death during the Colombian war., the whole room of the pavilion is filled with the scent of roses, however, the whole room is filled with a mournful atmosphere of sadness and death in contrast to the scent ; A similar piece is a scarf made from a combination of needles, in which Salcedo interviewed the relatives of children killed by gun violence and tried to understand how they felt. She chooses sharp needles as the knitting unit and uses the stringing material to form a soft, body-fitting fabric, the contrasting materials making it easy for the viewer bodily experience to feel the pain. At the same time, Salcedo experimented with wood, metal, and concrete as representations in her artworks, aiming to create new materiality of mourning out of the materiality of different materials. Despite this, Salcedo has created many art installations and actions in public space: on 6 November 1986, on the facade of the Judicial Building in Bogotá, she slowly lowered chairs with ropes from the roof each day to represent lost bodies, in memory of those who died on this day a year earlier in the violence between government forces and the M-19 partisans, and In 2003, Salcedo stacked 1550 chairs between 2 buildings in Istanbul in order to create a kind of 'topographical warfare,' but also a difference and a counter-convention that makes people question spaces and memories that are easily neglected in the daily life (Figure 14).<sup>37</sup>

Salcedo's work was inspired by mourning's rituals and processes, creating and amplifying the materiality of mourning deliberately with her keen perception. Salcedo's work touched the nerves and perceptions of people more quickly than the conventional ways of mourning and the materiality of mourning in different cultural contexts and customs: clothes were always designed to fit so closely that when one saw them and fabrics, one could always think of the way they fit on the body; chairs were always adapted to people's height, taking over the job of the skeleton and helping to support the body; tables were adapted to people's height, and one could

<sup>37</sup> Mary Schneider Enriquez, Doris Salcedo, and Narayan Khandekar, *Doris Salcedo: The Materiality of Mourning* (Yale University Press, 2016).



Figure 14 Collective Collage of artworks of Doris Salcedo by Yifei Zhang

easily visualize using them by lying on their backs or sitting in front of them. When they were infused with other materiality, everything became different. The clothes which should support the bodies themselves were piled up; the flimsy chairs seemed as if the bodies of the people sitting on them had been stuffed into a narrow space; the tables which people used to rest were turned over and stacked two-by-two as if their bodies had been tucked between them to sleep for a long time. These daily objects, created by human beings, were decorated with beautiful and painful details and then manifested incredible fragility or solidity.<sup>38</sup> Torture, war, and violence were represented figuratively in everyday objects, presented in this fragility or materiality, and in turn, the experience of these daily objects allowed people to perceive pain. The pain, the screams, and the silence of these perceived objects were what the materiality of mourning conveys and means. As time elapsed and these events of bloody violence and grief became a lesser part of history, these works of art could bring back these almost forgotten memories. This mourning was vital to society, and by re-depicting, recounting, and creating the materiality of mourning, each death, violence, and mourning event were preserved.

Whether it was the materiality in traditional mourning, where the living used the mourning items to anchor their feelings and hopes for the deceased in specific objects for the act of mourning, or Salcedo's utilization of the materiality of mourning to in turn affect the masses who were unable to comprehend the events and grief, both types of mourning materiality manifested themselves in the use of substantial gestures, actions or objects that helped give substantial weight to ineffable emotions in order to prevent them from drifting and failing to connect.<sup>39</sup> In public mourning, these remain the things that are the essence of the materiality of mourning. For example, in Madrid's case of the train bombings<sup>40</sup> in March 2004 and the

<sup>38</sup> Mary Schneider Enriquez, Doris Salcedo, and Narayan Khandekar, *Doris Salcedo: The Materiality of Mourning* (Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Margry and Sánchez-Carretero, *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Cristina Sánchez Carretero, *El Archivo Del Duelo: Análisis De La Respuesta Ciudadana Ante Los Atentados Del 11 De Marzo En Madrid* (Editorial CSIC-CSIC Press, 2011).

9/11 terrorist attacks<sup>41</sup> in the United States, such public grassroots mourning began at the roadside, often included crosses, flowers, and personal items. While all memorials were easily classified as permanent and spontaneous memorials with common characteristics, almost all grassroots mourning began as temporary, spontaneous memorials, some of which were replaced by permanent memorials as time passes. However, from the small grassroots memorials to relatives killed in traffic accidents<sup>42</sup> and erected on the side of the road to the massive grassroots mourning process that took place across the country in the aftermath of Princess Diana's death<sup>43</sup>, the fundamental components of both were similar. Even if the scope of impact differs, some initiators began to build temporary memorials or called on people in the media or online to build them in a specific area and within a specific time frame. The construction began in unison. As more people joined, there were usually passers-by or spectators who opted to join as participants because they have been influenced. Those who knew the deceased may bring personal items such as fabrics, dolls, tools that bear traces of the deceased's life, or, if they were not close to the victim, they might bring traditional objects of sympathy and grief such as bouquets, crosses, candles, autograph books, which formed the material carrier for public mourning. In this sense, death was a powerful engine of social solidarity: paradoxically separating people from the social body and generating an intense desire among survivors to reconnect with others<sup>44</sup>. This connection was physical because public mourning was unique: people's emotions were mapped onto objects and then stacked up, connecting and transmitting them to each other in the process. Moreover, they were of considerable help to the relatives of the deceased, who were encouraged and supported by those who shared the burden so that they could alleviate their suffering more quickly.

41 Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (Penguin UK, 2011).

42 Mirjam Klaassens, Peter D Groot, and Frank M %J Death Studies Vanclay, "Expressions of Private Mourning in Public Space: The Evolving Structure of Spontaneous and Permanent Roadside Memorials in the Netherlands," 37, no. 2 (2013).

43 Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief* (Psychology Press, 1999).

44 Sylvia Grider, "Twelve Aggie Angels: Content Analysis of the Spontaneous Shrines Following the 1999 Bonfire Collapse at Texas A&M University," in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (Springer, 2006).

These objects constitute the material carriers of public mourning. In contrast to traditional private mourning and mourning artworks like Salcedo's, whose audiences are limited to a small group of relatives in the private field (private mourning) or a smaller audience for artistic expression (mourning in artworks), a public grassroots mourning is set in the public field. Grassroots public mourning has a lower threshold and a wider audience, aiming to alleviate grief and connect the living with the dead, allowing others who wish to participate in mourning rituals to participate without simply stepping into a private sphere.

### 3.4 The Materiality of Digital Mourning

Nevertheless, with the rise of media and information technologies, there have been some attempts to move these grassroots mourning rituals from the physical space to the Internet's virtual space. Such death tributes were shared on social networking media, such as Twitter and Facebook. For example, after N.B.A. star Kobe Bryant's death<sup>45</sup>, many Facebook groups called Kobe Bryant Forever, Kobe Bryant Memorial. People could join the groups and post messages and articles on these pages to show their respect. Essentially it was still a process of the originator choosing a site and gathering people (or people spontaneously) to pay their respects. Participants gathered at the chosen site with well-wishes, signatures, flowers, candles, and other objects and gathered to grieve and may later talk and discuss their grief with each other. The material element in this was transformed from a tangible entity into a virtual digital message: the site was a web domain, gifts and flowers were given by clicking, blessings and signatures are no longer handwritten but typed in by keyboard<sup>46</sup>. In our current definition, digital public mourning's behaviors and outcomes were still more in line

45 A Lamont %J Sociology of Sport Journal Williams, "Mamba in the Mirror: Black Masculinity, Celebrity, and the Public Mourning of Kobe Bryant," 1, no. aop (2021).

46 Harriet F Senie, "Mourning in Protest: Spontaneous Memorials and the Sacralization of Public Space," in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (Springer, 2006).

with our definition of public grassroots mourning to encompass digital public mourning as a particular form of public grassroots mourning.

Digital public mourning is very much more convenient than physical public mourning. Firstly, the meeting place is a click-away location. There is no need to drive or leave the room, which allows more people to join quickly<sup>47</sup>. In addition to this, the mourning items, being free from physical constraints, can be used electronically, such as mourning videos and memorial images, significantly increasing the flexibility and carrier constraints of the items of mourning. Simultaneously, the emotions that these digital mourning items can convey in this carrier are more direct and easily understood. While digital mourning conveys emotion through these carriers, it is vital to note that it is divorced from physical reality, allowing intangible feelings to remain transformed into intangible expressions. This virtual carrier-based transmission of emotion is missing the part of the materiality of mourning that can be touched and felt with physical experience. With this absence, even if we have performed the act of mourning, the lack of being able to touch and interact with the physical world makes it easy to fall into nothingness and does not help to alleviate grief.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, it became clear that the epidemic would hinder physical communication for longer than initially anticipated and that the inconvenience of this would affect mourning rituals<sup>48</sup>. The difficulty of carrying out physical mourning led to a focus on digital mourning, with the Internet providing a new space for mourning for those who lost loved ones during the epidemic who were unable to leave their homes. However, because the medium of mourning has changed from a physical object to a virtual digital message, the absence of markers and accurate information made it easy for people to fail to capture the

47 Jed R. Brubaker, Gillian R. Hayes, and Paul Dourish, "Beyond the Grave: Facebook as a Site for the Expansion of Death and Mourning," *The Information Society* 29, no. 3 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2013.777300>.

48 Margaret Gibson, "Death and Mourning in Technologically Mediated Culture," *Health Sociology Review* 16, no. 5 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.2007.16.5.415>.

event's reality, including the mourners themselves. The digital information represented by the digital is not accurate enough for people, so mourning becomes less tangible and more aimless. In contrast, the fact that mourning content could be viewed at any time, plus the fact that people had to live and work alone with screens and the Internet for long periods due to the long duration of the epidemic, increased people's contact time with social software as well as mourning content. Under these conditions of staying connected to the Internet, digital mourning could have the negative impact of prolonging the time of grief, which in the long run could lead to emotional grief and even mental breakdowns.

## 4. Case Study: Combining physical mourning with digital mourning

### 4.1 Madrid train explosion, 2004

On 11 March 2004, Spain experienced its worst terrorist attack since the 1988 Lockerbie bombings. The series of bombings in Madrid killed 192 people and injured more than 1,500. On that day, 13 bombs were hidden in backpacks and placed on several suburban trains in the city's commuter district. The trains were filled with people going to work, while others were taking their children to school. The explosion caused many casualties during the rush hour, and an atmosphere of terror prevailed throughout Madrid. In the aftermath, the train stations were turned into mourning centers, with candles, teddy bears, clothes, markers, bouquets, and other mourning items being piled up by countless people to pay their respects.<sup>49</sup> The physical structure of these grassroots memorials placed at the four stations where the bombings took place had vertical and horizontal planes<sup>50</sup>. Vertical planes (walls) were more suitable for graffiti; white flowers, candles, teddy bears. And other objects were mainly placed on the ground, while notes and slogans with emotional text were present horizontally and vertically.

49 Fernando Reinares, *Al-Qaeda's Revenge: The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings* (Columbia University Press, 2017).

50 Jack Santino, *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death* (Springer, 2016).



Figure 15 Physical space occupied by mourning objects during the mourning of the train bombings in Madrid, affecting the daily use of space

In addition to traditional mourning items, paper and words were used as carriers to express protest and condolences on the walls. The railway station has become a source of fear and an emotional carrier by those who come to mourn. In the Madrid bombings, the traditional objects of flowers, teddy bears, candles, paper and slogans, and the railway station have taken on an attribute beyond their generic nature -- the materiality of mourning. The copying of mourning objects in large numbers and the interaction with these objects generated a shared emotional response to a public loss event.

Meanwhile, the station employees explained the trauma of the bomb blast to the journalists, describing the candles' smell as "seeping into their lungs like a bad liquid."<sup>51</sup> They felt they were working at a funeral through the grassroots memorials placed next to the station, which described the entire station's atmosphere as a place of mourning. However, the large amount of physical space occupied by the memorials had a massive impact on physical space activity. In the subsequent public mourning events, as the number of people affected and participants in the mourning rapidly

51 Alejandro López %J Disasters Carresi, "The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings: An Analysis of Pre - Hospital Management," 32, no. 1 (2008).



increased, the excessive amount of mourning items being piled up inside the station also forced the station staff to resort to means to maintain the station as a transport space for large numbers of people. At this point, the staff came up with the idea of using video as a medium for digital mourning: they took away the large amount of physical space occupied by mourning objects and placed screens on the walls. Interactive clicks provide a means of communication and catharsis, releasing people's emotions in mourning while addressing the problem of occupied stations.

#### 4.2 Memorial of Kobe Bryant, 2020

Shortly after his death on Sunday morning, Kobe's name appeared on city buses and trains, portraits of Kobe and his daughter were painted by artists on giant walls. His basketball number appeared on the Ferris wheel at the Santa Monica Pier.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, people gathered outside Staples Center wearing Kobe's numbered Lakers jersey, placing flowers, balloons, and basketballs for a public grassroots mourning session, where people who did not know each other were able to connect and mourn for Kobe through unique objects that identified him. Despite this, the most prominent venues for this mourning event were online and on social media.

On the first anniversary of Kobe Bryant's tragic death, social media was flooded with tributes to the legendary basketball player. Many believe that they never felt that Kobe was gone. David Beckham, the famous England player, paid tribute to Kobe on Instagram, arguing that Kobe's presence was an inspiration to all; ESPN reporter Wayne Drehs posted photos on Twitter of candles and hand-painted memorial proclamations around the court, arguing that the pain of Kobe's death knew no borders. The legendary Argentine footballer Diego Maradona posted a photo of Kobe with wings

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Gumbel, "La Mourns Kobe Bryant, Activist and Icon: 'We Didn't Just Lose a Basketball Player,'" *The Guardian* (2020). <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/jan/29/kobe-bryant-los-angeles-activist-mourning>



Figure 16 People paid tribute to Bryant with murals and other memorials throughout the city.



Figure 17 Fans gather around a memorial outside the Staples Center on Tuesday.

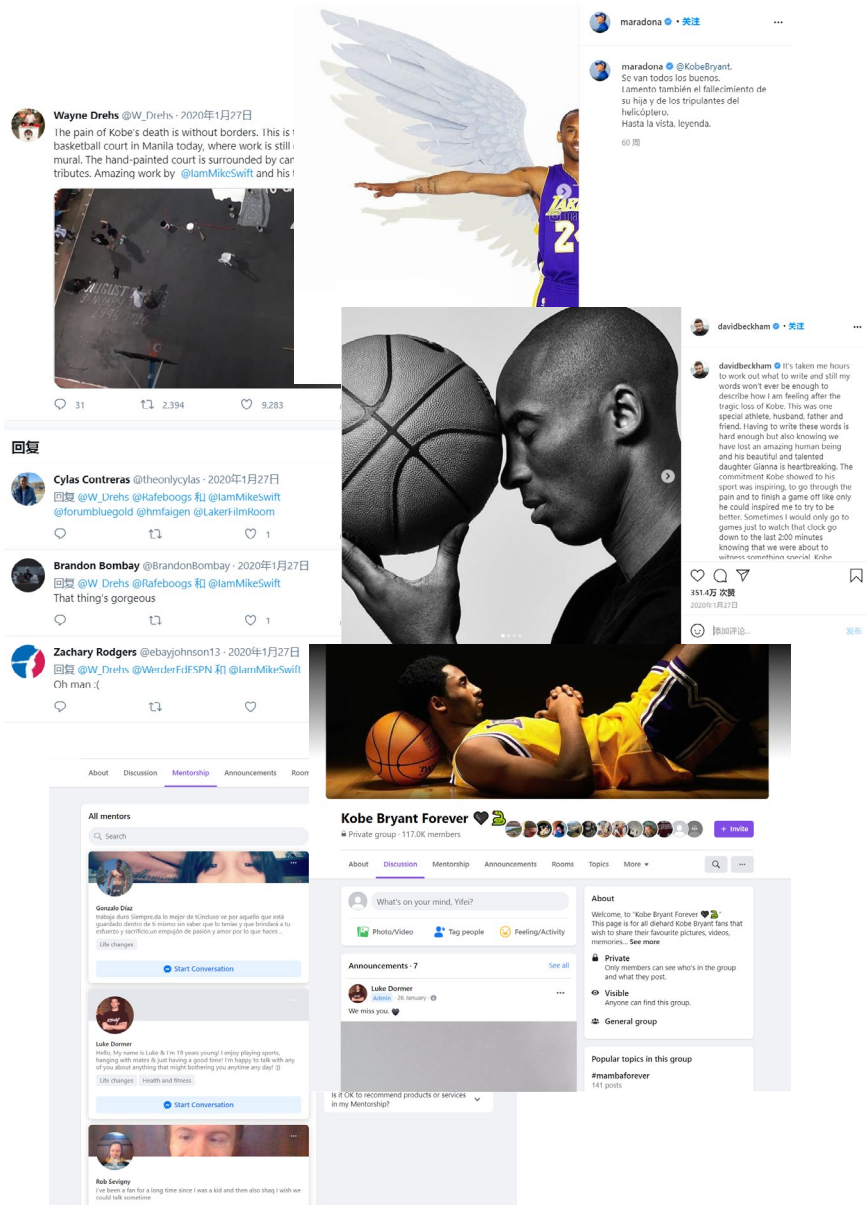


Figure 18 Facebook, Twitter and other social media pages related to Kobe's mourning.

on Instagram, saying that all the good people are gone and goodbye, legend. In addition to some celebrities, his fans and mourners have created several Facebook memorial groups, such as a discussion group called Kobe Bryant Forever, where people post messages of condolence for Kobe and post pictures and videos of their condolences (Figure 18). However, whether it was a celebrity or a discussion group, the atmosphere of mourning was spontaneously created by those who started it, like a makeshift memorial set up by grassroots mourning. People found a place to focus their discussions and expressions of condolences in these comment sections and groups.

Mourners post texts, pictures, and videos and discuss with each other ways to deal with their grief. As a celebrity and large discussion areas are relatively stable and easy to find, these areas allow mourners to participate easily and quickly find empathy in the discussion due to their longer duration and ease of documentation. As mentioned above, because of the accessibility of social media, social networks have become an alternative space to the physical space in which many people operate daily. The constant stream of condolence messages can lead people into this atmosphere of mourning, challenging to disengage from. It is worth noting that Facebook has a Mentorship sub-page (Figure 18) in these mourning-related groups. We can also find volunteers who can help one deal with the grief and help mourners deal with sudden negative emotions through chat. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid the fact that if people join in this digital mourning on social media, it is easy to participate for a long time and be negatively affected by the grief and prolong the distress due to its geographical and spatial independence.

### 4.3 Greece transportation accident in Tempe, 2003

While the elements and forms of mourning were no longer restricted to specific physical objects such as flowers, candles, balloons, and cards, along





Figure 19 This is a mourning page and process set up by someone on the internet to light candles for the children who were victims of the Greece transportation accident. It still exists and holds stories and warm letters from each of the victims.

with several virtual mediums and methods began to emerge, people began to try to express their feelings of mourning and anger more directly in text and video. In August 2008, user tolis09 uploaded a 2.5-minute video on YouTube entitled “Tempe 13/4/2003 accident”<sup>53</sup>, in memory of the 21 teenagers who died in a terrible road accident five years ago. A mourning website has been set up on the Internet for the 21 children who died in a road accident in Greece on 13 April 2003. People could mourn and pray by “clicking on the prayer - choosing the color of candle they wanted to use - and writing down their details and a blessing.” On the blessings page, people could then refresh to see that someone was praying for them at every moment, and the act of refreshing and seeing new blessings replaced the physical public mourning method, giving real-time comfort to those close to the deceased and a place for mourners to vent their emotions. At the same time, virtual and online means were also more conducive to low-cost maintenance and long-term preservation of these mourning materials (albeit virtual). This “click-feedback” virtual interaction ensured that people still have a physical mourning experience to perform their mourning actions and receive the corresponding rewards in real-time. The final form, which refreshed in real-time, turned individual acts of mourning into communal mourning rituals with resonance (Figure 19). The multimedia social networking environment provided video and music acquisition and open forms of user engagement (likes, comments, and embeds) to develop. In addition to this, the simple clickable format (scrolling through photos of the deceased one by one) and the ritualistic interactive animations (clickable animations for lighting candles) allowed the virtual nature of digital mourning to be made real to simulate and replace to a certain extent a significant physical part of the physical public mourning. Moreover, the restricted functionality and the specific simplicity of the homemade web page’s interactions were more straightforward than the freely published content and randomly uploaded

53 Penelope %I Memory Studies Papailias, “Witnessing in the Age of the Database: Viral Memorials, Affective Publics, and the Assemblage of Mourning,” 9, no. 4 (2016).” *Memory Studies* 9.4 (2016)

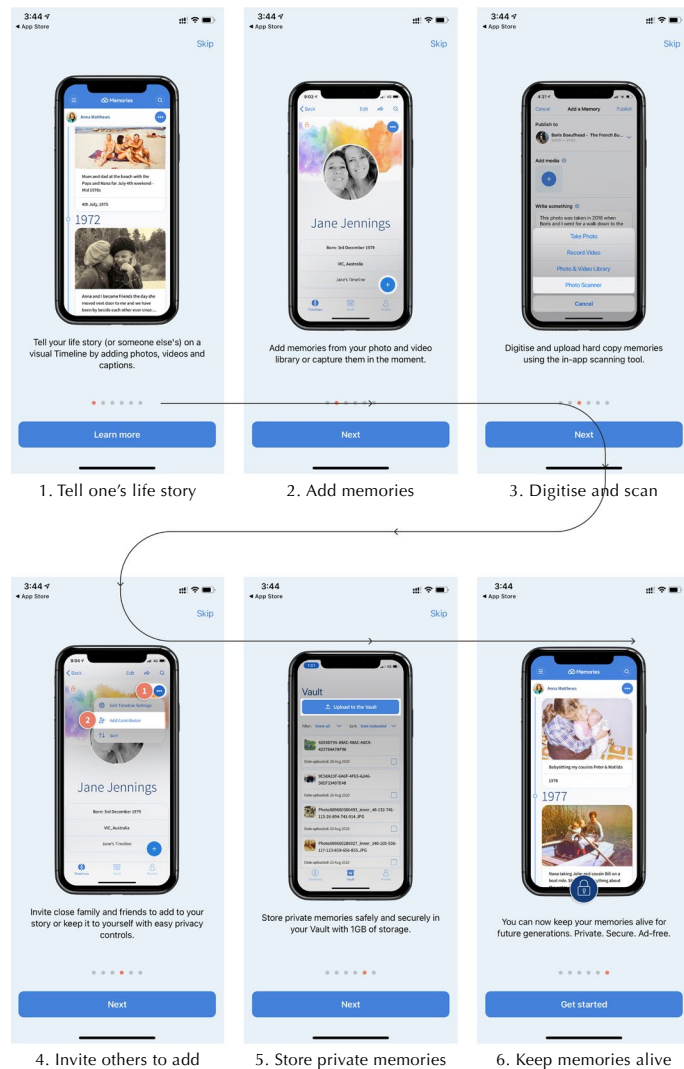


Figure 20 The process of preserving the memory of the deceased and mourning on Memories

videos of social networks and exclude other possible malicious statements. This approach took advantage of the accessibility of digital mourning and optimized the lack of authenticity of digital mourning in social media with simple interactions and animated simulations. While it was not easy to distinguish the difference between the authenticity of digital and physical mourning, the materiality of mourning could still be represented in a sense in 'real' virtual digital objects.

#### 4.4 Chapter Summary

Overall, from the above research and analysis, the combination of digital mourning and public mourning methods produced different results in the three cases, and the different ways of using digital mourning brought different advantages and disadvantages. In the case of the Madrid Bombings, the railway station used offline digital media devices to provide an interactive form of digital mourning that took up less physical space. It replaced the actual posting of notes and signatures with the interactive action of clicking and typing. However, the disappearance of handwriting and clicking and typing due to the limitations of the device still created a sense of virtuality. In the mourning of Kobe's death, digital public mourning in social networks rose to an unprecedented level.

Nevertheless, digital mourning on social media can invade daily life due to the overwhelming proximity of mourning to everyday social networking life. Its potential detrimental effects far outweigh its advantages in terms of venue and space. Moreover, such digital mourning still has significant pitfalls, as it lacks the materiality of mourning, is challenging to capture and control the process of mourning, and is prone to unpredictable side effects such as malicious comments from bad people and a sense of alienation in the mourning process.

In contrast to social media platforms, which offer greater freedom

and exposure, a dedicated website was set up to document the mourning process and take a simple and direct grassroots approach to mourn in the Greek traffic accident. After rendering the passage of the tragedy, the simple interface and ease of use allowed people to express their condolences through clicking and its feedback of realistic candle animations. Compared to the digital device approach to mourning for the Madrid bombings, mourners here could choose different candle colors to create a degree of specificity and prevent the strangeness of replicating seemingly homogenous content. The capacity to leave a message also allowed each candle to be given an emotional text. Although it still lacked the materiality of physical mourning, it was more realistic, bringing digital mourning closer to the materiality that physical mourning could express. This dedicated online memorial page provides a private space, and the relatively limited functions restrict annoying people from harassing or interfering with the mourning process, and people can help comfort those who have suffered loss through a few simple gestures.

Another good example is an Australian mobile app, *Memories*, which provides a place for people who have suffered the loss to recall the story of the deceased on a timeline and record memories by adding video and audio media. By adding participants, other people can also help upload and fill in the memories. In addition to the public stories, the vault page allows people to add private memories that others will not see, guaranteeing their privacy. Additionally, *Memories* offers Future Messages to allow people to send messages and voices to a future moment in time or themselves, giving people a place to mourn and talk alone, just like the Wind Phone.

In summary, this chapter argues that the materiality of mourning remains the essence of people's mourning behavior during the mourning process, but based on the development of virtual media and digital technology, people can mourn if they perform certain ritualistic acts with certain limited movement on the Internet, where anthropomorphic activities and media

enable people to have a sense of anthropomorphism between reality and the virtual. By depicting moving carriers through color, animation, 3D renderings, and other effects, people can feel that they perform a relatively real and solemn ritual of mourning, thus giving the virtual carrier a degree of materiality. Although this materiality remains limited when the senses of smell and touch are blocked, it facilitates the choice of venue and reduces the additional occupation of physical space. In addition, relatively independent mourning sites, for example, avoid unnecessary and multiple detrimental life effects compared to the way mourning is done in social media. In this case, the benefits of digital mourning can compensate for some of the drawbacks. Under certain conditions, such as the COVID-19 period, people can still relieve their grief in this way relatively quickly.

## 5. Conclusion and future outlook

To summarise the above discussion, we can see that mourning is a necessary act to mitigate the psychological impact of loss after the event of loss and that in the development of mourning, the materiality of mourning has been an essential value in the process of mourning as an emotional transmission and physicalization of emotions which can be used to analyze the effects of mourning activities on the mourner. As mourning, particularly physical public mourning, was extremely limited in the COVID-19 period, there was an urgent need to organize digital mourning to address mourning demands during this period. To achieve this, we have used case studies and historical tracing to analyze the history of public mourning and its future trends concerning digital mourning. In the case studies, we found that the combination of digital media mourning and grassroots mourning could reduce physical space consumption, but the lack of materiality of the mourning led to a sense of detachment from the carriers and emotions of mourning, resulting in less effective mourning. So when electronic message boards were provided, many slogans were still posted by hand (as in the Madrid bombing mourning).

Digital mourning on public social media dramatically reduces space and time constraints, but as social media is a virtual public social space, there is sometimes no way to prevent people from being mean or malicious on memorial pages. Since social media is closer to people's daily lives, it

can often be difficult for people to get out of their grief. The creation of dedicated memorial pages seems to have solved this problem by limiting people's actions to sending out well wishes, which sometimes prevents people from hurting the mourners again. At the same time, personal pages are also free from the limitations of traditional social media functions and can be made more relevant to simulate the rituals of genuine mourning, increasing people's recognition and familiarity with the mourning rituals. This type of mourning also essentially mimics the material aspects of mourning missing in the first two, such as the giving of flowers and the selection of mourning tokens. In the future development of mourning, the dedicated memorial page approach to mourning is a better way of completing the act of mourning than the former two and is more deserving of future replication. It has proved feasible to study mourning using the materiality of mourning as a parameter.

However, it is worth noting that the materiality of mourning is not as helpful as the more expression of grief in the mourning act, but that sometimes too strong a transmission of emotion can lead people into a sad mood. Especially in the COVID-19 period, where digital mourning serves as an alternative to physical public mourning, mourning should remain a ritualistic but low-threshold and straightforward mode of participation.

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