

U2 Positions Through Essaying.

Video Transcript.

My inquiry started with 100 iterations investigating 3D texturing as a narrative device. I explored using real-world textures, my own illustrations, and well-known monograms; as well as changing the material nature of the 3D object to recontextualize it.

I find interesting the value we place on objects as they exist in digital and physical forms. We often regard great works of art as the artefacts which define human existence. In reality, our lives are more defined by mundane objects. Items which constitute the detritus of our existence, much like the data we upload online. We'll return to this point later, but for now I'd like to talk about Donna Haraway.

Haraway decries the underlying ideology of the world as one of detached, all-seeing objectivity. Here meaning is created through observation and taken as fact. In contrast, Haraway argues for a situated awareness that considers object and subject. A reflexive form of knowledge that exists in a liminal, contingent space.

This is a useful framework for examining my central enquiry - how we interact with online media. The platforms we use everyday are designed as objective, standardised structures. We, as subjective users, interact with these structures to generate situated knowledge.

An interesting facet of this interaction concerns death. Specifically death as it is mediated through digital spaces. We often consider how the internet has changed ways of life. But we don't often contemplate how it is changing our funerary practices. This is remarkable given that there are currently more than 30 million profiles on Facebook belonging to deceased users.

The book *Death and Digital Media* suggests that our conceptions of death are changing in the online era. In my practice, I consider two of its central ideas:

Due to their immaterial nature we often regard online spaces as immune to decay. This is fundamentally untrue. Infact, online spaces are vulnerable to manifold factors such as dysfunctional hyperlinks and unmaintained domain names. The rule of the internet is that of mutability, and graphic designers play a role in this.

Take for example a traditional gravestone. Set in granite, the typographic treatment of this memorial marker will not change until eroded by time. In contrast, the typography of a social media memorial page is tied to a corporate style guide. This means the design of one's online memorial is dictated by Youtube, or Tik Tok, or Twitter, to name a few. To clarify this,

consider what a traditional gravestone may look like in the typographic style of the early internet. Such changes are enacted by graphic designers.

On the flipside, online spaces can facilitate personal modes of memorialization. Where once mourning rituals were governed by institutions, contemporary culture often emphasises individual expression and celebration of life. As the internet collapses time and distance, digital spaces also permit a means of congregation when this might not be physically possible.

Digital funeral pyres could be added to by loved ones from across the world, assembling a collection of items personal to the deceased. A set timer wiping the information and providing a ceremonial sense of closure.

Similarly, an online-hosted PDF could be populated with such items. A collaborative poster to be printed and hung in remembrance, or ceremoniously burned.

In a future metaverse we may design our own virtual gravemarkers. We may even gather textures from real-world locations in order to imbue them with meaning.

We might find ways to blend digital and tactile forms and create new traditions. Take these clay pipes for example. They were once a common feature in pre-Christian Irish wakes where tobacco was communally smoked. A custom that has fallen by the wayside.

Using NFC tags we can give new vernacular meaning to these items. These, or objects like them, can be embedded with data. Here each pipe links to a song, the full set comprising a remembrance playlist. Music, as a primal means by which we mourn, is particularly suited to such a use.

These explorations are a few of the many possibilities offered to us as life and death moves increasingly online. A shift that is underlined by tensions between the objectifying, market-orientated inclinations of big tech and our subjective, situated experiences.

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