

The Stories of Zyzz - Distributed Memories on Distributed Networks

Nansen, B, Arnold, M, Gibbs, M, and Kohn, T. (2015) The Stories of Zyzz - Distributed Memories on Distributed Networks, In *Social Media and Social Memories. Remembering in Digitally Networked Times*. Eds. Christine Lohmeier, Andrea Hajek and Christian Pentzold. Palgrave Macmillan.

Abstract

This chapter explores the online posthumous memories of Zyzz – an amateur bodybuilder and social media celebrity who died of a heart attack at the age of 22. It compares how memories of Zyzz are distributed and contested across multiple platforms, including niche body-building fan sites, popular social networking sites, and other online information-sharing or discussion forums. Based on a comparative analysis of content from these platforms, the chapter reveals how memories are subject to a tension between coherence and dispersal under the conditions of distributed networks. Digital memories are persistent, replicable, scalable, and searchable; yet they do not remain stable, with digitally networked data often fragmented, incomplete, restricted or obscure. We argue that in these contexts, memories of the dead are susceptible to competing, partial, and disparate accounts, which endeavour to secure a particular view of the deceased and identify a specific legacy that the deceased leaves behind.

Introduction

Aziz Sergejevich Shavershian, better known as “Zyzz”, died in 2011 at the age of 22 from a heart attack in a Bangkok sauna. Zyzz was a well-known identity among amateur bodybuilders – a subculture which seeks to achieve the “aesthetics” of a highly muscular physique. Prior to his death, Zyzz had become a minor internet celebrity, actively self-promoting himself through social media to create a personal brand. He had a Facebook following of more than 60,000 ‘fans’ and regularly posted videos of himself on YouTube. Following his death, however, coverage of Zyzz exploded with both social and traditional media discussing his death, his status as a role model and celebrity, and the growing use of steroids among amateur bodybuilders.

This chapter compares posthumous representations and memories of Zyzz across multiple platforms, including niche body-building fan sites (BodySpace, Shredded), popular social networking sites (Facebook, YouTube) and other online information-sharing or discussion forums (Australian Broadcasting Corporation or ABC, Squidoo). Based on a comparative analysis of content from these platforms, we examine how material ecologies and social collaborations of commemoration in digital networks shape and re-shape the collective memory of Zyzz. This analysis draws on the multiple disciplines of the authors, including media studies, digital anthropology, technology studies and human-computer interaction, to outline the various social and technical trajectories involved in retrospectively remembering and prospectively memorialising the dead online. In so doing, we offer a new perspective on interactions between digital media and memory (Garde-Hansen 2011; Garde-Hansen et al., 2009; Neiger et al., 2011; van Dijck, 2007). We argue that the memories of the deceased are entangled with and across multiple platforms, and thus subject to a tension between coherence and dispersal under the conditions of distributed networks. In these conditions, digital memories are persistent, replicable, scalable, and searchable. Furthermore, instead of remaining

stable, digitally networked data is often fragmented, incomplete, restricted or obscure. Subsequently, memories of the dead are susceptible to competing, partial, and disparate accounts, which endeavour to secure a particular view of the deceased and identify a specific legacy that the deceased leaves behind.

Background: Remembering the dead online

Digital platforms are increasingly important for contemporary practices associated with commemorating the deceased. Just as the internet is implicated in the changing customs and rituals of socializing, it is also increasingly impacting on changing customs and rituals of death and commemoration. Billions of people socialise in significant ways online, and each year tens of millions of these people die. Therefore, it is important to understand how people make use of social media in the context of death and the affects and effects of these uses on our collective memories of the deceased. These issues have generated responses from mainstream press (articles such as ‘What happens to your Facebook after you die?’ (Fletcher, 2009), online commerce (see Carroll, 2014), social networking services (such as Facebook’s memorialization policy, see Facebook, 2014), and academics, who have become increasingly interested in how new technologies stimulate new ways of thinking about death and commemoration.

Digitally networked forms of commemoration emerged as the internet became readily accessible and an integral part of people’s communicative practices. They first took the form of online memorials in the late 1990s, when memorial websites were created and hosted by families and friends (Roberts 2004; Roberts and Vidal 2000). The earlier web required familiarity or proficiency with coding languages to create or contribute content. This meant that online memorials were uncommon, authored by a limited number of people, often combined text and images in a cumbersome way, and remained fairly static. However, following the emergence of web 2.0 platforms, digital commemoration has grown in popularity and diversified in form, with a range of user-friendly tools allowing people to more easily create, author and publish content (Anderson 2007; O’Reilly 2005). People are now appropriating the general-purpose resources of social networking sites to connect with others and engage in digital commemoration of the dead. Digital commemoration incorporates a range of online practices including: tribute pages and memorials hosted on specialist memorial websites (e.g. Legacy.com); blogs created to commemorate loved ones; videos posted on video sharing sites such as YouTube; repurposed and memorialized pages on social networking sites (e.g. Facebook); digitally mediated funerals or cemeteries (e.g. streamed funeral services; digitally-tagging gravestones); and virtual world commemorations and ceremonies (Gibbs et al. 2012).

Hutchings (2012) describes the shift accompanying web 2.0 platforms as one where memorials are no longer created within virtual cemeteries or as stand-alone websites, which have “clear parallels with the role of the physical cemetery, relocating the deceased to a place which is accessible but separate from the spaces usually occupied by the living” (51). In contrast, social media platforms allow users to convert existing profiles into memorials and existing “intimate publics” (Hjorth and Arnold, 2013) into mourners. This process integrates mourners’ “practices directly into their ongoing social relationships” (Hutchings 2012, 51), and removes any need to create a new dedicated memorial website. Carroll and Landry (2010), and Williams and Merten (2009) have noted this inclusive aspect of online memorials, by examining the use of online social networks amongst young internet users who lost loved ones. Through an analysis of

comments on sites such as Facebook and MySpace, they found that many young people continued visiting and posting to their dead peers' sites, and these sites allowed them to maintain an attachment with the deceased. Indeed, later research by Brubaker and Hayes (2011) has identified these cultural practices of interacting as commonplace, and entwined with the platform affordances and conventions of social networking, rather than a deviant or fringe activity.

These studies show that individuals' online selves persist to some degree after their bodies have gone, and that these surviving digital selves are managed in a distributed and collective fashion. They demonstrate how these new forms of persistence are dynamic and therefore contrast in important ways with gravestones, epitaphs, or printed obituaries, by providing more opportunities for change and development over time. Similarly, Veale (2004) identified that the dead do not remain static but continue to evolve through the participatory construction of memories, bereavement and remembrance, which Veale describes as a "collective memorial landscape". Veale (2004) points out that online memorials are typically authored by many people and develop over time, which has led to controversies about appropriate communication and behaviour, especially in relation to tribute pages subjected to forms of defacement or so-called 'RIP trolling' (Kohn et al. 2012; Phillips 2011). These relational, decentred posthumous ontologies are not stable or necessarily coherent, but instead evolve as they are represented, contested and negotiated through multiple user accounts, across various services and platforms.

But what does it mean to socially network with the dead? The shift from an older web architecture to a web 2.0 environment – where the technical affordances or capacities of social media platforms enable or facilitate a shift from archiving to interactivity – means that deceased profiles continue to be added to, modified and/or maintained through collaborative actions and interactions. Whilst many memorial sites or services are set for private use by friends and family, others are not and can be publicly viewed and contributed to by strangers. As a result, the affordances of digital networks for creating distributed and collective memories of the dead are open to different networked publics - and to conflict as much as collaboration - with some researchers even suggesting a need for posthumous impression management. Marwick and Ellison (2012), for example, note that Facebook memorial pages *persist* and *scale* through networks in ways that allow for a large audience of family, friends and strangers, who can potentially come into conflict over the deceased's memory, thus suggesting a need for posthumous profile curation. They also explain that the *replicable* and *searchable* qualities of memorials means that memorials can easily be found, copied and amended by this varied audience, challenging notions of authenticity and authorship.

This research points the emergence of practices associated with posthumous impression management on Facebook – on the ways audiences *within* this platform collectively gather and remember, and potentially collapse or conflict through the structural affordances of persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability (Marwick and Ellison 2012). However, it also suggests a need to consider how memory and amnesia are established, shaped and challenged as they spread across the numerous platforms that are part of our everyday media environment. This research approach needs to extend beyond the possibilities afforded by the platforms, to also include their constraints and contradictions. So while memories inscribed on the Web may be persistent and durable, they are also fragmented by differentiated platforms and their publics. They are replicable and dynamic, yet also messy, incomplete and subject to repurposing and revision. Digital memories

are scalable and participatory, yet can also be restricted through platform architecture and moderation. And whilst memories are searchable and visible, they are often obscured by levels of access or high volumes of data.

A single social media memorial page is a site of collective memory (through inscription) and amnesia (through omission), in which a public gathers and participates in determining what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten; yet memories are often inscribed across many and different kinds of networks, each acting as a meeting ground for a differently constituted public, remembering some things, forgetting others. Through a detailed analysis of the reaction to Zyzz's passing, we outline how various authors, publics and platforms constitute a dynamic (and more unstable) social memory, one underpinned by an ongoing tension between coherence and dispersal, and by competing efforts to secure the past or fashion future significance.

Methods: A case study of Zyzz

To investigate how the dead are remembered across digital networks, we chose to investigate the digital commemoration of a single person. We use this case study to explore how the affordances and appropriations of different platforms shape collective representations of memories of the deceased. We selected Aziz Sergeevich Shavershian ("Zyzz") for this case study as the timing and prominence of his death meant that copious commemorative content was publicly accessible online, and that a variety of platforms were deployed in engaging with his death and inscribing his memory.

Zyzz was a Russian-born Australian who gained a degree of social media celebrity status through self-promotion within the subculture of amateur bodybuilding. Through hours of daily weightlifting he transformed himself over space of a few years from a "skinny high school kid" into a young man with a muscular and "shredded" body; a particular physical appearance described within the subculture as "aesthetics". While transforming his body he also transformed his online presence. A social media persona called "Zyzz" was created, and Aziz dedicated himself to promoting Zyzz the brand by regularly posting pictures and videos of Zyzz online. He amassed a following of 50,000+ Facebook fans, and used his online celebrity to sell a book – *Zyzz's Bodybuilding Bible* – and a protein supplement – *Protein of the Gods*. At the same time he worked part-time as a stripper with the male revue *Sydney Hotshots*, and studied business management at the University of Western Sydney (Robinson and Whyte, 2011).

Zyzz first came to prominence in traditional mainstream media following the arrest of his brother, Said Shavershian (also known as "Chestbrah"), for the possession of anabolic steroids. This media coverage pointed to an explosion in the illicit sale and use of steroids outside the rarefied contexts of elite sports, forming part of a culture of muscular masculine aesthetics. Zyzz, his brother Said and their peers, appeared to be at the vanguard of this culture, with suspicions of steroid use seemingly confirmed by Said's arrest for possession. In an email to journalists in response to the media coverage, Zyzz did not deny but certainly did not admit to steroid use:

The article portrays me in a negative light, using my photo for what was an article predominately about anabolic steroids when I have never been charged, caught, or convicted with anything related to drug use...What I have done, however, is use the internet to build up my name and brand, I have my own protein label and supplement sponsorships, all made

possible through social media...As you may be able to tell from my articulacy, im no idiot, Im a student studying business management at university and essentially have been successful im marketing myself - i have around 52000 facebook followers; that's only a few thousand short of Kyle and Jackie O's Facebook support group (quoted in Robinson and Whyte, 2011)

Shortly after these events, in August 2011, Zyzz was found dead in a Bangkok sauna. The circumstances of his death were ambiguous. On the one hand he was only 22, was in most respects a very fit young man, he died from a cardiac arrest, he moved in circles known to take steroids, and he was in Bangkok – a city well known for steroids “drug tourism”. On the other, there is no admission of steroid use and an autopsy revealed a congenital heart disorder (Robinson and Whyte, 2011).

Following his death, coverage of Zyzz exploded further across both social and traditional media. The coverage focused on his untimely death, his status as a role model and celebrity, and the growing use of steroids by amateur bodybuilders. Numerous threads devoted to Zyzz appeared on dedicated bodybuilding forums, such as *Simplyshredded* and *Bodybuilding*, whilst multiple public Facebook memorial tribute pages were created following his death. In March 2012, his brother Said released "Zyzz – the Legacy", a 19-minute tribute on YouTube, which as of November 2014 has been viewed over eight million times and has generated over 50,000 likes. There are also thousands of videos dedicated to Zyzz on YouTube, collectively viewed by millions and commented on by thousands. In this sense Zyzz is clearly not an example of an ordinary death and its subsequent digital commemoration. Nevertheless, his commemoration serves as an example of the potential for digitally dispersed and collectively shaped memory.

We compared the posts about Zyzz following his death across different platforms, including niche body-building fan sites (BodySpace, Shredded), popular social networking sites (Facebook, Youtube) and online information or discussion forums (Squidoo, ABC), using qualitative sampling and content analysis. Clearly the number of posts and sites devoted to the memory of Zyzz make it difficult to conduct a comprehensive or systematic qualitative analysis. There are certainly opportunities for quantitative “big data” approaches here; however, our aim was to explore digital commemoration through public memories, multiple actor perspectives and their interactions, sociotechnical context, and contested meanings, which a qualitative approach is well positioned to capture. We conducted a digital ethnography and engaged in qualitative content analysis, a method designed to capture the detail and context of online video and asynchronous online discussion of associated comment threads (Ackland, 2014; Horst et al., 2012). We searched, explored and navigated the multiple platforms where memories of Zyzz were shared or shaped and sorted these into three main types: niche, popular SNS, and other discussion or information forums. We then took screenshots and scraped images and comments of publicly available material from six sites: BodySpace, Shredded, Facebook, Youtube; Squidoo, and the ABC. We coded and analysed the comments and conversations within each of these sites using an inductive approach common in grounded theory to locate and compare themes in the interactions between practices, platforms and social formations of commemoration. Despite the necessary partiality of the method, an iterative analysis of the themes within the data proceeded until an assessment of saturation was reached. Themes included the forms of expression, the topics of conversation, and the modes of address within the digital networks that come to shape and re-shape the collective memory of Zyzz.

Findings: The collective commemoration and distributed memory of Zyzz

The proliferation of posts and comments that inscribed what was remembered and forgotten about Zyzz, and contested his past and future significance, were often idiosyncratic, always incomplete, subject to deletion and revision, and thus challenging for researchers to capture, comprehend or analyse. Nevertheless, certain themes emerged around the competing forms of expression, topics of conversation and modes of address, through a close reading across different platforms.

Response to the death of Zyzz on niche body building forums

Zyzz had been a regular contributor to bodybuilding sites such as *SimplyShredded.com* and *Bodybuilding.com*. Both of these sites provide information on different aspects of bodybuilding and fitness culture, from news articles, training advice, supplement and nutritional information and so on. They feature advertising for food supplements and accessories for fitness training, as well as options for posting user generated content, such as images and views on discussion forums. Within the *Bodybuilding.com* website is a social networking site (SNS) called *BodySpace*, on which Zyzz had an active profile. Like other SNS, *BodySpace* allows people within the bodybuilding culture to create a profile page to publicly present themselves, establish a network of connections, and exchange messages. In addition, the site has features that allow users to post and monitor weight training goals and performance statistics, to share images on a photo galley or links to videos on YouTube. Ploderer et al (2010) cite *BodySpace* as an example of a “passion-centric” social network site, which facilitates self-presentation, peer recognition and mutual appreciation for amateur bodybuilders. Following Zyzz’s death, the comments posted on discussion forums within these sites were mostly tributes, expressing a sense of loss or admiration or personal inspiration:

R.I.P to fallen brah (Bodybuilding.com)

i love zyzz, ill start training from now on! R.I.P (Simplyshredded.com)

everyday im lazy I come visit this page, I N S P I R A T I O N (Simplyshredded.com)

Moreover, posts on these sites were often written in the lexicon of the amateur bodybuilding subculture, expressing a sense of community and solidarity, but also employing a grammar to implicitly restrict access or exclude participation from others outside:

Forever mirin in your name brah! reps in peace (Simplyshredded.com)

Zyzz got me on the right path to lose weight, get lean and look AESTHETIC AS FUARRKKKKKKKK. Completely changed the way I view life and opened up a new and exciting chapter for me. My new goal in life is not to become a legend, but a true inspiration, just like zyzz (Simplyshredded.com)

To get “aesthetic” is to achieve a shredded muscular body, and “mirin” or “mire” is to admire another’s physique and achievements. This lexicon also included oblique references to riding a cycle of anabolic steroids (“bicycles”), and blurred with more general internet slang in the moderation of the tribute threads on the discussion forums:

Official R.I.P Zyzz Memorial thread. be respectful (SRS) (Bodybuilding.com)

I was never a fanboy and i hated the zyzz nut huggers but there is no denying you were an inspiration. you will be missed brah (srs) (Bodybuilding.com)

everyone fell free to post pics and vids of him to memorialize him...im sure he would have wanted that. anyone disrespecting the srs tag or trolling will be negged(srs) (Bodybuilding.com)

The threads were also premised with a call to be treated seriously (“SRS”) and not disrespectful, with a warning that any stranger who trolled the site and posted offensive comments would get “negged” (rejected or denied access by moderators). The use of slang, warnings and moderation highlight the way commemorative conduct is governed, and thus ostensibly open and participatory platforms are limited to particular forms, expressions or subjects of remembrance based around a culture of shared interests and activities such as bodybuilding.

Response to the death of Zyzz on participatory platforms Facebook and YouTube

In 2009 Facebook enacted a number of protocols to deal with posthumous profiles as a consequence of a series of events, including the death of a Facebook employee in 2005, the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007, and the introduction of functions that generated “suggestions” to “reconnect” with friends (including dead ones). Facebook created two options: remove the account or memorialize the account. A memorialized account is converted from an existing user profile, and limits some of the functions associated with it; it is hidden from public view and only accessible by people who were existing friends before becoming memorialized who can continue to post comments and interact. However, there is a third option available within the architecture, which is to create a memorial page. Unlike a memorialized account, which repurposes an existing profile, a memorial page is created after the person has died. Unlike the private status of most memorialized accounts, a memorial page is usually open to the public for participation (Kern et al 2013; Karppi 2013). By highlighting the embedded role of dead users within the architecture of the platform, Karppi (2013) extends the observation that life is now inseparable from and lived within media (Deuze 2012) to the conditions of death within digital networks. In doing so, he shifts our attention from the perspective of the user, which largely subordinates the dead to processes of online grieving, and towards the medium itself. Thinking about the media technology rather than the participation of the user demands a platform sensitive and material approach to understanding how the dead are shaped and endure within network culture (Gibbs et al. 2014). In the case of Zyzz, whilst his pre-existing Facebook profile remained publicly inaccessible, eight separate public Facebook memorial tribute pages were created following his death. This multitude of public data can be tracked, mined, aggregated and sold by Facebook (Karppi 2013), but also searched, duplicated, shared and amended by publics with an interest in Zyzz.

On the so-called *official Zyzz RIP Facebook* memorial page, we see public outpourings of loss and grief that in some ways resemble the tributes, admiration and personal inspiration on the bodybuilding forums. Yet, as a more publicly visible and shared space than bodybuilding forums, many of the Facebook tributes appear to be from a broader audience of fans, in addition to known

peers within the bodybuilding community, which is reflected in the persistent but less pronounced use of the lexicon of the amateur bodybuilding subculture:

Even though Aziz has passed away, the Zyzz legacy still lives on (“official” Zyzz RIP Facebook)

RIP zyzz he died for our gains we shall honor zyzz by becoming aesthetics as fuck (“official” Zyzz RIP Facebook)

I will shred 4life thanks to zyzz (“official” Zyzz RIP Facebook)

Going to go smash my legs today in the gym in honor of ZYZZ! (“official” Zyzz RIP Facebook)

The fan culture on the Facebook memorial is further revealed through the visual tributes, such as tattoos and drawings, dedicated to Zyzz and his muscular physique (Figure 1).

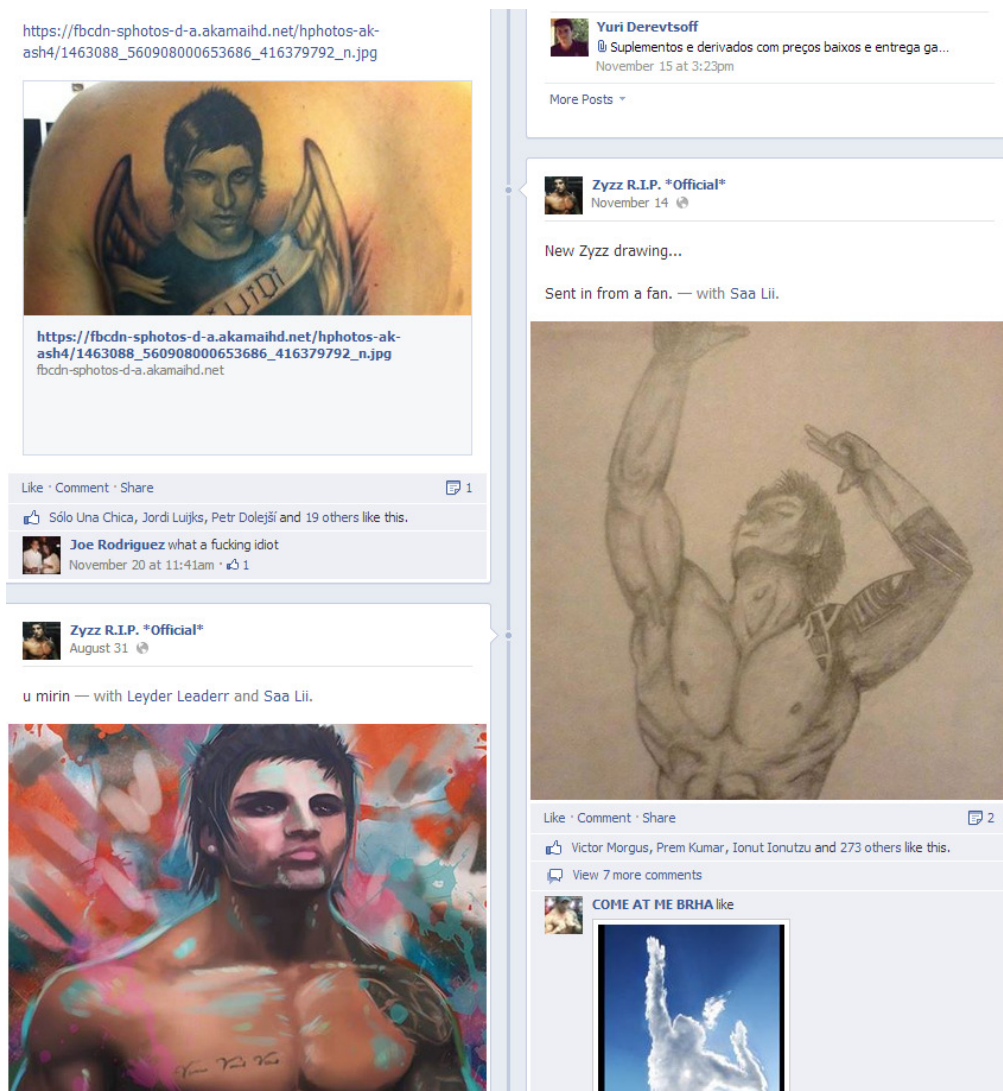


Figure 1: Screenshot of Zyzz RIP Facebook memorial page

There is a clearly diverse mix of publics and diverse forms of participation on Facebook, and this spreads from relatives and fans, to tourists and trolls. We see intimate and direct forms of commemoration juxtaposed, as in a post from Zyzz's brother Said below, as well as aggressive and provocative posts from strangers, particularly in reference to accusations of steroid abuse:

Come back to me baby brother, I dont think you know just how much I love you. I've always looked out for you all your life and protected you...I'm soo sorry I coulnt be there and save you this time. My heart is broken and I can't stop crying. You weren't just my brother, you were my best mate too. Love you with all my heart and soul and will never forget you. Rip Aziz Sergejevich Shavershian -Said Sergejevich (Brother of Zyzz)

its not sad! what would you think was going to happen when taking too much roids and drugs ? think the heart wont stop sometime ! feel sorry for the family ! may he rest in roids and coke as he will be remebered ! ("official" Zyzz RIP Facebook)

Yet, when comments and conduct are deemed inappropriate, they are quickly policed through a collective and participatory mode of governance from other contributors within the site:

shut up...dont be disrespectfull to a person that was an insperation to every one ("official" Zyzz RIP Facebook)

Your a selfish cold hearted person. Regardless of what he did or what people thought, its not for you to say or judge! Keep your opinion to yourself. Its sad over the fact he was young to pass away. If you read the recent news update he also had a heart defect! No one is perfect! ("official" Zyzz RIP Facebook)

Memories of the dead on public Facebook memorials clearly conflict, but in aggregate appear to be revised through consensus and contestation within the site, rather than through exclusive modes of cultural expression, or a sense of tight-knit community that are prevalent on niche sites such as those dedicated to bodybuilding.

In contrast, comments on a YouTube memorial video, *Zyzz – The Legacy*, posted by Zyzz's brother, Said, reveals how the volume and diversity of comments challenges the possibility of maintaining any kind of coherent narrative or collective memory. A number of affordances of the platform are helping to shape this messy proliferation of posts, and contradiction in memories constructing Zyzz. YouTube is a spectacularly popular video-sharing platform, and uploading to YouTube is a decision to make a video publicly accessible, allowing anybody to view and contribute comments on the video. These visual and participatory qualities of YouTube have ensured that the platform has generated a larger and more diverse public, and a greater quantity and scope of contributions in shaping the collective memory of Zyzz. The Legacy video has been viewed over seven million times and generated over 30,000 comments, 45,000 likes (and 4,000 dislikes), and comments continue to be posted on a regular basis.

What emerges in the bustle of YouTube memorial comments repeats what we see across other platforms discussed, such as tribute, loss, admiration, fandom, and so on. And like the Facebook

memorial we see a diverse and conflicting audience. But, what is novel to this platform is the breadth and intensity of conflict around the inscription of Zyzz's public memory, and the manner in which any collective coherence becomes unmanageable. The many posts that argue for respect for the dead in general and Zyzz in particular, and inscribe a memory of Zyzz as a personal inspiration and role model, are drowned out by the cacophony of comments that have different patterns of remembering and forgetting, patterns that seek to de-value the celebratory discourse and cultural significance of Zyzz through references that remember his decadent lifestyle and use of steroids:

fuck this spastic (Zyzz – The Legacy, YouTube)

Heart defect noob (Zyzz – The Legacy, YouTube)

All faggots who do roids should die. Get big like a real man you pussy. I'm gonna go stomp on your grave (Zyzz – The Legacy, YouTube)

thank you zyzz for dieing. now we have one less steroid junkie on this earth and one less person to pass abysmal genes (mental and physical genes) to future offspring. RIP where you belong (Zyzz – The Legacy, YouTube)

Through these inscriptions the fans' efforts to construct a uniformly clean image and positive memory of Zyzz are undermined, and by extension, his status as a role model for young men is challenged:

this zyzz fanaticism is sick. you use streroids in day and drugs in the night. bodybuilding and strength training was developed to make you healthy not sick (Zyzz – The Legacy, YouTube)

On the start of this video...what drug is he on (aside from steroids)...i believe cocaine...aggressive talk without much sense, some weird face articulation...is this the guy that today's youth looks up to?? Ridiculous (Zyzz – The Legacy, YouTube)

Thus, whilst the memory of the dead may be shaped within some platforms to create a coherent narrative, there remains a partiality that is potentially challenged by the proliferation, dispersal and disaggregation of digital memories across distributed networks.

Remembering Zyzz on other social media platforms

The distributed data and collective memory of the dead are also available for repurposing in different contexts and media platforms. As Karppi (2013) notes, archives of and interactions with the dead on Facebook continue to offer value to the platform in ways that exceed their social memory to mourners. Yet, the broader ecologies of media in which data and memories of the dead now spread across distributed networks also offers further opportunities for extracting value, whether economic or social.

A page dedicated to Zyzz on Squidoo attempts to create economic value by digitally harnessing memories of the dead. Squidoo is a platform that allows users to create pages, known as lenses, dedicated to the sharing of information on particular topics. Much like a website or blog, but

contained within a single platform, Squidoo offers user-friendly tools to create subject-specific content within a page. The purpose of a lens is to generate traffic, and through integrated advertising generate clicks and revenue. Squidoo charges 50 percent commission on any page profits, of which 5 percent is donated to charity. Users who create lenses (known as Lensmasters) can also choose to donate their 50 percent portion of revenue to charity, and hence the platform is advertised as a community-based website. Nevertheless, Lensmasters can also choose to keep their profits, and so as a money making venture requires lens that will attract high volumes of traffic.

A lensmaster known as Epic_Noob has created a lens on Squidoo dedicated to Zyzz. The lens, titled *Zyzz RIP - The "YOU MIRIN" Memorial Gallery *UPDATED WITH ALL PICTURES EVER**, is a picture gallery that has aggregated images of Zyzz from across the web to attract fans, and whose purpose is described as "motivating all you skinnyfat dudes to attain killer aesthetics." Nevertheless, the page is also dedicated to monetizing the memory of Zyzz, which is facilitated through built-in links to purchase protein supplements, and whose purpose is questioned by at least one comment:

if you're actually here for motivation and you're looking for the best supplement to assist you on your journey to becoming Zyzz-mode, I've placed a link below to the best deal on 100 whey protein by Optimum Nutrition. I've found it to be the best and most cost-effective supplement online and it really can help you with those post workout aches and pains, so if you want that added energy and excitement in your lifting, check it out (Squidoo)

bahahaha.... after all those photos "buy whey protein". If this website was accurate it would say "buy anabolic steroids" (Squidoo)

In contrast to such explicit endeavours to harness the economic value of Zyzz's distributed data, social media has also been deployed to leverage the collective memory of Zyzz for a wider social project debating the growing culture and impacts of amateur steroid use on male health and notions of masculinity. Zyzz was used as an extreme example of the potential consequences of steroid use and abuse within male body culture on a program broadcast on radio and subsequently posted online along with a discussion forum. The program, *Boys and the Buff Culture* by reporter Brendan King, was aired on Radio National, an Australian-wide non-commercial radio network dedicated to current affairs and social programming, which is run by the public broadcaster, the ABC.

On the online discussion forum accompanying the posting of the broadcast, comments and debate about Zyzz shifted from *how* he was posthumously remembered to *what* the prospective significance of his death represents:

What a good documentary. The drift of steroid use from sports to social arenas (dance clubs, music festivals, the street), as discussed in the program, is really a worrying trend. Programs that make us aware of this trend, and do so in such a realistic, authentic way, can only be applauded. Essential listening for all young people, males and females.

This is very true, Sydney and now Australia have serious issues with their body image, it is a obsession that needs to stop. I know so many of my friends who are on roids, I had to stop my cousin from taking them and one of my mates. Every single male in Aus wants to look like

this, with the tatoos and all, its stupid and makes life difficult for everyone, lol, I have to start working out because I feel intimidated because every single Sydney male under the age of forty is buff, WTF is going on people?

Discussion: Media, death and memory

Media have long been associated with death and memory, with media technologies operating as both a means of communicating news of a death *and* as a means of memorializing the deceased (Jones 2004; Carroll and Landry 2010). The material and symbolic mediation of remembrance has grown to include more than the narratives of traditional epitaphs, eulogies, wakes and funerals, (all of which go back millennia). It has extended beyond centuries old obituaries printed and circulated in newspapers to embrace today's social media, the latest phase in this process of remediating memories of the dead (van Dijck 2013; Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading 2009). In contrast to these long established practices, commemoration online offers an extensive range of media for constructing narratives of the dead and platforms to collaboratively store, and circulate memories. Therefore, a variety of distributed spaces emerge as meeting places for publics to commemorate the life and death of an individual.

Yet, the relationship between memory and media is not straightforward. Stretching back to ancient Greece, media have either been positioned as a prosthesis to memory, faithfully storing content for later retrieval, or alternatively as a threat to human capacities for remembering. Materialist approaches in media theory have proposed that media technologies are historically intertwined with and constitutive of human memory. French anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan, for example, conceived the evolution of the human as a technical exteriorization of memory in media:

The whole of our evolution has been oriented toward placing outside ourselves what in the rest of the animal world is achieved inside by species adaptation (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993: 236)

This understanding is helpful for encouraging us to think about the ways media technologies and human memory are intertwined, not simply for individual remembrance but for the development of a collective, social memory. German media theorist Hartmut Winkler identifies such collective relations by tracing the technological connections between written and oral cultures (Winkler 2002). He notes that at first glance writing and orality appear to produce two distinct forms for establishing cultural memory – one invested in the durability of a material medium, the other in the repetition of ritual practice. Yet he goes on to show how the material persistence of written media initiates encounters, such as reading, that 'dissolve' into daily practices. In turn, the repetition of communication in oral traditions is 'condensed' in the material storage device of human memory. Thus, different technologies mediate memory through specific processes encompassing both material affordances or 'inscriptions' and social practices or 'rescriptions' to shape media cultures (Winkler 2002). And this raises questions about how specific technologies mediate memory, and not just for the living but also for the dead. How are memories of the dead are collectively assembled, shared and stored?

Digitalization may increase our opportunities for accessing, recording and sharing memories through affordances of persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability. Yet, at the same time, the material and networked qualities of digital media also *challenge* these very affordances. The

distributed authorship, audience and platforms that constitute collective memories of the dead online are subject to a tension between coherence and dispersal. Collective memory is not simply about representation. The material architecture of platforms (see Karppi 2013) is also implicated in the formation and contestation of collective memories, continually modulated and defined by specific networks:

They become points where memories are activated and in some cases fabricated. As platforms for online grieving the dead become nodes that open up towards other nodes and other agencies (14)

In the case of Zyzz, memories of his life and death were constructed and consumed by different (though overlapping) publics, and through this process Zyzz multiplies. Zyzz is remembered on Facebook fan tribute sites as an inspiration to a tight-knit subculture and its defining normative values, and as a vulnerable and imperfect person who died far too young. On YouTube his life and death is represented in terms of decadence, egotism, and uncontrolled drug taking, whilst on other discussion forums his memory serves as an opportunity to sell protein products or to warn other young men about the dangers of steroids. These conflicting memories are each collaboratively constructed and shared, blurring the distinction between personal and public, individual and collective (Hoskins 2009; van Dijk 2013). Moreover, at stake in these competing memories are efforts to secure how the past significance and the future value of his memory are socially consumed – is he a folk hero who inspires imitation or is his death read as a cautionary tale that serves as a warning? The democratizing possibilities for publishing and recording are challenged by the ‘chaotic and uncontrolled’ scale of publics and agendas (Arthur 2009), and by the conflicting norms and accounts that arise in these circumstances.

Conclusion

As the case study of Zyzz reveals, digital networks imply that content persists, and while memories are ostensibly preserved online, they are subject to forms of forgetting, alongside human memory, through the limits and failures of technology. In addition, the content that represents memory of a life and a death is also mobile and easily dispersed and fragmented through different networks and publics. Content can be easily duplicated and shared, yet also revised and repurposed in ways that make it messy and uncontrolled. Zyzz used representations of his body and the life that produced it to serve his own purposes, but these representations have now been repurposed, and have been used to serve other agendas – in particular, Facebook’s commercial purposes (through his memorial sites), his intimates’ bonding and boundary-guarding purposes (through his ongoing presence on bodybuilding sites), and his critics’ anti-drug purposes (through criticising his YouTube presence as a warning to others).

What is missing in current scholarship on memorials is an understanding of the multiple ontologies of the deceased, how memories are collectively shaped and dynamic, and how they are re-shaped in different online spaces and ecologies of interaction in contested efforts to secure particular social remembrance of the past and/or prospective significance for future legacy. Both the distributed data and the collective memory of the dead are subject to opportunities of coherence, whether economic or social, within specific platforms; yet at the same time have the potential to proliferate and

disperse in ways that may conflict or disaggregate across distributed networks – having different relational ontologies and thus forms of value in different contexts.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by funding from the Australian Research Council (DP140101871).

References

- Ackland, R. (2013) *Web Social Science: Concepts, Data and Tools for Social Scientists in the Digital Age*. SAGE Publications, London.
- Anderson, P. (2007) What is Web 2.0? Ideas, Technologies and Implications for Education. *JISC Technology and Standards Watch*, 1-64.
- Arthur, P.L. (2009) Saving Lives: Digital Biography and Life Writing, in Garde-Hansen, J, Hoskins, A., and Reading, A. (eds). *Save As....Digital Memories*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- boyd, d. and Ellison, N. (2007) Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13(1): 210-230.
- Brubaker, J.R. and Hayes, G. R. (2011). 'We will never forget you [online]': An empirical investigation of post-mortem MySpace comments. In *Proceedings of Computer Supported Cooperative Work CSCW 2011*: 123-132.
- Carroll, E. (2014). *The Digital Beyond*. <http://www.thedigitalbeyond.com/>.
- Carroll, B., and Landry, K. (2010) Logging On and Letting Out: Using Online Social Networks to Grieve and to Mourn, *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(5): 309-315.
- Deuze, M. (2012) *Media Life*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Facebook. (2014) What happens when a deceased person's account is memorialized?. *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/help/103897939701143>
- Fletcher, D. (2009) What happens to your Facebook after you die? *Time Magazine*, 28 October, 2009.
- Garde-Hansen, J. (2011). *Media and Memory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Garde-Hansen, J, Hoskins, A., and Reading, A. (eds.) (2009). *Save As....Digital Memories*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gibbs, M, Meese, J., Arnold, M., Nansen, B., and Carter, M. (2014). #Funeral and Instagram: Death, Social Media and Platform Vernacular. *Information Communication and Society*. Advanced online publication. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2014.987152
- Gibbs, M., Mori, J., Arnold, M. and Kohn, T. (2012). Tombstones, Uncanny Monuments and Epic Quests: Memorials in World of Warcraft, *Game Studies*, 12(1), http://gamestudies.org/1201/articles/gibbs_martin.
- Hjorth, L. and M. Arnold (2013) *Online@AsiaPacific: Mobile, Social and Locative in the Asia-Pacific region*. Routledge.
- Hoskins, A. (2009) The Mediatization of Memory, in Garde-Hansen, J, Hoskins, A., and Reading, A. (eds.). *Save As....Digital Memories*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Horst, H, Hjorth, L, and Tacchi, J. (2012) Rethinking ethnography: An introduction. *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy* 145.

- Hutchings, T. (2012). Wiring Death: Dying, Grieving and Remembering on the Internet. In, Davies, D. and Park, C. (eds.) *Emotion, Identity and Death: Mortality Across Disciplines*. Ashgate Publishing; Farnham, 43-58.
- Jones, S. (2004) 404 not found: The Internet and the afterlife. *Omega, Journal of Death & Dying*, 48(1): 83-88.
- Karppi, T. (2013) Death proof: on the biopolitics and Noopolitics of memorializing dead Facebook users. *Culture Machine*, 14.
- Kern, R., Abbe, E. F., and Gil-Egui, G. (2013) R.I.P.: Remain in perpetuity. Facebook memorial pages, *Telematics and Informatics* 30: 2-10.
- Kohn, T., Gibbs, M., Arnold, M., and Nansen, B. (2012) Facebook and the Other: Administering to and Caring for the Dead Online, in Hage, G. (ed.). *Responsibility*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 128-141.
- Leroi-Gourhan, A. (1993) *Gesture and Speech*. Trans. A. Bostock Berger. MIT Press; Cambridge.
- Marwick, A, and Ellison, N.B. (2012) 'There Isn't Wifi in Heaven!' Negotiating Visibility on Facebook Memorial Pages, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 56(3): 378-400.
- Neiger, M., Meyers, O., and Zandberg, E. (Eds.) (2011) *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005) What Is Web 2.0. Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software, <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>,
- Phillips, W. (2011) LOLing at Tragedy: Facebook Trolls, Memorial Pages and Resistance to Grief Online, *First Monday* 16(12).
- Ploderer, B., Howard, S., and Thomas, P. (2010) Collaboration on Social Network Sites: Amateurs, Professional and Celebrities, *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)* 19(5): 419-455.
- Roberts, P. (2004). The living and the dead: Community in the virtual cemetery. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 49(1): 57-76.
- Roberts, P., and Vidal, L. A. (2000) Perpetual Care in Cyberspace: A Portrait of Memorials on the Web. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 40(4): 521-545.
- Robinson, G., and Whyte, S. (2011) 'Shattered': body of bodybuilder 'Zyzz' heading home. Sydney Morning Herald, August 11, 2011.
- van Dijck, J. (2007) *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford: Stanford UP.
- Veale, K. (2004) Online Memorialisation: The Web as A Collective Memorial Landscape For Remembering The Dead, *Fibreculture* 3.
- Williams, A.L. and Merten, M.J. (2009) Adolescents Online Social Networking Following the Death of a Peer, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24(1): 67-90.
- Winkler, H. (2002) Discourses, Schemata, Technology, Monuments: Outline for a Theory of Cultural Continuity. *Configurations* 10(1): 91-109.



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Nansen, B; ARNOLD, M; Gibbs, M; Kohn, T; Meese, J

Title:

Remembering Zyzz - Distributed Memories on Distributed Networks

Date:

2015

Citation:

Nansen, B., ARNOLD, M., Gibbs, M., Kohn, T. & Meese, J. (2015). Remembering Zyzz - Distributed Memories on Distributed Networks. Hajek, A (Ed.). Lohmeier, C (Ed.). Pentzold, C (Ed.). Memory in a Mediated World: remembrance and reconstruction, Memory in a Mediated World: Remembrance and Reconstruction, (1), pp.261-280. Palgrave Macmillan.

Persistent Link:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/122036>

File Description:

Submitted version