

Immortal Online: A Study of Digital Storytelling on Deceased Subjects

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Langellier (2011) has argued that the telling of a story is a performance. Such emphasis on storytelling as performance conceptualizes the “narrative as act, event and discourse-a site for understanding and intervening in the ways culture produces, maintains and transforms relations of identity and difference” (p.3). When the digital sphere is brought into the equation, the possibility of multiple and contesting narratives with varying relations to structures of power and visibility are inevitable. The digital space enables the production and dissemination of individualized alternative narratives from multiple subject positions that may challenge dominant narratives. Further, the personal and the ordinary may metamorphose in digital spaces, challenging and changing the ways in which individuals interact with and respond to lived reality. Drawing on the premise that the digital is an agentive space and the interactions on the digital sphere involve intervention and transformation, this paper critically reads the multiple narratives surrounding the tragic death of a young Sri Lankan woman as represented in multiple digital platforms. The paper attempts to explore the subject positions of storytelling and consumption, ethics of storytelling, structure and interaction of users with the deceased subject’s social media presence, and concepts of virtual body, digital remains, and grieving through drawing on intersecting theoretical readings on discourse (Foucault, in Hall, 1997), liminality (Lister et al, 2009), gaze (Mulvey,1999), storytelling and power (Plummer, 1995; Cohen-Cruz, 2006) in the digital platform. A critical content analysis of meta-narratives and numerous alternative narratives made viable on digital spaces suggests that the liminality of digital spaces allows multiple subject positions and subversive ‘truths’ that blur the boundaries between seeming binaries; in this particular instance, those of life and death and public and private.

Keywords: Immortal online; Digital storytelling; Deceased subjects; Performance; Digital Sphere/ Space; Lived reality; Subject position

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