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## ABSTRACT

Conversations have an afterlife. But what if the afterlife could have conversations? In that metaphorical space, the author explores how technology and design will engender new communicative rituals and tools of mourning as the semiotics of traditional gravescapes begin to diffuse. This pivot will occur in tandem with the rise of alternative forms of body disposition and growing environmental stewardship in response to increased urbanization and notions of intergenerational equity. Digital space, the postmodern hearth of an ever individualized and fractured society, will enable a plurality of mourning as the idea of legacy is deconstructed within the framework of transhumanism and the construction of the self. This paper will investigate the multidisciplinary constellation of narrative, digital technology, bereavement studies, thanatology, post-humanism, gifting, and sustainability in order to support my proposal for the design white space surrounding end-of-life care. The final design, an extension of the Death Positive movement, is called LifeWrite; however, its implementation transcends the physical endpoint of death. LifeWrite is endowed with multiple life course applications. The final design is also intended as a therapeutic tool for those persons or families navigating forms of psychosocial death, i.e. various dementias, certain mental illnesses, or traumatic brain injuries.

THE RAPTURE OF BEING ALIVE: MOURNING, NARRATIVE, AND  
COMMUNICATIVE RITUAL IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by

Marjorie Drinan

B.A., Kent State University, 2005

Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Collaborative Design

Syracuse University

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*For my mother's memory*

*“When I die, I’m leaving my body to science fiction.”*

—Stephen Wright

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## Introduction

Conversations have an afterlife. Our words and actions and the ripples of their meaning, whether intended or not, imbue our interactions with the residue of feelings—emotions that can last a lifetime and beyond. Communication, whether visual or spoken, makes manifest the interiority of a person or subverts it. Communication creates social worlds, master narratives, and personal identities. It is powerful. It is rich. Its absence is glaring. When a person dies, her ability to physically communicate ceases. However, the residue of feelings, of things said and unsaid, lingers. The deceased's material possessions, saturated in habit and evocative of memories for the living, remain. And increasingly, the digital presence of the departed lives on. Using the fulcrum of metaphor this paper asks: "What if the afterlife could have conversations?"

Within that space, I will explore how technology can engender new communicative rituals as well as new timelines and tools of mourning as the semiotics of traditional gravescapes begin to diffuse. This pivot will occur in tandem with the rise of alternative forms of body disposition and growing environmental stewardship in response to increased urbanization and movement towards intergenerational equity. Digital space, the postmodern hearth of an ever individualized and fractured society, will expand existing modalities mourning as the idea of legacy is deconstructed within the framework of transhumanism.

What if a postmortem dialogue with the living were possible? *Alas, poor Yorick*, conversations with the dead are not a new phenomenon. "Within many belief systems the landscapes and buildings of the dead act as confessional spaces, places in which the living can communicate with those who have gone before" (Worpole 159). For as much as the living reach out to the dead, how often do the dead reach out to the living beyond

the threshold of ghost stories? What if the dead were somehow performing the communication? What if that exchange aided mourning by wresting some of the temporal aspects of current Western burial practices from the outsourced hands of regulatory entities and back into the hands of the dying, the dead, and their families?

I will examine design outcomes based on those questions using a postmodernist lens to assess shifts in death and dying, ritualization and mourning. This paper will explore a multidisciplinary constellation of communicative and narrative possibilities, digital technologies, thanatology, transhumanism, gifting, and sustainability to bolster my design proposals for the white space of death and dying.

In a world where requests to be buried with a fully charged mobile phone are on the rise should one wake up after being interred, the conjugation of death and digital technology is evidencing itself (King 3). The fusion of death and technology in service of immortality is an old one: recall the rudimentary implements of Egyptian embalming, an early technology ([www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu)). In the West, the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the Civil War initiated standardization, speed, sanitization, and efficacy when responding to the corporeal aspects of death. This bled over into mourning as the process was shortened, regulated, and managed (Gilpin Faust 3-38).

The medievalist Phillipe Ariés, author of seminal surveys on death, describes the chronology of how Western societies' attitudes have changed over time. He describes the Middle Ages' performance of the "tame death", one in which "...the simplicity with which the rituals of dying were accepted and carried out—in a ceremonial manner, yes, but with no theatrics, with no great show of emotion" (12-13). He goes on to describe the familiarity with death at this time as a form of the acceptance of the order of nature. "In

death man encountered one of the great laws of the species, and he had no thought of escaping it or glorifying it” (28). The attitude of acceptance morphed over time to view death as something to be pathologized, managed, and under experienced. During the Middle Ages the concept of the *Ars Moriendi*, or the art of dying, sprang up across Europe. The *Ars Moriendi*, a direct reaction to the mass casualties of the Plague, prescribed the best ways to die a “Good Death” (Duclow). The concept of the good death is now common in hospice and palliative circles and has come to mean a death with dignity, which can include pain management, preparation for death coupled with reflection, feelings of completion, and peace (Callahan-Lesher). Throughout all of the permutated concepts of the “Good Death”, management with an eye towards resolution seems to be a theme.

It is hard to resolve something, however, that ostensibly lacks visibility in Western cultures. “It seems the modern attitude toward death, that is to say the interdiction of death in order to preserve happiness, was born in the United States around the beginning of the twentieth century” (Ariés 94). A component of preserving happiness and propagating the “interdiction of death” is *not* talking about it, reducing its visibility, and attempting closure, which perhaps never comes, as I will highlight later in this paper. “Death is often called the ‘last taboo’, but far from being a prohibited subject, it is actually one of our greatest obsessions” (King 3). It is perhaps an obsession in the common—but not completely representative—desire to avoid it.

### Gravescapes and Mourning

The current visual rhetoric of the gravescape in the United States is that of the lawn cemetery, the commercialized rolling plain of grave markers that occupies zoning away

from city centers. The pathway to the lawn cemetery is one that originated in the churchyards of Europe and the United States. Churches were a centralized and grounding presence of daily life in communities. “From the beginning of colonization until after the turn of the nineteenth century, mainstream graveyards routinely were located at the community’s center, typically adjoined community church grounds, and uniformly presented visitors with a singular rhetorical and cultural imperative: remember death...” (Morris 205). The braiding of religion and community provided the context for the churchyard cemetery to act as classical *memento mori*. The *Death Dictionary* defines the term *memento mori* as “A reminder or symbol of death, esp. a skull [lit., remember that you must die]” (Quigley 104). “The cultural worldview expressed by the *memento mori* to its viewer is that life is fragile.” (Church 185). The living were reminded of their mortality as they interacted with the cemetery space, passing by and through its somatic topography while performing their routines. “To walk past a churchyard or cemetery, as so many people do in the course of their daily lives, is a constant reminder of those gone before, a community of the dead to which each of us will one day belong” (Warpole 448). The “community of the dead” created by cemeteries highlights an organizing principle of mourning: the creation of social worlds and communities of mourning for the living.

The contemporary bereavement theory of “continuing bonds” exemplifies how mourners continue to maintain and to initiate bonds with the deceased. There is a “...newfound recognition of the ways in which bereaved people may work to keep the dead socially alive. These may include displaying photographs, talking about the dead, visiting mediums or spiritualists, and celebrating or acknowledging anniversaries such as birthdays” (Howarth 27). Old models of grief conclude that grief can become

pathological if a state of detachment from the deceased is not reached. “These theories have reified independence and, in doing so, have required bereaved people to detach from relationships with the dead in order to reassert their autonomy. This detachment is both physical (and unavoidable) and mental” (Howarth 24). The theory of continuing bonds could thus be described as promoting interdependence and social bonds. It also provides a way for mourners to harness the abstractions of death and turn them into something more concrete and useful for the bereavement process.

Continuing bonds theory is a more descriptive form of grieving, and it sits in contrast to the prescriptive concept of closure. “So, closure is not some natural emotional state that we can simply reach. Rather, it’s a constructed concept, a cultural frame (how we translate our cultural and social experiences into explanations) for how we should respond to loss” (Berns 49). The way each person responds to loss is plotted on a continuum of ebbs and flows, not actualized by some mythological, manufactured endpoint that may never come. The idea of closure is one often leveraged by funeral homes as an antidote to declining profits. “Closure has become a neatly packaged concept used to sell services within the death care industry. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, trends, like a rise in cremations, increasingly challenge funeral directors’ profits” (Berns 50). The potentially false promise of closure mimics the artificiality of a rouged corpse.

Concurrent with the Industrial Revolution and the American Civil War, whose mass casualties along with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln caused a paradigm shift in the collective American consciousness, the vernaculars of cemetery and burial shifted from the churchyard cemetery to the landscape architecture concept of the rural cemetery, also known as the garden cemetery (Eveleth). “Originating in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the

garden romance display, in contrast [to the churchyard display], portrayed death to be inspirational and beautiful, as much a natural part of life as breathing” (Church 185). These rural cemeteries were park-like spaces that emphasized community, nature, and art. The rural cemetery space invited the living into its expanses as an act of communion with the finitude of death and the transient beauty of nature; therefore, these spaces portray the transience of life. The rural cemetery fulfilled a “...yearning for community among the living, thereby bringing mourners together to be unified with each other and with nature. As such, they would view nature and appreciate its inherent unity even while being faced by the disunity and chaos of death” (Church 185). The rise of garden cemetery was contrapuntal to the spread of urbanization and expanding industrial capacity. These alternative spaces served as a refuge outside of city centers. Garden cemeteries played host to picnics and Sunday strolls. The living co-mingled with the dead and nature, and the rural cemetery acted as an equalizer.

### Changing Funeral Practices, Body Disposition, and the Immaterial Self

As urbanization and industrialization increased, so did the outsourcing of funerary practices. Up until the early 1900’s most deaths occurred at home, as did funerals (Smith 30). Hospitals and care facilities became industrialized complexes as more and more Americans worked outside of the home and agrarian lifestyles disintegrated. Until this societal shift, families played a crucial role in ushering a loved one out of life and into death. Death was a visible, tangible, and natural component of ordinary life. That visibility has been largely subverted as death and the practices surrounding it became extraordinary, medicalized, legislated, and commercialized. “Confronted with expanding cities, rising tides of immigration and migration from rural areas to suburbs,

industrialization, labor strife, and all other problems that summed up their modern industrial society, Americans hoped to reorder and unify it by applying business techniques to many aspects of it” (Sloane 128). The reordering and unification of death as a business is described below:

Reliance on business strongly influenced the development of the cemetery.

Church and government officials were less and less involved with the burial process. Private businesses directed the funerals and buried the dead. In burying the dead, they did a public service, but for a profit. The cemetery, as well as other aspects of the burial process, became an entrepreneurial enterprise. The success of private businesses in selling lots, cutting costs, and providing a wide variety of services led more conservative cemeteries to change their practices. (Sloane 128)

And thus funerary practices and landscapes became part of “the funeral transaction” according to Jessica Mitford, author of the seminal exposé on the American funeral industry called *The American Way of Death* (20).

Mitford establishes herself as a crusader for cremation as she issues her polemic against the funeral service industry. The reduction of the corpse to ashes can be seen an act of noncooperation with the industry itself, depriving funeral directors of a body from which to upsell services, goods, and accouterments.

The messaging of the funeral industry relies on framing the corpse in opposition to its natural biology and ordered breakdown. “Embalming is not, as funeral directors habitually claim, a legal requirement...” (Mitford 44). Many people, unaware of regulation and policy, unwillingly buy into these prevailing notions of body disposition, a notion scrubbed of its natural properties and injected with artifice, both in the treatment



of the body and of resulting performances of grief. There is danger in the pretense of the directed funeral, as Farrell states below:

The paraphernalia of the American way of death keep such people at one remove from their own feelings. When they want to focus their mind and emotions on the loss in their lives, they find only a dead social convention designed to constrain and contain grief. This social convention developed historically, but it continues today, as Americans delegate control of death and the funerals to specialized funeral personnel. Consequently, funerals are custom-made only in the same sense that automobiles are, and the price we pay for paying our last respects in the American way of death is the price of our personality, which we have purposefully withheld from the funeral. By our passive role in directing our funerals, we have transformed an important rite of personal passage into an impersonal rite of impassivity. (Farrell 30)

Mitford also draws attention the interloper status of funeral directors within the grief process of families and loved ones. “The sellers of funeral service have, one gathers, a preconceived stereotyped view of their customers. To them, the bereaved person who enters the funeral establishment is a bundle of guilt feelings, a snob, and a status seeker. Funeral directors feel that by steering the customer to the higher-priced caskets, they are administering the first dose of grief therapy” (Mitford 20). With the same contrarian mindset that Mitford advocates, many are choosing cremation over earthen burial, not only to avoid the cunning upselling of the funeral industry but to move towards concepts of burial that are more authentic, personalized, and environmentally concerned.

Indeed, cremation is on the rise in Western societies. According to the Cremation Association of North America, “Cremation is the new tradition” with the rate of cremation nearly doubling from 24.8% in 1999 to 46.7% in 2014. (cremationassociation.org). The move away from the unnaturally preserved bodies and gravestones that attempt to assert permanence and dominion is on the decline. Western cultures are moving towards immateriality in death that coincides with post-modern individualization and understanding corporeality itself, which could even partially explain the increase we are seeing in right to die legislation (Hamil-Luker & Smith 373-375). This new understanding of the body is described as thus:

Where once the body was understood to be the vehicle for the soul, it is now afforded central significance in the construction of the self. The loss of mainstream Christian faith has been matched by the force of individualism. In the current system, the dead body is the signifier of the loss of self and the loss of individuality—the material reality of death. As such, the dead body has a destabilizing impact. (Hallam et al. 127)

If the dead body is a signifier of the loss of the insular self as Hallam et al. suggest, it appears that cremation and alternative forms of body disposition are mirroring the breakdown of the social and cultural monoliths such as church and state, which once gave lives tent poles of meaning. Ken Warpole seconds this phenomenon in the context landscape architecture:

To a large degree what is happening to people’s attitudes to death and disposal in modern societies is simply part of a larger, seemingly ineluctable, trend towards growing individualization and personalization. The once solid public and

collective infrastructure of the town or city—its churches, cemeteries, parks, schools, hospitals, railway stations, transport systems, religious and civic rights and rituals (and processions)—is unraveling as global market forces reach further and further into public life and amenity. This has produced efficiencies and choice, but it has weakened collective identities. Nevertheless one also has to report that the great mystery of death remains, and that people still find many ways to respond to it, even if some of the traditional places and disposal rites and customs are changing. Death is not going to go away. (454-455)

In addition to cremation, some of the changing forms of body disposition alluded to by Warpole include the new processes of green cremation and promession, which, like cremation, reduce the body down to particles, furthering the immateriality of the corpse. “Green cremation is a gentle, eco-friendly alternative to flame-based cremation or casket burials. It is a quiet process that uses water and potassium hydroxide to reduce the body to its basic element of bone ash. The ashes are then returned to the family. The process was adapted for funeral home use by the Mayo Clinic in their anatomy bequest program and is now becoming available to the general public” ([greencremation.com](http://greencremation.com)).

Promession is a cutting edge form of disposition that is an “environmentally responsible method of freeze-drying human corpses, condensing an adult corpse to twenty to thirty kilograms (44-66 pounds) of fine, hygienic, odorless organic powder which serves as compost.” ([deathlab.com](http://deathlab.com)). This method “engages cryomation, wherein a body is put in a bath of liquid nitrogen and subsequently vacuum dried, making it brittle and easily reduced to fine particles. Other than the removal of water, human remains maintain their complete chemical composition—suitable for biodegradation and

absorption in the ecosystem. The process requires 130kWh of electricity, or about one third the energy consumed by cremation” (deathlab.com). In both of these processes, environmental stewardship is an impetus for the creation of alternative methods of body disposal.

*Environmental Concerns.* Earthen burial and cremation are both environmentally damaging and unsustainable. The following statistics compiled by Columbia University’s Deathlab elucidate the environmental drain of earthen burial:

Each year, cemeteries across the United States bury approximately 800,000 gallons of toxic embalming fluid, risking groundwater and soil leaching. Nearly two million caskets are purchased in the United States annually...Most caskets are buried in cemeteries three deep within concrete vaults. In aggregation, buried caskets consume over 90,000 tons of steel, 2,700 tons of copper and bronze, and over 30 million board feet of hardwoods annually. Burial vaults and vacuum sealed industrial casket bunkers which cause the body to putrefy in black isolation rather than actually “return” to the Earth, are comprised of an additional 1.6 million tons of reinforced concrete and 14,000 tons of steel annually. No matter how fortified the bunker is, eventually a fetid brew of embalmed tissue slowly leaches into the surrounding soil and groundwater. (deathlab.com)

Those are pretty grim and disturbing statistics regarding the negative environmental impact of earthen burial, all of which are seemingly avoidable. In addition to embalming chemicals leaching into the soil, the maintenance of lawn cemeteries is rife with pollution. “Cemeteries are kept verdant by regular applications of biocides. Fossil fuels are used to produce these biocides and to dig and groom graves. Cemeteries are

‘beautified’ with turf and invasive exotic species. The result is an artificial and toxic environment” (Stowe et al. 1817). Cremation, while more sustainable in its intrinsic lack of land consumption and land poisoning, poses its own air pollution and energy footprint conundrum.

In consideration of all of these environmental statistics and social shifts, a restorative pendulum is swinging back towards pre-industrial, natural burial, also referred to as green burial or woodland burial. A definition of natural burial follows:

Woodland burial...is generally held to mean burial in a biodegradable shroud or coffin in a grave excavated in a woodland setting, and allowing no permanent grave marker in metal or stone. Over time it is intended that the burial site itself reverts to, or takes on the appearance of, natural woodland, publically accessible and with none of the symbolic boundary markings and memorial objects that have characterized most burial grounds in recent and modern times. (Worpole 454)

The natural burial ground, with its emphasis on delivering the body back to the cycles of nature, disallows obvious grave markers and memorial objects as Worpole describes above. However, despite the specifications of green burial grounds, the need for memorialization persists inside of mourners. A study of memorialization at a natural burial site called East Meon in England highlights some of this need:

Bereaved people’s desires to memorialize the dead was revealed, or indeed perhaps not revealed, at East Meon in different ways. On first impressions, the majority of graves in East Meon appeared empty of memorabilia, but a closer inspection revealed a range of subtle, discrete and what [groundskeeper] Al described as ‘organic’ forms of memorialization there too. Al and

[groundskeeper] Charlie could identify memorialization, such as arrangements of twigs, leaves, pebbles on graves, or plants not typical of this woodland, which for others would go unnoticed. Indeed, interviews with bereaved people also revealed that the desire to memorialize was as strong in this site as others we visited during our study. (Clayden et al. 113)

The “organic” memorializations of the East Meon site illustrate the need for mourners to engage in some act of spatial recognition or temporal visitation of the deceased’s final resting place in the absence of normative grave markers.

### Digital Gravescapes

In conjunction with the move towards immateriality of corpse and resting place, we find ourselves ascending into the digital ether when it comes to mourning and eulogizing.

“Digital technologies create new personal and social worlds—new immersive environments in which concepts of time, space, and place are reconfigured” (Graham 65). Social media become informal mustering points for those grieving and eulogizing the loss of a loved one as well as a space for announcing death. “While the digital memorials lack the permanence of traditional gravescapes, the ongoing conversation they foster sublimates death into the process of communication” (Church 184). As traditional gravescapes begin to dissolve and morph into whatever shape they will take as corpses are increasingly transmuted to particle forms and more natural states, reminiscences themselves will become the more permanent touchstones of mourning, as explicated below:

When these sites are shifted into the digital sphere, however, that local anchoring is lost and the digital memorial is decontextualized. Though profiles created in

life by the deceased are extremely personal, as digital memorials they lack the geographic and cultural specificity that gives the material memorials their character. Perhaps because of this, the sense of community is overshadowed on Facebook by the desire of the bereaved to communicate with the dead. (Church 187)

As implied above, in the absence of material memorials, the desire of the bereaved for communication with the deceased becomes paramount in the realm of the digital forums available to those who mourn.

Dramatic schisms between the body and the self are not only marked with the finitude of death. Embodiments can include vegetative states and psychosocial death, in which disease or illness splits the body from the mind. Even the grief construct of continuing bonds honors the social identity of a person after the physical embodiment is gone. “Once the relationship between body and self-identity becomes radically destabilized...we can begin to engage with a deeper sociality that goes beyond the body. And in so doing, the privileging of biological death as an endpoint beyond which society’s members may not stray, becomes questionable” (Hallam et. al 209). The destabilization described by Hallam unfastens strict concepts of the social relationship that death creates. “It is the confinement of our gaze to the body alone which produces forms of binaristic thinking within which ‘life’ and ‘death’, as biologically based categories, come to stand in clear and oppositional relationship to one another. Once we have moved beyond the body, we are freed up to take a more far reaching and encompassing view of human sociality” (Hallam et al. 210). Moving beyond the body

seems increasingly possible as we transition to the post-industrial era of technology, described below:

Over the past half-century developments in genetic, biomedical, cybernetic and digital technologies in the West have intensified interest in the effects of technologies the effect of technological change on notions of where the boundaries lie between humans, animals, and machines. New reproductive technologies, cloning, and genetic modification promise to engender a future in which the boundaries between humanity, technology, and nature will be come ever more malleable (Graham 65).

The boundaries between the subjective embodiment and body as object to be modified, as evidenced above by such example as genetic modification and cloning, are ever porous.

The school of thought called transhumanism, or posthumanism, posits a brand of futurism in which humans will be able to overcome their physical limitations and biological frailties. “It promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology. Attention is given to both present technologies, like genetic engineering and information technology, and anticipated future ones, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence” (nickbostrom.com). Seemingly, there are two schools of transhumanism. Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom, a standards bearer of the movement and architect of transhumanist values, proposes the radical post-human. Think cyborgs, intelligent immortals constructed using genetic engineering and nanotechnology. A more moderate example of the transhuman project aims to “...use technology to enhance human characteristics—for example beauty,



lifespan, and resistance to disease. In this less extreme project, there is no necessary aspiration to shed human nature or human genetic constitution, just to augment it with technology where possible and where desired by the person” (McNamee & Edwards 514). In this paper, and in my final design concept, I ascribe to the softer side of transhumanism: one that presents itself as an augmentative force.

I believe subjectivity itself depends on embodiment, a subjectivity that includes an awareness of one’s mortality. “The reflection on death is therefore the central moment of assuming responsibility for one’s own existence, which at its most extreme leads to a real and proper conversation of the subject” (Adorno 352). Radical transhumanism aspires to overcome death through the objectification of the body, its corporeity technologically manipulated and modified with immortal aims. The blunted form of transhumanism, one that we partake of when we accept life-saving or altering medical interventions or use an iPhone to enhance our navigational skills, is a pedestrian enhancement that we probably don’t give too much consideration. And it’s one that we can harness for interesting design specifically aimed at designing for the life course.

## Design Process

*Cultural Probe 1.* The first cultural probe I constructed utilized aspects of narrative and realia in an attempt to coax a sympathetic reaction from the user. I scoured local antique stores for vintage boxes or vessels worn from human touch. The boxes I chose had visually representative qualities of masculinity, femininity, and neutrality. I chose a masculine cigar box, a feminine handkerchief box, and a neutral tea tin. Inside of each box I placed a vintage black and white candid photo of a person or people within a

domestic scene. The photos were from the Forties and or the Fifties, and they included images of both men and women and represented different cultures. I also included a personal object that would have come into contact with a body, such as a comb or broach. The aim of these probes is to create a physical representation of a life. I specifically wanted the probes to feel precious in order for the user to approach the probe(s) with tenderness and thoughtfulness.

Along with the pictures and personal objects, I also included a series of cards with prompts about the life and death of the person in the picture and to whom the included object fictionally belonged.



Figure 1: Cultural probe exteriors



Figure 2: Cultural probe contents.

*Cultural Probe 2.* For the second iteration of my cultural probe, I produced a thirty-six inch by forty-six inch poster to use as a manipulative during a lunch event at the Aging Studies Institute at Syracuse University. The event’s attendees included many professors and students of gerontology, most of whom have experience with death, dying, and bereavement as a component of their chosen field. Therefore, I was working with a topically familiarized audience for this iteration of my probe.

The poster’s graphic displays a large bisected tree and a title question that asked “What Does a Good Death Look Like in 2016?” I chose a tree because it encompasses the ideas of legacy and sustainability. The branches and leaves hint at plurality of ideas solutions. One side of the tree represents the current manifestations of how the U.S. and many other Western cultures process death. This side is labeled “Now: monolithic, highly regulated systems, strict cultural prescriptions.” The other side of the tree represents the possibilities of the future and was labeled “Future: social, conscientious, personalized.”

I provided Post-It notes and Sharpie markers and asked participants at the event to write descriptive and evocative words or phrases for each side of the tree. On the

“now” side participants wrote entrenched problems, barriers, or negative conceptions of death and dying. On the “future” side participants issued hopes, changes, and predictions they would like to see in our systemic and cultural responses to death. The format of this probe worked very well in a group setting with a fluid structure. It provided a participatory forum, and it functioned well as a conversation prompt (See Appendix 1, fig. 1).

I was very humbled by the intimate stories people shared about the deaths of loved ones. However, the probe did not exert one of my motives, which was to have people engage in future-casting regarding their *own* “good deaths.” It seemed there was cathartic value in having the chance to converse about death and dying albeit through the buffered reevaluation of the timelines, procedures, and feelings surrounding deaths already experienced.

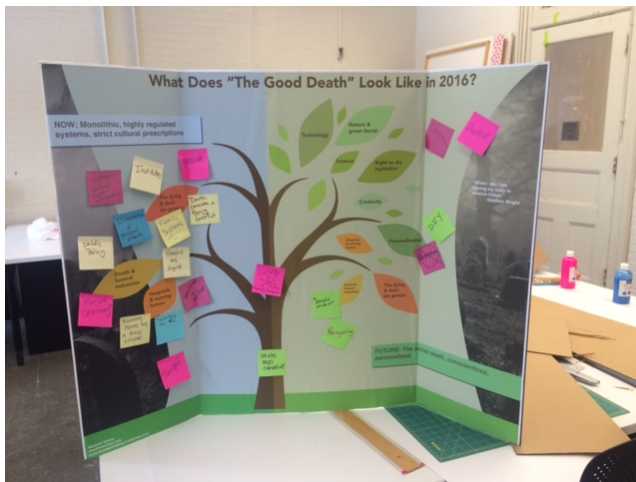


Figure 3: Cultural probe manipulative with participant responses.

*Cultural Probe 3.* The third and final iteration of my cultural probe was designed to provide users with a broad space, demonstrative of continuums, with which to engage the topic of death. I produced an eight and a half by eleven sheet of paper, whose standard sizing made it easy to print and to pass out quickly to anyone interested in engaging on

the topic. The probe's prompt stated "What are your observations on how death and dying (this includes mourning and ritualization) have been framed in the past and how they could be framed in the future? Please plot the processes and trends over time as you see them." I provided the recognizable framework of a Cartesian coordinate system (x/y axis). The top of the y-axis is marked "Good Death" and the bottom is marked "Bad Death." The left of the x-axis is marked "past" and the right side is marked "future."

This probe was utilized at a symposium called "Living the Final Chapter: Compassionate Care for Persons at the End of Life," hosted at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, New York. Since my tactics were guerilla, I was only able to nab one participant between conference sessions. His responses echoed what participants were already saying at the Aging Studies Institute presentation of cultural probe 2. However, I had many quick informative conversations throughout the symposium.

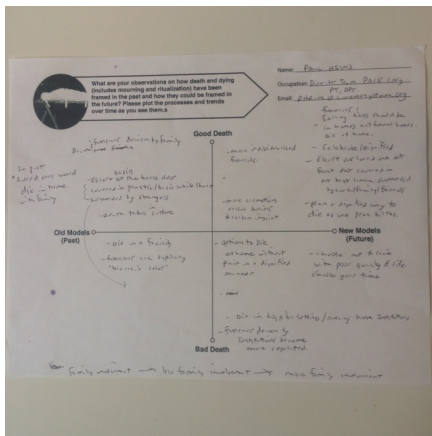


Figure 4: Research probe 3

### Additional Field Work with Probes

When gathering information on green burial and sustainability trends in the area of death and dying, I was able to conduct some field interviews at "The Ecovillage at Ithaca." The Ecovillage is a cohousing model with a sustainability focus. The residents of the

Ecovillage make group decisions and organize into committees, which influence policy and operations at the Ecovillage. I met with “CHAT,” which is an acronym for the “Community Health and Aging Team.” Four women from CHAT agreed to share their viewpoints on death, dying, and alternatives to the traditional framework of mourning and memorialization in the United States. I will identify each woman by calling her Participant 1, 2, 3 or 4. Since cultural probe 2 worked well within a group setting, I decided to use it as an anchor activity for my discussion with CHAT (See Appendix 1, fig. 2).

Participant 1 serves on the board of a non-profit natural cemetery preserve in New York. She offered insights as to why natural burial is gaining traction. She believes that the “sleaziness and the hubris of the funeral industry has driven many to seek alternatives” (C.H.A.T.). The pre-paying and up charging of slick funeral sales along with falseness and melodrama of funeral parlors has lost its appeal for an entire generation, the Boomers. She says of the prototypical funeral parlor ceremony, “It’s phony music. The real is missing.” When I asked her what else contributes to a person seeking out and making alternative burial a priority, she replied, “comfort with mortality.” To explicate her answer she threads in a critique of medicine. “Medical intervention at the end of life seems unnecessary. It should not prolong life. It should alleviate pain. Some of us are just comfortable with the time we have on earth.”

Participant 2 echoed the same generational shift described by Participant 1. She maintains that Baby Boomers watched their parents get bilked out of thousands and thousands of dollars, money which would have been better spent on their own retirements. Participant 1 echoed this statement by saying, “Many working class people

were brainwashed into thinking this [pre-paid funerals] was their only choice.” She also theorizes that the pattern of silence surrounding the topic of death as many Baby Boomers came of age has been redirected in her generation, with more people willing to discuss and to acknowledge it. She believes her generation’s reluctance to play into the funeral industry’s hand is engendering new responses to death, which includes green burial. She backs these sentiments up by saying the shift is because “Our generation is influenced by the Hippie naturalism. We have a desire for conscientiousness” (Interview). Indeed, “We are likely to see the growth of this alternative as a viable option, especially if the baby-boomers represent a cohort that embodies more ecologically sensitive aspirations in burial choices...” (Feagan 171). Judging from the conversations incubating at the Ecovillage, the trend toward “ecologically sensitive aspirations in burial” is on the rise.

The Boomers’ tendency towards an environmental ethos is self-directed, but it also engenders an ecological futurism, espousing a form of intergenerational equity. “The principle of intergenerational equity—a requirement to think and act across generations—has critical relevance for green burial” (Feagan 163). The idea of intergenerational equity, a dedication to the outcomes of actions in the present, contains a gift mentality.

Participant 4, also a Baby Boomer, shared an intimate anecdote about the death of her mother and the possible interference of current standards and practices of embalmed bodies with her mourning process. She states, “I had a hard time leaving the building, leaving my mother’s body. I think it might be because she still looked alive.” In the book *Caring for Your Own Dead*, Lisa Carlson states:

The most common argument for embalming today is that friends and family have an emotional need to see the body one last time before final disposition. If people are unable to gather for a week or longer, embalming may help to fill that need. That is a fairly credible argument.

But having spoken with a great many people on the subject, I have heard that viewing a restored corpse did not always fulfill that need. In some cases, the body was made to appear so lifelike that it became even harder to say goodbye.

(Carlson 38)

Carlson's anecdote backs up the assertion of Participant 4's memory of her mother's funeral. Embalming constructs an unnatural and confusing final snapshot of the deceased.

Although Participant 1 is not pro-cremation, as she still considers it to be a non-natural form of body disposition and an affront to the environment, she believes it produces an important side effect beneficial to mourning—waiting. The materiality of the ashes protracts the temporal stretch between physical death and ritualized goodbye, which is important because in American culture “mourning and bereavement does not exist.” Participant 3 touched on the temporal constraints of mourning as it is codified in American culture as well. She acknowledges that families live so far apart now that “if someone lives across the country in California, they have to fly to the other side of the country and then immediately turn back around and go back to work, so the body is preserved”. According to Feagan, “The distancing or detachment of families and community from the death of a member is coincident with an emergent preoccupation, especially in North America, with the modernistic aesthetic of sanitation and avoidance



of decay” (162). As addressed earlier in this essay, Participant 3’s observation, backed up by Feagan, coincides with examples of the embalming as a sort of snake oil remedy against what are considered the unsanitary natural states of a corpse.

How do the interviewees view natural burial as a foil to the scripted “hubris” of the funeral parlor? The participants agreed that the simplicity and participatory qualities of natural burial constitute an antidote to traditional American funerary prescriptions. I asked Participant 1 to describe natural burials as she experiences them as part of her work. She shared:

The grave is dug ahead of time. There are no machines. Your hands are in the earth, and it’s a slow process. And the family lowers the body into the grave, and they literally let go. Then they fill in the dirt. Some fill in the entire grave, which takes a long time. It’s simple, not fancy. It’s sad and poignant, everything that death is.

Participant 1’s description highlights the simplicity of ceremony that strips away the extraneous fluff of the funeral parlor and puts death squarely in the hands of the loved ones and mourners. Feagan seconds:

Many of the analysts of death, dying, and burial chronicle the movement of death and burial from their communal orientation...to an event that has become secularized, individualized, professionalized, private, and medicalized—loosely characterized as moving the body and death out of the hands of the family and social and spiritual community and into the hands of the “professionals.” (162)

The reclamation of the body in the burial process offers an ecological, tactile and personalized sense of the deceased individual without the choreography of a funeral

home service acting as a buffer. The tangibility of death and contact with the materiality of the corpse at the time of burial is an important trade-off in a natural burial site, a space in which no assertions of permanence, such as monuments and headstones, are usually permitted by edict of their commitment to maintaining natural vistas. If they are permitted, they are usually limited to unremarkable flagstones, which maintain the uninterrupted topography of a natural burial preserve.

I find the progression of my probe iterations interesting, as I moved from probes that expressed materiality in the form of artifact to less of a materiality, paralleling my postulations on the future of gravescapes.



Figure 5: Ecovillage residents engaging with the research probe

### Design Concept: LifeWrite

For my design concept, I am proposing a web platform, LifeWrite, which will allow a person to engineer an interactive collection of memories, messages, and gifts to be explored and delivered posthumously. This website's functionality is not only realized after death, however, as I will demonstrate when I assess its scalability. In effect, the concept facilitates interactive narrative biography. It expresses an impulse towards intergenerational equity through the lens of familial legacy and the idea of gifting. This delivery is imbued with a transhumanistic flourish, as the messaging occurs after a person has passed away. A website that facilitates a dialogue with a gifting component between the living and the dead would be an extension and expansion of what is already happening formally and informally online.

*Benchmarking.* There are existing websites that offer the ability to create memorial tribute pages for deceased loved ones. YourTribute.com incorporates social media platforms and doubles as a funeral planning website. Sancrti.com functions within Facebook, and it operates free of charge. And some websites, such as Mem.com, function as arms of funeral home chains. Service Corporation International, one of the largest retailers of cemeteries and funeral goods, operates Mem.com. And it offers another example of the funeral industry's attempts to corner the market on grieving.

Safebeyond.com is website which touts itself as a "digital time capsule" that allows users to construct four types of messages that can be archived and disseminated after one's death. The first type is the date message. This is described as "a message that you leave for your heirs at a predetermined date, for example: your child's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday,

a holiday, or a wedding anniversary.” The second message type is the “event message”, “a message that you leave for your heirs to view at or after a certain event, for example: your grandson’s wedding or graduation.” A third kind of message is the “location message”, which is defined as “a message that you leave for your heirs to view when they physically reach a specified location or site, for example: New York City or the Eiffel Tower.” And the final category of message is “social media message”, “a last farewell that you can leave on Facebook or Twitter to your friends, family, or the world.” Safebeyond.com is geared heavily towards the construction and the delivery of messages, which seems to be the focus of any such posthumous communication technologies. “DeadSoci.al...is a service that socks away Facebook and Twitter messages on set future dates, for things such as birthdays, special occasions or to continue jokes beyond the grave” (Duffy). However, the concept of gifting is absent from all of these current services.

The rise of online gifting was, perhaps, incubated in the early days of the worldwide web. Freedom to share files and to create open-source information was integral. “The popular combination of pervasive computing and digital media has recently contributed to a world-wide sharing phenomenon” (McGee & Skågeby 2). Sharing and gifting are often dissected in terms of transactional reciprocity with in an anthropological framework. This is not always the case. Altruism is not as uncommon as one might think. McGee and Skågeby outline the opportunity space for digital altruism below:

...[T]here is another dimension to the sharing phenomenon that is not as widely discussed—and which suggests an unexplored opportunity for developers,

providers, and consumers of digital media: the strong human desire to *give*, whether it is advice/assistance (newsgroups), digital goods (music, literature, software, or other resources (bandwidth, processing cycles). Much sharing is almost certainly motivated by reciprocity in one form or another; many times people clearly do “give in order to receive.” But there are significant indications that some acts of sharing are difficult to explain easily in terms of reciprocity: it seems that some people simply enjoy non-reciprocal giving. (2)

The idea of gifting forward from beyond the grave is definitely altruistic because there is no chance of reciprocity. Some might be inclined to declare that it could be seen as indirectly reciprocal because the act of gifting secures a sense of immortality. In the absence of the ability to give reciprocally with the dead, the living recipient of gifts would then internalize the act of giving as something she could do in the future for her heirs and loved ones. Thus “paying it forward” generationally, in line with the concept of intergenerational equity.

Much emphasis is placed on the legal and financial components of tidying life affairs before death. Wills, durable power of attorney, and living wills are the legal testaments of legacy that we have the power to organize before death. And we are urged to pre-plan and pre-pay within these systems. Isn't a will a person's voice that is endowed with agency from beyond the grave? The will is almost an analog transhumanist artifact. We should consider the idea of emotional willing and gifting concurrently with the formalized legal and financial gifting of wills. “[T]here are good reasons to begin looking at technology design ‘from the gifter’s perspective.’ There seem to be fundamentally different technology needs and design problems that appear when a

designer looks at the world from the perspective of someone who wants to gift—and to gift more easily, efficiently, and meaningfully” (McGee & Skågeby 10). The gifter’s perspective is one that I want to explore in my design concept. The gifter is defined herein as the person securing his or her legacy.

*How LifeWrite Works.* The website could be considered a vehicle for expressions of the bereavement theory of continuing bonds. The living would be able to continue celebrations of anniversaries and the acknowledgement of milestones, however, so can the dead. The gifting and messaging would be pre-programmed by the deceased while they are alive, and it could be considered a life course activity.

A life course approach is a sociological framework for understanding a life at various stages. “Life courses are studied in sociology and neighboring fields as developmental processes, as culturally and normatively constructed life stages and age role, as biographical meanings, as aging processes, as outcomes of institutional regulation and policies, as demographic accounts, or as more empirical connectivity across the life course” (Mayer 413). Engagement with LifeWrite is something that could be started earlier in the life course when a person is younger, not necessarily older or terminally ill, as is typically the time when humans are expected to focus on death. In this implementation, it could help to dissolve some of the closeting that is erected around death and dying in this culture. Which cultural shifts are necessary to dismantle some of this closeting and death denial exhibited in Western cultures?

The “Death Positive” movement is exploding in the United States. The vanguards of death positivity are the intellectual collectives Death Salon, founded by

medical librarian Megan Rosenbloom, and The Order of the Good Death, founded by mortician Caitlin Doughty, each of which is devoted to deconstructing current cultural norms in the United States by the exploration of all things death-related. Death Salon's homepage announces:

Welcome to Death Salon. We hold events that bring together intellectuals and independent thinkers engaged in the exploration of our shared mortality by sharing knowledge and art. Death is sanitized and hidden in contemporary culture to the point of becoming a taboo subject. We aim to subvert this death denial by opening up conversation with the public about death and its anthropological, historical, and artistic contributions to culture. In the spirit of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century salon, our curated intellectual gatherings [are] hosted worldwide.

(deathsalong.org)

The goals of Death Salon promote conversation about death in order to subvert its cloaked status in American society. Likewise, The Order of the Good Death offers an eight-point credo for those persons interested in summing up the necessary cultural shifts promoted by the Death Positive movement and their allegiance to its mission:

1. I believe that by hiding death and dying behind closed doors, we do more harm than good to our society.
2. I believe that the culture of silence around death should be broken through discussion, gatherings, art, innovation, and scholarship.
3. I believe that talking about and engaging with my inevitable death is not morbid, but displays a natural curiosity about the human condition.

4. I believe that the dead body is not dangerous, and that everyone should be empowered (should they wish to be) to be involved in care for their own dead.
5. I believe that the laws that govern death, dying, and end-of-life care should ensure that a person's wishes are honored, regardless of sexual, gender, racial, or religious identity.
6. I believe that my death should be handled in a way that does not do great harm to the environment.
7. I believe that my family and friends should know my end-of-life wishes, and that I should have the necessary paperwork to back-up those wishes.
8. I believe that my open, honest advocacy around death *can* make a difference, and *can* change culture. (orderofthegooddeath.com)

Both Death Salon and The Order of the Good Death seek to change the narratives surrounding death and dying on levels both personal and cultural. They seek to reframe how much we talk about death as well as how much we acknowledge and interface with it in a conscious, daily manner. “In other studies, those close to dying, such as the elderly and terminally ill also showed lower levels of death anxiety, indicating that coming to terms with the end can make it more acceptable, wisdom that younger healthier people could learn from” (Hayasaki). The idea of coming to terms with death as a younger healthier person is exactly what I am encouraging when I assert that LifeWrite is a life course tool.

*Narrative.* Much like SafeBeyond, LifeWrite will allow scheduled delivery of messages. LifeWrite has more of an archival quality, however. Pictures, videos, and text can be



uploaded and annotated either vocally, with written word, or both. Imagine receiving a picture of yourself as a baby with your mother's voice singing a lullaby. Digital artifacts could be embedded with geolocation capability. For example, a picture taken at Thanksgiving at your aunt's house could be marked as such, and thus a narrative geography is constructed, one that contains a memory overlay.

*Giftng.* The gifting quality of LifeWrite is layered. On one hand, the enriched and interactive collection of archived ancestry and legacy is a gift in and of itself. However, I also envision the ability to schedule gifts sent posthumously along side messages. Imagine the ability send your daughter or son a copy of a book or collection of poetry that helped you make meaning of your life. Perhaps there is an album that conveys the feelings you have if you need to apologize for something in life but never quite found the courage or ability to do so. The opportunity for a terminally ill mother to schedule the delivery of some baby gifts for her pregnant daughter might come as a touch of comfort when the new mother needs it most. Ideally, the terminally ill person has found some sense of peace within his or her relations before passing, dying the good death as it were. But what if a portion of that peace comes from being able to imagine continued altruism beyond any lessons you have imparted to your loved ones? There are many ways to die and many ways to mourn. There are many lives and many narratives, perhaps some wherein this tool would not even be a choice.

*Access.* The question of access coincides with the possibility of unintended consequences. It is my intention that the living should be able to choose to have access to

such a Pandora's box of feeling. Perhaps a relationship was so fraught in life that it is not worth the emotional turmoil of receiving messages after death; there might be no need to revisit the relationship, such as the case with an abusive relationship. The examples I just gave "...illustrate the narrative space entered by using or misusing a simple electronic product, how interaction with everyday electronic technologies can generate rich narratives that challenge the conformity of everyday life by short-circuiting our emotions and states of mind. These stories blend the physical reality of place with electronically mediated experience and mental affect" (Dunne & Raby 6). I do not want to predict misuse, but I acknowledge the myriad of uses and contexts a technology such as this could rouse. Essentially it is a tool, and users make choices regarding its implementation.



Figure 6: Design in progress

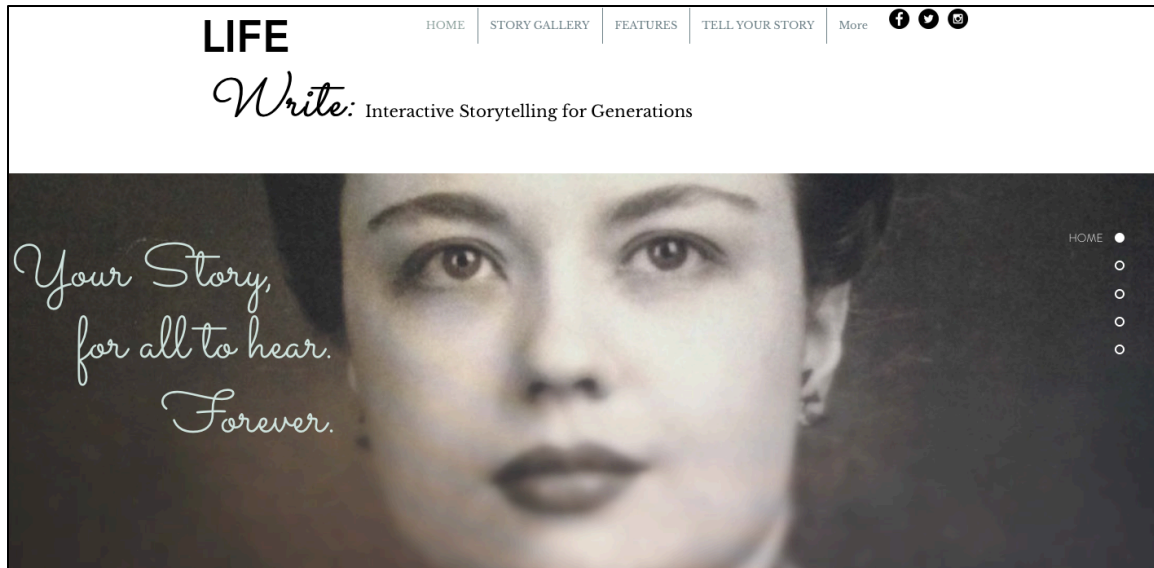


Figure 7: UI design, LifeWrite landing page

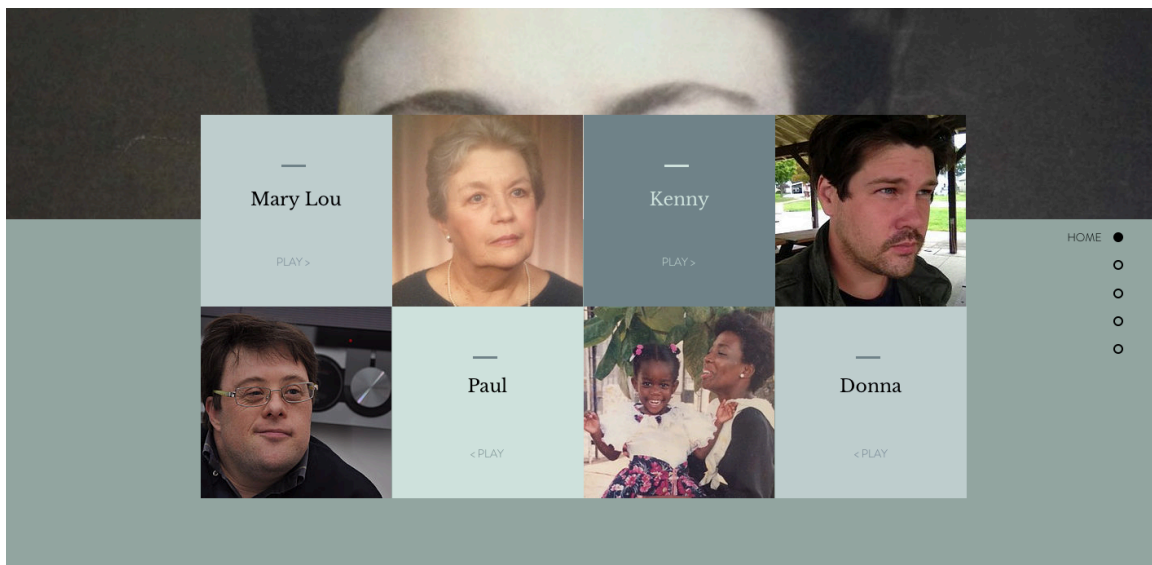


Figure 8: UI design, LifeWrite story gallery (demos features)



Figure 9: LifeWrite testimonials page (highlights scalability)

## Future Possibilities & Scalability

There are many synaptic possibilities for the fundamentals of this design. I look forward to users creating implementations beyond what I can imagine for the life of this project. I view it as a Swiss army knife: it is more than singularly capable. The springboard of my design is embedded within the framework of death and dying. But, at its core, the design is a storytelling tool that will encourage the construction of social worlds and intergenerational equity that enables the inherent human need to create meaning and temporal infrastructures in life and in death. Environmentalist David Suzuki maintains:

It [the brain] has a built-in need to *create order* out of the constant flow of information coming at it from sensory organs. In other words, the brain creates a narrative, with a beginning, a middle and an end—a temporal sequence that makes sense of events. The brain selects and discards information to be used in the narrative, constructing connections and relationships that create a web of meaning. In this way, narrative reveals more than just what happened; it explains

why. When the mind selects and orders incoming information into meaning, it is telling itself a story. (Suzuki 10).

The need for meaning and organization is a taxonomical, biological impulse, a brain functionality that helps us make sense of the material world and our place in it. The mythologist Joseph Campbell, whose work looks at the power of narrative in the human experience, assesses the need for meaning and puts it in a more philosophically phenomenological framework. “People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive” (Campbell). Hopefully, in my design concept, the external physical plane merges with the innermost being with memories and experience producing some of the “rapture of being” alive described by Campbell.

I envision this platform as an opportunity for life revision and as a tool for intergenerational bonding and the dynamic chronicling of family histories or any kin group history. Life revision is valuable because “[t]he continuity of subjective biographical identity, and of personality characteristics and behavioral dispositions, provides a sense of integrity in life” (Settersten & Mayer 249). Imagine a grandmother and her grandchildren building an archive together, an archive that transmits family culture and lore. A favorite recipe can be uploaded with explicit verbal instructions and anecdotes. The grandmother and her grandchildren can film themselves making an heirloom recipe and the platform becomes a teaching tool as well as a reservoir of memory.

The platform is endowed with multiple therapeutic possibilities. In the first scenario, it can be used as a grounding tool for those with dementia. A person with dementia and her family can summon a familiar biographical landscape to help induce a sense of comfort and return to self. Similarly, for a person with a diagnosis such as cancer, which looms and leaves one in the interstices between life and death depending on whether or not the disease is in remission, the messaging forward and gifting component could feel like a way to negotiate the possibility of death. It would allow the user some agency in feeling as if one's emotional affairs are in order.

In another therapeutic scenario, my design concept is also an instrument of mourning for family and friends experiencing the “psychosocial death” of a loved one. When a person presents with an illness such as dementia, schizophrenia, or a traumatic brain injury, the person is still alive, but different. “In some cases, the family members report that the fundamental aspects of the injured person's personality have changed such that the person they loved and knew was ‘dead.’ The fact that the injured person is still in the family, yet so changed, can lead to refusal on the part of family members to acknowledge the impact. The ‘old’ person, as he was before the injury, remains as a continual reminder, yet is fundamentally changed” (Herbert 137). This is especially murky territory for a family member to process because “When a person experiences a sense of loss but does not have a socially recognized right, role, or capacity to grieve, his or her grief is disenfranchised” (Herbert 140). I would like the family members of such people to have a sanctioned space that empowers them to reflect and to grieve.

As we learned from the East Meon natural burial site, mourners still attempt to memorialize their dead in natural burial spaces where overt memorialization is not a part

of the idiom of the cemetery space. To accommodate this need, couldn't the green burial mourning experience be supplemented by a visitor center that allowed for the projection of digital memory archives, a 360 experience infused with the voice, image, and messages of the deceased? "In an effort to preserve a vision of the burial ground that is free from individual memorials, providers have developed different strategies that allow the family to record the identity of the deceased without impacting on the burial area. These have included the promotion of memorial websites..." (Clayden et al. 91) The need for enriched memorialization at such sites is presenting itself.

In a parallel scenario, one in which the homogeneity of military burial sites—the rows of identical markers barely expressing the individuality of the person who died in service—could be supplemented by the ability to evoke the memory of the fallen with a more enriched tribute. A similarly endowed visitor experience would allow families to summon and to highlight the individuality of their loved one against the background of uniformity typified by military visual rhetoric.

## Conclusion

I know so many friends who can't bring themselves to delete the voicemails of deceased loved ones. There are even voicemails from the living I can't bring myself to delete. These voicemails tenuously survive upgrade after upgrade so that they can be summoned at will from iPhone coffins and android urns in moments of bittersweet melancholy—the play button affording a controlled drip of memory or a torrent longing.

Perhaps the future will see memorialization that includes holography or voice manipulation technologies that would the living to construct entirely new utterances, the dead revived through speech control. Imagine your dead uncle's voice delivering the

eulogy at your father's funeral. Imagine your mother saying the things you need to hear long after she has passed.

My thoughts turn to the passing of David Bowie. Bowie used his cancer diagnosis to write *Blackstar*, a poignant final album that was an act of creation in the face of destruction, a negotiation of mortality, a goodbye, and a parting *gift*. One could say it was a good death if such a thing indeed exists. Known for his ability to transform from one musical persona to another, Bowie's final transformation saw him finally jettisoning Earth like the spaceman he fashioned himself to be. But his voice on *Blackstar* remains, a quavering, sonic *memento mori* that makes me feel grateful for any acts of reinvention and creation I have yet to experience. Perhaps the best gift the dead can bestow upon the living is the rapture of being alive.



## APPENDIX 1

Figure 1

| <b>Aging Studies Brown Bag Probe Responses</b> |   |
|--|---|
| <i>What does death look like now?</i>          | <i>What will death look like in the future?</i> |
| System doesn't support individualism           | Anti corporatism                                |
| Institutions                                   | Active  |
| Waiting to die                                 | Cryogenics                                      |
| Scripted                                       | D.I.Y.  |
| Nursing homes are dress rehearsal              | Recycling                                       |
| Palliative is political                        | Create one's narrative                          |
| Forced ceremony                                |   |
| Public policy                                  |   |
| Disposition of personal effects                |   |
| Death correlates a family conflict             |   |
| Passive  |   |
| Family systems                                 |   |
| Family diasporas                               |   |
| Hospice  |   |

Figure 2

| <b>Ithaca Ecovillage CHAT Probe Responses</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <i>What does death look like now?</i>         | <i>What will death look like in the future?</i>                         |
| Antiseptic                                    | Leaving your mark   |
| Inflated                                      | Telling your story  |
| Not truthful                                  | Death as a natural process  |
| Over medicated                                | Part of nature  |
| Financial gain                                | Home funerals   |
| Will try anything                             | Most respectful   |
| Denial  | Do as little to the body as possible                                    |
| Consumerism                                   | Leave an impression of your life and spirit                             |
| Too many middlemen                            | Green house homes (as opposed to nursing homes)                         |
| All kinds of distracting "business"           | If I have a home funeral my husband would be supported by our neighbors |

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