University of Tartu

Department of Semiotics

Dylan Michilsen

The New Death: On Grief, Mourning and Death in the Digital Age

Master Thesis

Supervisor:

Prof. Peeter Torop

Tartu

2018

I have written the Master Thesis myself, independently. All of the other authors' texts, main viewpoints and all data from other resources have been referred to.

Author: Dylan Michilsen ………………………..

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Introduction

Death remains a topic strongly marked by the most ambivalent of emotions even to this day. On the one hand, those matters which bring us face-to-face with death, our own mortality and the finite nature of life are ones that manage to fill people's hearts up with dread without fail. At the same time, death has continued to fascinate – perhaps even obsess us – for over hundreds of years. This ambivalent position should come as no surprise: Death after all belongs to that category of core elements in the cycle of life that are shared by all living organisms, but even with that reality in mind, death is often swept under the carpet, taken as something worth contemplating only in those cases where we find ourselves directly and unavoidably faced with its reality. Despite this general reluctance to engage with death, it forms a fertile ground for academic research. As one of the base elements of life, death makes its presence known within every community across the globe, and as such this means that each and every one of these communities has its very own way of experiencing death. The reactions to death, for example in the form of grief and mourning, are at a surface level colored by an individual's personal feelings, belief systems and the like, but digging deeper shows that these feelings and belief systems are very much a concretely identifiable part of the network of sign systems and cultural codes that make up that individual's source culture. While death is thus universally the same, the ways in which cultures choose to represent death, to deal with death, to conceal it or to expose it, are all very certainly culturally determined.

The culturally multifaceted aspects of death have by now already figured as the object of research within a substantial corpus of work across a wide variety of disciplines, two of the most notable of which must certainly be the fields of sociology and anthropology. When speaking about the culturally determined elements of death, grief, and mourning, it is almost impossible to ignore the importance of the work by Durkheim. In his works, Durkheim maintains the view that individual forms of grief (as felt in response to the death of a peer from one's broader social circle) are expressed collectively, and those expressions of grief are in turn realized in culturally prescribed forms of mourning. Durkheim wanted to know to what extent society could be defined in relation to "collective representations," what could be the nature of said representations, and how we might discover and describe their nature. In light of this view, mourning is therefore made out to be more than just "the spontaneous expression of individual emotions" (Durkheim 1915: 397). Mourning instead " is a duty "is a duty imposed by the group," (Durkheim 1915: 397) and the loss of a member of the group

makes it so that "collective sentiments are renewed which then lead men to seek one another and to assemble together" (Durkheim 1915: 399) in order to find comfort among likeminded members of the peer group. Years after Durkheim, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2004) brought forward yet another possible perspective: According to Scheper-Hughes, we must not only take displays of mourning into consideration when we speak about culturally prescribed behavioral codes. Even human emotions such as grief and sadness, for instance, which in essence lie behind these concretely realized rituals of mourning, should be taken as culturally determined, and what follows from this is thus that even such intense emotions effectively might be expressed differently across different cultures (Scheper-Hughes 2004: 190). Such forms of expression may be made with the help of certain sets of symbols, the public display of certain emotional states, or through the performance of certain culturally coded forms of ritualized behavior.

By holding on to the conclusions drawn by Durkheim and Scheper-Hughes respectively, we are essentially left with no choice but to interpret nearly every form of death-related activity short of the act of dying itself as guided by cultural norms. Even the way in which the members of a given society treat the deceased's corpse, and that society's attitude towards the corpses of the dead is in the end very much culturally determined. As Metcalf and Huntington state in relation to this topic that "close attention to the symbolic attitudes of the dead body provides an avenue into a culture's understanding of the nature of death" (Metcalf & Huntington 1991: 53-54). As was already suggested above, the death of a group member is ultimately a highly social event. The processes of grief and mourning play an important role in establishing social cohesion between members of said group.

To attempt to provide a historiography covering the entire corpus of texts written on the topic of death and mourning here would go far beyond the scope of this work and would warrant a much larger, more expansive research project all of its own. Instead, then, the historical material covered here should be taken as a selection of material which I find to be pertinent in relation to this particular work.

One example of such material would be the work of Van Gennep. Much like Durkheim, he sees death as more than something confined to biological processes or to the individual sorrow of the bereaved. Van Gennep too shares the view that death evokes certain moral and social obligations, which are in turn expressed in culturally determined funeral practices. According to Van Gennep, every form of ritualized behavior involving a transition from one state to another – think here of the transition from *alive* to *dead, childhood* to *adulthood* and

so forth – may be boiled down to a single tripartite structure: The first part**,** the 'before' state wherein the subject has not yet transitioned to the new status, the second part which is the liminal period in between two states, and the third which is the state wherein the subject has fully transitioned to the new state. For Van Gennep, identifying this tripartite structure helped prove that ritual behavior is inexorably connected to a fixed system of culturally defined roles. While these rites of marriage, death and such may differ in the minute details of their execution, Van Gennep states that "[o]ur interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes. […] Beneath a multiplicity of forms either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern always recurs: *the pattern of the rites of passage*" (Van Gennep 1960: 191).

   While these underlying, core patterns are capable of enduring for extensive periods of time**,** those individually differentiated manners in which they become manifest across various cultures are often more malleable in nature. As with so many other aspects of cultures, a community's general attitude towards death and mourning too may be subject to change over time. Such shifts can for instance be a result of changes in the dominant political climate, technological advancement, or a transition from one particular paradigm of thought to another. According to Katherine Verdery, these new meanings may even extend to corpses that have already been interred for an extended period of time. Verdery uses the posthumous reevaluation of certain public figures within post-Soviet Eastern Europe as an example of this process (Verdery 2004), though other examples of a similar sort undoubtedly abound across the globe. It comes as no surprise that altered views on death at the cultural level also elicit change at the academic level. A point of interest in relation to this topic is brought up by Robben, namely that a sizeable portion of academic work on the subject of death is still inherently life-centered rather than death-centered (Robben 2004: 13). This life-centered perspective may perhaps to a great extent even be unavoidable. The intrusion of death into our lives is often primarily taken as a spanner in the works of the established social order**,** a disturbance in our sense of social cohesion. We are wont to interpret death through the lens of its impact on those who are left behind after the event and the various ways in which those left behind cope with loss, as this is essentially the only way in which we can truly comment upon death. Moreover, a sense of taboo still hangs over the subject of death and all that is connected to it. Nevertheless, Benjamin Noys argues that we may be reaching the end of death as taboo, and may instead be entering a new phase marked instead by a fearless exploration of death: "In modern culture death is not simply invisible or taboo but bound up with new structures that expose us to death" (Noys 2005: 3).

Without a doubt, one of the most prominent areas showcasing these 'new structures' of death and its associated topics previously spoken of by Noys is that particular area nowadays commonly referred to as the *digital world* or *virtual world*. With this, I mean the space occupied by digital computer technology on a broad scale, and the internet in a more focused sense. The gradual transition from the *Industrial Age* into the era which has been dubbed the *Digital Age* or *Information Age* by some has marked a distinct shift in the way in which we form interpersonal connections, as well as the way in which we engage with the world around us. This is especially true for those generations growing up during this transitional period between the two eras and those who directly grew up in a world surrounded by digital technology. Within the last several decades, digital media platforms gradually have become increasingly widespread and commonplace in the day-to-day life of people across the world, and the number of people who are 'connected' only continues to grow. It is estimated that at this point in time, roughly 4 billion people, over 50% of the global population is connected to the internet, (Kemp 2018) while at least 5 billion people make use of mobile phones on a regular basis. Those in this last category in possession of a smartphone in turn make up 52% of the total global internet users (Kemp 2018). Based on these statistics, it is not difficult to imagine how great the role of information technology has become in shaping our everyday experience. Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine that this proliferation of information technology across the globe necessarily comes coupled with changes on the level of the cultures of the people so heavily employing such technologies in their lives. We are able to conduct our business correspondence and interpersonal correspondence through emails instead of through analog mail, we share aspects of our lives with others through various social media platforms, either in the form of text posts, pictures, videos or audio recordings, we are able to connect to others across the globe and directly see the events happening there even as they unfold, and we have near-immediate access to amounts of information and content heretofore thought unimaginable. These are just some of the ways the new media has changed life in the modern age. It is as such the case that we may find ourselves so deeply entrenched in this new media and technology on a daily basis that it can occasionally become difficult to take a step backwards and assess the manner in which this truly affects our semiotic behavior on the levels of direct signification and that of cultural codes in a broader sense within our lives, and most importantly in the context of this particular research, when we are faced with death.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that something which now forms as integral a part of our everyday lives as the internet has proven itself a highly fertile ground for academic

research in a wide variety of disciplines. Within the specific niche of death-related research, we can already find a wealth of research examining the ways in which the internet has influenced how people from all across the world think about and how they deal with death, grief and mourning within these new digital spaces. Once again, to attempt to give an overview of the entire existent body of work here would go far beyond the scope of my own work. Still, however, I feel that certain elements must be highlighted. Due to the undeniably important role which these platforms play nowadays in helping people maintain social ties with others, a sizeable fraction of the death-related research involving the internet deals with the topic of death and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and others of a similar sort. Recent research has shown that social media networks such as Facebook can provide means of comfort for the bereaved as they try to cope with feelings of grief over the loss of a close loved one, and that these networks can in such circumstances turn into an alternative, public space for ritualized mourning (Kern, Forman, Gil-Egui 2012; Rossetto, Lannutti, Strauman 2014). Numerous works have highlighted the way in which these social networks make it easier for the bereaved to enter into and maintain a state of communication with the dead, not only by leaving messages on their page, but also simply through the act of browsing the material that has been uploaded to said page in the past (Carroll, Landry 2010; Bouc, Han, Pennington 2016). At the same time, several authors have pointed out the potentially harmful and unpleasant sides that may come with such public forms of mourning, such as harassment of the bereaved by internet trolls (Philips 2011) and emotional rubbernecking (Degroot 2013). As these digital spaces present entirely new methods of both autocommunication and interpersonal communication alike, there have also been several recent works which focus on the unique cultural codes and behavioral norms which can be observed in these social media spaces (Giaxoglou, Döveling 2018; Wagner 2018). Finally, one additional aspect related to death on social media that has received attention from scholars is the aspect of the public mourning of celebrity deaths: The potential for public displays of mourning allowed for by social networks in the case of celebrity deaths can give rise to a stronger feeling of community between members within the same fandom, and moreover it may also result in a stronger sense of connection between people and other celebrities who are publically shown to be mourning the same loss (Klastrup 2018; Radford, Bloch 2012; Sanderson, Cheong 2010). Even based on this admittedly limited selection of material, it is plainly visible that these new forms of media have had a significant influence in changing the way death, grief and mourning are experienced.

Research Object & Research Methods

   While it is indeed true that the role of social media within the context of death and grief in contemporary society is certainly non-neglectable, it seems to me as if this particular aspect is perhaps somewhat overrepresented in academic literature even though there is a myriad of other aspects to death in our current era that as of yet do not seem to be equally as explored. The main aim of this particular work is to offer a personal examination of the ways in which the concepts of death, grief, and mourning have evolved within the Western world as society began its transition into the Information Age, and thereby fix new tendencies in the understanding of death. In order to achieve this goal, I shall be approaching my topic from the angle of cultural semiotics.

   It is important to note here right from the start that when I refer to the 'Western world' within the context of this work, I am referring exactly to those nations that have their historical roots in Western Christian culture. This thus includes Europe, as well as those countries in America and Oceania which are of European colonial origin.

   Within this work, I will attempt to answer the following research questions:

> 1. If we read death as a *text* in the Lotmanian sense, what exactly is the possible world of contemporary mourning? How can cultural semiotics be productive in understanding death and mourning?
>
> 2. What is the nature of contemporary expressions of mourning in the Digital Age? Must we take these cultural codes connected to death and mourning as they appear in their contemporary forms as logical evolutions of older, traditional forms, or are they to be taken as being something wholly new and original?
>
> 3. Focusing in particular on the transition from analog printed news media to digital printed news media, how has this transition between traditional and modern communicational channels influenced the way in which news of death is transmitted to the audience? Can we identify significant variations in the significatory elements which different types of digital print media choose to focus on? In what way do the notions of *spectacle* and *performance* play into the ?
>
> 4. Can we identify significant differences in terms of how prominent public figures – in this particular case meaning the pop icons David Bowie and George Michael – are remembered and mourned for within the online print media?

As I have already indicated before, I am approaching the topic of death from the perspective of cultural semiotics within this work. Death, as one of the universal natural constants, has become one of the most heavily semiotized processes in the world, with different forms of expression, cultural codes, and traditions observable in just about all cultures known to us. Following the works of Juri Lotman then, we may classify the notion of *death* as a text, perhaps as the supertext to which all other thematically related texts are connected, while associated codes of grief and mourning in turn form connected meta- or subtexts. We may classify *death* as text due to the sociocommunicative function it fulfills. In his article *The Semiotics of Culture and the Concept of a Text* (1988 [1981]), Lotman identifies five main communicative processes of texts: The first is communication between addressant and addressee, the second communication between the audience and the cultural tradition, the third communication of the reader with himself, the fourth communication of reader with the text, and finally, the fifth concerns communication between text and cultural context (Lotman 1988: 55 – 56). Indeed, the notion of death ties in with these communicative functions at every level. Attitudes towards death are very much the product of cultural tradition, and as such death-as-text in part "fulfills the function of a collective cultural memory" (Lotman 1988 [1981]: 55). Not only that, but death is also very much a product of personal (and interpersonal) memory, which in some cases may differ from the general attitudes reflected in the cultural memory at large. Death as the core text of this particular associative web is in turn surrounded by yet more individual texts and networks of further texts. These particular texts are themselves related to death, culturally determined attitudes to death, cultural traditions, norms and representations related to death and the emotional states evoked thereby. Among the myriad of other texts surrounding *death*, we may for instance also find all those digitally published news articles reporting on death and loss in all its aspects. Moreover, within this sphere of death we also find those texts related to grief and mourning.

Speaking about these digital news publications, I must also bring up yet another pair of important notions within the context of my work here – the notions of *spectacle* and *performance*. Both of these notions have a rich history of usage, definitions and redefinitions within the academic context, and therefore it is important to highlight here that the definition I shall provide here for both will likely not satisfactorily encompass the full scope of these notions, but should rather be taken as indicative of how these notions are understood within the context of this research. The notion of *performance* has become so broadly applicable within the academic context that it is almost problematic, ranging "from the most highly elaborated artistic activity to minimalist examples of expressive behavior, from organized

social events […] to the informal gathering of young people," (McAuley, n.d.) and more. With such a broad scope of reference, it is necessary to identify the core necessities that make *performance* what it is: "[P]erformance requires people (or animals or even things) who perform, and people who witness the performance. Performance is always for someone even if the roles shift and witness becomes performer or *vice versa"* (McAuley, n.d.). *Performance* must thus necessarily be taken as a social or socializing act.

The notion of *spectacle* too should be taken as "a social relation among people, mediated by images" (Debord 1967). According to DeBord, "the spectacle is *affirmation* of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance," while simultaneously functionally being "a negation of life which *has become visible"* (Debord 1967) at its very core. In Debord's view, the notion of spectacle is tightly interwoven with feelings of alienation. It moreover constitutes a society "organized around the consumption of images, commodities, and spectacles," (Kellner 2003) all of which may have a learning effect on the members of said society, in the sense that they introduce the members of this society to the thought patterns, behavioral patterns and social constructs that are seen as tolerated or not quite tolerated by presenting the audience with dramatized versions of conflicts.

It is my belief that both of these aforementioned notions are in some form reflected in our newer modern-day practices of mourning. Certain forms of behavior displayed by people can possibly convey more than one layer of meaning, and the permeation of social media and other digital media into such a great variety of layers of society has only made this even more acutely noticeable. The posts, images or videos shared by private persons and the media may initially appear to convey just one particular message, but may at the same time very well carry other, entirely different connotations: Think here for instance about possible connotations of religious devotion connected to particular expressions of mourning, or about the act of sharing certain content as a form of virtue signaling.

As the research questions I have formulated may perhaps already indicate, I will be splitting the body of my analysis into two main parts: In the first part, I shall first of all attempt to analyze and contrast certain 'core' codes and attributes related to death and mourning that I consider to be somewhat universally recurrent. This list of core codes will by no means be a comprehensive one, as undoubtedly there will be other relevant traditions and codes which I have failed to include here. This list should thus not be taken as conclusive, but rather as a selection of material. By means of these codes, I hope to analyze how the modernization and development of Western society may in turn be reflected in how traditions tied to death and mourning may have possibly changed or evolved over time. In the second part of this project I

shall more closely examine the phenomenon of mass grief in the Digital Age. By means of two case studies, focusing on the media cycle in response to the death of David Bowie and George Michael in the digital print media, I will attempt to analyze exactly how these media contribute to the construction of a concrete cycle of mass grief in the public consciousness, how these media contribute to fixing a particular image of the dead in the cultural memory, and how (if at all) these traditional or new codes of mourning covered in the first part are shown in these posts. Of course, the selection of material to be covered within this section will offer but a limited view on the totality of content available in relation to the news on the death of these two cultural icons. The material I have opted to focus on is a selection of articles offering both a more positive posthumous view on the lives of these celebrities and some which choose instead to emphasize the more negative aspects of their lives. For the selection of material covered I have opted for material taken both from more conventional, established news platforms with a more reputable reputation, along with material taken from sources with more of a tabloid character, and material taken from independent platforms that are not yet as established in order to also take into the account the possible discrepancies between platforms primarily aimed at different target demographics. Moreover, this will help in observing how different platforms cover (or perhaps even exploit) this public mourning.

   As far as the research methods I will be employing in this project are concerned, I shall primarily be making use of the following methods:

   1. Comparative analysis: The comparison and contrasting of the traditional cultural codes and sign systems related to death and mourning in the Western world with their modern-day counterparts in the Digital Age in order to observe the trajectories of these codes and sign systems. I do acknowledge that this may perhaps not exactly be 'comparative' entirely, but much rather 'contrastive', due to the fact that these codes and sign systems do not exist as binary oppositions, but rather as more of a fluid continuum. Outside of that, I shall also compare and contrast the public cycle of grief in the digital print media in the wake of David Bowie's death versus that in the wake of George Michael's death in order to analyze what the main differences are in how these cultural icons are remembered, and how this form of public mourning fits into the wider context of mourning behavior in the Digital Age.
   2. Typological analysis: In connection to the previously mentioned analysis of old codes of mourning and their newer incarnations, I will also attempt to establish a personal typology of cultural codes that I feel can be said to possess a sense of cross-cultural presence in some

rudimentary shape or form, thereby forming a sort of 'core' of death-related codes. In this particular context I shall be taking into account those traditional codes which are still actively seen even now, those which have been transformed or further developed in the Digital Age, and also the possible emergence of entirely new cultural codes tied to death and mourning that exclusively pertain to the Digital Age.

   3. Case study: The analysis of the reaction to the death of David Bowie and George Michael as portrayed in the digital print media shall serve as case studies. The use of case studies as a research method is admittedly controversial, and the method has attracted criticism for a myriad of reasons. Among these points of criticism are the persistent perception that one cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case (Flyvbjerg 2006: 221), and that theoretical content is more 'useful' than the practical, context-dependent content of a case study (Flyvbjerg 2006: 221), which may occasionally eschew the more traditionally analytical format common in hard science in favor of one that is more descriptive in nature. Nevertheless, I believe that this method is useful in this context of cultural research because the case study format has several advantages as well, such as "its applicability to real-life, contemporary, human situations and its public accessibility through written reports" (Soy 1997). Moreover, descriptive case studies, by focusing on one particular issue (such as cultural attitudes to death in this particular case), may in fact contribute to a greater understanding of the causal processes behind the analyzed subject matter, functionally being "illustrative 'portraits' of social entities or patterns thought to be typical, representative or average" (Hakim 1987: 59). Within the context of my work, these two case studies together are aimed at uncovering certain recurrent patterns across the two cases, hinting perhaps at certain general culturally codified structures of public grief, as well as examining if and how the cultural codes covered within the first chapter figure into this mediated public mass grief.

   Having now delineated the main aims and methods of my research, I will now subsequently move on to the first part of this research proper – the analysis of key cultural codes of death and mourning in their traditional forms, and their evolution into their contemporary incarnations.

<u>Analysis</u>

Chapter 1: On The Dynamics of Death, Grief and Mourning

 Death is universal – all living organisms will someday inevitably be faced with the unavoidable reality of life's finite nature and its eventual end. Many different forms of behavior have over mankind's history emerged to help people cope with their loss, many of which are to some extent unique to their native culture. It thus becomes clear that if anyone would ever want to embark on a serious study of the cultural traditions and rituals related to death, grief and mourning, one must ensure that the focus area of their research is clearly delineated. As I have already indicated, this research will be focusing on the human experience of death and loss, and the rituals and cultural codes we have established in order to help us process and cope with such losses. Earlier, I already alluded to the rather sizeable corpus of subtexts related to the core text of death that already exist, not only in terms of the actual concrete traditions and rituals, but also in terms of the literary and academic texts written on these topics. As this overwhelming selection of material suggests, the variety of cultural traditions related to death, grief and mourning is wide. I have also already indicated that grief- and mourning-related behavior are both heavily culturally determined, and as such it would not be inaccurate to state that there may well be as many different mourning rituals as there are cultures across the world, or perhaps even as many as there are people, as every individual copes with loss differently. Due to this large variety in possible cultural and individual traditions, I have opted to emphasize only those belonging to a particular, delineated sphere within the context of this research, which is the sphere of the Western world. Admittedly, it is true that even this is still a rather broadly defined category, as most countries in that part of the world that we now dub 'the Western world' are made up out of a wide variety of people with different ethnic backgrounds and cultural traditions of their own. As such, it is without a shade of a doubt true that the following analyses will involve some degree of generalization on my part, as it is simply impossible to take every possible individual variety and deviation from the dominant cultural norm into consideration in a research project of this scale. Still, the Western world without a doubt forms a good basis for research – despite individual differences, there are many underlying similarities between countries in terms of culture and traditions, not in the least due to the fact that many of these cultures share roots which are historically strongly tied to the common laws and traditions of the Catholic and Protestant Christian faith. This shared religious past has in turn left its mark on many of the cultural traditions, beliefs and rituals in these nations that is still strongly felt even to this day, especially where the topic of death and mourning is concerned. Globalism

and multiculturalism have of course made it so that these traditional values have begun to undergo certain changes due to influence from other cultures, but a lot of these classical values nevertheless remain relatively intact. Moreover, I have opted to focus on this particular sphere because a significant percentage of the academic research connected to the topic of death seems to be primarily focused on traditions and rituals encountered in more 'exotic' and obscure locales, while the 'known' domestic traditions of the Western world many of these scholars are used to appear to be somewhat neglected, or in certain cases even outright referred to as being inferior or uninteresting compared to the more colorful or obscure traditions found elsewhere. This position is problematic, as it blatantly disregards the rich potential for further analysis that even these familiar, less 'exotic' cultures of the Western world nevertheless have to offer. The very fact that the Western world carries such an air of familiarity may in this particular case even prove to be useful, as it makes it easier to trace the variations on certain mourning rituals back to their underlying core structures. It is for these reasons that this particular project will thus primarily be taking the mortuary traditions of the Western world into consideration, despite the fact that the expression 'Western world' necessarily erases elements of individual identity and homogenizes cultures that may not always be fully identical to one another.

   Before I proceed to go into the cultural codes and symbols of mourning in their contemporary forms, I shall first go deeper into their traditional forms in the following section.

1.1 On old codes of death and mourning

   In his article *The New Semiotics of Death* (2014)*,* Alex Gordon presented a list consisting of 14 cultural codes he regarded as strongly connected to how death and mourning were traditionally experienced within the United Kingdom. Although Gordon's article in and of itself doubtlessly offers only a very limited perspective on the total scope of possible texts related to mourning and death even in the United Kingdom alone, and can therefore not be used as the sole basis for the purpose of this work, I will be borrowing the selection of codes he enumerates in his article, as I feel that these particular codes may well be interpreted as laying at the very heart of mourning traditions in general, possibly even effectively functioning as some sort of core codes (archetypes) for mortuary traditions on a scale far beyond the delineated area that I am primarily focusing on in this particular work. As I already hinted at before, my purpose here is not merely to highlight some interesting or strange funerary rites and traditions in the form of an enumerative cabinet of curiosities, but

rather to note how these cultural texts have evolved over the years, and how the changes in society at large may be reflected in these changed forms of experiencing death, grief and mourning.

1.1.1 Masculinity

The first element I want to highlight as a traditional code of grief is *masculinity*. As Gordon notes, many funerary rites are traditionally overseen by a male authority figure such as the clergyman or the undertaker (Gordon 2014: 4). This traditional structure of the funerary rites mirrors the structure of society itself, which in the Western world was (and to some extent still is) overwhelmingly patriarchal in its very nature. From a traditional standpoint it was thus highly uncommon, if not almost unheard of, for a woman to fulfill such social functions in the past, as to do so would go against the patriarchal structure of society in general. Outside of the realm of concrete, physical funeral rites and traditions, we may also observe that certain other figures that have often symbolically been associated with life and death, such as the Grim Reaper or the Judeo-Christian God for instance, are also frequently personified as male figures in most classic artistic depictions. The masculine aspect intertwined with death and mourning has also been noted as being a prominent part of traditional Finnish mourning culture at the start of the 20th century by Liisa Lindgren (2007). Lindgren remarks that at the start of the 20th century, the exaggeratedly melancholic mood of the thematics of death that had once been so commonplace in, for instance, the creation of grave markers during the previous century began to be regarded more and more as a form of decadence, and as a mark of the excessively feminine (Lindgren 2007: 85). With the new rhetoric of modernism came a turn back towards classicism, which "gave approved models for new, masculine monuments, stripped of excessive decoration" (Lindgren 2007: 85). The result was that memorial sculptures depicting mourning maidens were often replaced by what Lindgren describes as "young men carrying attributes of art that link death with spiritual freedom and aesthetic experience" (Lindgren 2007: 85). We can thus observe in this particular case here yet another example of male-centered imagery and symbolism in connection to death, which once again ties back into the patriarchal structure of society on a macro scale.

1.1.2 Powerlessness

The element of *powerlessness* is the second entry in Gordon's list of traditional codes symbolizing death. In the predominantly Christian Western world, death was often regarded as but another step in God's ultimate plan for mankind, something man was essentially forced

to undergo and powerless to change. Instead, then, faced with the reality of death and the powerlessness to change it, it is religion "that helps an individual to maintain a reality-oriented perspective when the order of life is challenged" (Leming 2003: 120).

The sense of powerlessness is also found if one looks at the traditional trajectory of grief and mourning in general. The bereaved were generally expected to go through the culturally normative trajectories of grief and mourning, including the memorial service, burial, etc. and by and large there were not that many options to deviate from these norms. An individual subject's refusal to participate in acts of mourning can in certain cases be perceived as a sign of disconnection from the social unit, especially in cases where the deceased is someone with close personal ties to the non-mourner, and as such it is seen as somewhat of a social faux-pas to outright refuse to participate in acts of mourning. Moreover, it was also expected that people would follow the commonly laid out plan of the ceremonies themselves without all too much room for flexibility and change to adapt to individual taste. On top of this, the bereaved "may be labeled as suffering from complicated grief or having some level of mental disorder if he or she is perceived as grieving too much or too long" (Cox 2017: 69), suggesting that even the duration of mourning is to some extent socially prescribed. In general, people are thus expected to engage in the trajectory of mourning in certain prescribed ways in order to avoid losing face in public. In the traditional processes of death and mourning, the bereaved thus essentially end up getting stuck in a position where they are powerless to decide exactly how they wish to honor their departed loved ones. Another aspect in which the feeling of powerlessness played (and in fact still plays) an important role is the sense of anger felt by the bereaved at their perceived inability to prevent the loss of their loved ones, or the sense of frustration felt by the bereaved due to a perceived lack of time provided to them in order to spend more time with their loved one before their impending death. Here once again the individual subject becomes reduced to a role of helplessness, pushed by an inability to control fate.

1.1.3 Top-down authority

Top-down authority, the third entry on the list, is in a sense quite closely related to the preceding two entries. Gordon himself notes that, according to the rules of tradition, the rituals of mourning in the United Kingdom were presented in the form of "a male-led top-down authority structure; whether in the form of the clergyman, the undertaker or God 'himself'" (Gordon 2014: 4). These authority figures are the ones who guided the mourners through the process of coming to terms with their loss, and they are also the ones who made

the decisions regarding the ways in which the memorial service was effectively realized, being the ones who primarily controlled the course of the service, with the bereaved themselves being relegated to a position of powerlessness when it comes to influencing the course of these ceremonies to a great extent, as mentioned before. From the 19th century onward, this religion-based authority structure began to shift: "As death became increasingly medicalized, the clergy were less often the first at the scene of death and their influence waned" (Naylor 1989: 68). Instead, then, "[i]mperceptibly the business norms of undertakers began to inform death rituals rather than the metaphysical concerns of either the church or the domestic culture" (Naylor 1989: 68). Regardless of this shift from clergyman to undertaker, the authority structure generally maintained the top-down organizational format. I already made mention of how the traditionally *masculine* aspect of death and mourning echoes the primarily patriarchal structure of Western societies. This top-down authority structure once again can be said to largely functionally mirror the patriarchal structure of authority that may be observed in society at a broader scale.

1.1.4 Ritualized uniformity, formality, and the sombre

The next three entries on Gordon's list, *ritualized uniformity, formal and sombre,* and *mourning* are also quite closely related to one another. As far as the formality and somberness of mourning is concerned, one of the ways in which this aspect is expressed is through the use of primarily darker-toned and muted colors in mourning attire. The actual palette of colors that is utilized may vary per individual mourning service, but black is without a doubt one of the most commonplace colors when one looks at traditional mourning attire in the Western world. Over the years, the color black has ended up becoming inexorably connected to themes of death, darkness and mourning, not only in the form of mourning attire, but also in terms of mourning cards, ribbons, caskets and the like. Gray, brown, darker shades of red and, occasionally, white are also frequently seen in traditional mourning attire. According to Turner, we may speak of a color triad of red, white, and black. In this tripartite division, white represents purity or fertility, red represents good, as well as the evil aspects of power, while black represents decomposition and death. Turner moreover believes that these particular colors may symbolically correspond to bodily fluids, with the color white symbolizing semen, red symbolizing blood, and black symbolizing feces or decayed blood (Turner 1975: 151). Moreover, the color white may sometimes used in Christian funerals in order to symbolize the joy of eternal life in paradise, as well as to serve as a symbolic opposition to the 'blackness' of death itself. The fact that memorial services often had a streamlined dress code, with all

attendee being expected to wear outfits fitting primarily within one particular color scheme, forms but one part of the ritualized uniformity ingrained in the process of mourning. Other formulaic aspects connected to the traditional memorial service pointed out by Gordon are the carrying of the coffin, and the collective repetition of certain ritualistic invocations, such as the invocation 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' (Gordon 2014: 4). The recitation of verses from the Bible is another example of commonplace ritualized behavior during traditional memorial services. Regarding the ritualization of mourning, Lattanzi-Licht (2013) writes that "[r]ituals are ways to address the great mystery of death and the profound questions it raises. Rituals related to dying are essential and offer three important elements of comfort to participants: They bring people together, they acknowledge a significant experience/event, and they create opportunities for support or comfort" (Lattanzi-Licht 2013: 14). Moreover, such ritualized forms of behavior "allow for emotional expression not usually permitted outside this context," (Gordon 2014: 4). It is seen as an embarrassment or a sign of weakness in certain cultures for a person to be seen crying or otherwise expressing extreme emotions in public, but, by contrast, to perform the same expressions of emotion during a funeral service is almost expected, if not outright demanded from the bereaved. As I already indicated before, people are traditionally expected to mourn the loss of their loved ones, to be saddened by their passing, to the point that it is sometimes felt that an "[i]ndifference to a death expresses a lack of moral and cultural unity and an absence of social cohesion and solidarity" (Robben 2004: 8). Still, at the same time, emotional reactions to death are too varied and shifting to provide a solid foundation for a theory of mortuary ritual, even when expanding the definition of grief to encompass notions such as "sorrow, mental distress, emotional agitation, sadness, suffering, and related feelings," (Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson 1976: 2) and therefore, although this emotional aspect should certainly be taken into consideration due to the fact that it undeniably forms an important dimension in the mourning process, it should not be taken as the sole core key aspect in said process.

1.1.5: The Hidden / Closed-Off Nature of Death

The next entry in Gordon's list, *hidden/closed*, refers to the hidden and closed-off nature of grief and death, as well as the closed-off nature of that locale where grieving traditionally takes place – the cemetery. Noys argues that death, after the end of the Victorian era, has become isolated within hospitals or residential homes for the elderly (Noys 2005: 2), and as such has over time become relegated to a sort of 'hidden' or 'invisible' state. It is not just death itself which is hidden – the process of grieving is traditionally also something that is not

publically shared, but rather only within the private sphere of one's own family and friends. The aforementioned contrast between crying in public being seen as embarrassing versus crying during a memorial service at a cemetery also reveals the hidden nature of death. In fact, the cemetery itself can be seen as an expression of this same sentiment, according to Gordon. He states that "cemeteries are both among us but also hidden from us. Frequently within or near the city, they are typically constructed within walls and gates signifying a separation from the life outside" (Gordon 2014: 5). Death is confined within the borders of the cemetery's space, and outside of that area people generally prefer not to think of such things in their everyday lives. According to Baudrillard, western culture rests on the exclusion of death and the dead from its societies. Death, however, cannot truly be excluded, and thus, by virtue of these attempts at excluding it, threatens to undermine our culture. The attempts to avoid and exclude death have as a result that we conversely end up more exposed to death. This also results in a decline in the degree to which people engage in acts of symbolic exchange with the dead. To Baudrillard, the result of this decline in symbolic exchange means that "little by little, the dead cease to exist" (Baudrillard 1993: 126). We try to rid ourselves of the dead as quickly as possible, proceed with the burial or cremation at the soonest opportunity, and we try to get over the loss as soon as we can. However, the more we try to exclude the dead from our thoughts and from our lives, the more they are likely to return in some traumatic form. Think here for instance of zombie fiction as but one example. While I have so far mainly referred to the hidden/closed-off aspect of death in largely negative terms, this does not necessarily imply that this concealed nature of death always has to be taken as a negative characteristic. In order to show this, I will once again turn to Liisa Lindgren, who links cemeteries and the experience of mourning to the 18th-century aesthetic theory of the sublime, stating that cemeteries were a proper place for experiencing the sublime, and that through contemplation of death, terror may recede into melancholy (Lindgren 2007: 81). Similarly, Gordon borrows Foucault's notion of the *heterotopia* in relation to cemeteries, stating that cemeteries function as a space outside the borders of normative life, allowing for unusual or unexpected forms of behavior and an exploration of differences (Gordon 2014: 5). The expression of extreme emotions not otherwise displayed during everyday life is but one example of the possible 'unusual' forms of behavior the space of the cemetery allows for.

1.1.6: Temporal Remoteness, Decay, Destruction and the One-Way Movement of Death

The following four entries on Gordon's list, *temporal remoteness, decay, destruction,* and *one-way,* can all in some sense be tied together as well. The idea of death being associated with some form of *temporal remoteness* is an old one that cannot quite be called representative any longer in this day and age. Death, according to Gordon, is "[t]ypically […] understood as being beyond us, out there and inherently linear and one-way (we are all moving inexorably towards it)" (Gordon 2014: 5). It is the final part of man's lifeline, often visualized in the form of a straight line starting from the moment of a person's birth, and ultimately ending at the moment of their death. Still, for the majority of a person's lifetime, death is treated as something remote and unreal, to the point where it can be argued that these attempts to avoid the reality of death can be seen as yet another attempt to hide the reality of death. The only times when people once again become aware of the reality of life's finite nature is during those moments when we are suddenly confronted with the painful inevitability of death once more, either due to some sort of tragedy or through the death of a loved one.

Death has traditionally always been associated with notions of rot, decay and destruction of the organism. Still, this decay of the body is also commonly regarded through the lens of the temporally remote, being as it is a biological process that commonly only starts to take place after an organism's death, making it into a notion most people do not directly consciously concern themselves with during their lifetime. Nevertheless, these notions of decay and destruction do figure heavily in the traditions related to death and mourning of many cultures, including those of the western world**.** As a first example, we may turn yet again towards the memorial service. Here we can already observe this association between death and destruction when we look at the incantation of 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' mentioned at an earlier point once again. The link between this aforementioned incantation and death in a general, broader sense, becomes reinforced in the most direct sense through the act of cremation. Since cremation involves the near-total reduction of the organism's material form into a heap of ashes, it perfectly embodies the idea that death equals the total destruction of the physical form**.** These notions of decay and destruction can moreover also be traced back to the iconography and symbology of death, which commonly features skulls and bones as part of the category of *memento mori*-imagery. The skeleton, stripped of all its flesh and organs tying the body to the mortal realm, has become fixed as a symbol for the inevitable end of life (Cassell, Salinas & Winn 2005: 243). The figure of The Grim Reaper serves as yet another embodiment of this idea that death is inescapably tied to destruction. Not only is the figure

itself commonly depicted in the form of a skeleton, but in many incarnations, the Grim Reaper is also the one who is responsible for taking the lives of those destined to die. The Grim Reaper and his schyte function as signs "to remind people that death is an unavoidable part of life, something to be prepared for at all times" (Cassell, Salinas & Winn 2005: 244)

1.1.7: Immortality of the Soul

The idea of *soul immortality* forms another one of the key codes that traditionally symbolize death according to Gordon. The idea can in a sense be connected to the notions of decay and destruction mentioned in the previous section, as the two ideas form a complementary pair of opposites. The finality and imperfection of the physical body, which will inevitably succumb to processes of decay over time, is offset against the perfection and infinite nature of the life of the soul in the afterlife, which will there forever be preserved**.** This particular duality is yet another concept that has its roots firmly planted in the soil of not only the Christian faith, but also that of numerous other religions across the world. Though this idea of soul immortality is a long-enduring one, it is not necessarily uniformly spread. According to Alan Segal, "[a]ge is an important factor in the articulation and interest in beliefs in an afterlife," (Segal 2004: 7) with a notable increase in belief in an afterlife among the elderly. Segal states that "[o]lder people characteristically show more recognition of mortality and, at the same time, lower anxiety about death" (Segal 2004: 7), and moreover also that church membership and high commitment have an equal effect on the fear of death (Segal 2004: 7).

Beyond the scope of Christianity (and religion in general), this idea of soul immortality is also encountered when one looks at many forms of superstitious beliefs, including for example the belief in ghosts. Moreover, though technically disconnected from religious and superstitious beliefs, the notion of soul immortality can also be seen when we observe certain expressions and turns of phrase that are strongly connected to death. One example of such particular expressions would be the phrase 'the other side,' used here in this particular context in reference to the journey to a possible afterlife or some sort of realm of the dead. Even though such phrases are commonly used in a secular context and not necessarily directly related to any religious ideologies in their everyday vernacular use, they nevertheless also reveal how these ideas of immortality of the soul and the belief in an afterlife are very deeply ingrained in Western culture.

1.1.8: Downward Motion

Another one of the key traditional codes of death Gordon identifies in his article is the idea of *downwardness,* used here in this particular context not in the sense of feeling emotionally downtrodden, but rather in the sense of a downward motion. Gordon states that "[a]lthough the immortality of the soul remains coded as a move up to heaven, that remains in the realm of religion," and that "in the material world of the everyday, the absolute certainty of death is frequently the tangible reality of a body moving downwards into the ground" (Gordon 2014: 5). The burial of the corpse underground has traditionally always been one of the most popular methods of honoring the dead in the primarily Christian cultures of the Western world, although from the first half of the previous century onwards, this tradition has come to be supplanted by cremation in more and more places. Still, burial remains a popular process, especially in countries and areas within countries that still have stronger ties to traditions. For instance, it is noted by the Cremation Association of North America that even in 1999, there were only "595,617 cremations, a percentage of 25.39% of all deaths in the United States" (Cremation Association of North America n.d.).

Outside of the practice of burial, this motif of downwardness can also be observed in the way in which the general process of aging is frequently depicted and perceived in Western cultures. It is not uncommon for the process of aging to be coded with metaphors indicating some type of decline, frequently in terms of declining physical health and in terms of a decline in overall life quality coming with age, a process that ends with death at the very bottom. According to Simmons, this focus on declining with age "does not imply a recognition of death," but should rather be taken as "evidence of a culture which hides away from death" (Simmons 2008: 154 – 155).

1.1.9: The Linearity and Finality of Life

This idea of the aging process as a downwards decline ties in well with the notions of *linearity and finality,* the final entries on Gordon's list, as well. These notions are also strongly connected to the notion of *one-way movement* which was covered at an earlier point in this chapter as well. These notions call to mind the metaphor of life as a journey, a process with both a clearly defined starting point and a clearly defined ultimate destination that is equal to everyone. We follow this journey in a constant, unbroken line, unable to return to the past in order to change it. The idea that our lives will eventually come to an end, and that at that moment our lives as organic beings are essentially over is deeply ingrained in our traditional culture, in part yet again due to the somewhat euphemistic metaphorical perception

that life is meant to be a journey which ultimately leads men either towards an eternity spent in some form of afterlife, a view that can also be found within many branches of Christianity even to this day, or simply into nothingness. This particular metaphor of 'life as a journey' is one that is most often "evoked when people are primed to think of the course of life tied to a time dimension" (Katz; Taylor 2008: 151), and as such the connection of this concept to the topic of death and mortality should ultimately come as no great surprise. Still, the use of this metaphor remains interesting, as it presupposes that the deceased is still somehow alive, and "[i]t is in this view of the deceased as an alive being that these metaphors fulfill their euphemistic function" (Fernandez 2006: 116).

1.2 On new codes of death and mourning

Alongside the selection of traditional codes symbolizing death, I also desire to go deeper into the emerging codes connected to death and mourning in the Western world. I shall once again be borrowing the list of codes initially put together by Gordon for the purpose of my research in this particular section, supplemented where necessary with additional relevant material. Before I move on with the analysis proper, I must first delineate exactly what I mean when I use the term 'new' in this particular context. These new codes encompass all those forms of mourning- and grief-related behavior that embody a new type of thinking characteristic of their age, a new type of rituality expressed as a product of these new ways of thinking, and those forms of relevant behavior that are the product of, or at least connected in some form to, new environments, or old environments repurposed and modified with new attributes. I emphasize once again that the focus here in terms of these codes and behavioral patterns is grounded firmly within the realm of the generally shared, underlying elements of culture from the Western world, and as such anything falling outside the boundaries of that particular sphere will largely go ignored within the context of this particular research. Most of the newly emerging codes covered here may upon closer inspection be argued to stand in a direct opposition to the ones I have covered in the previous section, although in some cases it is also possible to instead speak of organic evolutions of the traditional codes covered before, of adaptations to newer sociocultural and technological climates.

1.2.1: From *Masculine* to *Feminine*

In contrast to the predominantly *masculine* nature of traditional mourning culture, recent years have seen a growing emphasis on its *feminine* side. These developments may be reflective of broader changes in society as a whole, as positions that were once primarily held

by men nowadays are more often being filled by women as well. As Gordon remarks, "[f]uneral care comms use female imagery as a way of presenting sympathy and care, while death and funerals […] are presided over by male figures" (Gordon 2014: 6). This development in the funeral care industry is interesting due to the fact that funeral directing "involves a significant amount of emotional labor, but is numerically dominated by men" (Pruitt 2012: 5). Funeral directing falls within the realm of occupations dubbed by Hochschild as *emotional labor*. These occupations are marked by direct face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction with the client, the production of an emotional state in another person, and finally by the fact that these occupations allow employers to exert control over the emotional activities of their employees (Hochschild 1983: 147). Traditionally, emotional labor has been associated with occupational fields primarily occupied by women. The funeral director business, once occupied almost solely by men, has in recent years become populated more often by women than ever before. Mansfield (2016) states that "[t]oday, nearly 60 percent of mortuary science students are female, and women make up more than 16 percent of all National Funeral Directors Association members [in the United States]". The reasons given for this shift, and the success of female funeral directors are many. Kim Perry, a funeral director herself, is quoted in Fisher (2015) as stating that "[w]omen are often more nurturing than men, and they understand the tremendous importance of details" better than men do, and as such they are believed to better be able to assist the bereaved when it comes to choices regarding the arrangements necessary for the memorial service.

1.2.2: From *Powerlessness* to *Choice*

Another shift that has occurred in the last several decades has been a shift from overwhelming *powerlessness* on the side of the bereaved towards a greater freedom of *choice*. In connection to this increased freedom of choice, we may also observe a distinct shift in the traditional authority structure. Instead of the traditional *top-down authority structure* that was so common in the past, there has been a shift towards a more *bottom-up authority structure* in recent years, a structure wherein the bereaved and the pre-deceased are the ones who are provided with all the room needed in order to make their own choices as to how they want to fill in their own memorial service or that of a loved one. As Gordon himself puts it, the traditional function and status of the funeral director has shifted in the last several decades "from a position of authority and social power – the uniform coding of Victorian social order – to one of listening and learning" (Gordon 2014: 6).

The emphasis on the choice of the client has to some extent put an end to the *ritualized uniformity* of the past. Of course it would be an overstatement to say that modern-day funerals have done away with ritualized behavior entirely, but the extent to which funeral services directly resemble one another has lessened. There is now more space for *diversity and personalization* in the mourning process. This desire for more individually tailored funeral services, according to Ramshaw (2010), stems from a multitude of reasons, among which are modern-day society's growing sense of individualism, increased pluralism and secularism, declining roles of old tradition-bearing communities, and more (Ramshaw 2009: 171).

This aspect of personalization may manifest in a variety of ways: In the Netherlands, for instance, the bereaved may opt to substitute the traditional transport method of the hearse with the country's very first so-called mourning cow Leentje. The cow can transport the deceased along a distance of up to three kilometers in order to deliver them to their final resting place (van Daal 2017). According to the mourning cow's owner, Renee van Daal, the reason why he began to offer this particular service was because he felt that just as many people feel a strong connection to animals such as horses, many people feel a type of connection to cows, and as such he wanted to cater to these people's needs (van Daal 2017). Another result of the increase in freedom of choice and individualization of funeral services is that there nowadays are a lot more options available for individualized caskets, tombstones and urns to commemorate the dead, even for the non-elite. These personalized objects may reflect some of the deceased's greatest passions in life, thereby honoring them one last time. In some cases it is also possible that the funeral service will be held in accordance with a particular theme, one which may once again in some way be related to the deceased's occupation or hobbies. This potential for input from the bereaved in planning the rituals of the memorial service can be empowering for the bereaved, and offer comfort and stability when the normal flow of life is interrupted by the loss of a loved one (Ramshaw 2010: 175).

Finally, on the topic of freedom of choice, I must also highlight recent developments in relation to assisted suicide and euthanasia. While both topics are still not entirely considered acceptable even to this day, there have been movements in recent years striving to give the elderly and terminally ill the choice to end their lives when they feel they have led a fulfilling life. This means that in those communities which are open to this form of death, people are given a more direct form of control over their own life than ever before.

1.2.3: From *Formality* and *Somberness* to *Informal* and *Fun*

While death and mourning still largely retain an atmosphere marked strongly by codes of *formality and somberness,* this is no longer universally the case. Contemporary memorial services have to some extent begun to emphasize an atmosphere of the *informal and fun* as well, perhaps in an attempt to help people process their loss in a more effective and positive manner. As Gordon notes, "people want to colour the occasion with more positive feelings, maybe even to celebrate it actively, seeing this as the most fitting end to a person's life" (Gordon 2014: 6). Instead of actively *mourning* the death of a loved one, there is an increased movement towards the *celebration* of their life and their greatest achievements. There are many possible reasons to explain this shift: In part, this shift from somberness and rigid formality to flexibility and celebration may stem from a rejection of the traditional rites, be they based in religion or not, as they are in some cases perceived as being too depressing. Another possibility pointed out by Ramshaw is that this shift may be a result of "cultural death denial and grief avoidance" (Ramshaw 2010: 174). Whichever of these may be the true reason, there is a clearly observable shift in emphasis from the reality of the loved one's death and the standardized forms of behavior towards remembering the best moments of the deceased's life. One aspect in which this more positive turn is reflected is in the selection of colors used during the memorial service. The traditional use of the color black as the predominant color in both mourning attire and other attributes connected to death culture, such as coffins, mourning cards, and so forth is beginning to make way for more colorful alternatives. This, too, indicates a growing willingness to part with the rigid formality and somber attitude of the past, and to instead replace this atmosphere with something joyful.

Another example of the newfound ways in which people nowadays have attempted to break with the rigidly formal and somber patterns of the past can be observed when we look at the phenomenon of the mourning clown. The mourning clown is still a relatively new and uncommon phenomenon found in both Belgium and the Netherlands. The mourning clown can also be found in certain other countries, but the occupation generally remains an extremely niche field. The purpose of the clown's presence at the funeral or at the memorial service is to help people become more willing to let their emotions run free instead of sticking to the rigid formal behavioral patterns of the past (Leeman n.d.). This ties in with the previously mentioned idea of the cemetery (or the church, or any other space used for the funeral service) as heterotopia. The mourning clown's main purpose is to allow people to ease themselves into the expression of certain emotions that they would otherwise be unlikely to display in front of others in their everyday lives. Other forms of personalized ritualized

behavior related to the deceased such as "sharing characteristic anecdotes, or smelling her favorite recipe, or touching something she often wore" (Ramshaw 2010: 176) can also help to simultaneously commemorate and celebrate the deceased, and to ease the bereaved into expressing and working through their grief individually or as a group.

1.2.4: From *Hidden/Closed* to *Revealed/Open*

In the previous section covering the traditional codes of mourning, I referred to how both Baudrillard and Noys had argued that, ever since the start of the twentieth century, death has become relegated to a sort of 'hidden' state, being pushed away behind the closed doors of hospital rooms and retirement homes. While this assessment may indeed to some extent ring true, it is simultaneously also true that in certain aspects the topic of death has moved from a *hidden/closed* state to one coded instead by *revelation* and *openness*.

The internet has allowed people from all over the world to come together and form online communities centered around nearly every topic imaginable. Moreover, the internet has also contributed to the creation of a broader awareness of marginalized groups and a general move towards what Gordon dubs "a more transparent and expressive society" (Gordon 2014: 7). It should come as no surprise, then, that eventually such communities dedicated to the topic of death and dying started to appear on the web as well. Online bereavement forums such as *forums.grieving.com* allow people to offer digital support to strangers in a similar state of bereavement to themselves. Moreover, the internet has also successfully served as a platform for different activist groups attempting to raise awareness of terminal illnesses, suicide, euthanasia, and death in general. Thanks to online blogging platforms such as Tumblr, Livejournal, Blogspot, and Wordpress it has become much easier for the dying and the terminally ill to speak out publicly about their illnesses and to directly share their experiences with others. A darker side of this increased openness towards death is the emergence of websites offering advice on various ways of committing suicide. In relation to this increased openness about death in virtual spaces, I must also highlight how in recent years there has been a marked increase in crowdfunded funerals, using digital platforms such as GoFundMe or Kickstarter as a means to amass the necessary funding. According to Kneese (2018), these forms of commemoration theoretically carry the political potential to raise attention for members of marginalized groups, as "[c]irculating financial and emotional support through social media platforms is seen to provide dignity in death for those whose lives were taken by a system that devalues them" (Kneese 2018: 1). Even in these particular spaces, however, Kneese points out that traditional power structures found in the real world still very much

continue exist, and the measure of successful or unsuccessful funding of such funerals depends strongly on the 'marketability' of the deceased: "Those who are most marginal in society are the least likely to attract sufficient compassion and are therefore likely to have failed crowdfunding campaigns" (Kneese 2018: 9). In this latter category of those with failed crowdfunding campaigns we may also find the "elderly, disabled, or [those] who die violently" (Kneese 2018: 9).

   All of these developments show that the reality is somewhat more nuanced than the pessimistic views of Baudrillard and Noys, although it has to be pointed out that, technically speaking, even these online support forums still do not represent a total sense of 'openness': In the case of forums, more so than other social media, "individuals are differentiated from each other by a handle [...] rendering distinguishing features such as gender, race, disability, voice and general appearance irrelevant" (Swartwood, Veach, Kuhne, Lee & Ji 2011: 163). A sense of anonymity is thus still preserved, so long as the individual users choose not to reveal any additional information.

   Despite what the previous section may suggest, the increase in openness towards death is not solely limited to the context of the internet. One may also observe this change in mentality when looking at other aspects of our contemporary society. One such example is the newly reemerging public debate related to the production and sale of euthanasia pills, as well as the debate related to the topic of assisted suicide. The fact that these topics can publicly be discussed and even to some extent actually accepted as possible solutions alone already shows that the topic of death has generally become more discussable in certain context than in the past.

   All these developments leading towards a greater openness about death have made it so that the reality of death is no longer seen as something *temporally remote* as it traditionally used to be, but rather more firmly rooted in the *here and now*.

1.2.5: From *Decay* and *Destruction* to *Growth* and *Construction*
 The overwhelmingly commonplace association of death with codes connected to *decay* and *destruction* have in recent years begun to make way for codes of a more positive, optimistic type, namely those related to *growth* and *construction*. What becomes emphasized in such cases is no longer the inevitable moment of the body's destruction as such, but rather the potential to channel feelings of loss in such a manner as to create wholly new material out of one's grief. The ways in which this practice can be actualized are manifold. As I already highlighted at an earlier point, the new mourning offers the bereaved space for individual

customization. As Cann (2014) states, "bereavement practices are often just as much about the grievers (if not more) than about the deceased themselves" (Cann 2014: 13). This is reflected in the form of these new 'creative' forms of mourning, which may be as reflective of the passions of the deceased as those of the bereaved. Certain commercial institutions nowadays offer clients the possibility to plant memorial trees in honor of their lost loved ones. Others offer the possibility to place special memorial stones as a token of commemoration. Another new, creative form of mourning highlighted by Cann is the commemoration of the dead in the form of tattoo memorials. Here "[t]he body, though it has disappeared, is remapped onto living flesh to become a symbol of mourning in a world where mourning is denied" (Cann 2014: 15). The deceased are carried close to the bereaved at all times, and their image is turned into a permanent imprint on the body of their loved one. Yet other forms of creative mourning addressed by Cann are car-decal or t-shirt memorials. These forms of memorializing can generally be "found among marginalized communities and are used by marginalized grievers—grievers who cannot express their grief in other socially acceptable ways, either because they are not "allowed" to grieve or because they are grieving for the socially unacceptable dead (usually babies or young adults)" (Cann 2014: 16).

Besides these previous examples, which involve the transformation of secondary objects into forms that are made to be symbolically meaningful, we may also look at some newer processes that offer the bereaved a means to transform the very remains of their loved ones into a new, equally meaningful form. One company that offers the bereaved an opportunity to do exactly that is the British company Andvinyly. This company offers people the opportunity to have a loved one's ashes pressed into a vinyl record containing a recorded message left by the deceased or some pieces of music selected by the deceased (Andvinyly n.d.). In this way, the deceased can in some sense 'live on' in the form of an object carrying the deceased's personal mark. Thus, what was once marked by sadness and loss now instead may come to be marked by joy and a potential to keep the deceased close at all points. Another relatively new manner in which families can keep their dead loved ones close is by having their loved one's ashes turned into a diamond. Over the last several years, multiple companies offering such services have appeared on the market, one of the first of which was the company LifeGem. The diamond, even more so than the vinyl record, offers the bereaved a direct and close connection to the ones they have lost, as the diamond may for instance be embedded in a ring so that it may be worn anywhere and anytime.

1.2.6: Virtual Immortality and *Interactivity* of Death

Whereas death has traditionally always been perceived as a *one-way* street, a permanent end, it is nowadays increasingly becoming turned into a more *interactive* and multidirectional process instead. In his article, Gordon refers to the relatively modern and still somewhat niche trend of placing video screens on graves, as well as the use of QR codes on graves which can offer visitors certain personalized messages by, or information about the deceased as an example of this changing process (Gordon 2014: 8). These new forms of technology now available to us in the Digital Age allow for a closer form of interaction between the living and the dead, as limited as these interactions may still be at this point in time with the current state of our technology. Even if it is in the form of prerecorded videos or text-based messages, the possibility to experience and interact with a lifelike approximation of the departed adds a new dimension to the way in which we experience loss and process grief.

Another notion that has rapidly come to play an important role in our digital society is the notion of *virtual immortality*. It may be argued that this notion's role in our contemporary world has come to be of equal importance as the belief in *soul immortality* was in the past (and still remains for many members of religious communities). Internet-based social media have become an almost unavoidable part of our day-to-day lives, with millions of people using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter on a daily basis, and by maintaining an active online presence in the form of blog posts, status updates, shared photos and such people build up a curated online persona, in a sense a form of a digital legacy. When these people eventually come to die, these aspects of their personality remain stored on the web, potentially for an indefinite amount of time. There are cases in which people would rather not have their loved ones posthumously discover certain aspects of their web presence, and this need for posthumous privacy has allowed digital legacy companies to sprout into being. Digital services such as Entrustet and My Webwill are but two examples of companies that provide people with posthumous digital identity management, so as to ensure the preservation, or sometimes the posthumous deletion, of their online persona. These digital legacy companies "mainly fall into two categories, asset maintenance and posthumous scheduling" (Wright 2014). The latter category offer their users "the ability to posthumously schedule social media posts" (Wright 2014). This phenomenon not only serves as an example of how the reality of *virtual immortality* has made it necessary for commercial businesses to adapt or expand their range of provided services in order to provide the appropriate care in this new technological landscape, but also serves as yet another example of the increased

possibilities for free choice afforded to the deceased and their loved ones in how the memory of the deceased is preserved after death.

Another way in which the reality of *virtual immortality* can be observed is by looking at the rising phenomenon of virtual cemeteries. These virtual cemeteries, some of which have already been accessible since as far back as 1995, in essence serve a function similar to their counterparts in the physical world, serving as locations where the bereaved can visit in order to commemorate their lost loved ones. Besides these digital cemeteries allowing the bereaved to erect a memorial in honor of their loved ones in exchange for money, one can also find virtual memorials tied to specific topics: Think here of online memorials dedicated to victims of the Holocaust or the Vietnam War. As Walter et al. (2016) indicate, many of such memorials are political in nature (Walter et al. 2016: 8).

In recent years, virtual cemeteries have even begun to appear in dedication to deceased fictional characters from television series and other media. One such example allows fans to mourn the deaths of their favorite characters from Game of Thrones, for instance. This new phenomenon shows how modern forms of mass mourning may even extend to encompass the death of fictional characters, no longer being limited to real-life public figures.

Besides these dedicated virtual cemeteries, even certain popular social media platforms themselves can end up functioning as virtual gravesites in some shape or form. I have already spoken about the wide selection of articles written on the topic of social media and death, but I would nevertheless like to highlight certain aspects connected to this topic here. As a response to complaints by people regarding birthday greeting reminders of dead friends, Facebook made it so that users gain the option to 'memorialize' the dead user's page, a process "closing it to new friend requests, eliminating reminders, and limiting wall posts only to those who were actually friends with the deceased" (Riechers 2013: 56) . This preserves the deceased's profile in such a manner that only those who shared a connection with the deceased during their lifetime can still directly interact with their profile. Outside of that, it is also possible on many social media platforms for users to create commemorative pages in honor of their favorite celebrities, victims of certain tragedies, etc., even if they may not have had a direct personal connection with these people. In these cases, it is sometimes possible for other parties to also leave messages in honor of the dead**.**

One result of this *virtualization* of the space of mourning is that death becomes borderless. No longer are the death tied solely to their individual space in the physical graveyard or within a commemorative urn. Instead, the deceased's legacy can now be dispersed all around the entire world. Not only are these virtual gravesites accessible by anyone who possesses the

link at any time and from any place in the world, but it is also possible for the deceased's legacy to live on after death in other forms, for example in the form of fan-made tribute videos uploaded to platforms such as Youtube, or in the form of internet memes.

1.2.7: Changing Directionality of Death

Newer funeral processes have emerged which emphasize a movement *up* instead of the traditional movement *downwards* associated with the process of burying the dead. As I already indicated before, the traditional method of burying the deceased's body is more and more often being replaced by cremation. After the body of the deceased has been cremated, it is common practice to either preserve the ashes in an surn, or to spread them out in a location that was important to the deceased. This spreading out of the ashes does away with the downward motion so commonly associated with death in a traditional sense, as the ashes instead get carried off by the wind. While the process of cremation in its current form is s a relatively new tradition, *upward* movement as a code associated with death has been around for a long time already. In order to illustrate this, I shall turn yet again to the sphere of religion and spirituality. Even nowadays, one can see a strong emphasis on the belief that the soul of the departed will ascend to heaven or move on to some other form of afterlife in these particular spheres.

The motion upwards, beyond the borders of our world, has always fascinated us, both in a metaphysical sense and in a way that is more grounded in the physical world. With mankind taking its first steps in the exploration of space in the last half a century, it should come as no surprise that eventually even space itself would begin to figure in some shape or form in our traditions related to death and mourning. Recent years have seen an increase in private companies offering families the possibility to give their departed loved ones 'space burials,' wherein the deceased's ashes are launched up into space (Gordon 2014: 8). One of the biggest players in this branch of the funeral industry is the company Celestis. Regarding this form of memorial service, the company's official homepage states that the ritual consists of "launching a symbolic portion of cremated remains into near-space, Earth orbit, to the lunar surface or even beyond" (Celestis n.d.), traveling along aboard a commercial or scientific space mission. Over the years, many other funeral businesses offering the bereaved the possibility to include symbolic gestures such as releasing butterflies, balloons or pigeons up into the sky in order to commemorate the departed have sprung up. Each of these aforementioned commemorative rituals once again functions as a symbolic depiction of the ascent of the soul towards the afterlife.

Besides these notions of *upwardness* and *downwardness*, other codes traditionally related to movement have come to change over the years as well. Earlier I already mentioned how life has commonly been perceived as a linear and finite process, but this particular view is slowly being replaced by codes of *circularity* and *incompleteness*. Haraldsson (2013) shows that between 1999-2002, about 58,87% of Western Europeans polled as part of the European Values Survey reportedly believed in life after death, with 22,20% of that same group expressing a belief in reincarnation (Haraldsson 2006: 174). While it is still a relatively low percentage, this amount of believers in reincarnation is noteworthy due to the fact that this idea clashes both with the dominant contemporary scientific view, as well as the dominant religious view (Haraldsson 2006: 177). As possible explanations for this belief in reincarnation, Haraldsson mentions pre-Christian beliefs that may have endured in Scandinavia and Western Europe, the introduction of Hindu and Buddhist philosophies and scriptures in the Western world from the 18th century onward, and finally simply an innate personal conviction that this is our fate after death (Haraldsson 2006: 177). The growing belief in reincarnation means that believers perceive every life as part of an overarching set of lifecycles, as well as holding the belief that souls may reincarnate in the form of different organisms after one of these lifecycles is completed. These beliefs offer people a different way in which they may contemplate death, allowing them to derive either hope or despair from the fact that death may not necessarily be the end, and we may return to this world in the form of some other organism. The view of life and history as something cyclical also serves as an example of this shift in mentality regarding death.

1.3 Summary

Every culture has a set of its very own cultural codes and rituals connected to the processes of death, mourning and grief. While in practice these particular codes and rituals may diverge from one another in many cases, especially when we compare two different cultures entirely, oftentimes these divergences are merely individual variations on certain particular motives or practices that, at their very core, are in fact shared between many different cultures and communities. The codes that were covered in this chapter are, in essence, a selection of some of these 'core' codes, lying at the heart of many of the rituals and traditions connected to death and mourning in the Western world.

The cultural codes associated with death and mourning are, to a certain degree, tied strongly to the dominant cultural norms and paradigms on a total scale. As I noted before, for instance, the traditionally patriarchal structure of many Western societies also had an influence on the

way in which the memorial service was structured. Many other examples could be named besides this particular one, and all of them show how the dominant values and beliefs within a culture exert an influence upon how grief is experienced and expressed within a cultural context. As I have hopefully also successfully demonstrated, the gradual transition into the Digital Age that has taken place within the last several decades has also marked an evolution of the cultural codes related to death and mourning in order to accommodate for the changes within society on a larger scale. For some of these changed codes we can observe that there is not so much a change in the original essence of these codes, but rather merely a change in the medium or channel employed for the expression of certain forms of behavior. Of course, conversely, there are also cases where the newer codes are connected to behavior patterns and belief systems that are foreign for the Western world. An example here is the growing popularity of the belief in the Western world and the belief in life as a cycle introduced into the Western world through Eastern religion and spirituality.

The influence that modern-day technological developments have had in changing the codes of death and mourning is undeniable. The fact that technology and new media have become so tightly woven into our everyday experience has made it inevitable that they, too, would eventually begin to play a role in how we find ourselves dealing with death.

In the following chapter, I shall focus more on how these new or evolved forms of media play into the process of public mourning and mass grief in the form of two case studies related to the digital print media. By taking some of the reactions published on digital news media platforms in response to the death of David Bowie and George Michael into account, I shall attempt to provide one possible interpretation of the way in which the process of mourning a public figure's death in the public sphere is influenced and shaped in part by the new media.

Chapter 2: Death and Mourning in the Digital Age – Two Case Studies

   In order to gain a better view of the way in which the processes of death, dying and mourning are experienced in the Digital Age, we may also focus on the manner in which the processes of *mass grief* and *public trauma* have become redefined in this new era. While it is indeed true that acts of public grief and mourning have in some shape or form formed a part of public life for a substantial part of mankind's history, the manner in which such acts of remembrance have evolved over time is significant enough to warrant a further, more in-depth examination. I have already remarked upon the fact that humanity as a species has become more interconnected than ever before in the Information Age, largely thanks to the proliferation of the internet, as well as the profound influence new forms of (social) media exert on our day-to-day lives. Thanks to the internet, and especially thanks to social media, physical borders have become less and less of an obstacle hampering people's ability to connect with others across the globe. This interconnectedness has also made it so that has become easier than ever for news stories about deaths and tragedies to spread quickly and reach a wider audience than ever before. The 9/11 terrorist attacks were one of the first of such events, widely witnessed and documented by both professional news channels and eyewitnesses alike. Other media events, such as the death of Princess Diana several years earlier, along with many other tragedies that have happened in the years since then have a similar character. One of the most interesting phenomena to spring up in relation to mass grief and public trauma in these contexts connected to our contemporary (social) media-saturated world is the one that has been dubbed *mourning sickness*. This particular notion, originally coined by writer Mick Hume in response to the overblown, highly sensationalist reactions of the media and the general public in response to the death of Princess Diana, can be defined as "a collective condition characterized by ostentatious, recreational grieving for dead celebrities and murder victims" (O'Neill 2004). The condition has also been referred to as *conspicuous compassion* by the journalist Patrick West. In the eponymous pamphlet written by him, West states that this culture of 'caring' is not so much about people expressing a genuine concern for the victims of a tragedy or genuine sympathy for their loved ones, but is rather about "projecting one's own ego, and informing others what a deeply caring individual you are" (West 2004: 1) . Effectively, at their very core, expressions of mass grief are equated here to acts of selfishness, seen as a means to establish phony connections with other people in order to be seen as virtuous. West's pamphlet is in fact not only focused on the topic of public displays of mourning, but also other forms of public behavior that can be perceived as

'phony' in some sense, but it is this aspect of public mourning which is the most directly relevant element here in relation to the rest of this work.

   The notions of *mourning sickness* and *conspicuous compassion* tie in quite clearly with the notions of *spectacle* and *performativity* I have already referred to at an earlier point in this work. In the view of authors such as West, Hume and O'Neill, these public, often social media-based expressions of grief are frequently primarily intended as a means for the 'bereaved' to put their own capacity for compassion and care on display for others to see and to thereby boost their own ego, using the spectacle surrounding the death of what essentially amounts to a stranger as a stepping stone in order to accomplish this particular goal, only to repeat it again when the hype surrounding that particular event dies down and is substituted by a more recent case. In general, then, terms such as *conspicuous compassion, mourning sickness, grief porn* and others referring to similar sensibilities are distinctly marked by connotations of a negative sort. Nevertheless, we must not too hastily group all expressions of grief in response to tragedies, celebrity deaths and the like under the umbrella of *conspicuous compassion*, or perhaps at least not necessarily see such behavior as explicitly negative at all times. In the beginning of this text, I already brought up some of Durkheim's views regarding the role of grief as a culturally determined collective experience. These instances of social media-, television- and printed news-mediated mourning form the next step in the evolution of these collective experiences of grief, as the international fandoms that have sprouted up around many celebrities in effect serve to strengthen the sense of cohesion felt between individuals even when their idols are still alive through the sharing of experiences, discussion of the celebrity's work, gossip, etcetera, and then, after the death of the celebrity through the shared experience of mourning for one's idol. For Jackson and Usher (2015), "these constructions of public grief, and the observed expressions of grief, are not for those who have died, so much as they are for what the loss symbolizes to these 'mourners'" (Jackson & Usher 2015: 93). If we interpret the act of expressing one's grief publicly on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter in such a light, behavior that may to some appear to be a symptom of narcissism at a first glance may in reality just as well be a genuine expression of grief by the original poster, lamenting over the loss of what could – in the case of a celebrity death – possibly be a case of the loss of a childhood role model or idol, a loss which in turn can come to symbolize the loss of a part of the bereaved's childhood if we are to follow the line of thought illustrated here by Jackson and Usher. In the case of other types of death, such as for instance the death of a famous or influential public official, we can then also find certain symbolic expressions of loss, such as the death of such a public figure marking the end of a

particular historical or political era. The idea in these types of situations, then, is thus that in these public expressions of grief in digital spaces such as Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest or other platforms of a similar nature, genuine feelings of grief may certainly be placed secondary to a desire by users to mark themselves as the most stricken or the most compassionate of all, but even with this reality in mind, these individual expressions of mourning still contribute to the larger-scale complex of mourning, and thereby share in the construction of these aforementioned collective experiences.

Despite the unquestionably important role these digital expressions of grief play within the overall broader-scale spectrum of mourning in the digital age, we must not forget the equally important role the media itself plays in this context. I already referred to the way in which spectacular media events such as 9/11 are able to spread across the entire world even as they are occurring live. With this, I have reached another important aspect that I feel must be highlighted: the 24-hour news cycle. Both television and the internet offer all those who choose to play the role of audience the possibility to constantly keep up to date with the most recent developments even as they are happening. This new non-stop media climate has resulted in what according to critics may be called an "obsession with the "liveness" of news […] and the diminishing of time devoted to actually finding out what has happened" (Saltzis 2012: 703). Breaking news stories are often replaced quickly by newer, more recent stories, and this is also often the case with news stories related to celebrity deaths and the like. Even with this fleeting nature of the modern-day news cycle held in mind, I propose that an analysis of the way in which the media reports on the death of famous public figures may reveal certain attitudes connected to how mourning is embodied in the public sphere in the Digital Age, and moreover also provide a look into how the overall tone and the content selected for coverage in news reports may be of influence on the way in which the deceased is preserved in the cultural consciousness. In this section I shall attempt to show this by looking at the digital print news coverage of David Bowie and George Michael's death as case studies.

In the following section, I shall first be focusing on the reception of Bowie's death in the digital print media. I shall be taking into account both a selection of the positive and negative articles written in response to the artist's death. Within these articles, I will pay attention to the way in which the written content and the possible additional material (such as images or videos) work together to constitute the total message of these texts.

2.1 David Bowie

David Bowie's death came as a big surprise to both fans and friends of the artist alike, following in rapid succession after the release of his album *Blackstar* (2016). Only after the pop icon's death was it revealed to the general public that Bowie had already secretly been battling cancer for a period of eighteen months before his passing. The news of the popstar's death quickly garnered a lot of attention worldwide and spread across a wide variety of media channels. Quite rapidly the impression was created that the entire world was in mourning, if only for a little while. How was this sense of mourning expressed? Can we identify some certain underlying structures and codes in the manner in which public mourning is experienced, much like we attempted to do in the previous chapter within the context of smaller-scale acts of mourning? In order to find some possible answers to these questions, we must necessarily turn towards the way in which the new media platform of the internet plays into the global spreading of a shared sense of mass grief among the people.

Before I move onwards with my analysis proper, it is important that I first provide a brief biography of the artist and highlight some of the key moments of his career in order to provide a proper context for the subsequent analysis.

2.1.1 A Brief Overview of the Highlights of David Bowie's Life and Career

David Bowie, originally born David Robert Hayward-Jones, has gone down in history as one of the most influential and iconic British popstars of all time. Bowie – at the time still using his birth name – formed his first band, the Konrads, in 1962 (McDermott 2016). It wasn't until 1966, however, that the future star first assumed the stage name which would end up garnering world-wide fame and recognition. which would end up garnering world-wide fame and recognition. After the disbandment of Bowie's first band, he went through several unsuccessful attempts at attaining fame, first as a member of various bands in the period between 1962 and 1967, and subsequently as a solo artist with the release of his first self-titled album in 1967 (McDermott 2016).

It wouldn't be until the release of his iconic single *Space Oddity* in 1969 that Bowie would finally have his major breakthrough. His next two albums, *The Man Who Sold the World* (1970) and *Hunky Dory* (1971) further helped him rise to stardom. At this point, Bowie began experimenting both with a heavier rock-oriented sound, as well as a more androgynous visual appearance (McDermott 2016). This penchant for experimentation was a trait that would stay with Bowie for the rest of his career, and would prove to be one of the reasons for his profound influence on other artists. The release of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the*

Spiders from Mars (1972) saw Bowie taking his experimentation to the next level. It was the first occasion in which Bowie would create a fictional persona to tie in with the underlying concept of the album. The *Ziggy Stardust*-persona proved to be highly influential in the glam rock scene, as well as the gay scene due to the way in which the character succeeded in blurring the boundaries between genders. The *Ziggy Stardust*-persona was eventually retired in 1973, after which it was followed up by yet more unique personae: *Aladdin Sane*, connected to the 1973 album of the same name, *Halloween Jack,* tied to the album *Diamond Dogs* (1974) and *The Thin White Duke*, a persona affected mainly for the album *Station To Station* (1976). This particular persona also quickly acquired notoriety due to several controversial remarks made by Bowie during this period. At this point in his career Bowie relocated from the United States to Berlin after a period of drug abuse and instability, where he would famously collaborate with musician Brian Eno and producer Tony Visconti to record the highly acclaimed three album streak known as the *Berlin Trilogy: Low* (1977)*, "Heroes"* (1977) and *Lodger* (1979)*.* These three albums saw Bowie once again radically changing musical styles, moving in a more experimental, electronic direction influenced by the so-called Krautrock genre on the former two albums, and a more pop music sound on the last (McDermott 2016). The early '80s saw Bowie making his Broadway debut in The Elephant Man, as well as the release of his album *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps* (1980). Throughout the entire decade, Bowie continued to tour, release new albums, and score international hits, although the majority of the material Bowie released in the period spanning from the middle of the '80s to the early '90s would be released to little critical acclaim.

  Ever since his role in the film *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (1976), Bowie began to get more and more involved in the world of film acting alongside his primary career as a musician. His role as the Goblin King in Jim Henson's cult film *Labyrinth* (1986) would prove to become one of Bowie's most well-remembered personae. Bowie would continue to make appearances in films for the next few decades to come as well. The '90s saw Bowie further experimenting with electronic music, as well as the launch of *BowieNet* in 1998. In several ways, *BowieNet* pioneered many of the aspects of the internet we consider as commonplace in contemporary times. Besides functioning as an ISP, *BowieNet* was also tied to a dedicated David Bowie website which offered subscribers their own unique BowieNet email address, a vast array of archived material related to Bowie, access to exclusive material, as well as opportunities for subscribers to create their own websites and participate in chat sessions with Bowie himself (Stuart 2016). In this way, Bowie managed to prefigure popular social media networks such as Myspace. In the same decade, Bowie was also officially granted a place in the Rock and

Roll Hall of Fame and on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Bowie continued to release new albums throughout the rest of the decade, as well as the beginning of the next to varying degrees of acclaim, though none of his newer works would match up to his most highly acclaimed output from the '70s. Only with the release of his albums *The Next Day* (2013), released almost a decade after his previous album *Heathen* (2003), and the previously mentioned album *Blackstar* would Bowie's work once again reach the level of critical acclaim Bowie received at the peak of his career. Alongside the album *Blackstar*, the musical *Lazarus* (2015) was one of the last works Bowie completed before his death

As can be gleamed from this brief overview, David Bowie was, for all intents and purposes, an innovator, and not just within the sphere of music. It is undeniably true that Bowie's work has been of an enormous influence on both his juniors and contemporaries alike, helping to bring a new level of theatricality to the world of rock music.

Bowie's enormous impact and status as a contemporary cultural icon also means that the corpus of texts (in the broader, Lotmanian sense of the term) produced in the wake of his death is quite substantial. Now that I have provided further background context by means of this overview of key moments throughout Bowie's artistic career, I may now move on with the analysis of the public cycle of grief after his death.

2.1.2 David Bowie's Death & The Public Cycle of Grief

In order to analyze the way in which the cycle of public mourning developed and progressed in the weeks after Bowie's death, we may first focus on the ways in which the event of Bowie's death itself was covered by the mass media. In this analysis I shall be focusing on the form of discourse employed in the news reports, which aspects of the artist's career are highlighted and which ones are ignored, and the forms in which grief is expressed or reported upon in these articles. Due to the fact that the corpus of texts produced in response to Bowie's death is of such a considerably formidable size, it is necessary for us to make a careful selection of the material to be covered in this particular section so as to maintain a proper focus and not get lost within an excess of extraneous or repetitive information. In order to narrow down our focus, I have therefor primarily opted to focus here on five texts in particular, three of which approach Bowie's death from a positive perspective, and two of which instead place more emphasis on negative aspects of the artist. I shall first focus on how the text of the articles paint a particular image of the artist, followed by an examination of how the images selected to accompany the text may possibly reflect the content of the text, or might in some other way possibly influence the overall sense of the articles in question. In

the following sub-section, I shall first be focusing on those texts that posthumously paint Bowie in a positive light, before moving on to the ones that are more negative.

2.1.3 Remembering Bowie in Text: The Positive

The BBC's report on Bowie's death, published a day after the artist's passing, starts off by highlighting Bowie's status as "one of the most influential musicians of his era" (BBC 2016), followed by a disclosure of the artist's cause of death. The overall tone of the article is positive, and it follows many of the conventional patterns we can observe in the traditional structure of the memorial tribute – a listing of the deceased's greatest achievements, their cause of death, inclusion of personal anecdotes and tributes from the author/the deceased's loved ones, etcetera. The article incorporates many quotations from Bowie's contemporaries, including figures who are seen as household names in the music industry at this point such as Paul McCartney, Brian Eno, Iggy Pop and more. The inclusion of these quotations serves first of all to exemplify how the musician is remembered by those who knew him during his lifetime, but moreover they also function as a way to emphasize for the audience once again just how big of a loss Bowie's death actually was to the world. On more than one occasion, Bowie's theatrical and colorful personality is highlighted within the article, with the artist being referred to as "flamboyant" and "provocative" (BBC 2016), among other terms. Once again, the choice of terminology employed here serves to embody the artist's status as a rebel, an innovator, a breaker of conventions. This, too, falls in line with the 'conventional' structure of the obituary and the memorial tribute, where emphasis on the departed's best sides and their virtues is seen as carrying the highest sense of importance. In remembering their loved ones, people most often want to focus primarily on the good times. Such feelings are commonplace in the case of private memorial affairs, but also for those instances involving public expressions of mass mourning. That there is some truth to this statement is also shown by the fact that the BBC's article makes reference to special memorial services organized by dedicated fans in order to celebrate their idol's life and mourn his death.

The article initially published by the popular online music magazine Pitchfork in response to Bowie's death, written by Jeremy Gordon, too, largely follows the traditional style of the obituary. Recurring structures are the report on the artist's cause of death and a brief enumeration of his greatest achievements. Unlike the article published by the BBC, the article written by Jeremy Gordon makes no further mention of unofficial tribute events organized by fans, nor does it incorporate any quotes from other stars or loved ones connected to Bowie in

any way. Instead, the article remains neutral, yet positive in tone regarding the star's life and works.

   A second article written in the wake of Bowie's death also published by Pitchfork offers a far less neutral tone and far more personal one instead. Near the beginning of the article, its author, Tom Ewing, describes British pop as "a costume shop riot with Bowie its idol and excuse" (Ewing 2016). Much of the remainder of the article is similarly heaped with praise for the artist, while at the same time questioning what his possible legacy could still be for the youth of the '00s. Ewing's article, unlike the previous two, does not so much read as an obituary, eschewing the emphasis on more concrete factual biographical information related to the artist, and instead focusing more on personal anecdotes regarding the way in which Bowie influenced the author's life. This structure has more in common with the traditional format of the eulogy. While much of the article concerns the author's own individual experience, we can see recurring themes and topics present in the previous articles as well – references to Bowie's role as an influencer and role model for many, as well as to Bowie's versatile nature throughout his career. The author's sense of grief at the loss of one of the idols from his youth is never quite explicitly referred to in the article, except in a passage near the end where the author, after disclosing what he himself terms his "most private Bowie memory," states that this "was the last time [he] cried about David Bowie until today" (Ewing 2016). Although it is only a brief snippet picked from the article as a whole, it is nevertheless indicative of more commonplace trends in our modern-day mourning behavior when viewed within the context of the full article. As has increasingly become the case with instances of 'private grief' at the loss of a relative, friend or some other loved one, public grief, too, has become centered primarily around a celebration of the deceased's life and achievements. Sadness in this way becomes displaced, perhaps even recontextualized in a sense through the act of channeling these feelings commonly associated with the negative into something positive. This particular form of coming to terms with loss can be encountered in many other articles published around the time of Bowie's death as well. Another trend that appears to be recursive across these similarly-natured articles is that many of them include references to some sort of 'life lessons' that the average person may derive from the deceased star's career. This 'life lesson' motif can be found in the previously mentioned article by Erdwing, where Bowie's legacy to the adults of the '10s is helping them "recognize when to try something new, and do it well and without fear" (Erdwing 2016). In her article *Reflections of a Bowie Girl,* Ann Powers delivers a similar conclusion: "Pursue joy and make room for contemplation, do the work and appreciate the pleasure, never stop unless you want to, the

changes are everything, hang on to yourself' (Powers 2016). Many other articles, as well as comments left by Bowie's fellow celebrities, emphasize this aspect of 'learning'. In this way, the reaction to Bowie's death is transformed yet again into one not solely conveying connotations of loss, but in this case also carrying connotations of potential growth and self-actualization. To some extent, it appears as if the emphasis on life-lessons the general public may derive from the departed popstar's life that is present in some of these articles is meant to function as a way to lessen the blow of the pop icon's death, and attempts instead to establish a positive form of connection between people based on this idea of growth and improvement.

2.1.4 Remembering Bowie in Text: The Negative

Not all articles written in response to Bowie's death look back upon his life and his career in such an unanimously positive light, however, showing once again that – as with every sort of business concerning the general public as a whole – people from different demographics and cultures inevitably experience the world in their own unique, individual way, and this variety of perspectives goes for the way in which we experience death as well. Instead of solely reflecting on the highlights of Bowie's career, several people on various social media platforms, as well as in the media in general have instead opted to also look past the initial layer of positivity in order to reflect upon some of the more problematic aspects of the artist's career rather than solely being satisfied with the idealized picture that is portrayed in the media at large. In Bowie's case, many of these less unanimously positive articles are written from a feminist perspective.

One example of exactly such an article is *The Complexity of Mourning a Celebrity Accused of Sexual Abuse* (2016), written by Aida Manduley for the Huffington Post. In the article, Manduley initially follows in the footsteps of most of the other articles covered so far by first highlighting and acknowledging Bowie's influence on queer and trans people worldwide, as well as the way in which he, in the eyes of many, helped to change the world of music and perspectives on gender forever. This acknowledgement of Bowie's positive influence on these aspects of culture are subsequently directly juxtaposed with Bowie's problematic allegations of rape, as well as his sexual involvement with a 14/15 year old girl. The problem brought forth here is an interesting and complex one indeed, and perhaps not one I should strive to answer within the boundaries of this particular research. Nevertheless, this problem does have aspects to it which tie in directly to the case of mass grief in the digital age.

The problematic duality of wishing to mourn the loss of a loved one who has committed questionable acts during their lifetime was already a difficult reality within the context of

private, personal mourning. Now, in the context of mass grief in its current form in the Digital Age, it has become complicated even further. I have already highlighted the emphasis in modern western mourning processes on positivity, celebration of life, and growth in previous sections of this research project. People in general wish to remember the departed in the best possible way, be they loved ones with whom the bereaved had a direct, personal connection, or perhaps an idol with whom the bereaved had a far more superfluous connection. This results in the transformation of the deceased into some sort of symbol for those positive values which the deceased was said to possess in their lifetime. A logical result of such a transformation is the erasure of anything deemed to go against this particular positive narrative in order to present and preserve the best possible version of a person within the cultural memory, especially within the realm where public figures are concerned. This is even more explicitly the case within the contemporary context, where internet fan communities dedicated to specific musicians or other figures forming a part of the local and/or global cultural consciousness have become a widespread and commonplace sight. These types of communities in particular tend to consist primarily of people whose lives have been positively affected by the celebrity in some shape or form, and as such these fans might react in an especially negative manner to any less-than-positive comments made regarding their idols in the period soon after their death.

   To some extent, thus, a situation is reached here wherein two separate (yet not always necessarily entirely disparate) narratives sprout into existence: First, there is what we may term the 'sanitized' version, which is the narrative that is most commonly encountered in reports featured in the mass media, or in the delineated spaces of fan communities. This is the aforementioned narrative that largely glosses over the deceased figure's negative aspects, while instead focusing primarily on their positive contributions to their respective field or to society as a whole. Secondly, there is the one which may be labeled as the 'unsanitized' narrative, which may in some cases acknowledge a public figure's positive contributions and achievements as well to a certain degree, but simultaneously also acknowledges their faults and possible problematic acts they have committed during their lifetime. In certain cases, such 'unsanitized' narratives may focus solely on highlighting the negative aspects of a public figure's career in an attempt to counter the positive exposure, or to retroactively 'expose' them for their misdeeds. This type of narrative is commonly not heavily pushed in the media directly at the start of the public cycle of grief, only appearing later on in the course of the cycle, if at all. Instead, these types of narratives are more commonly found among non-

mainstream media channels, especially those ones that aim at giving a voice to marginalized groups of various sorts.

 While *The Huffington Post* is, for all intents and purposes, a mainstream media platform (albeit with a strong leaning towards liberalism), Manduley's article falls within the latter category of texts that appear to be primarily aimed at audiences belonging to marginalized groups. In the article itself, the author identifies as a "gender/queer Latinx" who "has worked for years on preventing and dealing with sexual assault and abuse" (Manduley 2016). As this self-description indicates, the author is a member of such self-same marginalized groups as well. Due to the author's history of dealing with sexual assault and abuse cases, it is logical to conclude that topics related to sexual abuse more directly influence the author's perception about a celebrity (and whether it is 'right' to mourn their eventual death). In her article, Manduley acknowledges the difficulty many people with a personal history connected to abuse or assault may have in terms of deciding whether or not one should ultimately grieve for one's idol after being faced with the reality that they have engaged in forms of abusive or otherwise morally questionable behavior. As I have already established regarding forms of grief in general, the ways in which people grieve at an individual level are not all uniform, and as such it is difficult, if not downright impossible to account for these individual idiosyncrasies. Quite similarly, Manduley does not necessarily push to have her own particular view on what would be a necessary course of action to follow onto the audience, but rather acknowledges that even in this case of mass grief at the death of a public figure these individual, subjective differences in experience continue to play a role in how each person chooses to process this knowledge of Bowie's alleged abusive activities. The author's ultimate conclusion in the article appears to be that members of oppressed or abused groups affected by Bowie's death must in the end follow their own judgments and either mourn the man as they see fit while simultaneously acknowledging his problematic past, or sever their emotional ties to Bowie's works as they see fit.

   Manduley's article is not the only one that emphasizes the problematic aspects of Bowie's career. In her article *Remembering Bowie: The Man, The Legend, The Sexual Abuser* (2016), published on *The Establishment*, an online media platform aiming to provide a voice for women from all walks of life, author Jody Allard also addresses the problem surrounding the mourning of Bowie's death after discovering the accusations of sexual abuse raised against him in the past. In contrast to the relatively nuanced and neutral position assumed in Manduley's article, Allard is far more damning in her article, stating that "there is no room for victimizers among our cultural icons" (Allard 2016) , and that, despite Bowie's transformative

influence on our popular culture, his work as an artist can in her opinion not be taken as something entirely separate from his private persona, and as such to mourn Bowie would in essence be equal to endorsing rape culture. The discourse utilized in this particular article is less concerned with providing any information on Bowie himself outside of an acknowledgement of his influential role as a pop cultural icon and the accusations of abuse raised against him, and rather has its roots in the discourse common to social justice activism, and as such it directly goes against most of the discourse commonly employed within the public cycle of grief (pertaining in this particular case to Bowie's death, but also to the broader style of discourse commonly employed in the media in relation to the cycle of grief). Still, we may simultaneously argue that this element of dissent nevertheless forms a core part of the public cycle of grief.

At an earlier point I already referred to the potential for states of grief and mourning to function as a means of strengthening the social cohesion within given social units. This characteristic of mourning has, for all intents and purposes, been retained even in the Information Age. As can be observed from the majority of the public's reactions to Bowie's death, the grief over his death helped bring people together into a sort of unity, while those others, the ones refusing to mourn Bowie due to his perceived negative qualities in turn also form a kind of unit of their own. We can here observe the classic emergence of the notions *self* and *other*, a dichotomy that has been identified as one of the core foundations of culture as a whole by scholars such as Juri Lotman. Whether one perceives this particular situation from the perspective of the mourners or that of the ones with a more negative view of Bowie as an artist or Bowie as a person, the opposite party automatically attains the position of the 'other,' falling outside of the sphere of recognition for that group in question. In this way, the act of public mourning (or the refusal to participate in it) becomes a means of identifying other members of the same group. While this is most likely not the case with this particular example of David Bowie's death, the expression of public grief can in effect be transformed into a political act through such actions. Expressions of grief and mourning may in such situations undoubtedly retain their original, genuine function as coping mechanisms and means to honor the dead, but may at the same time also come to be used as a means of demonstrating one's personal connection to certain social groups.

2.1.5 Remembering Bowie in Pictures

Up until this point, I have primarily focused on the way in which Bowie's death has been covered in the media in terms of the verbal discourse employed in relation to the case. Focusing only on the role verbal language plays in the way in which the public response to Bowie's death is framed, however, would ignore the role that other sign systems play in that very same process. Outside of verbal language, one of the most important types of sign systems utilized in order to frame a particular image of the deceased musician is the system of photographs and images. As I already indicated at a prior point, the process of public mourning may also be seen as a process of 'filtering' and 'polishing' the public image of the deceased so as to preserve it for future generations. In such a context, not only the choice of words used to describe the deceased matters, but also the image of the deceased that becomes fixed in the public consciousness upon the moment of their death (and thereby, for all intents and purposes, becomes immortalized).

As could already be gleaned from the brief overview of Bowie's career highlights provided before, Bowie was a man of many faces, akin to a chameleon for some. This multiplicity of identities, this wide variety of different roles Bowie has played in his lifetime as an artist, means that authors had a wide selection of personae to choose from, each of which in turn carry their own set of further connotations and meanings reaching beyond the surface level of pure aesthetic appearances. The choice of images used to support the written texts produced in memoriam of Bowie is thus inherently meaningful, and must necessarily also be taken into consideration. In this section, I shall take yet another look at some of the articles that have been covered in the previous two subchapters in order to see how the choice of images may possibly relate to the content of the articles themselves.

We may first once again return to the article written by the BBC. The article, as mentioned before, offers the reader an overview of Bowie's entire career, along with several tributes to the deceased by those who knew him or were affected by him during his lifetime. The images chosen to accompany this particular article fit in with this pervasive idea and purpose of displaying the greatest highlights of Bowie's career. At the top of the article one may find a video slideshow set to music titled 'The many faces of David Bowie' which chronicles many of the transformations Bowie has undergone in terms of both his physical appearance and sound during his time as an artist. Although the slideshow does also include some material from the latter part of his career, the majority of the video is focused on Bowie's style and music from the '70s and '80s, arguably the most noteworthy and iconic period of Bowie's entire career, during which he released the majority of his most acclaimed albums and

greatest hits. The emphasis here on exactly this material over the latter part of Bowie's career shows that this is the image of Bowie which appears to be most strongly ingrained in the cultural consciousness, at least in the mind of the one who compiled the article. The rest of the article similarly features a blend of footage taken from different points throughout Bowie's career, including some from his earliest acts. The selection of photos found within the main body of the text do offer a more even balance between Bowie's older and newer sides. The selection of photos complements the actual text itself, as both fulfill a similar commemorative function. The two elements complement one another and help to create a cohesive overview of Bowie's career as an artist. What is interesting is that the angle of Bowie, the man, is almost entirely ignored in this space in favor of Bowie as an artist. What is mourned in the public sphere, then, is not necessarily so much the death of Bowie as the person he might have truly been offstage, but rather the death of Bowie as a larger-than-life figure, a cultural phenomenon. We see this in the case of other celebrity deaths as well; what is mourned is often the end of the celebrity's legacy, not necessarily always the loss of the person who they are behind closed doors. This is not necessarily a phenomenon exclusive to the Information Age, but one that was undoubtedly present in the past as well. The only difference is that with the proliferation of social media platforms these days, it has become easier for fans to in some cases gain more insight into the private lives of certain celebrities, thus also gaining a chance to become more familiar with the 'human' side of these public figures. Still, as we see here, despite the occasional bridging of the gap, the general public is often more focused on the myth created around the celebrity.
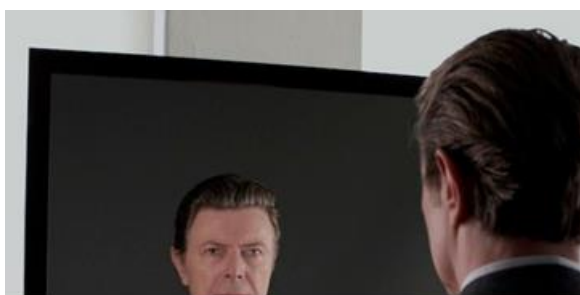
(Ewig 2016; Gordon, J. 2016)

Both of the articles published by Pitchfork that were mentioned previously feature the same image of Bowie as their header, a portrait taken by Jimmy King in 2013 which showcases an older Bowie staring at his own reflection in the mirror, shown here on the left-hand side. The two articles contain no further images, but both of them do contain a video – in the case of Jeremy Gordon's article it is the official music video for Bowie's song *Lazarus,* off his final album *Blackstar,* while in Tom Ewing's article it is a video containing official concert footage from 1975 aired by the BCC. The video shows Bowie's performance of the songs *Diamond Dogs* and *John, I'm Only Dancing*. How does this (audio)visual material relate to the textual content of these articles? Let us first look at the article written by Gordon.

As I already mentioned in the previous subchapter, the actual textual content of Gordon's article falls in line with the general format of the obituary or memorial text. The image featured within the article is among the last professional photoshoots featuring Bowie as the subject made during his lifetime. It gives the audience a view of an aged version of Bowie still in good health. This, too, falls in line with the general style of memorial pieces or obituaries, which may occasionally be accompanied by photographs of the deceased in their prime, or taken during the last few years of their life. Once again, we may observe here the recurrent desire to preserve the memory of the departed at their 'best' state that is so common in the mourning practices of the Western world. The inclusion of the music video of Bowie's music video for the song *Lazarus* may serve to help link Bowie's death to his at the time newly released album *Blackstar*, which has been interpreted by some as Bowie's farewell message to the world, knowing that he was close to death. This additional layer of meaning to the work makes *Blackstar* itself into another interesting example of how death or, as in this case, the awareness of one's impending death, has become more intertwined with notions of growth and creativity in modern times. The music video serves as Bowie's own personal epitaph, and as such it ties in with the rest of Gordon's article.

As Ewing's article employs the same photograph of Bowie as its header, we may presume that this particular image was chosen due to the fact that it carries similar connotations to when it was used in Gordon's article. This is also strengthened by the fact that the very nature of the article in question is concerned with showcasing the author's own personalized account of how Bowie affected his life, and how he thus chooses to ultimately remember the man after his death. The inclusion of the concert footage of *Diamond Dogs* is relevant within the context of the article due to the fact that the author indicates parts of the eponymous album produced a strong emotional response within him. It is thus in function essentially used here as a means of illustration for the author's text, a means for the author to share some of Bowie's work that personally impacted him with Pitchfork's audience.

What we can observe as a recurrent pattern across all of these aforementioned articles posthumously portraying Bowie in a positive light is that all three of them emphasize the side of Bowie the superstar, much more so than that of Bowie the man, not only in terms of their textual content as we have already seen before, but also in terms of the accompanying images used alongside the articles' textual content. We can thus say that these media truly seem to intend to ingrain the mythical image of the dead artist into the public consciousness more so than anything else.

Now that I have covered the selected articles posthumously speaking about Bowie in a positive light, I shall once again turn towards the selection of articles that put emphasis on the negative instead in order to see how the choice of visual material influences the overall content of the articles.

The first text we may look at once again is the article written by Manduley. The very first image featured in the article is one of a younger Bowie in a mustard-yellow suit, pictured here on the right, a part of a photoshoot by Terry O'Neill (1974), along with a memorial candle placed in front of it. The article also features

(Manduley 2016)

other images of Bowie, including a still of him and Jennifer Connelly from the movie *Labyrinth* (1986), a middle-aged Bowie holding a cat, a photo of Bowie in the iconic *Aladdin Sane*-makeup, and a smiling, older David Bowie. The article thus features a selection of different images spanning the early years of Bowie's career, up to his later years. Moreover, the selection of images simultaneously encompasses both a selection of images pertaining to some of the various artistic personae Bowie had adapted during his lifetime, as well as ones that offer the viewer a more candid and 'human' portrait of the man dressed in everyday clothes. This particular juxtaposition between Bowie the artist and Bowie the man in the selection of images is also relevant to the actual textual content of Manduley's article. As was already mentioned before, the article sees the author addressing the problem of separating between Bowie as an influential cultural icon, and Bowie as an abuser. These pictures highlight this divide even further, and moreover also provide support to the author's statement that abusers could come from any and all ranks of life, and that a person's artistic or cultural merits do not exempt them from guilt in cases of abuse. The selected images function as a means of strengthening the author's message in the text, though at the same time these employed images do not by themselves function as an indictment of any sort leveled at the artist himself. This, too, falls in line with the general message the author apparently wishes to convey, namely that what audiences choose to do when faced with the reality that their deceased idols may have crossed certain moral and ethical boundaries, during their lifetime, and how said audiences choose to reconcile this with their desire to mourn the deceased (if at all) rests in their own hands, and should be pondered carefully.

(Allard 2016)

The article by Jody Allard also features a stylized version of Bowie as he appears on the cover art of his album *Aladdin Sane* as its header image, seen here on the left-hand side. This particular portrait of the artist, showing a shirtless, androgynous-looking Bowie with his eyes closed and a lightning bolt design drawn onto his face, has gone on to become one of the defining images from the glam rock-era of his career, being often imitated, featured in parodies and tributes to the artist. Due to this, the image carries a strong sense of immediate recognizability for most audiences with some degree of familiarity with the pop culture of the last several decades. Due to the image's iconic status, the author's decision to use exactly this particular image of Bowie over all the other potential alternatives seems like a deliberate choice, especially given the content of the article. This instantly recognizable image creates an immediate contrast to the topic at hand within the article itself, as Bowie's sexual abuse allegations are in fact not as generally well-known among many of the singer's fans, unlike the iconic cover art. The juxtaposition between image and the topic of the article, as with Manduley's article, once again seems to be meant to evoke the idea that sexual abusers can come from all ranks of life. Moreover, the textual content of the article, coupled with the fact that what is used is a stylized version of the image, not one showing Bowie himself, suggests a reluctance on the author's behalf to portray the likeness of the real artist, perhaps due to the expressed distaste towards the artist over his abusive actions.

Whereas Manduley and Allard's articles both in fact do address the 'human' aspect of Bowie in their textual content, and do not only focus on the more mythical aspect, it is only in Manduley's article that this is reflected in terms of the images used to accompany the text as well. These two articles both highlight some of the artist's more problematic actions committed as a private person rather than focusing entirely on Bowie as a cultural influencer, but the manner in which this emphasis is created differs between the two texts.

2.1.6 Media Reception to David Bowie's Death: Final Words

The death of David Bowie proved to be no less than a spectacle, not only due to the buzz generated in the media and on various social media platforms, but also arguably in part thanks to the efforts of the artist himself, if we are to interpret his final work Blackstar as a sort of artistic farewell note to the world. In general, the first thing I may say regarding the public's reception of Bowie's death is that we simply cannot speak of any sort of universally consistent type of response. This, of course, is logical when we take into consideration the

sizeable amount of people who have come into contact with the pop star, either directly or simply through his work, and the variety of demographics they belong to, the roles they perform and the ideologies they adhere to. Nevertheless, even taking this disparity of perspectives into account, there still are certain aspects that retain a recurrent presence throughout the different articles we have selected for our particular analysis here.

In terms of the positive content that appears to be the most commonly recurrent, one of the main recurrent themes is the emphasis on Bowie's status as a near-mythical figure in contemporary pop culture, with many of the articles – even those that assumed a more negative tone – acknowledging Bowie's position as a role model and idol in the eyes of many of those who grew up listening to his music. In relation to this, most of the articles analyzed here also featured citations of other influential cultural figures expressing their grief at the loss of the singer, or reflecting upon the influence Bowie has had on their lives. Many of the articles make note, however cursory, of Bowie's cause of death, and moreover, multiple articles also highlight the way in which some of Bowie's glam rock personae helped to blur boundaries of gender and thereby may have been of influence in breaking down certain cultural stereotypes. In terms of the negative content, the topic of Bowie's sexual abuse allegations forms one of the main recurrent topics of discourse.

The expressions of grief presented here in general do not seem to directly involve many of the newer cultural codes related to grief and remembrance that we covered in the preceding chapter, other than a change in the media space utilized. While it is true that the space in which the printed news media operates has over the course of the past century gradually transitioned from a primarily analog, paper-based medium to a primarily digital medium with the internet as the primary channel of communication, it is also true that the core means of transmitting messages has in essence remained the same as it has always been. Paper obituaries and tributes have not quite been supplanted by their digital counterparts, as many printed newspapers, magazines, etc. still remain in circulation, but due to the fact that many print media have made the transition to digital platforms either entirely, or utilize digital media alongside print media, these virtual obituaries are starting to become more normalized. The previously mentioned quotes taken from Bowie's contemporaries and friends in response to his death, many of which have been taken directly from these public figures' Twitter accounts, provide a cursory glimpse of how social media platforms have these days become effective platforms for the public broadcasting of people's grief, with posts having the potential to easily reach hundreds, if not thousands of followers at a time. If we were to assume a more cynical position here, these examples could also be interpreted as possible

examples of the modern-day performativity that comes coupled with grief and mourning. Spectacular media events, such as the death of a well-known public figure, seem to make it so that a response from other influencers on social media platforms is almost demanded, not only as possible expressions of genuine personal grief, but also in order to maintain an active presence on these platforms.

Keeping in mind what I have observed from the media reactions to David Bowie's passing, I will now continue on to the second case study by also looking at the way in which the death of George Michael was processed in the media. In this second case study, I will be following the same format I employed in the case study focusing on Bowie.

2.2 George Michael

Much like the passing of David Bowie several months earlier in the same year, the sudden, unexpected death of George Michael came as a great shock to people worldwide. The popstar's lifeless body was reportedly found in bed by his partner on Christmas morning of 2016. While Michael's actual cause of death remained a mystery for several months after the singer's passing, it was eventually revealed to the public that the 53-year old popstar had died a natural death, which is thought to have been caused by dilated cardiomyopathy with myocarditis and fatty liver (CBS 2017). In the following subchapters, I shall be examining a hand-picked selection of articles forming a part of the news cycle related to George Michael's death in order to see how the previously mentioned notion of *mass grief* manifested itself in the context of the popstar's death.

Once again, much like I did with David Bowie in the preceding subchapters, I shall first provide an overview of some of the key aspects of George Michael's career as a musician for the sake of background context before I shall subsequently move on to the analysis of how the cycle of grief in response to Michael's death was represented in the public sphere of contemporary print media.

2.2.1 A Brief Overview of George Michael's Career Highlights

While perhaps not as iconic or influential on a scale similar to David Bowie, George Michael nevertheless had an illustrious career spanning more than four decades before his unexpected death. Michael, originally born Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou, was born in 1963. Again, like Bowie, Michael, too, already began to pursue his dream of becoming a successful musician from a very early age. In his teens, George Michael played in a band called The Executive, alongside his school friend and longtime musical partner Andrew Ridgeley. The band was short-lived and disbanded before ever releasing anything of note. Soon after the demise of this first band, Michael and Ridgeley would move on together to form the pop duo Wham! in the year 1981. At this point, Michael has already been doing work as a DJ at several local clubs in his area as well (Ellis-Petersen 2016). Michael and Ridgeley's duo would prove to be a massive success, even despite its ultimately rather short lifespan. Wham!'s first album, *Fantastic* (1983), quickly climbed to the top of the UK music charts, as did several of the singles released to accompany the album. From that point onward, the duo only continued to grow in popularity.

The duo's second album, *Make It Big* (1984), managed to reach the top of the music charts not only in Michael and Ridgeley's native United Kingdom, but in several other countries as

well. Several of the singles released in connection to Wham!'s second album, including the well-known hit *Careless Whisper* (1984), ended up becoming some of George Michael's signature songs (Ellis-Petersen 2016). It is at this point in his career that Michael slowly began to emerge as a solo artist, with the aforementioned *Careless Whisper* being his first venture alone.

   Wham! would release one last album together in 1986, after which the pair would part ways so that Michael could focus entirely on building up his solo career. Michael released his first full solo album *Faith* in 1987, followed by a second one, *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1*, in 1991. Both albums were very successful, selling millions of copies each. Despite his continuing success as an artist, Michael's personal life became rather tumultuous throughout the course of the '90s. Michael's boyfriend passes away in 1993, several years after having tested positive for Aids. Not long after his partner's death, Michael openly comes out as gay to his parents. In the period after his partner's death, Michael largely withdrew from the public eye for several years, developing an addiction to different types of drugs. Michael would return after his period of absence to release his third solo album in 1996. (Ellis-Petersen 2016).

   Michael would finally openly come out as gay to the general public two years later, following his arrest for "engaging in a lewd act" in a public restroom in 1998. For the next several years, Michael largely vanishes from the public eye, other than to release a single from time to time. Michael releases only one album of original material in the '00s, *Patience* (2004), his first album in five years. (Ellis-Petersen 2016).

   The remainder of the decade saw Michael getting involved in several drugs-related offences, including one particularly serious case in 2010 that resulted in the popstar officially being sentenced to eight weeks in jail. Other than a handful of singles, Michael would release no further original studio material in the period between the release of his album *Patience* and his death in 2016. The final album to be released during Michael's lifetime was *Symphonica* (2014), a compilation of live material recorded during his world tour spanning from 2011 – 2012. On this particular tour, Michael suffered from a near-fatal bout of pneumonia, forcing him to put his performances on hold in order to recover in the hospital. In the last few years of his life, Michael would be admitted into the hospital for health-related issues on several more occasions before his ultimate unexpected passing in 2016 (Addley 2016).

   Although George Michael's career was not as prolific, diverse or influential on later generations as David Bowie's career was, George Michael too has enjoyed massive popularity throughout his life as a musician. Moreover, he ended up becoming an iconic figure in the

LGBT community for the way in which he openly came out to the general public regarding his sexuality.

The fact that Michael was not as influential a figure as Bowie automatically also means that the corpus of available texts (once again in the Lotmanian sense) produced directly in response to his passing is somewhat more limited than the corpus of texts related to Bowie's death. Nevertheless, there is still ample material available for further analysis. As such, let us now move on to the analysis in question , so that we may see in which ways these two separate cycles of public grief differed (if at all).

2.2.2: George Michael's Death & The Public Cycle of Grief

Similarly to our analysis of the reception to Bowie's death, I will primarily be focusing on the ways in which the event was publicized in the mass media, and as such on the way in which these new media contribute to the constitution of the public cycle of grief in this particular case. As I acknowledged before, the overall corpus of texts in reaction to George Michael's death is overall much smaller in size than the one related to Bowie's death, likely due to the fact that, even though he was seen as an icon by many, Michael did not have a career as influential as Bowie's. Even despite that fact, the total corpus of texts produced in response to Michael's death is still formidable in size, and as such, much like with Bowie's case, a limited selection out of the total corpus must be made in order to avoid losing focus and getting lost in superfluous material. In order to delimit our focus, I will thus once again be focusing on a selection of four articles that emphasize the positive aspects of Michael's life, alongside two which emphasize more negative aspects of his life. Once again, I shall first be focusing on the discourse employed within these articles, followed by an examination of how the supplementary material featured in the article helps to create a total image, and how this image in turn finally may influence the public perception and reaction to celebrity death. In the following section, I shall first examine the more negative content published in reaction to Michael's death.

2.2.3 Remembering George Michael: The Negative

In comparison to the general reactions to Bowie's death in the media, we can observe an interesting contrast when we observe the general trajectory of the responses to Michael's death directly around the time of his passing. Many of the earlier articles published shortly after the singer's death place an emphasis on speculation regarding Michael's possible cause of death. The heavy emphasis on what could have been the probable cause of death is

interesting here due to the fact that there is an implied (or, as in some cases, downright explicit) suggestion that Michael's death may have been related to drug abuse, tying back to the negative publicity the singer has received regarding his run-ins with the law due to his history of drug-related problems throughout his career. The rumors about Michael's death being tied to an overdose are brought up prominently in an article written by Mark Beaumont, published in NME in January 2017. In the article, Beaumont refers to Michael's self-confessed addiction to marihuana, as well as his history with prescription drugs. Moreover, Beaumont also refers to rumors about Michael possibly having spent a year in a rehabilitation clinic between 2014 and 2015 in order to combat an addiction to crack cocaine, as well as other rumors insinuating that the singer had developed an addiction to heroin in the period near the end of his life (Beaumont 2017). In an article written by Lisa Kjelsson published in The Telegraph in January 2017, the suggestion of Michael's death possibly being drug-related is brought up as well, alongside several other insinuations and rumors regarding possible causes of death. Both Beaumont's article and Kjelsson's article also bring up rumors stating that Michael's death could have been a suicide. These rumors stemmed from a series of (now deleted) tweets posted on the account of Fadi Fawaz, who was Michael's partner. In the tweets, Faraz wrote "The only thing George wanted is to DIE… he tried numbers of time to kill himself many times… and finally he managed" (Kjelsson 2017). Not long after making these tweets, Faraz' Twitter account was deleted, and he claimed to have been hacked. Still, it was enough to raise suspicion, even despite the fact that police had already indicated that it did not look like Michael had died under suspicious circumstances. In an article written by Jennifer Dzikowski for the publication Heavy in December 2016, less than a day after the singer's death, Dzikowski responds to rumors stating that Michael's death could have been caused by complications related to HIV/AIDS. These particular rumors were brought into the world due to the fact that one of Michael's partners passed away from complications related to AIDS in the early Nineties. Even despite explicit denial from Michael's representatives, these rumors managed to persevere on the internet and in tabloid papers.

   The fact that the media choose to emphasize these rumors, even though in many cases these claims originate from dubious, often anonymous sources, once again shows how the topic of death and mourning has become sensationalized by the media in a modern-day setting. This can be seen as a direct example of *grief porn* in action, with media channels essentially profiting off the death of a celebrity by posthumously spreading unverified rumors. The actual message regarding loss of a person gets buried beneath conjecture and other content intended to generate clicks, likes or shares. While it is true that such rumors will most likely not affect

the prior views of the deceased's fans or close loved ones, these rumors may indirectly influence the perception of the general public, and as such they may determine whether or not the general public would wish to participate in mourning the loss of this public figure, as well as the public's posthumous reception to their work. It is of course true that this sensationalizing role of the media is far from being something truly new, forming an integral part of the business model utilized within the sphere of journalism essentially from the very beginning, but the Digital Age has influenced the speed and the scope at which information is capable of spreading across the world, meaning that once certain pieces of information start spreading across the web, it becomes hard to remove them entirely. Even such unsubstantiated rumors can thus start to lead a life of their own in this virtual space, and due to the essentially borderless nature of the internet they may spread across the entire globe with great ease. In some cases, it can be argued that even negative rumors may contribute to the formation of a certain mythical image or persona of the deceased, but whether or not this truly is the case may depend on several factors. In the particular case being analyzed here, the singer's personal history of drug use and depression has commonly not been portrayed in a romanticized light in the media, but rather as something scandalous and of a negative influence on his musical legacy. On the other hand, the same behavior could be seen as a virtue for artists who are a part of the counterculture, and in such cases it could in fact contribute positively to the creation of a certain posthumous cult of personality surrounding the deceased. As I have already indicated before, the act of mourning, and especially the act of public mourning, has in many cases in our contemporary society come to revolve not just around remembering the dead and honoring them, but also around performativity, the use of a certain event in order to help establish a particular self-image. Much like with the example of the negative reactions after the death of David Bowie mentioned before, certain aspects of a public figure's life can be used by ordinary people in order to establish their own personal identities, to show their alliance with certain social groups, disdain for others, and so forth. The fact that Michael, an openly gay man, died under mysterious circumstances was enough for some to immediately insinuate that his death must in some form have been connected to HIV/AIDS. Such insinuations may in fact strongly be based on the long-lasting perception of AIDS being a disease of the gay scene, and thus these views and insinuations are easily adopted by groups or individuals with an intolerant stance towards the LGBT community, even if the original insinuations are based on unverified information, as is the case in this particular context. While I did not find any examples of texts that directly linked the topics of Michael's death and AIDS together in order to propagate some type of homophobic ideas, the

fact that these rumors were presented in the media in the first place does provide hypothetical grounds for such conceptions to gain footing and to spread further, thereby potentially also indirectly disrupting the usual flow of the public mourning process.

While the authors and publications expressing more negative reactions to David Bowie's dead predominantly belonged to marginalized groups in society, the publications spreading these rumors regarding Michael's possible cause of death, as well as rumors about other scandals involving the singer, are predominantly a part of what could be dubbed the sociocultural mainstream. The 'unsanitized' narrative is in Michael's case presented simultaneously with the 'sanitized' version when we take into consideration the articles which choose to emphasize the aspect of the rumors initially surrounding Michael's unexplained death versus those which simply choose to report on the events that transpired as-is, without excessive speculation, and on commemorating the dead artist.

One viable explanation for this simultaneous emergence of these two types of narratives in this particular context may have to do with the unexplained nature of Michael's death. Unexplained and unexpected deaths, even more so than regular ones, serve as a sign that once again reminds people of the fleeting nature of life, and the unpredictability and (occasionally) unfairness of it all. Faced with such an emptiness then, a void in the space previously occupied by the deceased, people will eventually begin to attempt searching for answers in order to try filling in the gap. This search for closure is in and of itself a process that can carry many different meanings for separate individuals, be they a desire for financial gain, a desire to find answers and a means to come to terms with the loss of a loved one, or some other potential reason not listed here. In cases where a person dies a natural death, this gap of knowledge does not exist, and as such the desire to come to terms with one's loss is externalized and expressed in a wholly different manner, usually one that is more focused on remembrance and reminiscing rather than on attempting to fill in the gap of missing knowledge that is left after someone's sudden, unexpected departure. Those publications which are more oriented towards sensationalism will readily exploit the people's desire to attempt to fill their perceived sense of emptiness by spreading rumors speculating about the deceased's possible cause of death, while the others will be geared more strongly towards commemoration and preservation.

2.2.4 Remembering George Michael: The Positive

While it is true that many publications emphasized the mystery surrounding Michael's cause of death, and thereby occasionally contributed to the further spreading of (potentially slanderous) rumors regarding the famous singer, there is an equally sizeable selection of texts that highlight some of the singer's more positive qualities, as well as the influence he has had on others' lives.

As I already indicated before, Michael didn't have as influential a career as David Bowie when it comes to the impact he left on the musical world of the generations following him or on pop culture in general, but it would also be too much of an overexaggeration to state that Michael did not leave any sort of impact whatsoever.

One aspect that is often mentioned in a positive light in regards to Michael's career is the singer's impact on the gay scene and on gay culture. In an article written for *The Guardian* by Owen Jones (2016), Michael's status as a gay icon is highlighted and celebrated, with the author stating that "[h]is sexuality and his music cannot, and must not, be divorced" (Jones 2016). The author states that Michael's life and sexuality should not be sanitized even after his death, stating that his refusal to self-censor and his openness about his sexuality are two of the most important traits lending him his status as an iconic figure to members of the LGBT community (Jones 2016). According to the author, "when people die, we have a responsibility to remember who they actually were, not a sanitized and false version that is palatable to some" (Jones 2016). In an article for the digital media website Mashable, Johnny Lieu (2016) expresses sentiments similar to those voiced in the article by Jones. Lieu notes that George Michael was one of the first openly gay people those growing up in the '90s became acquainted with (Lieu 2016). This cry to avoid sanitizing the life of the deceased in many ways goes against the established cultural traditions and norms still prevalent in Western society to this day. Even in the era of the Digital Age, where the information people choose to share about themselves is often readily available on the internet and usually only as sanitized as the people choose to make it themselves, it is still common for families to attempt to sanitize the lives of the deceased in order to preserve as positive an image of their lost loved one as possible. The digital identity management companies mentioned in the previous chapter are but one example of the ways in which people can attempt to accomplish this sanitization. In the particular case of George Michael I am dealing with here, however, this process of sanitizing the deceased's legacy is already made much more difficult due to the fact that on at least one occasion, Michael took one of the scandals he'd become involved in, and transformed it into a form of self-expression. Both Lieu and Jones make mention of the

public sex scandal Michael was involved in in 1998, the incident which played a direct role in Michael's coming out about his sexuality to the general public. In the music video for his single *Outside* (1998), Michael directly references the incident and satirizes it, with parts of the music video set in a men's toilet and featuring dancers dressed as police officers. Both authors highlight the fact that Michael's coming out, and the way in which he approached his sexuality were uncommon for the time period, with there still being a strong stigma against divergent sexualities. In Jones' article, the author also references the fact that Michael has been notoriously open about his sex life both in interviews and on social media. To Jones, erasing these aspects of the singer's life after his death would be an injustice, as it would take away from who Michael was during his lifetime. The topic of sanitizing a public figure's life is problematic in other cases as well, especially when the deceased primarily became famous for acts and forms of behavior that are commonly perceived as being obscene or illegal. In such cases, these parts of the person's personality are what has come to define them in the public consciousness, and to attempt to erase this posthumously would be akin to an act of revisionism, the creation of a false narrative not following the actual sequence of events that took place in the real world.

  Besides the praise for his role as a gay icon in the eyes of the general public, articles written in response to Michael's death often also explicitly make note of the singer's generosity and his willingness to help others,

  Besides the aforementioned praise for his role as a gay icon, many of the articles written in response to the singer's death make note of Michael's quiet generosity and his willingness to help other during his lifetime. In an article published by Business Insider, Caroline Praderio (2016) mentions that several parties have come out publicly on social media, as well as directly to the media after Michael's death, stating that the singer has spent a significant portion of his fortune by donating money to charities such as the UK-based Childline and the Terrence Higgins Trust, as well as to people in need of financial aid, all while keeping these acts of charity largely concealed from the public eye. The article presents a very positive image of the deceased star, focusing solely on some of the acts of charity he performed during his lifetime, and eschewing any and all aspects of the singer's life that in any way seem to be connected to scandalous behavior. Instead, the revelation of the singer's secret generosity serves to leave a final impression on the public that helps to preserve the singer's legacy in a positive frame, a development that stands in contrast in a positive way against the usually negative incidents that brought Michael media attention during the latter part of his career.

In his article published by AP News, Gregory Katz (2016) also makes note of the singer's career-spanning history of charity work. Moreover, the author also refers to a statement published by former Beatles member Paul McCartney in praise of George Michael, as well as a brief mention of tributes made by fans in honor of their departed idol. All these aspects – the references to the singer's generosity, the references to a pop-cultural authority figure such as Paul McCartney's positive assessment of the singer, and the fan reaction to Michael's death – when taken together as a whole construct an image of the singer as a caring, selfless person, and thereby all this falls in line with the conventional methods of memorializing the deceased. Still, when we compare this particular article to the previously mentioned one by Praderio, it is clear that Katz, unlike Praderio, does not focus solely on the positive side of Michael's life. Although it is true that it is but a brief reference, one that is no longer than a few lines, Katz does make mention of the string of driving incidents, medical issues and problems related to substance abuse that left a negative mark on the latter part of Michael's life. While acknowledging the reality of these events, Katz also notes that these negative elements do not matter to the singer's fans in the period of mourning following directly after his passing, and that the singer's fans rather focus on Michael's good deeds and the positive influence he has had on people throughout his career as a performer, a reaction which once again largely falls in line with the behavior often seen in situations involving the death of well-known public figures, with those forming a part of the so-called 'in crowd' – the 'core' forming the public figure's fan base or circle of supporters – refusing to focus on their idols' negative traits, sometimes to the point of hostility directed towards those on the 'periphery' that do not have any qualms about speaking of those same negative or 'unsanitary' qualities.

2.2.5 Remembering George Michael in Pictures

Now that I have briefly observed some of the ways in which the news of George Michael's death has been represented on digital media platforms in terms of the verbal language employed to help create a particular posthumous image of the deceased, I may now once again look at how the visual aspect figures into this same process of image creation, much like I did before in the case of David Bowie. In order to mirror the structure of the preceding sections, I shall first focus on those articles that highlighted some of the more negative aspects related to Michael's life in order to observe in what way the selection of visual materials used to supplement the textual content of the article possibly helps in shaping the overall posthumous image of the deceased in the public consciousness, followed by those articles which offered a more positive perspective when looking back upon Michael's career.

(Beaumont 2017)

Beaumont's article features a wide variety of visual and audiovisual material. The article uses a portrait photo of a bespectacled, middle-aged George Michael (seen here on the left-hand side) as its header image, a photograph wherein the audience moreover may also note the fact that Michel seems to be dressed in what appears to be a variety of formal attire. It is noteworthy to point out the fact that the photo chosen to be placed at the top of the article only shows the singer's face, and nothing below his shoulders. The image as such resembles a traditional portrait, of a kind which would not be out of place at a memorial service as a commemorative image of the departed.

Aside from the aforementioned image featured as the header in Beaumont's article, the text also features several videos taken from a variety of sources. The first is a video of the initial report of Michael's death done by BBC News. As the video was originally a part of a live broadcast made not long after Michael's death, the video primarily focuses on the facts directly available at that time, along with brief information on his career. The video thus provides a neutral report on the singer's death. The second video featured in the article is one made by Entertainment Tonight. This short video deals with the ways in which some of Michael's loved ones reacted to his death, including tweets from Michael's then-partner Fadi Fawaz and his ex-partner Kenny Goss, interspersed with archival footage of Michael performing and being interviewed. The material featured in the video covers both the earlier part of Michael's career, as well as the latter part of his career, including several candid videos of Michael with his partners. This candid material serves to humanize the star, to erase the boundaries between the mythological image of the pop star George Michael and the private person Michael was offstage. Simultaneously, this publication of commentary made by a deceased public figure's loved ones serves as yet another potential venue for media platforms to help craft the departed's public image, be it in a positive sense or a negative one. The third and final video featured in Beaumont's article is one made by celebrity gossip and entertainment news aggregator TMZ. This last video talks about Michael's purported weight gain in the period before his death. Due to the nature of its content, it is much different in tone from the other videos featured in the article, being grounded more in the realm of speculation and rumor than the realm of objective news reporting. In this sense, the video complements the textual content of the section of Beaumont's article in which it is placed, as this particular

subsection too is focused on the rumors and speculation surrounding Michael's unexpected death. As I already indicated before, this desire of media platforms to focus on possible scandals and rumors has only become more commonplace in the age of the internet as content creators strive to accrue as many clicks, likes and shares as possible in order to maximize their exposure and profit. This particular example of George Michael that we may observe here is no exceptional case, and indeed forms a part of a much larger, structural 'tradition' in the media to strive for sensationalism to the greatest possible extent, even if it may be at the cost of a public figure's reputation (either during their lifetime, or in some cases posthumously).

Kjelsson's article too features an abundance of visual material alongside its textual content. The image at the top of the article is a seemingly candid photograph of a middle-aged George Michael and his partner Fadi Fawaz out on the street together. The use of candid photography here once again has a 'humanizing' effect first of all, but at the same it also creates a kind of contrast between the article's title and the image itself. The title of Kjelsson's article is suggestive, implying a possible link between Michael's death and the actions of his partner Fawaz, even though it later becomes clear that there is no direct evidence to support this. The image of the couple walking together contrasted against the suggestive title of the article thus creates an impression that is at once pathic and antithetical. Aside from this particular image, the article also features several other photographs and videos throughout. One of said images is yet another candid photograph, this time showing an older George Michael addressing the press outside his home. The two other images featured in the article show George Michael posing together with Sir Elton John at a social event and a middle-aged George Michael displayed in profile respectively. The two videos included within the article showcase a countdown of Michael's top ten songs and the way in which fans pay their respects to Michael respectively. In contrast to the photograph of Michael and his partner featured as the header image of Kjelsson's article, all the other images and videos featured within the article bear no further direct relation to the actual textual content therein in any shape or form whatsoever outside of them featuring George Michael's likeness in some form. Instead, the remaining featured images and videos in this particular case rather seem to serve as a means of breaking up the text into shorter segments in order to maintain the reader's attention. By still featuring George Michael's likeness in the supplementary materials, the connection between text and image remains maintained, even if text and image are not necessarily thematically aligned. Outside of this, it is also possible that being able to visualize the artist may help the audience to empathize better with the loss of the singer, and thereby may also

help to establish an emotional connection from the reader to the topic at hand, however brief it may be.

Having covered those articles which focused on the rumors and gossip surrounding Michael's death, I will now once more turn towards those articles that spoke in more positive tones about Michael and his role as a public figure. The article written by Owen Jones features but a single image located at the very top of the article, seen here on the right-hand side.

(Jones 2016)

The photo shows an older, yet energetic George Michael dressed in a formal suit, performing on stage during his 2012 world tour. Due to Michael's position and overall body language in the photograph, it gives off an impression of warmth, joy and openness, an atmosphere that ties in well with the generally celebratory tone of Jones' article. Moreover, the choice to use an image showing Michael in his later years instead of using visual material taken from the earlier years of the singer's career may also be indicative of a certain sense of 'pride' in Michael's desire to be himself no matter what. The visual material chosen to accompany this particular article thus complements the textual content, and helps to constitute a fully rounded experience for the audience.

(Lieu 2016)

In terms of supplementary material, Johnny Lieu's article is rather minimalistic as well. Much like the previously covered article by Jones, Lieu's article too only utilizes a single image (seen here on the left), this one too featured at the very top of the article, to supplement the textual content of his article. Outside of that, the only other additional material featured within Lieu's article is a series of quotes about Michael's role as a gay icon taken from Twitter accounts belonging to various fans of the singer's work. The image chosen in this particular case is once again a photograph of George Michael, this time a black and white portrait of a smiling George Michael standing behind a microphone. On the photograph, Michael is once again depicted only down to the shoulders, with the primary emphasis being placed on the singer's face. Once again, as was the case with Jones' article, the joyful nature of the image selected to be the header of Lieu's article fits with the generally positive tone of the text, which speaks about Michael's role as an influencer to members of the gay community. The use of a black and white photograph in this particular context may have been a deliberate move as well, considering the implications the colors black and white traditionally have in relation to death and mourning, as well as the fact

that the article was clearly written in commemoration of Michael's life and his influential role on others. In the case of Lieu's article too we may say that the textual content and the additional material complement each other and play off one another in order to elicit the desired response within the reader.

Caroline Praderio's article too is low in supplementary materials. Like the previous two articles covered above, Praderio's article features only a single photograph and a selection of quotes taken from Twitter, this time revolving around Michael's secret acts of charity. The photograph featured in this article appears to be taken from an official photoshoot, displaying an older George Michael, once again dressed in a suit, looking down at the ground. Once again, Michael is not depicted in his entirety. This time, the photo only shows Michael down to the waist. As with the previous two articles covered in this section, it once again feels as if the choice of the photo featured in the article was a deliberate one. The position Michael is in on the photograph, gazing downwards, is one that is often associated with notions of humility, shyness, or submission (among others). As the textual content of the article revolves around Michael's reported acts of (primarily anonymous) charity, the fact that this downward-oriented position observable in the photograph evokes feelings of humility becomes notably relevant here. It does not matter that the original photograph may simply have been a momentary imprint, a snapshot of Michael in mid-motion; what matters here, in this particular context, is how the textual content of the article redefines or adds meaning to the pre-existing sign of the image. Taking the article in its entirety in this way, then, the way in which the visual and the textual work together helps to embed the image of the deceased George Michael as a good person in the minds of the readers, thereby preserving the man's image in the cultural memory in a positive sense. Such techniques of combining text and image in ways that suggest the image is expressive of certain notions brought forth within the text, even when this may not necessarily have been the original intent behind the image, are commonplace, and not exclusively limited to this particular case, or even to the topics of mourning and death alone.

(Katz 2016)

The article by Katz, finally, features six pieces of supplementary material alongside the text, although only one of these is directly visible to the audience at a first glance. In this particular article's case, the supplementary material consists of a series of photographs of a fan-made memorial site built Michael's honor outside his house. The photograph seen above is the one directly visible to the audience upon opening the

article. It shows some of the tributes Michael's fans have left in his honor, including flowers and a photograph of the singer. The other photos featured in the article similarly show more of the material the singer's fans have left outside his house in order to pay tribute to their idol, as well as simply showing some of the grieving fans that gathered around Michael's house in order to commemorate him. As was the case with Praderio's article, Katz' article also revolves around George Michael's acts of kindness and the various gifts to charities the singer has made throughout his life. The images featured in this article may perhaps not directly appear to relate to the topic of the article at hand at a first glance, but they are nevertheless related to the topic at hand. As the article revolves around George Michael's various secret and public activities related to charity, the choice of visual material used in this article may be taken to be reflective of the opposite, namely the singer's fans paying tribute and giving thanks to their idol for the positive ways in which he may have influenced their lives during his lifetime. The textual content of the article and the accompanying selection of visual materials could thus be said to be two sides of the same coin, approaching the same theme from different angles. Moreover, the selected use of exactly these images, showing how the fans have come together in order to commemorate Michael, helps in part to fix the singer's legacy in the cultural memory, giving the reader at least some brief glimpse at the extent of the influence he has had on others. By actually showing the act of commemoration, and not necessarily only focusing on the deceased person as they were back during the peak of their lifetime or shortly before their death, the reality of their actual death is forefronted, and thereby made to feel more directly and acutely real to the audience perceiving this news at home. Focusing on the act of commemoration in the images may also serve as an incentive for other fans to join in with similar grassroots acts of commemoration of their own, either at the site shown in the images or written about in the article, or closer to their own home. The choice to include this kind of visual material can thus have the potential to trigger creative and participatory forms of behavior in the audience, besides simply serving as a form of visual embellishment alongside the textual content forming the primary backbone of the article as a whole.

   When we look at the ways in which the supplementary material chosen to accompany the articles does or does not compliment the actual subject matter and content of the article itself here among the articles covered in the preceding sections, it is interesting to note that it appears to be the case that the articles placing more of an emphasis on Michael's positive contributions to society and his influence as an icon rather than emphasizing the unresolved cause of his death and the unverified rumors surrounding his life appear to have a higher

likelihood of containing material pertaining more directly to the written content of the articles in comparison to those articles that do focus on those more unverified elements. It is of course important to note here once again that the selected texts covered here form but a paltry selection out of the total wealth of texts produced in reaction to the news of Michael's death. Even while taking this reality into account, I can nevertheless say that both of these methods of responding to news of a public figure's death are telling of patterns observable within the broader system of the media and, therefore, the society directly influenced by said media. With the emphasis on generating buzz on various social media platforms nowadays by means of accruing likes, shares, clicks etcetera, death has once again become commodified, and as such media platforms will inevitably begin searching for ways in which to transform the news of a public figure's death into spectacle. This may in some cases mean that what follows after the event of a public figure's may be a reevaluation of, or a newfound emphasis on their positive traits and achievements in life, but more often than not this also means a reexamination of the deceased figure's faults, perceived engagement in problematic activities and other scandals surrounding his or her life. While I previously indicated that celebration of life has become one of the more emphasized cultural codes in relation to death in the Digital Age, it thus becomes clear that this form of *grief porn,* almost comparable to *Schadenfreude* in some respects, is just as much a part of the contemporary experience of death.

2.2.6 Media Reception to the Death of George Michael: Final Thoughts

As I already indicated before, the death of George Michael came as a surprise to the world. Not only the unexpected and initially unexplained nature of Michael's death served to send ripples throughout the world, but also the fact that the singer's death was discovered on a Christmas morning proved significant in the eyes of audiences worldwide. While it is an undeniably true fact that Michael's artistic output was not as illustrious and not perceived to be as widely influential as the works of Bowie, the reception of his death shows that he nevertheless remained an influential figure in the eyes of many, even despite (or perhaps in part thanks to) his shortcomings. As was the case with the reception to Bowie's death, there is no truly unanimous reaction to the news of Michael's death. Even solely confined within the realm of news media, there is a divide in the ways in which different channels choose to report on the event. Elements that were recurrent across many of the articles observed in this analysis were the following: emphasis on the unexplained nature of Michael's death, highlighting some of the high points of Michael's career, and allusions to Michael's health problems and the scandals the singer had become involved in during his lifetime. The singer's

sexual orientation and his status as a role model for some members of the LGBT community is yet another topic that was brought up in several of the articles analyzed here. The fact that this is the material that seems to reoccur with some regularity across these different articles shows that this information about the star's life is what has been preserved in the cultural memory, and these aspects will most likely be what he will be remembered for by the general public after his death.

  The way in which Michael has been remembered in the media, much like with the case of David Bowie before, at its core also does not seem to involve of any of the newer cultural codes related to grief and remembrance that I mentioned before, outside of the intense employment of platforms located within digital space for communicative purposes. Similar to what I previously observed in David Bowie's case, the way in which the media analyzed here wrote about Michael's passing mirrors the usual format observed in analog print news, obituaries and similar platforms. Still, even despite the fact that the medium as such has remained relatively unchanged in its very nature, it would be equally inaccurate to state that the transition from analog to digital space has gone entirely without any new developments whatsoever, even ignoring the new role played by social media which I already referred to before. One of the primary ways in which this transition from analog to digital has elicited a change in the manner in which media platforms formerly specializing solely in print media are able to transmit messages these days is by allowing for the inclusion of video material on the same page as the written text of the article. This feature, when taken within the context of media produced in relation to the topics of death and the subsequent commemoration of the dead, means that there is now a new potential for engaging the audience in the mourning process. As I observed in several of the articles analyzed in this subsection, video footage of, or related to the deceased is used occasionally within the body of the articles. This may sometimes be done in order to highlight the artist's most well-known works, but video footage may also be mixed in with textual content for different purposes. In the case of George Michael's death, we could see that some of the video footage interspersed throughout the articles for instance revolved around gossip related to the singer's life in the period not long before his death. The decision to include such material within a given article can very well have a direct influence in determining how the general public reacts to the death of a celebrity. The inclusion of visual material, thus, be they static images or moving images in the form of video segments, helps to more acutely frame the deceased in the minds of the audience, and thereby makes it so that the individual members of the audience become more capable of orienting themselves in their manner of expressing (or not expressing) grief.

<u>**Conclusion**</u>

   As I have already indicated previously, the topic of death continues to form a constant, unchanging and unavoidable part of the human experience. While the general process of life itself is thus effectively marked as decidedly finite and fixed in its very nature, the manner in which people spread across the world experience death – and thereby thus the ways in which these individual cultural spheres' (sub)texts related to death are coded – is far less fixed in nature. The rituals, cultural codes and sign systems built up around death are all very much subject to change, and these sign systems tend to develop accordingly as the rest of the sociocultural environment undergoes change. This tendency towards change and development appears to be consistent across cultures worldwide, though the manner in which these changes actively manifest in the real world is dependent on each individual culture's traditions and perspectives related to the topic of death, mourning and grief. By approaching the subject of death from the perspective of cultural semiotics we may get a clearer insight into how the network of subtexts related to death is organized. Moreover, cultural semiotics may help us to find underlying recurrent patterns in the ways in which different cultures' death and mourning-related traditions are constructed and performed, and thereby allow us to come to a greater understanding not only of the concrete signs and rituals that are seen as meaningful within these cultures, but also to help us come to a better understanding of the working of those that are a part of our own culture.

   In the first chapter of this research project, I attempted to delineate a rudimentary typology of some of the key cultural codes related to death and mourning within the Western world, focusing both on the traditional codes that dictated what was perceived of as normative behavior up until the late-20th century, as well as on those newer cultural codes that have begun to emerge as the world gradually began to transition into the Digital Age.

   In terms of the concrete fields wherein I have been able to identify the most distinct elements of change, I can point to three main areas:

   (1.) The shift from analog to digital
   (2.) Emergence of new spaces of mourning and new communities
   (3.) New modalities.

Of these three categories, the first and second ones occasionally display a sense of overlapping. In more than one instance, it became clear that the traditional codes of mourning have in reality not undergone significant transformations that fundamentally alter the basic

nature lying at their core. The shift towards a digital society seems to often have primarily resulted in changes in the platform employed for displays of mourning, or changes in the medium of operation. The internet, for instance, has proven to be the foremost out of these new spaces of mourning, forming the basic grounds upon which further, more specialized communities have been able to establish themselves. Many of the traditional codes of mourning have, in essence, retained the same basic form they have at their heart always possessed in terms of that which they signify, even though the channels through which these signs indeed ultimately come to expression have changed over the years. The semiotics of death, especially in terms of such things as the traditional symbology associated with decay, death, and mourning, has continued to endure in its original incarnation in many occasions. What has undoubtedly changed, however, is the set of tools we have at our disposal to engage in signifying activities – computers, smartphones and other 'smart' appliances have changed the ways in which we communicate with others, and have even influenced the way in which we interact with ourselves.

The ways in which the traditional cultural codes associated with death and mourning have developed themselves over the years has proven to also be reflective of changes in society on a broader scale when it comes to the emergence of new spaces and communities. We may think here for instance about how new space for women has emerged within the funeral business, leading to a great surge in new workers in the field. These developments are a direct result of how social movements in the last century have opened up greater possibilities for women to enter into occupational fields that had for a long time remained reserved exclusively for men. The emergence of spaces of mourning reserved for queer people is another example of this process. In general, changes in the cultural perception of life and death have also made it so that the manner in which death-related topics find their way into our society's public discourse has markedly changed over the last several decades. Although death still very much does retain the sense of *tabooness* that has surrounded it for so long, it has gradually begun to transition from something closed to something open (though not always necessarily public). I indicated how the emergence of new digital communities dedicated to topics such as grief, suicide, terminal illness and other matters explicitly related to death and loss have sprung up over the last decades, allowing people to connect with others spread over the world to share their thoughts with one another. Moreover, blogging and vlogging platforms also allow people to directly convey their experiences publicly to hundreds of people.

Finally, I have highlighted several new modalities that have emerged in relation to death and mourning in recent years. Phenomena such as the *mourning cow,* the *mourning clown,* specialized forms of preserving the dead such as cryogenic freezing, space burials and more are all indicative of the desire for individual self-expression and individuality in modern-day society. These new modalities take traditional forms of coded behavior and turn them on their head, giving them new forms that cater to the needs and wishes of the bereaved.

It is important to highlight here once more that, while the selection of key codes related to mourning covered within the bounds of this research project encompasses those cultural codes that seemed the most directly pertinent within the context of Western society, it would be a gross oversimplification to maintain that these codes covered here form the only cultural codes connected to death and mourning in existence. Doubtlessly it is possible to identify others that could potentially offer grounds for further research, especially were I to disengage from our current emphasis solely on the sphere of the Western world and look beyond.

In the second chapter, I chose to focus on one additional cultural phenomenon related to death and mourning that was not explicitly covered within the first chapter, namely that of *mass mourning* – a phenomenon that has already existed in some form for a far longer period in mankind's history, but has become especially widespread and relevant in the era of the Digital Age with the arrival of the 24 hour news cycle. By focusing specifically upon the response to David Bowie and George Michael's deaths within the sphere of digital print media, I hoped to come to some understanding of how the mass media itself is capable of cultivating the atmosphere of mass grief in the public consciousness, and how exactly this process is instigated. Right from the start, I may say once again that it is clear that the selection of texts selected for analysis within this research forms but a paltry fraction of the sum total of texts produced in relation to the death of the two selected subjects of analysis found in this chapter. As such, the perspective I am ultimately left with here is undoubtedly one colored by the inevitably limited scope of focusing on merely a condensed selection of texts taken from but one out of the many different spheres of the media out there. Though this is admittedly true, I hold that we may nevertheless draw some conclusions based on the material which I chose to analyze alone. I have borrowed the notions *mourning sickness* and *grief porn* at earlier points in this project: Both of these notions directly pertain to the contemporary mass media's tendency towards sensationalizing death and tragedy, a tendency resulting in the creation of what to some may feel as 'socially prescribed' atmospheres of public mourning. When taking such atmospheres of prescribed mourning into account, it soon becomes clear that we must still continue to take into account that even these forms of

behavior are graded on a spectrum in terms of how much the average citizen is expected to show compassion. Cases involving the death of celebrity figures, such as the subjects of the case studies in this particular research, evoke a weaker amount of pressure to display grief than for instance a national tragedy, the commemoration of those who died during a war, or the death of a member of a country's royal family. In the former case, those expected to display the most passionate signs of grief are the ones forming the most devoted core of the celebrity's fanbase, always ostensibly a smaller group than in the latter examples, all of which are instances in which the general population of a given society is expected to display if not some outright form of grief, then at least some form of respect for those who have passed away. In each and every single one of these cases, a degree of performativity is to be expected, both on the part of the media agents presenting the news to the general public, as much as on the part of the audiences consuming that very same news.

   The two case studies I chose to observe showed that even when it comes to the public reception of a celebrity's death no two cases are the same, and that this reception is dependent on a multitude of factors. It goes without saying that the extent to which the image of a celebrity has become a part of popular culture plays a key role when determining the audience's reception to the news of their death. The type of work a celebrity has been involved in, the quality of said work, and the celebrity's active presence in the public eye are but three factors we can take into account here. As I already indicated, both Bowie and Michael were extremely successful artists, and both were regarded as iconic figures by fans and members of the public alike for a variety of reasons. At the same time, both artists also had their respective share of negative publicity during their lifetime – accusations of fascist leanings and sexual abuse allegations in Bowie's case, and several scandals related to substance abuse in Michael's case. Despite these instances of negative publicity scattered throughout both artists' history, I observed a general tendency for media platforms to primarily emphasize the deceased's positive traits and to highlight the greatest achievements they have made during their lifetime. It should almost go without saying that this general tendency is not, however, all-encompassing, and to hope for a truly collective, homogenous reaction to a public figure's death from the public and from the media is to hope for the impossible, especially in the contemporary media climate where even the smallest, most niche subcultural communities are able to make their voices widely heard with the help of social media and the internet in general. In the case of Michael's death, the singer's unexpected passing, coupled with the unknown cause of his death, together create an ideal breeding ground for potential spectacle and sensationalisation of the real-world events that transpired

for media platforms that do not shy away from publishing gossip or information that is otherwise based strongly on unverified data. Several of the articles I examined featured material pertaining to such rumors, and it is difficult to interpret them solely as commemorations in honor of the artist when it is clear there is a secondary goal of creating buzz as well. In a sense, I could perhaps argue that this highlighting of the more negative sides of a deceased person's life may be illustrative of yet another change in mentality towards death, this time one that very well could be going up against the older tradition of sanitizing the deceased's life after death. Instead of solely remembering an idealized, ostensibly flawless image of a person, we are to remember them as they were in life, flaws included. This newer form of remembrance does not necessarily always have to coincide with grieving for the deceased, but at least serves to acknowledge that flaws and possibly 'problematic' aspects are part of what made the deceased who they were, even if this reality may possibly present difficulties for members of certain groups affected by this behavior. As I observed in David Bowie's case, for instance, multiple women indicated difficulties in expressing grief for Bowie's death while at the same time remaining aware of the singer's alleged abusive behavior.

   The frame in which particular publications choose to present the news of a public figure's death always remains malleable and largely unfixed, and even the selection of certain pieces of pictorial material over others can contribute to the conveyance of one certain attitude towards the subject matter over possible others. While the selected articles relating to David Bowie predominantly seemed to focus on material related to the earlier part of the singer's career in terms of extratextual content, those relating to George Michael are more evenly divided over the spectrum of the singer's earlier career and the later part of his career as a solo artist. The choice of extratextual material, at least within the material observed here, appears to primarily depend on both the image of the celebrity that is most firmly entrenched within the cultural consciousness, as well as the general tone of the article's textual content. Recognizability of image may help audiences to better identify with the presented content, and therefore help to build a stronger (albeit possibly still temporary) connection.

   Whether or not articles published in the event of a celebrity's death should indeed be taken as genuine expressions of grief, or whether they should perhaps rather cynically be interpreted as business is not a discussion I intend to become caught up in within the context of this research project. Regardless of the position one assumes in regards to this situation, it is impossible to deny the role the media plays when it comes to influencing the general tone of the audience's reaction to news of a death, be it the passing of a well-known public figure or a

report on some form of tragedy. Shared grief, like shared joy, has the power to bring people together even across great distances (both in terms of literal physical distance, as well as accounting for possible sociocultural distance between different affected individuals), and by encountering the opinions of likeminded individuals online, it is possible for both mourners and those who willfully choose to refuse to grieve certain individuals to encounter other likeminded individuals sharing their perspective. Even despite the changes traditions of death and mourning have undergone throughout the course of human history, the socializing function of mourning has proven to be as enduring and constant as the reality of death itself. Death is not only about loss, about endings, it is also about how people overcome and process these feelings of loss.

Through this particular research project, I hope to have provided an insight into the burgeoning new environments of the eternal sphere of life, and how traditions may transform themselves within a broad variety of contexts: the effects the digitalization of society has had on death and mourning, the emergence of new modalities tied in with the topic of death, how new forms of performative behavior have emerged in our reaction to death, and how death may be turned into spectacle in our contemporary society. The importance of the case studies making up a substantial part of this research is twofold: Every individually analyzed case may reveal yet more different forms of how death is perceived by members of the general public, and moreover these case studies may provide an insight, however limited, into the semiotic processes which help to constitute the cultural 'afterlife' of the deceased, an afterlife which may endure for a long time even after the subject has passed away.

As technology continues to evolve and society remains ever-changing, it is likely that our traditions of mourning will continue to be affected by these developments, a process which will undoubtedly lead to ever newer, or at least newly contextualized, forms of death and mourning.

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Uus surm: kurbusest, leinast ja surmast digiajastul

   Surm ning reageerimine surmale kui protsessile individuaalsel ja kultuurisel tasandil on jäänud üheks teadlaste huvivaldkonnaks mitmetes erinevates teadusharudes. Sarnaselt paljudele teistele kultuuri aspektidele muutuvad ka surma ning leinaga seotud traditsioonid üheskoos ühiskonna laiema kultuurilise ja tehnoloogilise arenguga. Inimkonna järk-järguline üleminek digitaalajastule on endaga kaasa toonud just selliseid tähelepanuväärseid muutuseid. Kuigi kiire digitaliseerumine on vaid üks tagajärgedest, siis eelkõige sotsiaalmeediaga seonduvalt on surm just selles võtmes teadlaste poolt palju tähelepanu pälvinud. Antud magistritöö hoiakuks on, et sellele seosele liialt rõhutades jäetakse tähelepanuta teised kaasaegsed teemad, mille puhul on potentsiaali intrigeerivaks edasiseks uurimiseks.

   Selle magistritöö eesmärgiks on seega anda minupoolne võimalik analüüs selle kohta, kuidas kultuurilised koodid ning surma, leina ja kurbuse dünaamika on Lääne kultuuris viimastel kümnenditel arenenud, lähenedes probleemile kultuurisemiootilise nurga alt ning võttes arvesse üldisemaid sotsiaalkultuurilisi ning tehnoloogilisi arenguid.

   Töö põhiosa on jaotatud kaheks eraldi osaks. Esmalt olen ma valinud välja erinevad traditsioonilised surma ja leinaga seotud kultuurilised koodid ning lisanud juurde kaasaegsemad lähenemised. Neile toetudes püüan ma näidata, kuidas need kultuurilised koodid on viimase kolme kümnendi jooksul arenenud.

   Teiseks, kasutades mõnda juhtumianalüüsi valitud digitaalsete meediaväljaannete reaktsioonist David Bowie ja George Michaeli surmale, püüan uurida, kuidas uudne digitaalmeedia aitab kaasa kuulsuse imidži säilitamisele kuluurimälus, samuti seda, kuidas mõisted vaatemäng (spectacle) ja etendus (performance) võivad olla osaks sellistes avalikkes kaotuse väljendustes. Lisaks olen proovinud vaadelda, kas ja kuidas on käsitletud kultuurilised koodid osaks seesugustes digitaalsetes esitustes.

   Lõpetuseks olen ma leidnud, et surma, leina ja kurbusega seotud evolutsioonilised muutused saab Lääne kultuuris jagada kolme kategooriasse. Esiteks on tegu rituaalide üleminekuga analoogplatvormidelt digitaalsetele. Teisalt on esile kerkinud ka uued ruumid ning kogukonnad leina väljendamiseks. Lisaks on tekkinud uued surma ja leinamise modaalsused. Üleminek digitaalajastule on vähemalt osaliselt kaasa toonud suurema tahte individuaalseks

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