Online memorials: adaptive practices in technoscientific and social change

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Online memorials: adaptive practices in technoscientific and social change

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

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by

Alison Jane Smith, Bachelor of Creative Arts (Honours)

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Certification

I, Alison Jane Smith, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts, in the Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Alison Jane Smith
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Of course, it must be the case that my thinking has been informed by contemplation of the losses that we all experience. I would like to pay tribute to those who are no longer with us, and the people who remember them, and to thank all those who, on hearing of my research interest, have discussed their thoughts and experiences with me.
Abstract

The development of the internet has been accompanied by discussion and speculation on its functions and possibilities, particularly the ways in which the internet will, or has the potential to, change society. The relationship between technology and social change has long been discussed in the philosophy of technology and technology studies. A common strategy has been to make a case study that will allow the researcher to investigate the relationship between society and a particular kind of technology. I have adapted this approach, making a case study of a specific social practice, the memorialisation of the dead, rather than a technology. Working across the fields of cyberculture and thanatology, in this thesis I argue that online memorials are an exemplary instance of the mutual constitution of technoscientific and social change.

My analysis of online memorials has been informed by two interdisciplinary fields, thanatology and cyberculture studies. My research in thanatology, especially the institutions and practices that produce death ritual in contemporary industrialised societies, theories of grief and bereavement, studies of material mourning culture and the care of the dying and bereaved, provides the necessary theoretical framework for an understanding of offline memorial practice and consequently, a comparison of offline and online memorial texts. Researching theories of the relationship between technology and social change focusing on alternatives to technological determinism has revealed the extent to which cyberculture studies is concerned with the effects of changing technologies on society. Cyberculture studies has tended to emphasise a view of the internet as a transformative phenomenon, separate from everyday lived experience. My research into theories of the relationship between technoscience and society has led me to work towards dismantling the construction of the internet as a separate space with transformative effects.

An online memorial can be described as a vernacular text published on the world wide web made by a bereaved person to commemorate someone who has died. I have treated online memorials as a genre, an approach that allows the comparison of one individual text with another, but also enables a discussion of features and characteristics in general terms. When analysing specific examples of the genre, I have considered these web sites in terms of four elements: design, media, connectivity and interactivity.
An approach that treats the online texts I have studied as part of a social practice that occurs both off and online is particularly suited to avoiding a determinist construction of the internet as transformative. By considering the similarities and differences between offline memorial practice and what can be described as a genre of memorial sites, I have identified and discussed a process of adaptive change that occurs within the social practice of memorialisation, and across online and offline memorialising activity. In the case of online memorials, the makers of memorial sites adapt from both prior forms of death ritual, but also the practices and techniques of online culture. The makers of these sites make considered and knowing use of the repertoire of death ritual, as well as their experience as participants in a variety of online activities, to produce a genre of texts that, while changed from prior practices, remains legible and meaningful.
Introduction

Entering the term “In Memoriam” into a search engine is likely to bring up results that include a link to a memorial site for Dr. Jonathan B. Postel. Jon Postel was involved in the earliest development of ARPANET, the Director of the Computer Networks Division of the Information Sciences Institute, and founder of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority. Not only was he one of the founders of the internet, he also played a key role in the development of infrastructure that would ensure that the internet and its high level organisation would continue beyond the life of any individual. In 1998 he died following surgery to replace a heart valve. After his death, Jon Postel was memorialised in a number of ways: a memorial service was held, and this service was webcast; numerous tributes were published in the online and print media; and an award was established in his name. He was also memorialised on the web in a site made specifically for this purpose (Rony 1998). This online memorial is stored as part of the web presence of the Domain Name Handbook. It incorporates biographical information, photographs, tributes, condolences, eulogies and remembrances written by colleagues, and links to media stories published on the occasion of his death. The page looks much like an autobiographical homepage, but it is headed “In Memoriam” like a memorial notice in a newspaper, and this heading is followed by Jon Postel’s name and dates of birth and death as they might appear on a headstone or plaque at a grave: “In Memoriam/Dr Jonathan B. Postel/August 3, 1943 - October 16, 1998”.

When I visit this page I recognise it as an example (amongst hundreds that I have visited and more that I have yet to encounter) of a specific type of web site, the online memorial. This is one of many offline social practices that, with the emergence and popularising of the internet, have begun to be practised online. A visit to an online memorial such as the site dedicated to the memory of Jon Postel raises questions about what happens to
memorialisation as it begins to be practised on the internet. Are there changes in the practice of memorialisation and the experience of bereavement as it becomes part of computer mediated communication, and if so, what form do these changes take? This leads to a broader question as to the relationship between technology and social change, and to the opportunity to treat online memorialisation as a case study, where the observation and analysis of the movement of a practice, such as memorialisation, to the online context allows a consideration of the relationship between society and technology.

Through a study of sites like the one that memorialises Jon Postel I will discuss the relationship between social and technoscientific change. I have researched the social management of death as a means of informing my reading of online memorials, and cyberculture studies to develop a theoretical framework for analysing online texts. The first challenge for the interdisciplinary scholar is the necessity of researching across a range of disciplines. I have undertaken a study that is informed by two interdisciplinary fields. In the written statement that appears at the beginning of each book in the Open University Press' *Facing Death* series, series editor David Clark writes that he has selected contributors that are “leading experts in death studies, from sociology, anthropology, social psychology, ethics, nursing, medicine and pastoral care” (1993, p xi). The range of disciplines listed by Clark gives some idea of how a study of the subjects of death and mourning might benefit from an interdisciplinary approach. My research has required that I become familiar with contributions to these fields that may come from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, nursing care, medicine, archaeology, the funeral industry, the church, law, psychology, media studies, geography, computer science, history, literary criticism, and cultural studies. More difficult than researching across these disciplines is the problem of attempting to work varied theories and methodologies into coherence.
Death ritual itself is part of the practice of many institutions, including the hospital, the family, the church, the law and the funeral industry. As living people, we cannot know death through our own experience, but we might understand it in any of the ways that death is known in these cultural contexts: as a biological state, a separation of soul and body, the end of the possibility of consciousness, a part of a cycle, and so on. The same terms can be used differently by scholars working within the context of different disciplines. For example, Beverley Raphael, a psychologist and the author of *The Anatomy of Bereavement* (1994) makes distinctions between bereavement, grief, mourning and rituals of mourning. Raphael's approach is a good example of a tradition of practice and scholarship that takes a humanist and medicalised approach to bereavement. She describes responses to bereavement as psychological processes that can be divided into the interior feelings of grief, and the exterior expression of ritual. Raphael defines bereavement as the reaction to the loss of a close relationship (whether through death or by some other means), regards grief as "the emotional response to loss", and uses the term mourning to refer to the "psychological mourning processes that occur in bereavement", as distinct from activities, such as the funeral, or the making of a memorial, which she refers to as "rituals of mourning" (1994, p 33). Sociologist Lindsay Prior, by contrast, takes grief and mourning to be "socially patterned and socially channelled" rather than what he describes as the normalising and medicalising approach of psychology (1989, p 133). Broadly speaking, Raphael's view of bereavement in the discipline of psychology follows the paradigm set by Freud (1974) in *Mourning and Melancholia* while Prior's work in the context of sociology follows the paradigm used by Durkheim (1976) in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. These two ways of understanding bereavement – the personal and the social – have both been a significant aspect of thanatological scholarship, and both approaches have informed my research.

My usage of terms such as 'grief' and 'mourning' differs from that of Raphael, and is
more akin to the approach taken by Prior. I will use the term ‘mourning’ to refer to the social processes that produce the experience of bereavement. A bereaved person mourns, and this can be done in ways that are customary, or in ways that are idiosyncratic, or both, and at some times mourning might be private, while at other times it might involve a community of mourners participating in death ritual. I can perhaps best characterise ‘grief’ as a term that describes the feelings and reactions of a bereaved person, and I regard it as overlapping with bereavement and mourning as I use these terms. I have used the term ‘grief’ cautiously as it has become so embedded in a pathologised framework of symptoms, stages, and recovery that it can be difficult to understand the term apart from the discipline of psychology, or the popularising of certain psychological and therapeutic theories, where the bereaved person is encouraged to engage in ‘healthy’ grief, in which they must ‘express their feelings’ or pass through the ‘stages of grief’ in order to ‘gain closure’ and ‘move on’. ‘Death ritual’ is the term I use to encompass all cultural activity associated with what happens at and after death. This includes formal institutionalised, commercialised and professionalised ritual, such as religious ceremonies, the construction of a headstone or plaque, or the publication of an in memoriam notice, as well as activities and objects devised by the community of mourners that may be private and unique to their own experience of bereavement, such as self devised ceremonies for the scattering of ashes, or the placement at home of a photograph of the person who has died. Finally, I use the term death ritual even more broadly, to describe death related activity – some of which may not be usually thought of as ritual – the requirement to register a death, for example, the procedures of autopsy, or the health regulations that determine how the handling and disposal of a corpse is carried out.

This thesis cannot be an exhaustive cross cultural analysis of all practices associated with death, dying and bereavement. The work I have read on death and mourning has been mostly written by Australian, American and British authors. However, I have also used, for
example, the work of Hans Geser (1998), who is German and has written on online memorialisation, as well as Phillipe Aries (1974), who was French, and wrote foundational texts in the field of thanatology that that discuss European, British and American practices. It is also likely that those authors that I have referred to above as ‘Australian, American and British’ cannot really be so unproblematically defined. Allan Kellehear (The Spirit of Things 2001), for example, an important Australian contributor to the field, has spoken about the influence of culture, ethnicity and difference on his life and work, through, for example, the influence of his mother, who is Japanese, and his childhood living in the Catholic monastery where his mother was employed as housekeeper. I would note here, however, that I am not attempting to explain the work of Kellehear through his biography, but rather seeking to emphasise that his identification of the influence of the experience of difference on his work in the social sciences is a reminder that there is nothing simple in any attempt to define (or construct) the boundaries of a culture. In any community, certain practices may be dominant, and may appear unproblematic, and even self-evident, to the members of that group. At other times, however, nation, ethnicity, gender, race, religion and family can create profound tensions in the subject attempting to negotiate these overlapping and contesting discourses. The institutionalised dominance of certain practices can mask some of this contestation and overlap.

I had initially considered my study of death ritual in terms of a study of dominant mourning practices, but as my research has progressed I also came to regard this question of dominance as problematic. This became clear to me when I was considering ways of defining such a concept. Should I consider Christian funerals as the dominant practice, or does the increase in humanist life-centred funerals mean that the secular ceremony is, or is becoming, dominant? The disposal of the corpse is a good example of a form of death ritual where the most widespread practice is not necessarily the most culturally resonant. According to The Cremation Society of Great Britain, fifty four percent of all people who
died in 1998 in Australia were cremated. However, the ways in which death ritual is represented culturally does not necessarily reflect this: for example, the English language is rich in expressions that refer to the burial of the dead – food for worms, pushing up daisies, six feet under – but does not yet have the same kind of repertoire of euphemisms to describe cremation.

It has been similarly problematic to consider dominance in terms of cultural context. It is likely that I have developed a concept of a dominant practice through my observations of those practices with which I am most familiar. I have attended Christian and humanist funerals, and it is probable that as time passes I will attend other kinds of funerals. I have found each of these rituals to be strange or familiar to varying degrees, and while I can only consider mourning and memorialisation from my own subject position, it can be difficult to describe what this position might be. I often assume that my own cultural identity is self evident. It is only when I am confronted with an attempt to name a culture that I identify as being mine that the conflicts and inconsistencies that I occupy become apparent. I might describe myself as an Anglo Australian woman; an atheist from a predominantly Protestant background. The boundaries of these categories suggest a more rigid categorisation than my everyday lived experience bears out. When I think about death ritual in my own cultural context, I think about the mourning practices likely to be engaged in by my friends and family when I die, as well as the mourning practices I have participated in when members of my family and community have died. For me, these practices cannot be defined solely in terms of the activities or beliefs of a particular culture or religion. If I imagine my own funeral, I can speculate that it would be likely to be held in the chapel of a crematorium, and that there would be little or no prayer or reference to religious belief. Other aspects of the ceremony, such as who conducts the service, whether anyone else speaks, and who is in attendance, are likely to be influenced by the extent of my social involvement at the time of my death. If I am very old, socially isolated with no
close surviving relatives, then there may be no ceremony at all. My imaginings of my own funeral (when I reluctantly and distantly consider the unvarnished probabilities) is formed by my experience of other funerals. In defining the scope of this thesis, and specifically in attempting to delineate the boundaries of the kinds of cultural practices that I will not speak about, I take into account my own subject position, as located in a particular region, state and nation, with my particular family, and religious background, my belief system, and my ethnic and gender identification.

I do not intend to mark out unproblematic boundaries in the form of historical periods, or the nations or ethnicities on which my research has been focused. As Katz has noted, the study of death ritual “has roots in the social anthropology of cultural traditions” (2001, p 6). Ethnographic anthropology as it was once practised often included studies of death ritual. I have not engaged in this kind of cross cultural study or comparison, as I want to avoid ‘speaking for’ those who are living what is for me the culturally other. The dangers and difficulties of this approach have been widely discussed. In the Australian context, for example, Anita Heiss has identified a range of reasons that Indigenous writers and scholars object to non Indigenous people writing about Aboriginal cultures and issues, including problems of exploitation and appropriation, lack of cultural knowledge and understanding, and spiritual reasons (2003, p 10-16). In her work on the law and non Indigenous and Indigenous burial sites in Australia, Prue Vines makes it clear that she does not intend to interpret the meanings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander death ritual:

The question I am posing here is not how Indigenous people see burial sites and human remains (which is not a question for me to answer) but what is the basis for the distinction which is made by Australian common law between the disinterment and disturbance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous remains? (1998, p 79).

Like Vines I have decided that there are some questions that are not for me to answer. My
political and historical position as a non Indigenous Australian means that Indigenous
culture is the most pressing instance in a broader political and theoretical decision to reject
potentially reductivist and exoticising discussion of death ritual as it takes place in cultures
not my own. This is not to say that the practices that I have discussed are static or
homogenous. Australian society is multicultural, and funeral services and other forms of
institutionalised and commercialised death ritual increasingly reflect this aspect of lived
experience (Griffin and Tobin 1997, Howarth 2000, Nicol 2000). Death ritual can also be
influenced by significant events that may rapidly change mourning and bereavement. For
example, the various forms of Balinese and Indonesian death ritual that have been carried
out in both Australia and Indonesia after the 2002 bombings at Paddy’s Bar and the Sari
nightclub in Bali may be taken up or adapted more widely as part of the repertoire of death
ritual used by bereaved people in Australia. Contemporary death ritual is diverse, and is
influenced by practices that are offered by the church and the funeral industry, by practices
in which bereaved people have participated in with their own families and communities,
and also by practices that they have observed in the broader culture and media.

Online research may also require that methodological questions to do with the ways in
which the lived experience of race, ethnicity, religion and nation are played out on the
internet are addressed. The examples of online memorials that I discuss include sites made
by American, British and Australasian mourners, usually in English (In Loving Memory of
Pia, however, contains content in English and Italian). I regard the means used to define a
field for research offline – for example a study of a specific geographical area, nation,
ethnicity, and so on – as not always appropriate to online research. I consider that in some
cases participants and texts can be situated in an additional cultural context, online culture
itself. I am not suggesting that all identity becomes subsumed to an online mode of being,
or that going online erases other aspects of subjectivity, but rather, the location of cultural
production and communication online involves additional ways of both grouping and
categorising people, and also a changing experience of subjectivity. Even so, the question remains – how does a researcher address texts that are online but whose makers are located in a wide variety of cultural contexts which are to some extent unknowable? I collected the data for my study, the online memorials themselves, by making a series of searches using various search engines, such as Google, Altavista, Yahoo and Infoseek. Using search terms such as ‘memorial’, ‘in memoriam’, and ‘in loving memory’, I was able to locate sites made by bereaved people memorialising a relative or friend – as well as the many memorials for pets, memorials for celebrities, and other material outside the focus of my research that these searches retrieved. The apparently simple act of selecting search terms has been one of the most methodologically significant aspects of my online research. The search terms that I have used clearly inscribe certain boundaries of language and culture in my data collection, and this has been deliberate. There are likely to be differences in nation, ethnicity, religious belief, and so on, amongst the makers of the sites that I have visited, some of which may be invisible to me. However, as I have selected search terms that come from the repertoire of death ritual that has been the subject of thanatological research, much of which is familiar to me from my own participation in death ritual, it is to be expected that, even though the makers of the sites that I have visited are located in various places and nations, the online memorials they have made can be interpreted in terms of my own experience and my research into the social management of death.

Online, the funeral industry has a limited role in memorialisation, and most of the memorial sites of any kind that I have visited have been made by bereaved people themselves. In offline culture, memorialisation is often professionalised and is largely part of the activity of the funeral industry, although some memorialisation does occur apart from the services provided by this industry. My focus has been on memorials made by relatives or friends of the deceased. Online memorialisation can be profoundly significant,
even necessary, to the people who make these sites, and to the community of mourners who help with construction, contribute content, and visit online memorials. My interest in online memorials is in part an interest in this kind of cultural production. The term folk art goes some way to describing these practices, however I see this particular categorisation as somewhat patronising and tied to mythologies of authenticity. I would prefer to describe this order of cultural production as ‘vernacular’, not as a simple substitution of one word for another, but rather in the pursuit of a term that allows me to refer to the kind of everyday cultural production that does not sit easily within mass culture or high art.

Vernacular cultural production can be a hobby, and part of a culture of kinship and reciprocity which nevertheless may from time to time be part of (and may also use material and references from) industrialised and professional forms of cultural production. The study of online memorials offers an opportunity to discuss online texts that can be seen as a continuation of a long standing and widespread offline cultural activity, while these sites are also an example of cultural production that is not entirely tied to mass market entertainment, nor to high art.

Another matter often referred to when discussing online communication is the potential for miscommunication and the misunderstanding, even offence, that can inadvertently occur in online conversation. Robin Hamman (1997), writing about his experience of online ethnographic study, identifies what he terms the “narrow bandwidth” of text only communication as the reason for this phenomenon. I would extend Hamman’s identification of a lack of data from that of visual and non verbal signals to the other contextualising material – such as the location and social occasion of communication – circumstances that are often evident in offline culture. We know if we’re in, for example, a school, or a bar, a house in a quiet suburb, or a beach. While online communication does take up many of the metaphors of offline culture these are not always adequate to providing a new visitor with enough information to assess the kind of behaviour that is
appropriate to the context. In these circumstances, the researcher must negotiate the potential for miscommunication, or inappropriate communication, online.

Alongside the need to continue to develop the kind of critical/cultural methodology for the analysis of texts on the web that Mitra and Cohen (1999) recommend, online research also requires that ethical research practices be considered in the context of online culture. One of the first issues encountered by the researcher is how and when online communication can be studied. Ethnographer Allison Cavanagh (1999) poses an important question:

Can we justifiably regard online interactions on bulletin boards, mailing lists and in chat rooms as ‘public status’ or do they constitute, as others may argue, a form of private conversation which is embedded within a public space? Or does the fact of private conversations occurring constitute these arenas as private spaces into which we, as researchers, are intruding?

Cavanagh’s concern lies with chat rooms and online conversation. The situation might be analogous to eavesdropping on, or even recording, a private conversation in an offline public space. The ethnographer may be required to consider whether it is the type of dialogue that is occurring, or the place in which the dialogue occurs that determines whether or not it is private or public. It should also be considered that many online forums build into their structure the means of speaking privately. An online public space is not just the same as offline public space, and again, the way that the technology functions should be taken into account in making an assessment as to the status of communication as public or private.

When first considering a methodological approach I felt that it was appropriate to consider communicating directly with the makers of memorial sites. I made an attempt to contact, with a view to interviewing (via email) the people who had made the online memorials I wished to include in my study. It was, of course, necessary to gain approval from the
University of Wollongong's Human Research Ethics Committee for this process. I contacted authors of sites who had included email addresses on the memorial sites they had created with a rather long and formal email that included the required information about myself, my project, and the institution to which I belong. This letter received only one response, from someone who did not want to participate, and who said that he had found the letter to be cold, and the idea of academic study of online memorials to be exploitative. I appreciated what this respondent was saying, and while I do not feel that it is exploitative to conduct academic research into death ritual, including death ritual in an online context, I can understand that such a study might seem meaningless to a bereaved person. The rationale for participation in research in the Humanities may not be as clear as that of, for example, medical research where it may be possible for a bereaved person to help other people through their participation by providing data that might help in the prevention, treatment or cure of illness or injury. As a result of the lack of response from most of the bereaved people I had attempted to contact, and more pressingly my own reservations about the ethics of contacting bereaved people in this way, I decided I would not make any further attempt to contact the makers of memorial sites.

While I cannot speak authoritatively about how researchers in other fields usually make the first approach to members of the public who may participate in research, it may be that relying only on email removes some of the means of initiating a trusting relationship between a researcher and potential participants, whether this trust is established by the personal qualities of the researcher, as someone who when met in person, seems nice, or honest, or well intentioned, or by a process of referral that may occur in the first contact between researchers and participants, or by the association with an institution appearing to guarantee integrity or even authority. By contrast, a long email from an unknown person might even be deleted without being read and the formal wording of correspondence that has gained Ethics Committee clearance might quickly deter people who are accustomed to
using the brief, informal language of email from responding. It is a convention of online culture in many contexts to offer what seem to be warm expressions of personal support for people who have posted or otherwise displayed information about loss or unhappiness. Due to the restrictions of my Ethics Committee clearance, it was not possible for me to project this kind of warmth or support. In the context of the internet, an email that does not express personal concern might appear particularly cold. It would of course be possible to devise a research process where participants are initially approached offline, although depending on the research topic, this may undermine the reasons that online research participants have been sought. There is also the potential for developing research contacts using online social networks and institutions, although this does not address the difficulties of monitoring the effects of the research process on participants in the case of research into traumatic experiences.

Susannah Stern (2003) has discussed the ethical difficulties faced by researchers when they encounter information such as threats of violence or self harm in their research activities online. She notes that not all online research should necessarily be considered to be human subjects research.

[She] works under the assumption that personal homepages on the WWW do not constitute human subjects research in the traditional sense... because their contents are intentionally published to a large, unfocused, and unmoderated forum, the WWW. (Admittedly, this assumption may not be acceptable to some scholars.) However merely because the study of homepages does not qualify as traditional human subjects research (bypassing, perhaps, the need for informed consent) does not necessarily mean that researchers can simply discount any responsibility for encountering distressing information in these online documents, considering they were in in fact created by very real people (Stern 2003, p 256).

Wakeford argues that the "apparently unproblematic model of Web pages as public documents cannot be taken for granted... Such issues direct us back to the inseparability of methodology with ethics and politics" (2000, p 33). The method of my approach, and
my decision not to persist with any attempt to contact makers of memorial sites was influenced in part by my own serious ethical concerns about approaching makers of sites. I selected exemplary sites for analysis that were available through search engines, directories of memorial sites, or web rings, and that used a mode of address to the reader that suggested that the makers of these sites expected them to be visited by members of the public outside the community of mourners for the person memorialised. However, I hypothesised that while my interest in the sites that they had made might be pleasing for some makers, for others it would be potentially distressing, and perhaps would be asking them to return to extremely painful and traumatic experiences without my project having the resources to provide adequate monitoring and support for this process. I was concerned that I would be contacting bereaved people, and that there was a significant risk of re- or further traumatising participants in the process. In considering my research methodology in terms of both ethics and politics, as Wakeford suggests, I engaged in a range of activities along the lines of those that Stern recommends to the researcher who may encounter such ethical considerations. Stern points out that researchers should be aware that they may encounter texts that include distressing content and develop a plan for how they will respond to this experience at the outset of their research. When analysing such texts researchers should consider the context, specifically the level of anonymity employed by the creator of the text, and the time at which it was created. She emphasises that the researcher should consult with colleagues as to appropriate responses, if any, to such encounters (2003, pp 262-263). While I decided that I would not pursue contact with the makers of memorial sites for these practical and ethical reasons, I would like to add to these a theoretical reason for my decision. That is, while many studies of texts on the web are reliant on data sourced from interviews and other contact with authors of a site to explain how their site is intended to function, and replace analysis of the site itself with an analysis of the intentions of the author of a site. While these research techniques can provide valuable insights into online culture, they tend to dominate the field at the expense
of an analysis on the formal qualities of the text.

I would like to briefly discuss a research model that has been able to successfully manage ethical and practical concerns along the lines of those I have encountered. Adrienne Chambon and her colleagues (1997) have researched the Link-by-Link project, a support service for survivors of torture. Chambon discusses the significance of the relations of power that exist between researchers and participants and the risk of researchers making cultural assumptions. Chambon and her group were able to develop a process in consultation with community workers who were already trusted by participants, and who had the well-being of their clients as their first priority. Some of Chambon’s colleagues on the Link-by-Link project were academic researchers while others were community workers who became an integral part of the research process.

The process benefited from guidance by an advisory group that included community workers and program participants helping to design and provide feedback on the research process. This also meant that researchers had access to a group of people who were already engaged in providing support, signalling that participants had an interest in articulating their experience of the process of surviving and recovering from trauma. It was not only the reflexive approach to methodology that has been taken by this group that interested me, as this feature is widespread in current ethnographic methodology. I was also interested in this particular research group because they had been studying a program that supports survivors of torture. The methodology that the researchers developed, in consultation with participants via an advisory group, had to find ways of managing the centrality of traumatic events to the work of the program without re-traumatising participants. This is different, of course, from contacting a disparate number of internet users whose only common feature is the expression of their bereavement online, but the risk of potential harm to participants was one that, unlike the Link-by-Link project, I did
not have the resources to manage. When my initial approaches to the makers of memorial sites were left unanswered in all but one case, my feelings were of relief rather than disappointment. However, it was not until I examined this response, and read more about the ethnomethodologies of researchers such as Adrienne Chambon and her colleagues that I was able to articulate why I decided not to persist with attempts to contact makers of memorial sites and to develop an alternative approach to my research. In identifying a reflexive methodological approach to the study of online memorials within the still emergent and interdisciplinary field of cyberculture studies, it has been necessary to consider the maintenance of an ethical research practice in cyberculture studies as much as the need to continue to develop the tools for the analysis of texts on the web.

To equip myself for making a textual analysis of online memorials, and to understand online memorialisation in the wider context of death ritual and the experience of bereavement, I undertook research into the social management of death and studies of various other forms of death ritual, and especially memorialising activity. My research has considered what death might mean to the dying and bereaved, how death ritual is performed in response to a loss, and the many different ways that death and mourning are managed in contemporary secularised society. I will discuss some contemporary understandings of the good death in Australian culture, particularly emphasising the work of Pat Jalland (1996, 2002) and Griffin and Tobin (1997) to trace some of the historical and cultural antecedents for these views. I discuss how death in secularised society is sometimes understood through the specific circumstances of a particular loss, but is also produced in the institutions that regulate death, including for example medicine, the law, the municipal cemetery and the funeral industry. Current specialists, such as Tony Walter (whose research and writing for the past twenty years has been devoted to death, dying and mourning), Jenny Hockey (2001) and Lindsay Prior (1989) have problematised what has become a popular view of western society as death denying. Scholars such as Walter,
Hockey, Prior and others have examined the way death is known through such things as the care of the dying (Mulkay 1993), handling the corpse (Adams 1993), the funeral (Howarth 2000), inheritance of property (Koop 1997), and so on.

I have also found the work being done by Walter and others (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 2001, Klass 2001, Stroebe 1999, 2001) in the area of grief and mourning to be compelling. These scholars have argued for a movement away from a model of pathologised grief, in which the bereaved person is expected to undergo a healthy grieving process resulting in recovery (with specialised correction required where such recovery does not occur), to observation of the differences in people’s experience of grief and the ways that a bereaved person’s bond with the deceased may continue after death. Attachment, stage and grief work theories have been challenged (Lindstrom 2002) and the continuing bonds paradigm, where the bereaved are seen as maintaining a changing relationship with the deceased throughout the rest of their own lives, has emerged.

As might be expected, my research into death and death ritual has changed my thinking about these subjects. The diversity of contemporary death ritual and the evidence that such ritual changes over time demonstrates that it is not useful, and perhaps not possible, to attempt to settle on a single or ultimate meaning that death holds for all of us. We will die, and we will almost certainly be bereaved, and these experiences are likely to be different in each case. The practice of memorialisation has become important, even central, to the way that bereaved people in contemporary secularised society mourn. In chapter two I describe the prevalence of memorialising activity and discuss some of the functions that memorialisation can perform, the importance of memorialisation for bereaved people, and the role that memorialisation has in private remembrance as well as the social management of death.
Alongside my research into the meanings of death and the practice of mourning, my work requires a discussion of computer mediated communication. Widespread participation in online culture in contemporary industrialised societies has been the subject of a correspondingly abundant scholarly interest in this activity. The internet has become part of academic life in every field and cyberculture studies has emerged as a discipline. Those interested in what happens on the internet now have the benefit of several years of groundwork intended to describe the new medium, its history, and its possibilities, allowing current research to focus on particular aspects of online culture. David Silver has written a periodised account of cyberculture studies which is included on the Cyberculture web site (2000). Silver gives an overview of the outpouring of writing that has been published in the field and hypothesises on the directions that will be taken within the discipline. Silver argues that early writing on cyberculture by academics and journalists was primarily descriptive: these writers were introducing new technologies to their readers. According to Silver, popular descriptive writing about the internet in the early nineteen nineties was accompanied by “a vocal group of writers, investors and politicians” who argued for the beneficial possibilities of cyberspace. Along with this descriptive writing there emerged what Silver describes as dualistic work, either dystopian or utopian. This dualistic writing often discussed imagined or predicted social transformations and positioned the internet as either a cause of, or a site for, change, whether these were changes in political action and systems (Locke 1999, K. Robins 2000) enhanced communities or social relationships, (Fernback and Thompson 1995, Rheingold 2000), or transformations of the self and the transcendence of corporeality (Markham 1998, Reid 1995, Stone 1993, Turkle 1995, 1999). I have used theories on the relationship between social change and technology developed in science and technology studies to find an alternative to this dualistic approach to cyberculture studies.

In qualitative studies of the world wide web, Mitra and Cohen (1998) suggest a
critical/cultural textual analysis is appropriate. That is, an analysis that is based on

the content of the WWW texts but also on the way in which the content is presented
and on its significance... it is important to recognize that the image is the result of
specific conditions of production that can determine the way the text becomes
meaningful... (1998, p 181).

Mitra and Cohen argue that it is not only the content of web sites that is of significance,
but also the way content is presented and the conditions of the production of the site.
Those practising web studies have adapted the methods of a range of other scholarly
disciplines in order to discuss these matters of presentation, significance and production.
Nina Wakeford (2000) has pointed out the need for a reflexive methodological approach
when working with online texts. She writes:

there is no standard technique, in communications studies or in allied social science
disciplines, for studying the Web. Rather, it is a case of plundering existing research
for emerging methodological ideas which have been developed in the course of
diverse research projects, and weighing up whether they can be used for our own
study (2000, p 31).

Wakeford describes an interdisciplinary approach where researchers may bring the
methodological tools from their field of study to online culture, but where they may also
need to be able to adapt their methodology and to encounter and adopt additional tools that
are appropriate to the online context. Methodologies from fields like literary criticism,
media studies, and the social sciences have been adapted to researching the web. Mitra and
Cohen include a brief summary of the features drawn from literary criticism that George
Landow (1992) described in his work on hypertext. Landow discussed what he described
as the reconfiguring of the text, the author, and narrative that was occurring in the
development of texts that could be linked to each other and incorporate a variety of media.
He identified features such as intertextuality, the writerly text, the multivocal text, the
decentred text, and narrative discontinuity in this early work that described hypertext as it
was before the world wide web had been developed. The way in which film and television have been discussed in media studies has also been adapted to web studies. David Gauntlett (n.d.), co-editor of *WebStudies*, describes the idea of the book as addressing the need for a publication that "treated internet media like any other popular media that appeals to people (without of course, forgetting about the things that make it unique". Gauntlett de-emphasises the web’s difference from other communication media, in favour of an interest in the significance of the web, as evidenced by its popularity. Gauntlett lists a number of ‘topic headings’ that describe what he regards as the most compelling issues and assertions in web studies. Gauntlett’s headings are as follows: the web allows people to express themselves, the web brings people together, building communities, anonymity and identity play in cyberspace, the web and big business, and the web changing politics and international relations. Gauntlett’s media studies approach demonstrates the field’s use of textual analysis, and theories of cultural production and social relations.

While this emphasis on the significance of activity on the web and the way in which texts are produced is a key methodological concern of web studies, it does not address a problem that Landow pointed out more than ten years ago. Whereas hypertext radically changes the experiences that reading, writing and text signify, how, without misleading, can one employ these terms, so burdened with the assumptions of print technology, when referring to electronic materials (1992, p 41).

When the study of a text on the web requires a discussion of form and features, the topology of web studies often uses terms adapted from the study of literature, and perhaps also film and television, which are not always adequate to an account of the unique ways in which material can be organised and presented on a site. This approach can run the risk of presenting some features as textual and others as technical, simply because the developing lexicon of web studies is not yet adequate to discussing, for example, interface design, with the same complexity and ease as it is possible to discuss passages of writing or graphic
images. Lev Manovich (2001) has studied visual art, computer science, cinema and literature, and has worked in what he terms ‘new media’. His work offers a map of the field “from the material foundations of new media to its forms... from the level of binary code to the level of a computer program” and considering the interface, operating system, the software applications, the appearance and logic of the images and forms used in new media. (2001, p 11). Manovich places new media in the context of cinema, the printed word, and computer science, and he argues that new media places an emphasis on selection rather than original creation. The work of the new media producer is not to create an original image, but to find an image that is appropriate and to combine it with other selected images.

New media objects are rarely created completely from scratch; usually they are assembled from ready-made parts. Put differently, in computer culture, authentic creation has been replaced by selection from a menu... While previously the great text of culture from which the artist created her own unique ‘tissue of quotations’ was bubbling and shimmering somewhere below consciousness, now it has become externalised... available as soon as the artist turns on the computer (Manovich 2001, p 124-125).

According to Manovich, new media uses the database form as the underlying organisational principle of the text, in the way that narrative has been used to structure texts. The database can be used to produce a variety of aesthetic forms as “new media objects that present themselves as linear narratives, interactive narratives, databases, or something else” (2001, p 228).

David Silver argues that scholarship in the field has developed into what he terms “critical cyberculture studies”, an approach that regards cyberspace as “a place to contextualize and seek to offer more complex, more problematized findings”. Sociologist Steve Woolgar argues that early work in cyberculture studies tended to focus on ‘macro-analysis’, giving “little clue as to how these technologies are actually used and
At the outset of my research process, I accepted a view of society as death denying, and saw online memorialisation as a radical break from offline death ritual. My investigation into death ritual, and into online culture and theories of technoscientific and social change has altered this view. Woolgar has observed the regularity with which current research outcomes in the field of cyberculture studies are “counter-intuitive”, that is, research outcomes are rarely what the researcher initially expected (2002, p 21). In the course of my research I have moved from an assumption that I would be describing a paradigm breach, a disruption or even revolutionary break in death ritual brought about by the unique conditions of communication and cultural production online. In other words I was anticipating that I would be observing the transformation of a social practice enabled by a new technology. As I will demonstrate, my research resulted in quite a different outcome. I will show that online memorialisation is an example of an adaptive process of change, where the technoscientific and the social cannot be meaningfully separated, and where an emergent practice is produced through the considered, knowing, skilled and active intertextual construction of social relationships, generic conventions, and texts. My approach to online memorials as a genre of texts, with an emphasis on the cultural and disciplinary contexts of death ritual and online culture has meant that I have been able to observe the reflexive and adaptive intertextual construction of online memorials as an exemplary instance of the relationship between technoscientific and social change.
Chapter one
Death ritual

Death ritual can be observed in how we manage and regulate death. We understand death through the institutions, knowledges and belief systems that produce our experience of dying and bereavement. This chapter is a discussion of death ritual in contemporary industrialised and secularised society, with some reference to past practice. My account of dying and mourning and my discussion of some scholarly views of death ritual will establish that it is not fixed and static, but rather changes over time and in different socio-cultural contexts.

The emergence of humanist disciplines such as sociology, psychology and anthropology has meant that death and death ritual can be studied as a secular social phenomenon, and dying and bereavement can be thought about in terms that are not restricted to the medical or theological. This study of death, dying and mourning tends to take one of two general approaches. There have been those who have seen society as death denying or death as hidden or forbidden subject (Gorer 1984, Aries 1974), while others have critiqued this position (Prior 1989, Walter 1991, 1999b, Hockey 2001).

In 1955, anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer’s ‘The Pornography of Death’ presented his view that, while in the nineteenth century, childbirth and sexuality were regarded as shameful, unmentionable subjects, in the twentieth century it was death that was shocking and embarrassing. This influential paper argued that death was ‘taboo’. In Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, Aries (1974) traces what he regarded as a change from an acceptance of death as a natural part of life, through a view of death as a rupture, to a twentieth century denial of death. The view of society as death denying, or of death as taboo persists amongst subsequent work in the field, and has
certainly become prevalent in popular writing on death and dying. Death ritual was criticised as being hollow and empty, particularly when compared to death ritual in the past or in other cultural contexts. While some scholarship and some practitioners in fields such as palliative care and bereavement counselling continue to operate within a paradigm that presupposes that we live in a death denying society, specialists in these fields are now refiguring this view of death and mourning.

Tony Walter (1991) is the most prominent amongst those theorists who are re-examining responses to death and death ritual, and has challenged the view of contemporary industrialised society as death denying, and points out the paradox in the premise that death is taboo and the extent of both scholarly work and popular media coverage of this view. Medical anthropologist and sociologist Jenny Hockey (2001) characterises the view of denied or hidden death as a modernist comparison with a nostalgic version of past practice or a view that more authentic or satisfying death ritual can be experienced in the culturally other. Hockey argues that when Western theorists look at death in their own cultures, their account of death tends to focus on emotions and the study of individual feelings, while Western theorists who study death in cultures other than their own focus on mourning and collective or public actions.

Emerging from this work critiquing the argument that death is hidden or society is death denying are thanatological studies and analyses that observe and discuss people’s experience of death and bereavement, mapping changing practices and developing new theory. Death might seem to be a topic that is beyond such interpretation – a natural fact, a biological inevitability – but dying is not a process that is confined to the biological. For example, the circumstances of a death can be of significance to the way in which we understand both the prospect of our own death and the experience of bereavement. A death that is sudden, violent, or caused by a feared disease; the loss of a friend, a colleague, a
neighbour, a spouse, or sibling; the death of an infant, or a person in the prime of their life, an adolescent, or an elderly person might all be circumstances that mean that such deaths are understood in different ways. Death might also have different meanings for people with different beliefs and values. Spiritual beliefs, but also those to do with parenting, friendship, marriage, community, working life and so on, may all be involved with our understanding of death.

It is not only these personal beliefs and individual circumstances that are part of how we experience dying and being bereaved: there are institutions and social practices that are involved in the experience of dying and bereavement in contemporary industrialised society. Once death is diagnosed it must be certified, registered, and sometimes investigated. In New South Wales, death must be certified by a doctor, and registered with the state. For the person who dies at home, or elsewhere outside a hospital or nursing home, a doctor must be called in order to issue a death certificate and, if possible, determine the cause of death (Rest Assured 1999, p 63). Death is defined in law. In New South Wales, “the law states that a person is dead when their brain stops functioning or their blood circulation stops, and these processes cannot be reversed” (Rest Assured 1999, p 63). Despite this, the diagnosis of death retains some ambiguity. Speaking to an interdisciplinary conference on death and dying, medical doctor Guy Micco (2002) described an instance of the inexactness of the moment of death, even in a hospital setting. He describes a planned death, that is, a death where medical staff and the family of a patient confer on the likelihood of the recovery of a patient and decide that the machines and procedures that maintain life will be made inactive.

Mr. Reggie’s heart’s EKG, electrocardiogram monitor, was on, just above and to the left of his head. And we all stood there... watching the ever-slowing tracing of the electrical activity of this man’s dying, or what we thought was this man’s dying, but not yet dead heart, and listening to its soft beeping accompaniment... Then somehow – I have no idea how – perhaps it was my discomfort with what was happening, or
perhaps it was a glance from his wife, something broke the spell, and I turned off the monitor, announcing at that time, as doctors are want [sic] to do, that the patient had died. The family then turned their gaze and attention to their beloved husband and father, and the minister said a blessing. But was Mr. Reggie really dead when I pronounced him so... Some might think, and some have told me, that this patient wouldn't have died until his monitor showed no electrical activity of his heart, that I shouldn't have turned off the monitor, or I should have kept watching the monitor myself at the nurse's station, and pronounced him dead when the electrical activity went to so-called 'flat line'. But virtually anywhere outside the Intensive Care Unit, unless the person is hooked up to an EKG, an electrocardiogram, at the end of their life, death is determined as it has been for, again, a very long time. You are dead when, first, you look dead – no movement and some other qualities, like, for instance, big pupils that don't budge when you shine a light on them.

Dr Micco's description of the death of Mr Reggie illustrates that even a medical diagnosis of death aided by monitors is not an unambiguous event – in the transition from a person whose respiration and circulation continues with the intervention of machines, to a person whose respiration and circulation has permanently ceased, there is room for contestation as to when, precisely, that person has died, and this can be further complicated in instances of brain death where respiration and circulation are maintained. Of course, this kind of planned death occurs only in exceptional circumstances, although "[m]ost people in NSW die in hospital and institutions" (Rest Assured 1999, p 62).

Many of those who die in hospitals, hospices or nursing homes do so after a long period of illness. Cicely Saunders is credited with being one of the founders of the hospice movement, and an enormously influential figure in the development of contemporary forms of palliative care. The work of Saunders and her colleagues and supporters was based on a patient centred approach, collecting data by speaking, listening and recording what dying patients had to say about their experience. It also involved learning about pain-controlling pharmacology, campaigning for support and funds, and developing a steering group that could discuss what their project could be, and the "medical, social and spiritual issues [that] had to be addressed before planning and fund raising could begin"
People dying of illnesses such as cancer had previously been cared for in the acute care setting of the hospital, in a benevolent society or church hospice, or at home, often in extreme pain and discomfort. The hospice movement argued against the then conventional concern that pain medication would cause dying patients to develop tolerance and/or dependance on these drugs. They developed knowledge that meant that “patients could be free of pain and still alert, responsive and remaining themselves” (Saunders 2001). Palliative care reflects some of the values and meanings associated with death in secular society. Palliative treatment might be given to allow the dying person a little more time, to relieve the pain and to ease the discomfort of dying from an illness, and to improve the quality of life of the dying person. The palliative care offered in the hospice setting is intended to provide the contemporary version of a good death. It “focuses on the physical, psycho social and spiritual needs and expectations while remaining sensitive to individual, cultural and religious values, beliefs and practices”, as nurse Reena McDermott has written (1997, p 197). This form of care may occur in the institutional setting of the hospital or hospice, or the dying person might be cared for at home with the assistance of family, friends and visiting health workers. In the course of their illness, a dying person may spend some time in each of these settings.

The hospice movement was successful in seeing palliative care become a recognised speciality in Britain in 1987, and in instigating changes that allowed dying people to be cared for, either in the hospice, or as out patients living at home, with as little pain and the best quality of life possible, and in a patient-centred environment. These developments in the treatment of illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, and degenerative illnesses in the present time are part of changes in contemporary meanings of death. It often takes longer than it has in the past for people with these kinds of conditions to reach the end stage of their illness, and it takes people longer to die. In ‘Nursing Care and the Dying’, Reena McDermott writes, “modern science and technology, new and emerging treatment
modalities, are adding more and more time to life for people living with life threatening illnesses” (1997, p 197). In Australia it was only in 1993 in the lead up to a Federal election that a palliative care policy was specifically referred to at a Federal level (Smith 2000, p 305). This reference was made in the Keating Labor government's health policy. In July 1998 the Howard Coalition government launched ‘A National Strategy for Palliative Care in Australia 1998-2003’. While palliative care had, of course, been practised prior to this, the fact that political parties have now developed such policy suggests that palliative care is gradually becoming a more widely acknowledged and valued speciality, and is another indication that the meanings of death continue to change.

The euthanasia movement reflects another view of what constitutes a good death in contemporary times. Advocates of this practice are arguing for death free from indignity and suffering and they also value being able to choose when and how they will die (Exit Australia n.d.). Those who support the provision of euthanasia may do so because they regard it as a way to avoid pain, physical or mental incapacity, are resistant to being cared for by others, or simply have a desire to control the circumstances of their death while they are still able to do so. Many who oppose euthanasia argue that good palliative care makes it unnecessary. I will not discuss arguments for and against euthanasia, which divide palliative care specialists as well as the wider community, but it is significant to note here the campaign and the meanings associated with death reflected in the arguments used by both sides of the debate.

The emergence of the natural death movement is another example of the diversity of death ritual available to people in contemporary industrialised societies. This movement argues for active and reflexive involvement in dying and mourning, and supports people who are dying and their friends and family in finding ways of experiencing the dying process that are meaningful for them (The Natural Death Centre n.d.). This can include supporting the
increased involvement of bereaved people in activities that have become professionalised, such as the laying out of the corpse, or the planning of the funeral. While the natural death movement could be seen as advocating a somewhat nostalgic version of death ritual, or as privileging some forms of death ritual as more authentic and natural than others, it does support many dying and bereaved people to access products and services that are not always available from the funeral industry, as well as providing a forum for discussion and support through the experiences of dying and mourning.

After death, the handling and disposal of the corpse and mourning activity are also institutionally regulated. The body may continue to be part of complex systems of knowledge and regulation and the corpse itself has become a site for producing meanings around death. The corpse has long been at the centre of the history and practice of medicine, to the extent that it has been argued by Leder (1998) that the physician in contemporary times still approaches the living patient as a metaphoric corpse, a practice instantiated through hundreds of years of dissection and representation that has produced a view of anatomy and methods of examination of the body that are based on the study of the corpse. In a presentation to an interdisciplinary conference on death and dying, medical ethicist Tom Cole (2000) discussed the making of his documentary film, *The Anatomy of Humanity*. He described his project as the investigation of the experience of students learning anatomy by dissection. Cole said his film was intended both to initiate, and to document, a process that allows the medical student to acknowledge the person that the corpse once was, and to consider their own feelings about this person and their dissection of the person’s body, in a way that will not make it impossible for the student to perform the dissection or the tasks that are necessary to their profession. His film focuses on dissection for the purposes of education and is an intervention in the way in which medical students are inducted into their profession through contact with the cadaver (though in recent years the centrality of dissection to education in medicine has decreased). Linacre
(2002) notes that while the dissection of cadavers is still common, especially in postgraduate training, it is time consuming and costly, and there is a trend towards using pre dissected tissue, models and digital aids for students studying general medicine. The procedures of autopsy, where the corpse becomes a text that can be read expertly to produce the reasons for its own existence, continues to be an important aspect of death ritual in the broadest use of the term. Through the procedure of autopsy, the pathologist records and gleans data from the corpse that can be documented, compared, ordered and interpreted. Lindsay Prior writes,

[t]he articulation of concrete social practices on the human body is evident from the very moment at which physical death is perceived. The marks and signs of death are, as I have said, normally regarded as visible both 'on' and 'in' the body, and the body is ordinarily viewed as a container of all manner of facts, explanations and data on mortality (1989, p 19).

The body provides evidence of its own death as well as data that can be used, for example, in the study of particular diseases, or in statistical information on social conditions. The collection and interpretation of this data is one of the ways that the living can feel that they have knowledge of death. In contemporary society, the corpse may be used for scientific research and education, and is an important source of information. A living person can leave instructions that they are willing to be an organ donor, (though it is usual for the hospital to obtain the consent of the family of a deceased person before harvesting organs), or a person can make arrangements to bequeath their body for scientific research. In one of the most sensationalist examples of the role of the corpse in understanding death, Professor Günther von Hagens has developed a method “by which bodily fluids could be replaced after death with silicone, epoxy or polyester polymers, thus preserving every single body part down to the last sinew, cell and vein” (Connolly 2001, p 18). Whole corpses, as well as body parts, are exhibited to the public as educative objects. A plastinated man sits at a chess board, his brain visible to the viewer. A plastinated pregnant
woman is displayed in such a way that the changes that were happening to her body are observable. While I have only read descriptions and seen photographs from this exhibit, I can imagine that the educational aspect of the experience could well be overwhelmed by the confronting insistence of the inevitable death of the body. The experience of a visit to an exhibition of plastinated corpses may be educative, or horrifying, or may intensify the viewer’s love of their own life, like a contemporary version of medieval memento mori. According to Connolly, Professor von Hagens asserts that he has received donations of over 3000 bodies in the last fifteen years.

Pathologist Frank Gonzalez-Crussi’s (2000) working life involves handling and thinking about corpses. He could be expected to have a certain insight into what the corpse means to the bereaved. He sees the presence of the corpse as “fundamentally paradoxical... a presence which is also an absence...” but which is important for survivors in order that they might perform the funeral and try to address the absence of the person who has died.

[The absence of a cadaver is doubly distressing... The dearly departed who is not there cannot be seen, cannot be symbolically questioned. One cannot make confessions, address reproaches, or elicit common souvenirs with the absent... Thus, a man who dies away from his loved ones is doubly absent: absent because he is dead, and absent again because he is not physically – corporeally – present. This is an absence of an absence, an absence with an exponent, an absence to the second power.

When a death occurs in a hospital or hospice, relatives may have an opportunity to view the body soon after death, and a viewing of the corpse is one of the services offered by funeral directors. When someone dies in hospital, the nurses’ care of their patient extends after death in the performance of the last offices – that is, the tasks that are performed before the body is taken to the morgue. The nurse might also need to inform relatives of the death and provide them with information about how the person died, and some support if they are viewing the body. The hospital may also be the first place to provide
information on bereavement to the surviving relatives. Bereaved people rarely have the kind of access to or contact with the body of the person who has died that they had when death routinely occurred in the home, and relatives, servants or handy women were responsible for laying out the corpse. In her research into the work of handy women in working class communities in Britain, Sheila Adams describes the way that these women once played a central role in caring for the sick, acting as midwives, and in laying out the dead. In contrast to handy women, the professional midwives and nurses who replaced them received formal training and were registered. Adams writes about the process of the replacement of community organised care with what she calls scientific rationalist forms of care, and describes the dominance of scientific rationalism through the formal regulatory control of fields such as midwifery and nursing, as well as changing attitudes towards the corpse.

Now, the corpse is usually prepared for burial or cremation in the funeral home, and health regulations mean that it can be difficult for family and friends to prepare a corpse for burial or cremation themselves. For some mourners, this handing over of the body of the person who has died to the professionalised setting of the morgue or the funeral home may be a source of frustration, while for others it might relieve them from having to cope with the abject necessities of preparing the body for burial or cremation. Whatever the preference of the bereaved, it is clear that what happens to our bodies as we are dying and after we die is regulated, not only by the law, but also by the customary practices that occur in institutionalised forms of care.

As Tony Walter writes, “the manner of our dying is affected by the social institutions that process our dying” (1997, p 175). Walter regards these institutions as having undergone “the twin processes of secularisation and humanisation” (1997, p 197). Where once it was primarily the church that regulated death and mourning (and many other aspects of
life), in secularised society medicine and the funeral industry are perhaps the most important institutions that help produce the way that we die and mourn. In the past

[t]he priest was present at the deathbed and the church ran hospices for the dying: the church owned and managed the burial grounds, and the church controlled the post death rites (Walter 1997, p 176).

Secularisation is not simply a change in the spiritual beliefs of individuals, as Walter makes explicit when he refers to the “sociological process” of secularisation (1997, p 166). Changes in the way in which death and bereavement are understood, shifts in the institutions that manage death, and the ways in which all forms of death ritual were practiced were part of the broad social changes of secularisation. As the institutional power of the Church continued to ebb, Christian theology was publicly questioned, even by the clergy themselves, and the funeral reform movement was established. The colonisation of Australia occurred through a period in which the transition described by Walter occurred.

By the eighteenth century the church’s extensive authority over death and its accompaniments was simply taken for granted in Britain, Ireland and much of Europe. And it was transportable, even to the new Australian colonies. In the ensuing centuries, however, that authority has been fundamentally challenged and the church’s control greatly weakened (Griffin 2000, p 40).

Australia’s colonial beginnings as a penal settlement have had an impact on the history of death ritual in this country, and has perhaps continued to have an effect on how we mourn. The provision of a burial service for convicts who died was sometimes a point of conflict between the military who ran the colonies and the very few ministers who were available, as military commanders often insisted that convicts were to be buried without a Christian service. The Church of England was the only official religion of the colony, with the result that the very many Catholics, non-Anglican Protestants and Jews that were buried in public cemeteries did not have the benefit of any burial service other than that of the Church of England (Griffin 2000, p 42). Historian Pat Jalland (2002) discusses the death of the lone
bushman in Australia. A lonely death and unmarked grave as a result of the bushman battling what was seen as the harshness of the Australian landscape came to be seen as heroic and tragic, although Jalland notes that a lack of adequate preparation for conditions, and other factors such as drunkenness were often the cause of such deaths (2002, p 249). Despite the way in which this kind of death became mythologised in Australian culture, Jalland argues that it was the antithesis of the nineteenth century Australian version of the good death.

As Europeans became more established in the colony, they were able to adapt ritual from their first country to their new lives. Jalland notes, however, that for many of those Europeans, their beliefs and expectations about death and mourning were disrupted by the many losses that occurred during the difficult sea voyage to Australia, and the impossibility of caring for the dying or of carrying out mourning as it would have been experienced in their first country (2002 p 48). Some of the descriptions of deathbeds in the nineteenth century in Australia that Jalland has researched show how the process of dying a good Christian death was then constructed. She notes that this idealised kind of death was generally available mainly to the urban middle classes, where the dying person was helped by (usually female) relatives and servants, and a doctor, a clergyman, professional nurses, or some combination of these carers. For those less well off, family and neighbours were the chief carers, and the doctor usually called only when the sick person was very close to death.

The increased importance of the doctor at the deathbed marks both the secularisation and the professionalisation of death and dying. Jalland also notes how challenges to religious authority by science, theological questioning of the Bible, and advances in medical science made Christian belief and the importance of a good Christian death less certain in the minds of middle class Australians in this period, while many working people also stopped
going to Church. Jalland does not offer possible reasons for this change in levels of attendance at Church services, although she does note that this decline was greater amongst Protestants than it was amongst Catholics. She suggests that bonds of ethnicity and class amongst Irish Catholics meant that they were more likely to continue to practice their religion. The experience of bereavement itself was often critical to the questioning or loss of Christian faith experienced by mourners. Jalland describes the case of Ada Cambridge, who lost two of her children, and came close to an early death herself. Cambridge’s reading of Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species*, and Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*, as well as the Biblical criticism of the time and her own experiences with death and dying led her to abandon her Christian beliefs and devise her own understandings of the meanings of life and death (2002, pp 102-103).

The secularisation of death ritual does not mean that all, or even most, contemporary funerals are non religious. Walter notes that, while there is a decline in the number of religious funerals, they “remain the norm even in countries where baptisms and church weddings are in decline” (1997, p 170). In contemporary secularised society there is less emphasis on dying as an opportunity to reconcile with God and mourning as a transition from life to afterlife, but even those who do not regard themselves as having a religious belief may feel that a person who has died continues in some way. Some bereaved people describe events where they are visited by the deceased, awake or in their dreams, and there are bereaved people who come to feel that the person who has died stays with them. Some bereaved people describe the deceased as being simultaneously nowhere and everywhere. Some regard the dead as continuing to live in their thoughts, feelings and memories (Walter 1999a, p 57-60). Secularised society has also seen the emergence, or continuation, of people developing their own folk, or ‘fringe’ belief systems (as the student of folklore Jennifer Chandler puts it), from a variety of sources and experiences in their lives which may include the church’s theology but is not confined to orthodox belief (Chandler 1999,
Mourning traditions such as the wearing of black, the use of flowers, the placement of significant objects in the coffin with the deceased and so on, are not part of the Christian meaning of death, but have nevertheless been practised as part of the Christian funeral. They address other aspects of the community of mourners' understanding of death. The contemporary funeral is no longer concerned primarily with ensuring transition from life to afterlife for the person who has died, although religious belief, personal spirituality or the absence of belief is important to bereaved people, and is represented in the ways in which they mourn.

While religion and spiritual belief continue to have a role in death and mourning for many people, these experiences are now regulated by a range of institutions, rather than exclusively or predominantly the Church. In contemporary industrialised societies death is associated with, for example, the hospital, the coroner's court, the registry office, the funeral home, the municipal crematorium or cemetery, and interactions amongst the body, pharmaceuticals, machines, medical and nursing care, the law and the family. These institutions and interactions regulate both the process of dying and the diagnosis of death. The way in which death is approached and experienced can affect whether the dying person is regarded as making a good death. Contemporary versions of the good death are often those deaths that occur in the context of professionalised care. For some, a good death is a quick and painless end without foreknowledge, while others value the opportunity to prepare for their death, to set their affairs in order, and to say goodbye to family and friends while remaining as physically comfortable and free from pain as possible.

The secularisation of death, and the professionalisation of death ritual has also contributed to the emergence of the funeral industry. In 1963 Jessica Mitford published her influential and popular book *The American Way of Death*. In this book, and in the revised edition,
The American Way of Death Revisited (2000) Mitford was highly critical of the practices of the funeral industry in America in the twentieth century. According to funeral directors like Richard J. Paul (1997) and Des Tobin (1997), some of the criticism raised in works like this continues to be expressed. Paul acknowledges that it is impossible to say that exploitation of the bereaved never occurs, but argues that the suspicion and resentment that is at times directed at the funeral industry may have more to do with the experience of grief, especially for people who see death as being removed from everyday life, than with the services provided by the funeral industry. He points out that while people are prepared to pay for activities that recognise other important occasions, such as weddings, they are often critical of the cost of funerals. He argues that the anger and the sense of loss of control that are common experiences for bereaved people may be part of the reason for some of the criticisms that are made of the funeral industry.

The funeral industry is exclusively concerned with death and bereavement. It has impacted on how we die, and how we mourn, making secular ritual accessible, and regulating death and mourning in new ways. The emergence of the funeral industry and its continuing involvement with what happens to our bodies once we die and the kinds of death ritual available to bereaved people is to some extent supported by legislation governing the handling and disposal of corpses. How this involvement and legislative control is regarded by bereaved people is difficult to assess. As Jenny Hockey writes:

[w]ith any consumerist development, evidence is often limited or uneven as to whether it has been driven by professionalizing, profit oriented motives of providers or by changes in the lifestyle and tastes of consumers themselves (2001, p 196).

Griffin and Tobin (1997) argue that it is reasonable to use the services of a funeral director for the same reasons that it is reasonable to use any other expert in a society where tasks are professionalised. That is, the funeral director has the skills, knowledge and experience to provide the services that are required, and the funeral director is expected to meet
professional standards in the delivery of these services. At present, New South Wales is
the only state in Australia where funeral directors must hold a license, while the use of a
funeral director is not mandatory in any state (Griffin and Tobin 1997, p 199) and

[t]here is nothing about the ordinary funeral that absolutely requires that it be
conducted by a funeral director. There is no law in most states which precludes
others from offering the goods and services that a funeral director commonly
offers... (Griffin and Tobin 1997, p 172)

The role of the funeral director developed out of the many different tasks involved in the
arrangement of a funeral and the disposal of a body. A cabinet maker might also make
coffins, a person with a vehicle and a horse or bullocks might transport the coffin, the
corpse was prepared for burial by relatives or neighbours, and the service was often held at
home, performed by a clergyman where one was available. Griffin and Tobin recount that
“early undertakers had other trades or callings. Most were carpenters, joiners,
cabinetmakers or other workers in wood. In time they were joined by wheelwrights,
general storekeepers, masons and a wide range of others” (1997, p 175). The sexton’s
duties were to take care of the graveyard, and sometimes to dig the graves. Griffin and
Tobin write that it is not known whether the sexton assisted in other aspects of funeral
preparations, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century in Australia, the sexton, who
worked for the church, began to be referred to as the undertaker. The diverse trades that
contributed to the furnishing and arrangement of a funeral eventually came to be offered
by one business rather than various different people.

The history of the profession in Australia provides an indication of some of the reasons
there has been so much debate in the industry as to the extent and form that licensing and
regulation should take. As Griffin and Tobin have noted, undertakers themselves have not
always agreed as to the nature of their role.
One of the reasons why this issue has not been settled is that the industry has been ambivalent about its own status. Some members regard it as a profession, others as a trade, others simply as a business (1997, p 199).

The Australian Funeral Directors Association advocates industry self regulation, with standards set and adhered to by its members. The Australian Funeral Directors Association has also established the Australian College of Funeral Service, providing training for workers in the industry. The need for those working with corpses who have died from infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B to use safe but non-discriminatory handling procedures was one of the catalysts for a national approach to education and regulation in the funeral industry, as there was a need to ensure that standards that would protect funeral workers and the wider community could be set and monitored (Griffin and Tobin 1997, p 201).

The funeral director has close contact with the bereaved in the first days after a death. Something of the role formerly performed by the clergy has been taken on by some funeral directors, who may also see grief education as a part of their responsibility: “many funeral directors find it necessary and appropriate to be available to clients even after the funeral has been held and the account paid – not as therapists but simply as care-givers” (Griffin and Tobin 1997, p 180). Funeral director and grief educator Richard J. Paul argues that if

a funeral service is going to provide some assistance to each mourner in their grief management there are three basic components which stand out as meeting the needs of the majority: the religious or spiritual; the memory of the deceased; and some grief information (1997, p 266).

The funeral becomes educative and therapeutic, and the remembrance of the person when they were alive sits alongside the religious or spiritual rationales for the funeral. Howarth (2000) agrees with Griffin and Tobin that both changes in attitudes towards death, and
general cultural changes in Australia have meant that the funeral industry and other professionals involved with death and dying must be able to arrange or support rituals that are drawn from many different religions and cultures, as well as humanist life centred funerals. Traditions of Christian ritual continue alongside non religious mourning and funerary practice and other mourning activities in the funeral industry.

It's difficult to say whether the dominance of the funeral industry in the handling and disposal of the corpse is regarded by bereaved people as a desirable situation that frees the bereaved from the health risks and the possible distress that may result from close contact with the body of a person who has died, or whether bereaved people would wish to have an increased role in this process if such an option were more readily available. It is likely that preferences would differ from one person to the next. The practical and symbolic processes that we engage in after someone dies are not going to be able to prevent the experience of bereavement from being painful. What is of relevance to this study is that there are changing and emergent practices in which some mourners engage, while others prefer to use death ritual that they see as being traditional, and there still others who choose to combine established and emergent practices.

The way in which a body is disposed of is governed by health regulations, custom, and the funeral industry. Methods of disposal are usually either burial or cremation, and the way in which these aspects of death are practiced in contemporary industrialised societies is another example of changing death ritual. It is considered to be desirable that the body of the deceased be disposed of in a way that is not only safe and healthy, but also respectful, dignified, even caring, and that relatives be able to visit the place where a corpse or cremains are interred if they choose to do so. Once the corpse leaves the hospital, morgue or laboratory it is usually buried or cremated in a process overseen by the funeral industry. The body of someone who has died can retain what Prue Vines has called an “emotional,
secular significance” to the bereaved (1998, p 89). Vines has written a paper that discusses the differences in the legal control of human remains in non Aboriginal cemeteries as compared to those in Aboriginal burial grounds. She writes that the significance of non Aboriginal human remains to survivors is “very much related to the recency of the death and the closeness of the emotional relationship between the dead and the living” (1998, p 89). The site of the disposal of human remains continues to have a significance for bereaved people, but a sense of sacredness is not usually, Vines argues, maintained in non Aboriginal cemeteries. Cemetery land is often reclaimed and used for other purposes. In Western society, the cemetery is now a place where the basic framework has shifted from that of religion to public health. What determines the layout of the modern cemetery is not religious consideration such as closeness to the sacrament (as in medieval Europe) or orientation of the body to Mecca (as in Muslim graves) but considerations in public health. The spacing and depth of graves and the temperature of the cremator in no way assist the passage of the soul but are carefully designed to protect the physical health of the living (Walter 1997, p 178).

The emergence of the contemporary cemetery and crematorium grounds follows a long and varied history of practices regulating the disposal of corpses. The practice of burying the dead in space owned and governed by the church came about as a result of beliefs that those buried close to saints and holy people would be the first to be resurrected, and that proximity to holy people would be in some way advantageous to them in their resurrection. In very early times, [m]artyrs were buried in extra urban necropolises shared by Christians and pagans. The venerated site of their tombs soon attracted other sepulchres. St Paulin had his son’s body carried to a spot near the martyrs of Aecola in Spain, ‘so that he might be associated with the martyrs through the union of the tomb, in order that in the vicinity of the blood of the saints he may draw upon that virtue which purifies our souls against fire’ (Aries 1974, pp 16-17).

The municipal cemetery or crematorium grounds developed from a variety of traditions,
including the garden cemetery, popularised in the United States, older versions of municipal cemeteries created as a response to campaigns about the health risks posed by churchyards crowded with corpses, and the churchyard cemetery itself. Churchyard burial grounds were eventually replaced by cemeteries that were located apart from the population centres, with concerns for public health, and fear of exhumation outweighing the desire to be buried in the churchyard. In Australia, the disposal of the corpse occurs most often in a municipally owned and operated crematorium or through burial in a municipal cemetery. Historically, in the various states of Australia, there have been church cemeteries, state and municipal cemeteries, and privately owned cemeteries, but most cemeteries are now owned and operated by local government under state health regulations.

The practice of burying the dead in monumental cemeteries and churchyards is decreasing. Cremation, and the disposal of the cremains either in cemetery grounds, or at some other site significant to the deceased has become prevalent. Walter writes that this is partly to do with urbanisation and the need to dispose of a large number of bodies in a small geographical area, as well as the secularisation of society and changes in attitude toward religion. He says that cremation “has been promoted in many countries as a means of secularisation, [but] it has only become a widely used method of disposal when the churches in secularised Protestant countries have implicitly or explicitly endorsed it” (1996, p 109). Walter notes that there are exceptions to the trend toward cremation, where “there is such an anxiety about roots that a cult of the grave has developed – as in the USA and in Finland” (1996, p 109). Cremation rates, according to Walter, are relatively low in the United States, and he hypothesises that this may be because burial in American soil has a strong symbolic meaning for Americans, as though the presence of the bodies of the dead in the soil was a way of strengthening, even legitimising, cultural connection to the land. This hypothesis is not consistent with the high rate of cremation in Australia, a
nation that can certainly be said to have highly contested origins. Presumably other
cultural factors have meant that burial does not have the same kind of powerful symbolic
value in Australia that Walter has observed in the United States. Prue Vines asks,

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\text{[d]oes the increased willingness of Australians to be cremated (leaving aside expense) mean that they are less convinced of the need for a body for resurrection, more likely to see the soul as entirely separate from the body, less likely to believe in an afterlife at all? Or does it mean that they have better ways of remembering, such as videotapes and photographs? (1998, p 91)}
\]

For some people cremation might be considered to be a practical, no-fuss method of
disposal, reflecting a Protestant Anglo Australian valuing of simplicity and emotional
restraint. It may simply be that, by the time the funeral industry in Australia established
itself the campaign for funeral reform in Europe was underway, new methods of disposing
of the dead seemed more acceptable, and there was no long established Australian form of
death ritual to which the colonising cultures would adhere. Pat Jalland argues that,

\[
\text{[t]he remarkably early development in colonial Australia of a secular tradition of}
\text{death and burial derived in large part from the harsh and initially alien environment}
\text{of the bush, reinforced by isolation from family, church, and community support and}
\text{rituals (2002, p 244).}
\]

The popularity of cremation in Australia might also reflect a history of resistance to
institutional authority, including the authority of the church, and a willingness to embrace
certain kinds of social change. While "the earliest known human cremation was in the far
south-west of New South Wales at Lake Mungo some twenty-five to thirty thousand years
ago" (Griffin and Tobin 1997, p 103), the first cremation of a European person in
Australia after colonisation was that of a woman named Mrs Richmond, who died at the
age of eighty three. Her cremation was arranged by her son, and was held on the beach at
Sandringham in 1895. A pyre of firewood, brushwood and kerosene was made around her
body and set alight by her son. Despite the outcry that followed this event, it was
discovered that, as there was no law that prohibited cremation, Mr Richmond could not be charged with any offence for the way in which he disposed of his mother's body (Griffin and Tobin 1997, p 107).

Gradually, as cremation continued to be debated, crematoriums were constructed and acts were passed that set regulations for how cremation might be practised. These acts were passed in order to allow, rather than discourage, cremation. As Griffin and Tobin point out, there is not yet a developed symbolic ceremony that deals with the practice of cremation (1997, pp 110-112). Mary Bradbury writes:

[i]n the ancient rite of burial, the friends and family watch the coffin being lowered into the ground. This is a dramatic moment. In contrast, cremation takes place backstage. Instead, the survivors watch a ‘false committal’ in which the coffin disappears from view behind a mechanically controlled curtain (2001, p 219).

Griffin and Tobin describe some other methods used for separating the coffin and the mourners. “In some crematoria a door opens; in others, a curtain parts or drops; in others, a catafalque is lowered; in yet others a whole wall swings around” (1997, p 111). I have also attended funerals where mourners are asked simply to walk away from the chapel and leave the corpse in its coffin behind. In New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, mourners are able to arrange to view the coffin entering the cremator.

With this increase in cremation rates has come a corresponding increase in the opportunity for bereaved people to either keep the cremains at home until their own death, or to devise private ceremonies for the scattering of ashes, either in the grounds of the cemetery or crematorium or in some other place significant to the deceased or the bereaved (Nicol 2000, p 99). This practice adds to the sense of the corporeal dispersal of the person who has died and their return to the earth. As Bradbury notes, “[t]hese personal rituals of secondary disposal are often creative and highly idiosyncratic, reflecting the tastes and
emotions of the family involved" (2001, p 221). With the cremains in their possession, mourners can engage in death ritual that they devise. It may be that in the final disposal of cremains, as in the selection and making of a memorial, the privately held beliefs and philosophies of the deceased and the bereaved are given their expression.

In recent times, the role of the cemetery and crematorium grounds may again be seen to be changing. The Victorian state government has conducted a review of legislation that covers cemeteries and crematoria, and has released a discussion paper on this topic (Department of Human Services, 1996). This review was begun under the Kennett government, and was intended to consider the future of cemeteries and crematoria at a time when a range of functions that had previously been part of government were being privatised. In this broader policy framework, a review process considered the economic and social role of cemeteries and crematoria, as well as how cemeteries are governed. In Victoria, as in other states of Australia, it is generally legislation relating to public health that regulates how cemeteries and crematoria must be run. The financial viability of the cemetery can also be an important consideration for municipal authorities. According to Griffin and Tobin, the lawn cemetery, for example, is much easier and cheaper to maintain than the older style monumental cemeteries (1997, p 114). These considerations of public health and economics are to some extent masked by a sense of the customary and the proper. The cemetery is designed to be a peaceful place, and like public parks, waterways and other civic spaces it has a sense of public ownership. The sense of ownership that some bereaved people feel about the cemetery allows them to engage in private death ritual, away from the need to negotiate contact with institutions such as the hospital and the funeral home and graves in the contemporary municipal cemetery are intended to appear to be individualised and permanent, even where burial places are re-used and tenure can only be secured for a set number of years.
For the person who does not believe in life after death, the death of another is entirely final. A secular view of death can mean that the experience of grief can no longer be linked to spiritual reunion with the dead person, either after death or through prayer or other forms of spiritual contact. According to Walter, a humanist may experience bereavement differently from a person with religious beliefs, and that “the very concept of bereavement is a secular one” (1997, p 178). He reasons that for a person with a belief in an afterlife, death is a separation rather than a loss, with the promise of the restoration, in some form, of the presence of the person who has died (1997, p 181). In contrast secularised mourning, Walter argues, takes grief itself as its subject:

If I am no longer to care for the continuing soul of the deceased, what am I to care for... I am to care about my loss and I am to care for others in their loss. If I have no continuing relationship with either the deceased or the God who is looking after them, then I become concerned solely with the loss of the relationship enjoyed with the person before they died. I may attend, without distraction, to my grief, and/or the grief of others (1997, p 181).

In the secular context, mourning is no longer a relationship with the dead person as they move into a new spiritual phase, nor is it an attempt to access a sense of presence through otherworldly contact, or the offering of prayers to speed the soul through the sufferings of purgatory. It is only one’s own grief that can be assuaged through death ritual and grief becomes known not only as an intimate and profound pain experienced by mourners, but also as an area of professional expertise by bereavement counsellors, grief educators, funeral directors, doctors, nurses, and the clergy. In Paul’s view, grief is something to be managed and part of the role of the funeral director is to help the bereaved person to do this. Paul describes how a

well known maxim in the area of grief psychology is the expression ‘either you manage your grief or your grief will manage you’. This phrase states categorically that if you are not equipped and informed to be master of your grief, then you will be a victim or a slave to your emotions (1997, p 255).
He sees the goal of grief education as the mastering of emotion. Of course, the fear of one’s own feelings that Paul expresses is not necessarily typical of professionals who work with dying and bereaved people, but it is an example of a position that promotes a healthy grieving enacted through proper mourning. For Paul, the goal of grief management is to move successfully "into a relationship based on memories" (1997, p 264). This is the Freudian paradigm, where grief can either be a process that results in the relinquishing of an attachment, or can become melancholia. In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1974), Freud proposed that mourning involved a process of detaching from the person who has died in order to form new relationships. Lindemann (1994) regarded the bereaved person as engaging in "grief work", working through a grieving process in order to achieve acceptance of death and the relinquishing of the relationship with the dead person. Stage theory further developed a model of grief as a process of recovery. The best known model of stage theory is that devised by Elisabeth Kubler Ross. In *On Death and Dying* (1970), Kubler Ross presented her famous theory of the five stages of grief. Originally conceived as a theory of five stages of receiving catastrophic news, these stages gradually began to be used as a way of theorising dying, and then also grieving. Kubler Ross’ books have had an enormous influence on the popular view of death and grief. Stage theory also came to be widely used in palliative care, and although Kubler Ross is not the only person to develop such a theory, it is her name that immediately evokes a changed approach to death and dying. Some thanatologists and palliative care workers, however, regard stage theory as too rigid, or point out that there is no evidence to suggest that the stages actually occur (Kastenbaum 1986, Stroebe 2001, Lindstrom 2002).

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, the characterisation of society as death denying has been challenged. Theories of grief and mourning are also undergoing a significant paradigm shift. For Doris Francis, Leonie Kellehear and Georgina Neophytou,
who conducted an ethnographic study of mourners in British cemeteries, the “public, non
clinical setting of the cemetery presented opportunities to understand how grief may take
its place in ‘ordinary’ life” (2001, p 227). They have observed the importance of private
visits to tidy or decorate a grave, or just to feel close to the deceased. Francis, Kellaher and
Neophytou’s research findings support the view that the bereaved may continue their
relationship with the person who has died and may also, often simultaneously, develop
new relationships. They see studies of bereavement such as their own work as

increasingly challenging the orthodox Freudian paradigm, where death in Western
society is perceived as a loss from which a mourner is expected to recover, severing
attachment and moving on to form new relationships (2001, p 227).

They describe various kinds of activity that demonstrate that bonds with the person who
has died continue in an altered form: normal grief might persist throughout the rest of a
bereaved person’s life; mourning might constitute the reforming of identity for the
deceased and the bereaved person; or the attachment between the person who has died and
the bereaved person changes over time. This model of ‘continuing bonds’ marks an
important paradigm shift in the understanding of grief and mourning. One proponent of
this model, Phyllis Silverman, speaking about grief on National Public Radio in the United
States emphasised that “[y]ou don’t get over anything. You’re changed by it. You’re a
different person as a result” (2001).

Lindsay Prior notes that, while Gorer did “supplement the study of grief with the missing
link of social structure” there has been a marked division in the study of death ritual
(1989, p 136). In broad terms, death ritual has been studied as grief, an interior process, or
as mourning, an exterior process. Prior notes, for example, that the social patterning of
death was initially the subject of social anthropology, as in the work of Durkheim, while in
Western culture, individual grief was studied by psychologists (1989, p 136). Some
theorists like Prior, take the view that mourning is “not the product of some inner
unfolding, but of social processes” (1989, p 137). Prior writes about the way that the discipline of psychology has pathologised grief by identifying symptoms that can be documented and known. Bereavement itself came to be seen an object of study for medicine and psychology, identifying symptoms and normalised time scales for recovery and became “something in the body which could be measured and assessed” (Prior, 1989, p 136). As Prior writes:

the problem of grief, like death before it, became medicalised and individualised and subsequently fell under the control of medical personnel. Thus, the priest was ousted from the aftermath of death in favour of the doctor and grief was treated (in all senses of that word) as a private and segmented emotion (1989, p 137).

Prior argues that mourning is socially constituted. This is not to say that grief is not profound and genuinely felt, or that mourning is hollow or insincere, but that we mourn in certain ways because of the relationship between ourselves and the person who has died and the social context of that relationship. I would agree with Prior in saying that mourning and grieving cannot be simply separated into an interior process (grief) accompanied by an exterior expression of that process (mourning). Indeed, as Katz suggests, “individualized emotions encapsulated by the term ‘grief’ can themselves be seen to have been produced through the discursive practices of members of particular societies, categories and groups” (2001, p 6). I would argue that the performance of ritual is part of a social process – mourning – that cannot be separated from the experience of grief. Mourning can be defined as “a set of cultural and social practices rather than an individual phenomenon” (Katz 2001, p 6). Jenny Hockey writes:

[d]ifficulties in understanding how – or whether – mourning practices shape the experience of grief: or conversely, whether grief is the spur that shapes mourning practices, can be seen to arise from a convention which separates inner experience and outer behaviour (2001, p 185).

Jenny Hockey sees theories of bereavement as having been influenced by the “parallel
influences of Romanticism and Modernism” and states that, while contemporary mourning processes do not involve the formal and elaborate mourning of the nineteenth century, she does not regard death ritual as cold or empty, but notes a movement towards a postmodern experience of bereavement (2001, p 168). In terms that are consistent with Hockey’s description of scholarly research in the field, Bradbury articulates the persistence of a nostalgic and exoticising view of death ritual.

Locked in cross-cultural envy and nostalgia we seem to imagine that other people do it better or that we used to be able to throw a good funeral but have somehow lost the knack (2001, p 224).

One result of the change in contemporary mourning practices has been the emergence of “a society that has few, or rather, conflicting rules for grief” (Walter 1999b, p 22). Hockey writes that for some who have turned away from what they see as overly prescriptive or empty, meaningless death ritual, there is a belief that “individuals can – and should – personalize their experience of loss, making it meaningful through self-selected images and practices, which help them manage their loss as they see fit” (2001, p 207). This is not to say that death ritual is limited or sparse in contemporary secularised society. By contrast it is the diversity of practices and abundance of choice available to the mourner that is indicative of the reduction in ‘rules’, whether legislated or perceived, for dying and mourning. The cultural phenomenon of choice and diversity may not always be experienced as being preferable to conventionalised cultural practice, and may at times create a sense of anxiety as much as freedom. Walter suggests that “[w]henever people find themselves in a state of chronic uncertainty, they look to others for cues as to how to behave...” (1999b, p 22). The contemporary experience of bereavement might be characterised by mourners’ use of death ritual they have observed in the media and other representations as much as that which they have known through their own experience. Perhaps this emerging approach to grief and mourning is also derived from shifts in the methodological approach of scholars. The methodologies that anthropologists have
applied to the societies that they have visited are now used by scholars researching death ritual in their own societies, destabilising some of the methodological frameworks for the division of bereavement into the personal and the social. Just as part of the change in care of the dying made by Cicely Saunders and her colleagues in the hospice movement was achieved through research that listened to, documented and invested in what dying people themselves had to say about their experience, so a methodological shift towards not only researching the experiences of the bereaved, but also accepting their accounts as evidence of their experience of grief, rather than viewing them as symptoms to be interpreted by the scholar, may have led to a less prescriptive model – or the acceptance of a variety of models – of responses to bereavement.

My discussion of the differences in death ritual that occur over time and the diversity of current practice supports the view that dying and bereavement are socially and culturally produced, and that mourning is a practice rather than an unmediated expression of inner feelings. In *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, Hallam and Hockey write of

> processes whereby expert discourses, such as curative medicine and grief counselling, give way to diverse innovations such as highly personalised funerals and the placement of memorial flowers at the sites of accidents (2001 p80)

While contemporary death ritual does not conform to a single, universal ‘proper’ way of dying or mourning, and it is accepted that dying people and those that survive them may have a diversity of beliefs, values, fears, wishes and experiences, this diversity continues to be located in institutionalised or customary practices that have been learned through participation in, or observation of, death ritual. Memorialisation tends to be a customary, rather than compulsory activity and is less regulated than the aspects of death ritual that are carried out through institutions such as the hospital, the funeral home, and the municipal cemetery and is well suited to changing experiences of bereavement and models of grief. Memorialisation as it is practised in contemporary death ritual is a good example of the
ways in which actions, forms, images and motifs continue while meanings, interpretations and emphases change. For some mourners there is now an aspect of their experience of bereavement that is located online. Older forms of memorialisation are continued, changed and adapted as attitudes and beliefs about death, dying and mourning change. The characteristics of online memorials are consistent with this process, and the makers of memorial sites take up many of the themes of death ritual in contemporary secularised society, with an emphasis on representing the deceased and the relationship that the mourner shared with the person who has died. Memorialisation is a continuing, but changing, aspect of the social management of death, and the making of online memorials is another form of death ritual available to a bereaved person.

The central theoretical concern of this thesis is the relationship between a changing social practice such as mourning (and more particularly, memorialisation), and emergent technologies. As I have shown, death ritual is produced through a wide range of institutions, knowledges, belief systems and practices, and change tends to be gradual, and associated with factors such as organised campaigns like the hospice movement, and slow and profound historical changes such as secularisation. This chapter has also provided a context for understanding a specific kind of mourning practice – memorialisation – which will be considered in the next chapter.
Chapter two
Memorialisation

Memorialisation is one of the most prevalent forms of death ritual in contemporary industrialised and secularised society. When someone dies, a death must be registered, the body disposed of, the estate distributed and friends, relatives and the wider community must begin to adjust to their loss. Some tasks performed by survivors of the deceased are required by law, like the certification of death and the disposal of the body, while others are customary, like the holding of a funeral or the publication of a death notice in the newspaper. Many bereaved people will also make or commission a memorial or participate in activity that memorialises the person who has died. In this chapter, I will consider some of the benefits bereaved people find in memorialisation, and discuss some examples of offline memorials, taking particular note of the ways in which older forms of death ritual have been continued and adapted to the ways in which they are presently practised.

A memorial is simply something which remembers or commemorates someone who has died: it can be an event, a place, or an object. A bereaved person makes, contextualises or commissions an object or event that will recall the deceased to mind and preserve their memory. Memorialisation can be commercialised, as when a bereaved person arranges for an entry in a book of remembrance or the construction of a headstone at the grave site, or it can be vernacular, like the devising of a roadside memorial or a ceremony for the scattering of ashes. Considering only objects found in contemporary cemeteries and crematoria, Mary Bradbury was able to list “bunches of flowers, pot plants, bulbs, rose bushes, trees, wall plaques, niche space, urns, benches, statues, entries in the Book of Remembrance... and poems” (2001, p 218). In his study of war memorials, geographer James M. Mayo has noted memorial schools, courthouses, clocks and drinking fountains (1988, p 69). Jon Davies in his study of British war memorials, lists some of the memorials he encountered
in his research:

the First World War memorial at Skelton, Cumbria, is a lych gate, the Second a bus stop... The memorial at Banborough, Northumberland is a Calvary, and that at Darlington a hospital... There is a memorial fireplace in a surgery at Dudley, North Tyneside (1993, p 112).

Memorialisation is an activity that is consistent with the emergence of life-centred humanist mourning practices and the individualisation and personalisation of death ritual, and can be adapted to the diverse meanings of death and experiences of bereavement that I have discussed in the previous chapter. While a community of mourners may not have a common religious belief or shared understanding of the meanings of death, remembering the person who has died can be a meaningful, commonly held response to loss. As Griffin points out,

[O]ne of the primary social functions of religious organisations is to provide a sense of cohesiveness through shared values, shared beliefs and practices, and shared understandings of how to deal with the mysteries of life and death (2000, p 45).

Memorialisation can refer to ideological frameworks or transcendent belief systems in which an individual loss may be located. For the non religious person, the deceased may be considered to live on in the memories of surviving friends and family “not as an immortal soul, but as an influence still at work in the lives they shared” (Walter 1997, p 169). Even those who do believe in an immortal soul, or some form of continuation after death, are likely to incorporate memorialising activity into their mourning and to participate in more personalised and individualised death ritual.

Memorialisation is a practice that can be treated as a personal response to bereavement, but also as part of the social management of death. Those making or commissioning memorials take up features and forms that have been long been part of death ritual and
adapt them to their own understanding of death and experience of bereavement. Tony Walter points out that there are two general paradigms for the study of grief and bereavement. One is

that the living must leave the dead behind and move on without them. The other is that the dead are always with us and the bereaved continue to bond with them: indeed the dead must be incorporated in some way if families, other groups and indeed entire societies are to have any sense of their past (Walter 1999a, p 205).

Memorialisation can help a bereaved person to ensure that the deceased continues in some sense to be part of the ongoing life of survivors. Helen Varney (2000) has written an account of her son’s death as her contribution to a book edited by palliative care specialist Alan Kellehear. Her son, Simon Varney died following a few weeks of illness. He was a very young man, in his late teens. Helen Varney writes about how, a year after her son died, she began to think of memorialising him:

I became obsessed with memorials. Everywhere I went, I saw memorial gates, seats, gardens. I heard a writer talk about his book on Australian war memorials. I thought of the memorial music prize at Si’s former school. Did it help the dead girl’s parents to have that name read out each year on Speech Night? When I was asked to write this chapter, I immediately thought of it as a memorial to him (2000, p 237).

Varney concludes by saying that, at the time of her writing, she and her family were still trying to decide how best to memorialise Simon. She describes the importance of remembering as being felt very deeply, though in different ways, by both her and Simon’s father. “I am still troubled by the fear that he won’t be remembered. It’s as if I need to keep him alive in some way by thinking about him” (2000, p 239). A publicly accessible memorial can be intended to preserve the memory of someone who has died in the public sphere. Passers-by who have never met the deceased will see such a memorial, and in this way the memory of the person who has died can be perpetuated beyond the lifetime of the
surviving relatives and friends, and beyond their private remembrance. The bereaved can make sure that it will not be as though the lost person has never lived.

Participating in memorialisation can also be more accessible to bereaved people than some other contemporary mourning activities. While some kinds of death ritual, such as establishing the cause of death or preparing and disposing of the corpse are professionalised and subject to health and other regulations, there are many forms of memorialisation that can be undertaken by bereaved people themselves. As Mary Bradbury points out, when bereaved people are considering the making of a memorial object, it is usually at a time when they have had the remains of the person who has died returned to something close to their care, either as cremains, or as a body buried in the cemetery (2001, p 223). Bradbury has studied memorials in cemeteries and crematoria, and the meanings that memorialisation has for bereaved people. She found that, for many mourners, choosing a memorial restored a feeling of being in control. For the bereaved, memorialisation comes after a series of interviews by a series of professionals:

The doctor, the registrar, the coroner, the police and the funeral director may all wish to ask questions in offices filled with dried flowers, social security leaflets and boxes of tissues. Having spent so much time waiting and answering questions, it is not surprising to find that choosing a memorial which reflects the personality and character of the deceased and then taking the initiative about when to visit that memorial is experienced as a good thing. At last, the relatives can take control of events (2001, p 223).

Bradbury’s research findings show how memorialisation can be more satisfying than some of the other kinds of death ritual that are available to the bereaved. Bradbury argues that this can be due to an increased feeling of control, and the ability of mourners to arrange things according to their own wishes, rather than having to contend with regulated practices and a sense of what should be done in order to satisfy a wider community of mourners. The prevalence of memorialising activity may in part be because it can be
carried out privately, in ways that are not institutionally regulated, and at a time and place that is convenient or significant to the bereaved.

Memorialisation can become a way of enacting the continuing bonds that a bereaved person may feel, and allows mourners to maintain a relationship with the deceased by maintaining the memory of the lost person. Someone who has cared for a family member or a friend when they were living might continue to labour for them after they have died, planning and caring for their memorial. In their study of the cemetery landscape, Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou describe how some widowers, for example, will maintain their attachment to their partner through care of the grave and the headstone: “mourners weed, plant, water or arrange the flowers and wash the stone: and at the same time, they recall memories and reflect on their married life” (2001, p 230). Caring for a memorial provides some substitute for caring for the lost person. A parent describes how visits to a child’s memorial can allow a sense of continuing to care for their child:

I feel I need to come to the cemetery for J to be part of my life, still. And coming to the cemetery is a way to do that. To still look after him. It would be negligent if we did not come (in Francis, Neophytou and Kellaher 2001, p 228).

Bradbury argues that, for the bereaved, memorials can provide “a physical focus around which they can centre their grief” (2001, p 223). Bereaved people might visit a memorial in order to talk to the person who has died, or to think about the loss that they have suffered. It is not unusual to see messages, letters and cards addressed to the deceased left at the site of a memorial, and sometimes writing addressed to the deceased is incorporated into the memorial itself. A memorial can also be a place where thoughts and memories are shared with other bereaved people, or with the wider community of mourners.

Bereaved relatives, or a whole community or nation, may choose to construct a memorial that will be of benefit to others. The process of memorialisation can become a means of
addressing some issue linked with the life or the circumstances of the death of the person who has died and intertwined with activism that attempts to understand a death, prevent other deaths, or to carry on the work of a deceased person. For example, a bereaved person may take up a particular campaign or interest that was important to the deceased. A mourner who has lost someone to a particular illness may work to raise research funds, to promote awareness, or to provide support for others affected by the same illness. The surviving friends and relatives of a person who has died in a way that seems wrong or unnatural to them may become involved in trying to prevent others dying in the same way. James M. Mayo has noted that some war memorials are objects, places or institutions that are intended to contribute to the common good in this way (1988, p 64). Such a memorial might be a school or a hospital, or something as simple as a public drinking fountain, and this kind of memorial object itself exemplifies that better society for which soldiers can be said to have been willing to sacrifice themselves.

A memorial made by bereaved friends and relatives can be bound up with the way in which mourners attempt to find meaning in their loss. The benefits of memorialisation in the context of a secularised, industrialised death ritual are consistent with contemporary models of bereavement, where a bereaved person may experience a continuing, if changing, relationship with the deceased. In summary, memorialisation is a practice in which people with a variety of beliefs can participate; it can help to ensure that the memory of the deceased person is preserved, perhaps even beyond the lifetimes of the community of mourners; it can often be undertaken by bereaved people themselves; it is consistent with the maintenance of the bond between the deceased and the bereave; it provides a focus for grieving, and it can be intended to have a social benefit.

Contemporary objects, places and activities that memorialise are often a continuation or adaptation of well established forms of death ritual. Even those forms that can seem to be
the most traditional have often been altered over time as the broader social context, and meanings of death and bereavement have changed. Sarah Tarlow (1999) has made an archaeological study of bereavement and commemoration in Orkney. The relative isolation of Orkney, and the fact and the amount of material cultural that has been conserved even from ancient times make it an ideal site for this kind of diachronic study. Tarlow describes how, while there is a continuation in the use of monuments, the type of monuments constructed, the images that are used, and their meanings change as the way in which death is understood changes. Tarlow notes that some monuments in the Orkneys emphasise the legitimacy and continuity of a powerful class rather than remembering an individual. She discusses late sixteenth and seventeenth century monuments to “higher status groups” that focus on ancestry and lineage, rather than relationships with the people they shared their lives with (1999, p 105). This can be contrasted with, for example, the nineteenth century gravestones she has studied that refer to relationships with husbands, wives and children, rather than lineage. So while the making of stone monuments has continued in Orkney over hundreds of years, the way in which they are used and what they mean to the bereaved and the wider community changes.

The way in which the contemporary funeral is frequently conducted is a good example of the increasing importance of memorialisation in contemporary secularised society. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the secularisation of death has changed this most ubiquitous form of death ritual. Where the funeral was once a religious ceremony concerned with the successful transition of the deceased from life to afterlife, many funerals are now civil ceremonies conducted by a celebrant, and focused on celebration of the life and the sharing of memories of the deceased. Tony Walter describes a visit to a bereaved family by a celebrant who conducts life-centred funerals:

I accompanied Brian McInerney - one of thirteen celebrants in the city of Melbourne - on a pre-funeral visit to the home of Peter and Jenny... Pete’s father had died. We
sat around the kitchen table, and Brian explained that at the funeral he wanted to give a clear picture of Pete’s dad and that the picture could only come from them: ‘We’ve only got one shot at it, and we’ve got to get it right’. Stories, a few tears and a few more smiles flowed easily for an hour or so (1997, p 173).

Walter’s description of the celebrant’s interview of a bereaved family is an example of the everyday aspect of bereavement. The language and the setting emphasise the domestic and vernacular. While some funerals are still predominantly religious rituals which incorporate commemorative elements, others focus on the commemoration of the life and identity of the deceased with reference to religious meaning being only a small part of the service, or even omitted altogether. The contemporary funeral is often a combination of the religious or spiritual, and personal remembrance.

The corpse is present at the funeral, and from this ceremony it will usually be taken to be disposed of, either to the grave or to the crematorium. ‘Memorial service’ is the name given to a similar ceremony that might be performed because the body is not present. In this case, a memorial service does something of the work of the funeral, but must also acknowledge the double absence of the deceased. There is no coffin or casket, and the service acts as a symbolic goodbye to the deceased, allowing the bereaved a public acknowledgement of their loss, and an opportunity to share their grief with the community of mourners. A memorial service is also held when there are seen to be two classes of mourner. For example, when a public figure dies a memorial service is often held in addition to a private funeral service. This arrangement allows the family and close friends of the deceased to attend a private funeral service while also acknowledging the loss of the public person. An especially shocking or tragic death, or the loss of a number of lives in a single event are also often occasions for memorial services soon after or on the anniversary of a death or some other significant occasion.

Sometimes, for bereaved people, everyday objects will be their most significant memorials.
Some feel no need to remember their dead at the site of disposal or final resting place. Their memorials, just as powerful, are to be found in the home in the shape of a chair, a cardigan, a photograph or a letter (Bradbury 2001, p 222).

In contemporary times, photographs of a person who has died are increasingly used in funeral and memorial services. A photograph may be reproduced as part of a printed program for the service, exhibited in the church or chapel, or may be displayed on top of the coffin. Photographs appear on the front of t-shirts that some bereaved people have printed when a friend or family member dies violently or unexpectedly (Shreve 2003), and as part of the assemblage of images and objects used to create makeshift shrines. Photographs are also significant for bereaved people after the funeral is over and as they continue to mourn. The visual representation of lost bodily presence is made accessible to bereaved people through the photograph, an object that often provides a starting point for the remembrance of lived experience shared with the person who has died. A photograph can be kept aside for private remembrance, or displayed, acting as a daily remembrance and a way of demonstrating that the deceased person is still part of the daily life of the surviving mourner.

In the nineteenth century it was not unusual to keep photographs that were taken of the corpse after death as a remembrance of the deceased. This was an adaptation of the older practice of mourning portraiture, and the taking of casts of the face and hands of a deceased person. According to Dan Meinwald (n.d.), who has made a study of such images "[p]ost mortem photography was widespread in Europe and America during the nineteenth century" with mourning focused on the retention of the image of the person who had died. Perhaps the desire to surmount the fact of separation from the deceased could in part be satisfied by the possession of such a photograph. These mourning portraits might depict a person in their coffin, surrounded by flowers, or lying on a bed or sofa as though asleep, or even posed in a sitting position. Children who had died are the
subjects of many of these photographs. Post-mortem photographs were private images commissioned from professional photographers by the family as a means of remembering the deceased person. The corpse appears dressed in formal clothes, with hair arranged. In many cases it not just the head and shoulders, but the whole body that is included in the frame, as though mourners wished to have a remembrance of the entire person, right down to their shoes. Sometimes a mourning portrait was the only photograph that had ever taken of the deceased. Aries also describes the use of mourning pictures, including lithographs or embroidered panels that were used to decorate the home. These portraits acted as “a sort of portable tomb adapted to American mobility” (Aries 1974, p 80). The rupture of death was to some extent bridged through the viewing of photographs and other images that recalled the bodily presence of the person who had died.

Philosopher Roland Barthes, who wrote about photography repeatedly throughout his life, developed theories for reading the photograph that have the precision and detachment of light captured on paper. In Camera Lucida (1980), he notes the presence of “that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead” (1980, p 9). As the reader progresses through the book it becomes clear that Barthes is not just attempting to understand photography, but that Camera Lucida is a moving and revealing account of loss as it is experienced by someone who does not see death in the context of a religious belief.

For Barthes, photography is a rapid, mechanical action, an unmediated record of a moment in time, producing an object, “the Photograph [that] mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (1980, p 5). This view of photography requires a forgetting of the process of making a photograph, photographic genres, framing, a forgetting of the way that light and chemistry can affect the outcome of the image, that exposure happens for a fixed, measurable period of time and that a two dimensional image is only ever a
representation of three dimensional space. Barthes is looking for a sense of the presence of his deceased mother in the photographs of her that he possesses. He describes an occasion of intensely felt remembering experienced when looking at a photograph:

I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother. The distinctness of her face, the naive attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression... (1980, p 69).

Barthes searches for an image of his mother and suddenly sees “only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body” (1980, p 7). The process, or rather the social and cultural understanding of the processes of photography, is what marks it as different from prior image-making technologies. While there is nothing instant or automatic about the photograph, the way in which it is produced is part of the way that photographic images are read. The photograph has a cultural meaning that is related to the authentic, the documentary and the real, and Barthes seems to accept this meaning. For Barthes, the photograph can occasionally allow the viewer to access a fleeting sense of the presence of the subject that is represented, and “[i]n Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric” (Barthes 1980, p 78). As Susan Sontag puts it:

[w]hile a painting, even one that meets photographic standards of resemblance, is never more than the stating of an interpretation, a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) - a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be (1971, p 134).

The photograph, even more than other kinds of portraiture, is well suited to recontextualisation as a memorial. The photograph lets us remember the face and form of a person who has died, and can occasionally offer the experience of a kind of remembrance that allows a bereaved person to feel, if only for a moment, the presence of the deceased, as Barthes has described. In the case of photography, it is both what is depicted and the way in which the image is made that can make the photograph such a
powerful and important memorial object. Elizabeth Barrett put it this way:

I long to have such a memorial of every being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases – but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing... the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever! It is the very sanctification of portraits I think – and it is not at all monstrous in me to say, what my brothers cry out against so vehemently, that I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest artist’s work ever produced (in Sontag 1971, p 183).

For people living in industrialised societies, it is very likely that they are able to have a photograph of every person dear to them. While these loved people are alive and present for us the possession of these photographs can seem unremarkable, our understanding of them as documents of the real taken for granted. When those depicted in photographs are absent, however, we might recapture the kind of thoughts that Elizabeth Barrett had about photographs, and to see them as the shadow of the person we have lost.

The taking of photographs of the corpse, although not unknown, is not common in contemporary times. Now it is more likely that a photographic portrait or a snapshot taken in life will take on the role of a memorial object after death. This change may not have as much to do with changes in death ritual as it has to do with photography becoming increasingly accessible and affordable. If the taking of a photographic portrait were still an expensive and difficult business, it is quite possible that more bereaved people would want to have a photographic likeness of the corpse of someone who has died where they did not have possess a photograph taken when they were alive.

Private meditations on memorial objects like photographs may be combined with more public forms of remembrance. Memorials can be objects that are significant to groups, allowing members to create and maintain their identity as a group. Memorialisation can help to maintain identity and community, representing and reinforcing continuity despite
individual losses, and with memorials becoming sites for knowing and remembering the past. War memorial is of such significance in the discourses of nation and masculinity that the role of war memorials in mourning for the dead can lie in shadow. The First World War is seen by some as marking, and perhaps causing, the break between nineteenth century mourning customs and the more restrained death ritual of the twentieth century, as Jenny Hockey notes (2001, p 188). The scale of loss, and the devastating effect of modern warfare on the bodies of the living and the corpses of the dead meant that it was sometimes impossible, and increasingly less desirable, to continue the kind of mourning that was conventional in the nineteenth century. Monumental memorialisation is often part of the military cemetery, but as Paul Gough has argued in his paper on the landscape of war memorial gardens, vegetation has also been of significance.

As early as 1915 the commission had put in place a scheme to plant home-grown maple seeds on Canadian graves in France and Belgium. That same year the Australian wattle had been planted around ANZAC graves in Turkey and cuttings of olearia and other native seedlings had been shipped over from New Zealand. In cemeteries with Chinese or Indian graves the commission had to ensure that only plants considered sacred and appropriate for commemoration were planted (1997, p 4).

In Australia, war memorials became part of the landscape of many Australian towns and cities. K.S. Inglis has documented memorials in Australia and researched their histories for *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*. These monuments, and the annual ANZAC march, were at least partly rooted in the remembrance of the dead by those who knew them, and for whom the loss was personal. For a person who mourned someone who died overseas, a war memorial and the ANZAC march might have stood in place of a grave site and funeral:

The Great War memorials built in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, as well as the ANZAC statue in seemingly every public park in Australia, were the first truly national monuments on Australian soil... inscribed names both substituted for and
represented the bodies lying overseas (Hoffenberg 2001, p 15).

Time passes, and the memorialisation of war dead becomes a kind of nationalist ancestor worship rather than a response to losses experienced by the families and communities of casualties, and in her study of Australian war widows, Joy Damousi notes that bereaved relatives were often marginalised in official remembrance (2001, p 12). The landscape of the war cemetery focuses on national symbols, excluding personal memorialisation other than the details of name and dates of birth and death. Davies (1993) however, has problematised a reading of war memorials as an expression of a dominant nationalist ideology. He writes that “[t]he demand for highly ritualised, endlessly repeated, properly respected war remembrance came from a cultural source well beyond the reach of any manipulative ideology” (1993, p 114). While Davies’ characterisation of a dominant ideology as manipulative may overlook the ideologies of the other cultural sources to which he refers, his interest in the role of war memorials in mourning is an important reminder of the many functions that memorialisation can perform. Davies argues that state commemoration did not always “address the elementary need of primal communities for an appropriate sacralisation of their particular, irreplaceable loss” (1993, p 125). Davies goes on to describe the process of the construction of a memorial in the village of Keld, Yorkshire. Returned soldiers were presented with village medals, but four men from Keld did not come back from the war:

The pressure for the memorial – if pressure there had to be – came from the mothers of the non returning boys because the soldiers who did return had all been given village medals, while their own sons – until the memorial – had nothing to commemorate them (1993, p 115)

The family of one of these four men paid for his body to be shipped home for burial. Another family, who could not do this, was later able to locate their son’s grave in France. The bodies of the other two men could not be found, as was frequently the case in the First
World War. The village memorial at Keld is part of the history of the nation, but also part of the collective memory of the village.

These memorials... sum up and symbolise the story and sacrosanct character of the primary community: they invoke its religion, they say what happened to its men, they re-integrate the non-returning soldiers into the memory of the community, they comprehend the larger world, and they state, without dispute, the primal loyalty of the living to the dead (Davies 1993, p 126).

These memorials become objects that are significant to history, and to collective and personal memory. War memorials made during or just after the First World War were built by people who lived through the terrible and widespread grief brought on by so many deaths. For Australians, the Great War was taking place on the other side of the world, and the difficulty of visiting either cemeteries or battlefields in order to mourn in the years after the war may have made war memorials and ANZAC day services even more significant in mourning their personal loss. In Australia, as K.S. Inglis records:

committees all over the country raised money, chose a site, decided on what form the tribute would take and how it would be inscribed, and then invited the whole community to a ceremony at which the memorial was unveiled and its meaning proclaimed (2001, p 123).

Inglis describes the planning and construction of such a memorial in Thirroul, New South Wales, close to where I live. The memorial at Thirroul still stands, though it was restored and moved a few metres from its original site to become the focal point of a small piece of public land dedicated as Woodward Park (Inglis 2001, p 421). The social and physical landscape of the seaside suburb of Thirroul is rapidly changing, but this memorial remains as a prominent local landmark. Inglis characterises the process of planning and constructing this memorial as an activity that involved the whole town, in contrast to some other communities, where there were rival committees with competing plans for monuments, or heated debate over the form a memorial should take, or even occasionally a
lack of interest in the process of funding, planning and constructing a memorial. In Thirroul, funds were collected by Granny Riach from people from a variety of social positions and with various political views, including the conscriptionist member of state parliament, the mostly anti-conscriptionist railwaymen, and the Governor General (Inglis 2001, p 126-127). Granny Riach was also one of the speakers at the unveiling of the monument in 1920, and her speech was similarly inclusive (Inglis 2001, p 198). The war memorials that were built all over Australia acknowledged personal bereavement, as well as national identity, using the repertoire of symbols and images that were seen as appropriate and significant. In his descriptions of the construction of this and other memorials in Australia, Inglis argues that

[the theme was universally the mourning and honouring of the men who went to the war from this place: and on that theme people in every city, suburb, town and township improvised their own variations, negotiated their own communal understandings of the meaning of the war in appropriate monument and ceremony (2001, p 28).]

In additions to these monumental memorials, Jon Davies also describes how “makeshift memorials... appeared [in Britain] on the street corners and churchyards in 1914 and 1915 as the lists of the dead grew” (1993, p 115), a description that sounds similar to the kinds of practice that can often be observed after sudden or violent deaths in contemporary times. What Davies describes as “makeshift memorials” have come to be known by other names, and to be created to mark other kinds of loss. One term that has been used is ‘wayside shrine’, usually identified by “the deposition of flowers by family members and the general public at the scenes of disasters, road fatalities and other violent deaths” (Chandler 1999, p 147). The construction of such shrines occurred most notably following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, but also as a response to an uncountable number of other accidents and violent acts, both before and since. The term “spontaneous memorials” is used by C. Allen Haney and Dell Davis (1999). They describe these
memorials as “typically shrines comprising an eclectic combination of traditional religious, secular, and highly personalized ritual objects” (1999 p 237). Among the most noticeable and longest lasting of these kinds of ‘spontaneous’ memorials are the roadside shrines that can be observed at the site of some fatal road accidents.

The making of roadside shrines is a mourning practice that is tied to the automobile, that vehicle that can be seen as an embodiment of the privileged and conditional individualism of post modernity. Roadside shrines are a recognisable aesthetic form made by people who are bereaved by a fatal motor vehicle accident. In most cases, white markers, often crosses, with flowers, messages and other objects attached are placed at the accident site. Sometimes it will be a telegraph pole, a tree or barrier that is so decorated. Kate Hartig and Kevin Dunn (1998) have studied roadside memorials in the Hunter region of New South Wales, and have written about how their research has meant that some RTA zones have changed their policies in regard to these memorials, and have practised tolerance toward the existence of roadside shrines, whereas previously they had been removed (1998, p 10).

The acceptance of these shrines is also indicated by their use in some RTA road safety advertisements. Hartig and Dunn’s interviews with drivers at a Stop, Revive, Survive campaign caravan serving free refreshments showed that drivers believed that the sight of roadside memorials did prompt them to slow down and pay more attention to driving safely. In the Australian Capital Territory, the practice of marking the location of motor vehicle accidents has become part of the operations of Urban Services, although rather than allowing the construction of makeshift memorials by family and friends, Urban Services identify sites where fatalities or injuries have occurred with either red or black symbols (Urban Services 2001, p 14).

Grief counsellor Aishwarya Saraswati describes the experience of visiting the place where her own son was killed in a motor vehicle accident for the first time in order to create a
On the first anniversary I visited the accident site and met the truck driver, we placed a cross and flowers at the roadside. The truck driver found this an essential and healing ritual to perform for healing his personal shock and grief. After this ceremony I was able to put to rest the horrible images I had regarding Sunny’s last moments of life. I now knew that he had fallen by tripping on a traffic island and that the truck had not run over his body, his neck had broken by falling hard against the wheels rather than under them (Saraswati 2002, p 13).

In this case, the significance of the shrine is not described so much as that of a permanent marker, but rather as an occasion at which those who had been profoundly affected by this death could participate in a ritual that facilitated that meeting and talking, with the result being some easing of the suffering that both the truck driver involved in the accident and Saraswati were experiencing.

Roadside shrines, although a widely recognised and common response to a bereavement by motor vehicle accident, have a somewhat marginal status. While they are respected by many passers-by, and of significance to mourners, according to Hartig and Dunn they are tolerated rather than regulated by the Roads and Traffic Authority. Hartig and Dunn are also interested in the gendered meanings of the roadside memorials that they have studied. They argue that many of these memorials represent meanings to do with “reigning versions of masculinity performed in the Hunter region” which tend to be “[m]ysoginist, restrictive and damaging” (1998, p 14). Hartig and Dunn also identify this performance of masculinity as working class, and describe roadside memorials that valorise a love of motor vehicles, of recklessness and aggression, and a glorification of crashing. Roadside shrines have developed as part of an informal mourning activity adapted from the marking of grave sites and monuments, and perhaps older versions of the makeshift memorial. They are an example of a changing mourning practice that has become conventionalised and that bereaved people have adapted to their needs.
In contrast to the marginal, individual and adaptive construction of roadside memorials, the construction and display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt is a centrally organised memorialising activity. The project began in the United States in 1987, and has since been taken up by bereaved people in other places, including Australia. Psychiatrist Brian Kelly notes that “[t]he social meaning of any illness is an important dimension that is likely to shape the individual’s experience...” and it is important to recognise that these social meanings will be different in specific social and cultural contexts (2001, p 151). In Australia, men who have sex with men make up the majority of cases of HIV/AIDS (Kelly 2000, p 145). In other parts of the world this is not the case, and some of the issues associated with the disease are different: health care, access to patented drugs, economic development, gender relations, government policies and education are all important factors and may all impact on the spread of HIV/AIDS and the care of those who have the illness. In industrialised societies, activism around HIV/AIDS has included campaigns of awareness promoting safer sex and safer intravenous drug use, campaigns to increase research funding and to improve the care of those who have been diagnosed with the disease, and campaigns to destigmatise HIV/AIDS. A significant aspect of the experience of bereavement for those who have lost people to this disease has been the specific conditions under which survivors mourn.

An important dimension of the social experience of HIV has been the burden of grief experienced. The impact of the multiple deaths and loss of social network with HIV are features of the experience of HIV that are unparalleled... The experience of caring for a partner with AIDS while being HIV positive oneself, or being at risk of HIV infection is another important feature of the social and interpersonal context of HIV infection rarely seen in other conditions (Kelly 2000, p 151-152).

The AIDS Memorial Quilt project has been one response to this experience of bereavement and the social issues and impacts around HIV/AIDS. Art critic Rico Franses describes the Quilt:
It consists of individual cloth panels, each of which commemorates a person who has died of an AIDS-related illness. The panels, most often made by friends, loved ones or family of the deceased, usually list the name and birth and death dates of the person commemorated... there is often a verbal reference to a personal, private aspect of the person’s life... (1996, p 258).

There is a historical relationship between quilting and mourning, in the making of mourning quilts that were constructed from fabric taken from the clothes that were once worn by a deceased person (Chouard 2003). The quilt form has been adapted to the making of memorials commemorating those who died in the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. There is also a continuing practice of quilt making as a way of promoting specific political campaigns. Quilts are, as Van E. Hillard has pointed out “synonymous with goodness, protection, warmth and caring” (1994, p 112). They may be utilitarian, decorative, documentary or activist. For Hillard the way in which quilts have been made (assembling fragments of fabric, piecing the quilt, and the quilting bee) is an important part of what makes quilts meaningful.

Quilts especially highlight the relationship of form to idea, of medium to meaning. Mourning quilts, victory quilts, autograph and friendship quilts, celebratory quilts and quilts created to cast social and political significance (such as anti-slavery, women’s suffrage, and temperance quilts of the nineteenth century as well as the peace and environmentalist quilts in our era) may all be studied according to their effects upon social and political situation, and are all instances of rhetoric as they are constructed to do work in the world: to alter, to transform, or to solidify a position, not by physical force, but by symbolic action (Hillard 1994, p 112-113).

In quilting bees, women who have made pieces for a quilt must collaboratively arrange how each piece will be placed amongst others, often making use of a syntax of forms and patterns that are specific to quilt making. Once this has been settled, they work from the outer edges to the centre, moving physically closer with, as Hillard surmises, the conversation amongst makers becoming correspondingly more intimate as they move toward the centre of the quilt. Hillard discusses the relationship between the quilting bee
model of making, and the meanings of quilts that "emerged in collaborative, collective settings and are themselves icons of rhetorical modes of thought – representative of debate or discussion or conversation or purposeful agreement by a number of interlocutors" (1994, p 113). He contrasts what he sees as the tradition of quilt making with the way in which the AIDS Memorial Quilt is constructed and deployed. Rather than a community of makers working together to plan and realise a quilt, Hillard sees the bereaved people who work on the AIDS Memorial Quilt as creating individual panels that are collected rather than meaningfully pieced:

we may look at the AIDS quilt as an instance of postmodern cultural politics, as contemporary art that transmutes the historical scene of quilting – the quilting bee, especially, with its specialized community – into a mere 'collective' of production... At the level of the single panel, then, the NAMES Project quilt is authentically folkloric – enlivened by the highly interpersonal interactions of a community of makers striving to inscribe the exigencies of mourning, grief and remembrance. Similar to the pattern and structure of traditional rhetorical quilts and quilt making, each panel is a metaphor of care and concern, cast by a group of creators, acting consensually. But these qualities disappear as the desire for size increases, and the AIDS quilt mimics the form of commercial media distribution... (1994, p 120-123).

Hillard takes a somewhat limited approach to his topic. A community of women working together at a quilting bee is not the only way that quilts have been made, and he can be accused of participating in the retrospective construction of a romanticised tradition of quilt making and a corresponding oversimplification of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. In the case of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the quilting bee model of assembling individual pieces is adapted to become the collection and exhibition of panels. Franses, for example, describes how "each square is unfolded and laid neatly alongside other squares, a gap being left between them to allow for walkways" (1996, p 258). The medium of quilting requires the bringing together of fragmented materials, and so allows bereaved people to adapt an enormous range of images, materials and techniques to the making of their piece of the quilt. Quilt makers are asked to comply with specific dimensions for their panel, and
recommendations are made as to construction. The guidelines for the construction of
panels can be seen as analogous to the way that cemeteries and crematoriums usually
impose restrictions on bereaved people designing and constructing memorials. Each panel
must comply with the dimensions and guidelines, and each panel is displayed alongside
other panels, taking on meanings in the context of the broader project. Quilt makers draw
and paint, appliqué, embroider, write on, glue and stitch fabric and objects onto their panel.

When assembled, the boundaries between one panel and another can, according to
Franses, be indistinct. The quilt has “no formal limits” no frame, although “it is not the
condition of framelessness that informs the quilt so much as its ‘gridded’-ness... [which]
leads to boundless structure” (1996, p 259). Franses compares the AIDS Memorial Quilt
to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC. This famous memorial is a wall
that lists the names of every service person killed in the Vietnam War. Franses sees the
use of the list of names as analogous to the grid form, writing that “[l]ists have no syntax,
no context and no narrative” and describing the AIDS Memorial Quilt as a list of the dead
(1996, p 261). Franses notes that some exhibitions of the quilt have been accompanied by
a ceremony that includes a reading of names of the deceased people represented by the
assembled quilts.

As Franses has observed, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is perhaps more like a war memorial
than might at first seem evident. Comparisons between the AIDS Memorial Quilt and the
Vietnam Veterans Memorial are made by Frances, and Marita Sturken also discusses these
two contrasting forms of memorial (1997). Sturken sees the Vietnam War and the AIDS
epidemic “in the context of postmodern culture”, through their disruption of master
narratives of American imperialism, technology, science and masculinity (1997 p16). A
relationship between the construction of the AIDS Memorial Quilt and war memorial can
also be made in the Australian context, particularly when the making and exhibition of
quilt panels is compared to the history of the construction of Australian war memorials, where community groups formed committees and raised funds to build their own monuments, objects that can be read both individually and in relationship to one another as a memorialising movement. However, Franses identifies the AIDS Memorial Quilt as operating in a way that departs from the practice of constructing monuments.

It is a memorial, but a strangely indeterminate, unfixed one. It does not perform the same operations of permanent inscription upon geography... It is not only postmodern, but postmonumental as well (1996, p 268).

The AIDS Memorial Quilt offers bereaved people an individual memorialisation of their friend, partner, colleague or family member who has died from AIDS, a role in promoting awareness of the disease, and the potential for developing new support networks. When I have visited exhibitions of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Australia, I have found that panels communicated a vivid sense of the individual losses that make up part of the experience of this epidemic. As Franses has said,

[a]s a monument it is profoundly violent and overwhelming. The sheer scale, the vast numbers, the individual listings of death, and the way those individual listings are inscribed in terms of personal mementoes, items of clothing, and treasured possessions, all make for an emotionally harrowing experience (1996, p 272).

The AIDS Memorial Quilt brings together the work of many individuals and small groups within a centrally organised framework. The AIDS Memorial Quilt contributes to the countering of homogenising discourses about people who are affected by the disease by collecting and exhibiting panels that refer to the diversity of experiences of those who have died from this illness and those who have been bereaved by it. The Quilt is able to represent each lost person as unique and highly valued by their partners, friends or family, while at the same time retaining a sense of a tide, a cumulative loss of loved people that leads the viewer back into a consideration of the collective, as well as the individual, effect...
I have argued in this chapter that memorialisation is a widespread, diverse and important part of mourning practice. It offers bereaved people a form of death ritual that is consistent with the ways in which death is understood in secularised, industrialised society. It is a practice in which people with a variety of beliefs can participate. Where many aspects of death ritual are highly regulated, memorialisation can be carried out in ways that do not require the same degree of negotiation and compliance with law and custom. Memorials can often be commissioned or created by bereaved people themselves. Memorialisation is consistent with contemporary models of bereavement, where a bereaved person may experience a continuing, if changing, relationship with the deceased. It can also be used for social benefit or advocacy and can play a role in preserving the identity and continuity of social groups.

I have shown that many of the practices that are part of contemporary death ritual can be seen as adaptations from past practices. Memorialisation, for example, may be increasing in importance and visibility, and is certainly a prominent aspect of contemporary mourning. However, I would like to emphasise the continuation of memorialisation, while noting, as I have, that it is a particularly apt practice in the context of the secularised and diverse activity that is a feature of contemporary death ritual. The association of technological developments with changing memorialisation can be discussed in relation to photography. Hallam and Hockey note that the introduction of photography as a way of metaphorically capturing a sense of physical presence overlapped with a decrease in the use of memorial objects such as death masks and mourning jewellery that incorporated the intricately worked hair of the deceased, objects that, like photographs, provided a physical connection to the lost person (2001 p 141). I interpret this overlap as standing as much for continuity in death ritual as it does for change. While photography became a new means
of recording the sight of the deceased, the desire for an object that represents the corporeal presence of the lost person can be identified in those earlier practices of making and keeping memorial objects, from the making of death masks, mourning jewellery, and the use of photographs of corpses, through to the present day recontextualised viewing and display of portraits and snapshots as memorial objects. This is not to say that death ritual is unchanging, or can be approached reductively as the manifestation of essential needs, rather it is my intention to emphasise the process of adaptation and change that occurs over time, and to show that changing practice can be read for connection as well as rupture.

Many contemporary memorialising activities are an adaptive continuation of older forms of death ritual. From events like memorial services, and self devised ceremonies for the interment or scattering of ashes, the use of everyday objects as personal memorials, monumental memorialisation, the construction of makeshift memorials, and memorials made through organised collective action, many contemporary memorialising activities exhibit an adaptive continuation of older forms of death ritual. Alongside these offline places and events another form in the repertoire of memorialisation has developed. Online memorials are becoming a significant part of contemporary memorialisation, but care should be taken not to attribute the cause of change to technology. As I will argue in chapter three, technology cannot be said to have inherent qualities, or to offer the isolatable cause of change. The emergence of online memorialisation has been noted by scholars (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p 215) while, as the commissioner of The Changing Role of Cemeteries, the Victorian state government’s Department of Human Services (1996) became aware, for the funeral industry, “[m]ost speculation relating to future memorialisation relates to multimedia memorialisation”. In the meantime, bereaved people themselves are making web sites that memorialise friends or family members that they have lost and in the next chapter I will turn my attention to the internet, placing my approach to online culture in the context of theories of the relationship between technology
and society.
Chapter three
Online culture

Having discussed death ritual, and particularly memorialisation, it becomes necessary to further explore theories of society and technology and to apply them to cyberculture studies before going on to analyse specific examples of online memorialisation in the next chapter. I will discuss some of the limitations of a technological determinist approach to the relationship between society and technology, and give a brief overview of social construction, social shaping, feminist and actor network theories that have been used as an alternative to determinism. I will go on to discuss the ways in which researchers in cyberculture studies have frequently taken the kind of determinist position that I have rejected, and some of the strategies that I have employed in an attempt to avoid the assumption that technology and social change can be placed in a causal relationship with one another.

As cultural historian Rosalind Williams has put it, technological determinism can be reduced to the proposition that “technology determines history” (1994, p 218). Technological determinism is considered by the historian Leo Marx (1994) to be a continuation of enlightenment thinking about technology as a force that occurs independent of social control, and can involve both what he terms technological pessimism, a view that technology is dangerous and beyond human control, or the vision of a technological progress that creates wonderful, barely imaginable benefits. Whether dangerous or beneficial, determinist accounts of technology can be easily identified where technology is described as an autonomous force instigating social change, but can also be found as the underlying assumptions made in certain accounts of social change, as Christine Hine has noted in her book *Virtual Ethnography*. 
Many theorists say that technological developments 'support', 'facilitate' or 'encourage' social developments in particular directions, while they hesitate to say that the technology directly causes social developments (2000, p 7).

When a technology is described, directly or indirectly, as having an effect, and is placed in causal relationship to the social or historical, a determinist view of technology can be recognised. Writing from a business studies perspective, Quentin Jones says that "determinist theories are proposed time and time again because of the desire to explain the relationship between technology and social structures" (1997). Treating technology as an autonomous force with effects that can cause change enforces an essentialist and reductivist approach that limits the ways in which change is understood. Haraway asserts that

to study technoscience requires an immersion in worldly material-semiotic practices... Science studies that do not take on that kind of situated knowledge practice stand a good chance of floating off screen into an empyrean and academic never-never land (2000b, p 235).

The risk in treating technology as an autonomous force, and as having effects, is that of effacing complexity, closing off potentially fruitful areas of investigation and masking the relations of power that are present in the technoscientific and social. However as industrial sociologists Keith Grint and Steve Woolgar observe, it can be difficult to find other ways of discussing social and technoscientific relations.

Post-essentialism is hard work: it is a position to which we aspire rather than one we can claim to have yet attained. One of the main reasons for this difficulty is that we are, of course, prisoners of the conventions of language and representation which display, reaffirm and sustain the basic premises of essentialism: that entities of all kinds, but most visibly and consequentially technical artefacts and technological systems, possess characteristics and capacities and are capable of "effects"... The fact of our enmeshment in the language game of essentialism, and our suffocation within its base premises, is evident from the linguistic contortions and convolutions necessary even to create a small amount of breathing space (19995, p 64).
Alternative theories that investigate the relationship between technology and society have been developed. The social construction of technology (or SCOT theory) as the name suggests, seeks to demonstrate that technology is constructed by society. Weibe Bijker, who helped to develop this approach, has described his interest in finding a theoretical basis for what began as a political concern with technology. Bijker’s rejection of determinist arguments in the support of technology that might harm people and environments, such as nuclear power, was one of the initial motivating factors for his sociological approach to science and technology. However, the theory of the social construction of technology has been seen as placing too much emphasis on an abstracted version of society as a determining force, while not adequately accounting for the change that does occur alongside the emergence of technologies. As Grint and Woolgar put it, “this kind of swing away from technological determinism to social determinism in turn generated a backlash against those who were seen to be too readily jettisoning technology in toto” (1997, p 14).

Both the ways in which society might construct technology, and also what sociology of technology scholars Donald Mackenzie and Judy Wajcman call “the valid aspect of technological determinism” (2002, p 23) are addressed in social shaping approaches to science and technology studies. Social shaping, as discussed by Mackenzie and Wajcman, modifies the constructionist view and regards technology as being shaped by society. Feminist research in science and technology studies has also been critical to the theorising of society and technology. However, Grint and Woolgar point out that “many of the critiques of ‘technological determinism’ themselves retain key elements of the condition” (1995, p 48). Grint and Woolgar regard constructionist, social shaping, and some feminist theories of technology and society as retaining the essentialist assumptions that their proponents set out to critique in technological determinism. They argue that “it is in and through our very attempts at describing technology that we implicate its possible
involvement in action, its possible and potential effects” (1995, p 54). The difficulty for
science and technology studies is to develop a methodology that can articulate the
relationship of technology and society, and account for the emergence of new technologies
and the observable phenomenon of social change. Such an approach should be able to
find a way of ‘taking the technology seriously’ without having to depend upon
uninterrogated notions of technical capacity, and to account for the intermingling of
technical and social without merely nurturing the view that these are essentially
independent variables conjoined through ‘interaction’ (Grint and Woolgar 1995, p 25).

Michael Menser and Stanley Aronowitz (1996) agree that to separate the categories
‘technology’ and ‘society’ is to attempt to make a distinction between things that are not
separate.

Culture, science and technology, although distinct on specific levels, have been and
continue to be inextricably bound to one another in such a fashion that each actually
merges into the other, laying lines of contact and support (Menser and Aronowitz
1996, p 7).

Actor-network theory is an approach that is intended to be able to analyse the complexities
of the interrelationship of society and technoscience. It is a methodology that studies the
process by which a diverse group of actants stabilise to the extent that they become a
technology. For those who make use of the actor-network model, technology is a network
of relations amongst actors, an “outcome of particular associations of meanings and
coalitions, both human and non-human...” (Ormrod 1995, p 38). One of the developers of
actor-network theory, Bruno Latour, has collaborated with Shirley Strum, a primatologist
studying baboon societies, in order to consider the significance of materiality in human
societies. Strum and Latour (1999) argue that, while in baboon societies, the members have
only themselves – their bodies – with which to enact social relationships and social
structures, humans are born into societies that have materials and symbols. Through these
means social relationships and structures can exist even when the physical body is not present. In this work, baboon society is not cast as 'nature' to the human 'culture'. Rather, baboon society provides a point of comparison that illuminates the role of the material-semiotic in human society. Human society, according to Strum and Latour, is always already technological, instantiated through "material resources and symbols" (1999, p 123). Work such as that done by Susan Ormrod (1995) and Donna Haraway (2000a, 2000b, 2002) has also contributed to post-essentialist theorising of science and technology. Donna Haraway's *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* discusses the construction of the subject through technoscience/culture/nature, and the *Manifesto* takes up Strum and Latour's point, reincorporating the material alongside the semiotic to emphasise that technoscientific change is social change.

Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, that is, as frozen moments of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings (2000a, p 55).

The internet can certainly be described as a formalisation of myriad interactions and social relations. This process of formalisation has included describing and theorising the internet as a technology, and internet pioneers and early theorists of cyberculture studies produced an abundance of general, abstracted, and sometimes essentialist descriptions of the internet and its potential effects. The television series *Nerds 2.0.1: a brief history of the internet* (1998) retrospectively narrativised activity amongst for example, technoscientific and social research and development, hobbyists, business, and government, and selected certain aspects of this activity to construct a history of what eventually became known as the internet. This series both described and reinscribed the process of formalisation that occurs in the emergence of 'a technology'. In the case of the internet, this process may have been so thoroughly accomplished that it can begin to become superseded. The internet has become too large and too varied to make any meaningful attempt to describe what it is, and the participants in online culture are too abundant and diverse for there to be
any cohesive way of theorising or defining what happens online. While computers and the internet have not reached the near ubiquity that radio and television have in the lives of Australians, usage is no longer dominated by the computer hobbyist, academic, or IT professional. The Australian Bureau of Statistics calculated that 61% of Australian households had access to a computer at home in 2002 while 46% had home internet access and a total of 58% of Australian adults used the internet, whether at home, at work, or through other access points. Uptake continues, though Australian Bureau of Statistics research shows that the rate is slowing. Early accounts of the internet have been wildly successful in their project of describing it as an enormously significant technology: uptake has been widespread, the internet has survived its extension beyond government and academic use and the ecommerce boom and bust to become a part of contemporary life. The internet is now used by people in every aspect of their lives: to maintain relationships, participate in leisure activities, share information, and perform everyday tasks like banking or shopping. For scholars in the field therefore, it may no longer be possible, or useful, to define the internet other than as a network of connected computers, or to produce an analysis of the internet as a whole.

The significance of the internet has often been characterised in either utopian or dystopian terms, as David Silver (2000) puts it, or in the form of a “polarization between narrow suspicion and uncritical enthusiasm” as it has been described by sociologist Steve Woolgar (2002, p 3-4). This tendency is consistent with the mode of thinking in terms of technological progress or technological pessimism that Leo Marx (1994) described, and Woolgar notes that both the utopian and dystopian predictions and descriptions were often based in essentialist and determinist assumptions about technology.

While the positive assessments of the new technologies were vital in drawing public and academic attention to the phenomena, we can now see that this phase depended on the largely uninterrogated adoption of early technological attributes. Negative assessments similarly tended to consider that limiting and unfavourable social
consequences would flow directly from the capacities of the technologies (2002, p 4)

The plenitude of studies of the internet in terms of attributes, effects, and capacities, and the concerned or enthused predictions for the potential of the internet has meant that online culture has frequently been represented as a separate space. In early writing on the internet and cyberspace, metaphor was used extensively in an attempt to characterise the internet and its imagined potential. Terms like virtual space, cyberspace, the superhighway, the infobahn, the new frontier and the cyber homestead, have all been invented, adopted and co-opted in the interests of various participants in online culture in order to introduce, describe, inspire, or make familiar the technology they were coined to represent, but these metaphors have also emphasised the separateness of the internet. The space of the network and the space of the ‘real world’ are often represented as distinct, with this representation valuing one kind of space over another. The binary pairing of internet/reality tends toward representing the internet as transcendent and the real as limiting, or the internet as inauthentic and the real as authentic. My use of the term ‘online’ avoids the problem of referring to activity that is not occurring on the internet by some other term such as ‘real life’, the use of which presupposes an access to a space that is shared and known as an unproblematic and authentic reality.

There is an obvious tension in referring to online culture in one breath and in the next critiquing the representation of ‘online’ and ‘offline’ as separate spaces. While the construction of separateness is becoming less relevant to the everyday experience of internet use, it is at present the case that, as David Silver suggests, “cyberculture is best comprehended as a series of negotiations which take place both online and off” (2000, p 12). For this reason I have found it useful to be able to continue to make contingent use of the terms ‘online’ to refer to networked computer mediated communication, paired with ‘offline’ as a description of non computer mediated communication. The pairing of
online/offline risks perpetuating a potentially hierarchical difference, even in the temporary and contingent separation that I am making, but it is intended to be strategic and productive, a means of discussing the interactive cultural positioning of these spaces which are frequently represented as separate, whilst taking care not to treat the internet as though it were simply a representation of what happens offline, a separate mimetic space of ‘virtuality’ running parallel to ‘reality’.

In cyberculture studies, what is represented as the separate space of the internet is often described as transformative, with the significance of the internet being portrayed in terms of its effects on social relations. This can be observed in the many accounts in cyberculture studies of the internet as having effects on society. An example is that of the research and discussion into online community. The concept of online community is one that has been the subject of extensive discussion and debate in cyberculture studies. Scholars have researched a variety of groups that engage in computer mediated communication, arguing for the existence (or non-existence), the value and the quality of virtual community. Woolgar recalls how

\[\text{[a]n early enthusiasm for the transforming effect of electronic technologies shifted previous attention from the use of computer mediated communication (CMC) in work processes and organizations to the possibility of achieving a form of electronically mediated social relationships built around enhanced community values (2002, p 2).}\]

In general terms, research and theory on this topic has been taken up with defining online community, debating whether groups engaging in computer mediated communication can properly be said to be communities, and in discussing the benefits and/or the problems of the existence of online community. For my purposes, the comprehensive definition of community provided by Jan Fernback and Brad Thompson (1995) is adequate. They argue that community has a dynamic meaning; that is, the concept of community must be
able to change as society changes, as it will be of little use in the investigation of social
groups if it is so rigidly defined as to be unable to allow for social change. This definition
is broad, but it is sufficient for discussing the way in which cyberculture studies at times
treats the internet as though it were a technology of autonomous effects. As Woolgar
observes, “early enthusiasm has given way to a realization that discussions about virtual
community often embodied confused ideals about what ‘community’ entails...” (2002, p 3). It is clear online social relationships can be as heartfelt, as important and as affecting as
relationships that occur exclusively offline, and it is likely that a person who has spent a
great deal of time participating in computer mediated communication, and has invested in
online relationships will value the connections and networks in which they participate.
Arguments around the existence of online communities are often underpinned by the
writer’s views on the value of online community, what is desirable or proper in social
relationships and networks, and whether or not the activity they observe online conforms
to these values. The content and quality of online communication, descriptions of
blistering conflicts and sustaining emotional support, the marriages, deaths and births, (and
even the offline get togethers) are all assembled in support of the existence and value of
online community. Arguments as to whether or not the relations amongst groups of users
of the internet constitute community and whether or not they are a good thing is not of
primary significance to my research. What is more relevant is the way in which the internet
is so often represented in these discussions as a transformative technology, capable of
having effects, and the underlying view of the internet as a site for or causal factor in social
change. Scholarly interest in computer mediated communication is beginning to move
away from discussion of the existence, quality and value of online community, as it
becomes accepted that, without the social networks that occur online, the cables and
computers that make up the internet would be of limited interest to researchers, and some
sociologists have pointed out that “limiting descriptions to groups and hierarchies
oversimplifies the complex social networks that computer networks support” (Garton,
Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community* (2000) is a kind of memoir of his experience as a member of the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (WELL). He begins by giving an example of the sheer usefulness of online communication – in less time than it takes for a paediatrician to return his phone call, Rheingold was able to get good advice on how to remove a tick from his two year old daughter's scalp from other people logged on to the WELL. In order to demonstrate the existence and quality of online communities, Rheingold goes on to discuss the ways in which participants involved one another in the most profound experiences of their lives. For example, in the final chapter of the revised edition of *The Virtual Community*, he tells the story of the responses of the members of the WELL to the deaths of two of their number, Tom Mandell and Kathleen Creighton. He discusses whether the WELL may or may not properly be called a community, and whether or not it is beneficial for participants. The attempts he makes to acknowledge and discuss all aspects of the arguments around online community might be a rhetorical hangover from the many years he has spent in online debate and discussion, but he is also responding to the amount of debate the publication of the original edition of his book generated. Rheingold's writing on the WELL and its members is warm and enthusiastic and despite his stated reservations, he argues for online communities as having the potential to improve people's lives. Rheingold relates how the WELL began as a project of the publishers of the counter-cultural publication the *Whole Earth Catalog*, and other counter-culture participants in the San Francisco Bay Area. Rheingold's book, and the debate that it helped to generate, focused on the WELL as a social experiment brought about by a technology, rather than a continuation of the existing counter-culture. This is perhaps not surprising, since for Rheingold, the counter-culture was an established part of his life, whereas the technological aspects of the WELL were new, and accorded with the excitement around the popularising of the internet at that time. The way in which the
WELL developed in the period the Rheingold has written about could certainly be said to have as much to do with the geographical and cultural context of the first users of the system as any inherent qualities to be found in computer-mediated communication, however the emphasis in Rheingold’s book and in the debate it generated has been on the effects of online communication, a situation that is consistent with a determinist approach to technology.

Trevor Locke (1999) made a study of, and acted as a facilitator/host to UK Communities Online, a network of groups developed with the specific intention of online community building in particular geographic areas. The community network that Locke worked with was intended to focus on resourcing an existing geographic community and contributing to “development and regeneration of geographical areas...” (1999, p 212). Locke’s project required active community building, rather than the suggestion that the connectivity of the technology itself would produce connective social relationships. An area in the Midlands was networked with the intention of creating additional platforms for political participation. The network provides a medium through which public and politicians can communicate, exchange information, consult, debate and gauge each other’s opinions... (Locke 1999, p 214).

This model, where a geographical place is networked, has been used all over the world. Typically a town or municipal locality is provided with access to networked computers, and email, discussion forums, bulletin boards, and web pages are developed, and may aim to enhance civic and community life, and to provide greater access to services or activities that cannot be found locally. These online networks were a means of furthering the offline, geographically bounded community development process but also ensuring that online culture would be inclusive, rather than the preserve of “social, educational and economic elites” (Locke 1999, p 215). Access to technology has itself become a matter of concern to those who advocate for social justice. In Australia, for example, debates about the
privatisation of telecommunications, the discrepancy between the level of telecommunications services in rural and urban areas, and the introduction of policy and legislation for changing technologies often incorporate arguments about access to technologies. The phrase ‘the digital divide’ has come to be used to describe a situation where a specific group is disadvantaged by lack of access to computers and the internet. Mark Warschauer (2002) gives examples of projects that have attempted to counter this lack of access that have had serious shortcomings because the use of technology has been treated simply as a matter of having computers, software and networks, rather than a practice that is part of a broader, and highly complex, social structure. He describes the ways in which an approach that assumes that technologies have effects can close off consideration of other important factors. Warschauer has discussed the importance of an approach to technology and change that takes into account “human and social systems” rather than focusing on hardware and software. He recommends setting aside the digital divide as a conceptual model and instead using a theory of inclusiveness that does not treat lack of access as a technological problem. Warschauer’s critique of the digital divide as a model for addressing inequality demonstrates the dangers of a technological determinist approach to social change.

Elizabeth Reid (1995) studied LamdaMOO, the text based world made famous by the event described by Julian Dibbell in *A Rape in Cyberspace* (1998). Dibbell described an incident where one participant’s character was able to control other participant’s characters, forcing them into what has been described as a ‘virtual rape’. Dibbell’s account of this incident has itself been the departure point for numerous discussions on the relationship between online and offline experience. Reid emphasises that the ‘virtual reality’ to be found in LamdaMOO is a “cultural construct... there are no visors or gloves, let alone body suits. The MUD interface is entirely textual” (1995, p 164-165). She found that a,
web of verbal and intertextual significances that are substitutes for and yet distinct from the networks of meaning of the wider community binds users into a common culture whose specialised meanings allow the sharing of imagined realities (1995, p 183).

Reid’s description of the community formed by LambdaMOO participants stresses the importance of a shared imagined space that users inhabit, but also on the difference between the online world they have created and their offline social interactions. For Reid, a shared imagined space is what allows those in LambdaMOO to be involved in an experience that is distinct from their offline social relationships. Participants in online environments such as LambdaMOO are actively engaged in creating a separate space. Text based worlds like LambdaMOO, and similar activities like interactive gaming, became a kind of social entertainment, where participants could interact with one another through play and fantasy. As some of the events on LambdaMOO showed, this kind of activity involved risks not unlike those experienced in offline social interactions and roleplay. The online exotic imagined space can occasionally be disrupted by the same kinds of events and actions that participants go online to escape. While a LambdaMOO participant may have had a degree of safety from physical assault from other participants, interactions could still be either painful or pleasurable.

As time passes there is more evidence that the internet is not innately libertarian, open or democratic, although the advocacy and interests of some internet users has ensured that these kinds of values continue to be promoted in aspects of online culture. There are technical and structural controls of the internet, such as the establishment of the Internet Corporation for Names and Numbers, or ICANN, which administers the allocation of IP addresses and domain names. The work of ICANN has been extensively debated and continues to be the subject of discussion and contestation amongst some internet users (Debate over internet governance 2000). Corporate mergers, and the successes and
failures of online businesses have also produced regulation of online culture. While the hypertext writer Stuart Moulthrop (2001) may assert that “[c]ulture building is too important to be left to the dot-coms”, the growth of business online, and the continuing significance of the business activity on the internet even after the collapse of many online businesses has meant that the corporate sector continues to build at least part of online culture. It can even be argued that the online business boom marked a repositioning of internet users as consumers, a re-evocation of offline economic models of production. However, along with the corporatised internet, there continues to be a strong pro-bono, hobbyist, and vernacular culture online. Internet users still invest time and money to make non-commercial web sites, and contribute to mailing lists, discussions and interactive groups, and many internet users continue to value the pro bono resources, vernacular texts and online social groups that are such an important part of online culture. The nation state, through policy, law, and even technical infrastructure also plays a role in the regulation of the internet. Graham Barwell and Kate Bowles (2000) have analysed an early instance of interaction between national laws and online culture. They point out that while the internet is “not controlled by any one organisation... this does not mean that it is not subject to regulation” (2000, p 702). While the case that Barwell and Bowles discussed is an instance of the ways in which internet users could transgress the boundaries of the nation state, in a recent judgement by the High Court of Australia in the case of Dow Jones versus Gutnick it is the ability of internet communication to cross borders that has resulted in a precedent that further regulates online communication (Australian Legal Information Institute 2003). In Australia, laws passed in state and federal parliaments and cases setting precedent are gradually bringing about the legal framework in which online activity occurs in this country. Although such laws can be difficult to enforce, they do modify online culture, supporting the view that the internet cannot be said to be a space that is free, in the sense of being ungoverned. What can perhaps be most accurately asserted is that the regulation of the internet occurs in ways that are specific to online culture. It has become
clear that the internet has structure, forms of governance, social mores and customs and that the dispersion and perpetuation of these regulatory practices occur through a variety of online and offline institutions and activities.

Cyberspace has even been envisioned by some, as Margaret Wertheim (1999) has argued, as a transcendent space. The internet is sometimes represented as a potentially posthuman technology where the body is absent and where a binary pairing of online space – represented as fleshless and malleable, fluid and liberating – stands in contrast to what is represented as the fixed and bounded corporeality of the body offline. William Gibson’s science fiction has contributed to this vision of the internet as a technology that can deliver transcendence of the corporeal. In his novels and stories, cyberspace is represented as a place where the body is not necessary. Gibson’s version of cyberspace is a realm for experiencing what would unavailable to the embodied self. Human geographer James Kneale (1999), who is interested in fictional representations of what he terms ‘thin’ space and the way that readers respond to such representations by reading them intertextually, describes Gibson’s version of cyberspace:

Cyberspace, also known as the matrix, is Gibson’s virtual dataspace, in which the combined knowledge of his information society is represented as virtual objects in an infinite space, organised as a regular grid (1999, p 207).

Gibson’s cyberspace is a place where a disembodied self can continue to have consciousness and to interact with other consciousness. In Gibson’s texts, users ‘jack in’ to cyberspace via the brain. In his fictional word, bodies are malleable but unreliable, altered and prosthethised liabilities, while cyberspace is presented as an alternative to the cage of the biological body. Gibson’s cyberspace relies on a view of the self based on the dualist Cartesian mind/body split. Where once the body was seen as flesh that contained the soul, Descartes, as social theorist Victor Seidler notes, “prepared the secular terms for the mind-body dualism which has also characterised modernity” (1998, p 15). For
Descartes, the mind and body could be conceived of as separate, and rational man attempted to govern his body, and the world around him, with his mind. Seidler characterises Descartes as seeing the self as located in the mind, that is, "[p]ut crudely, bodies are not part of ‘who we are’ as rational selves, but are part of a disenchanted nature" (1998, p 17).

Interactions between technology and the body do not necessarily erase or transcend biological processes. Rather than pointing to a post human future, they can make our corporeality unambiguous. For the person whose body is pierced by a stoma that runs from the bowel (in contrast to Gibson’s fictional cable that runs from the brain) the interactions of the body and technology make the processes of the body explicit. Jacking in (to use Gibson’s term) to the gut extends the life of many people, but for the person who lives with such a device, this experience of biological and technological interaction is unlikely to be experienced as one that transcends the body. Cartesian dualism and a version of the cyborg self as a trans-human phenomenon limits our ability to articulate and theorise the complex relationships that we have with and amongst our bodies and technoscientific machines and procedures.

Merleau Ponty’s (1999) theory of embodiment could be a more useful theoretical model for developing a view of the relationships between identity, corporeality and online space. Drew Leder (1998) has used Merleau Ponty’s concept of embodiment in his work on the intending body. He writes:

in the midst of my writing, I leave my chair and computer screen behind, seeking a glass of orange juice. The action can be described in terms of a series of mechanistic events involving neuronal firings, muscular contractions, and the like. However, if this becomes our exclusive, or even dominant, mode of understanding embodiment, it renders obscure the bodily intentionality through which we constitute and respond to our world... [t]he world of thirst, tiredness, orange juice, refrigerators, as well as computer screens, written language, readers and the like, always stands in relation to
a subject-body which experiences and constitutes the world (1998, p 123).

Theorising embodiment online has often taken the form of debates around the authentic self. In her ethnographic study of online culture Annette Markham (1998) discusses the outcomes of her research into internet users that she has interviewed about the way in which they see the relationship between themselves and the network. She places different kinds of users in a spectrum of ways of participating in online culture. At one end of this spectrum is the user who sees the internet as a tool. For other users the network is a place in which to reflexively perform a multiplicity of selves, and at the other end of the spectrum is the participant who feels that her embodiment online is a more authentic version of herself than her biological body, and that she is only truly herself when online.

Participants in online interactions can create multiple personas, including personas of different genders, ages, and with various other differences from their offline identities. Rosanne Allucquere Stone (1993) has written about one instance of a user of the internet constructing a persona online, in her example an able bodied man who represented himself online as a woman with disabilities. While this is one of the more complex and well documented instances of users constructing online personas that are vastly different to their offline selves, it is not an isolated example. The relationship between computer mediated experience, the body and the self has been a significant area of research in cyberculture studies, and “[t]here is a dream that through these new computerised technologies we can leave behind the hierarchies and ‘unfreedoms’ of gendered and racialised identities” (Seidler 1998, p 20). Some participants in and theorists of online culture see it as a site where anything seems possible and the other can, it is imagined, be occupied. This approach to interactive online space has been characterised by Sherry Turkle (1995) as ‘identity play’, but Lisa Nakamura (2000), for example, has pointed out that it can also exclude difference, or alternatively operate as an exotic space. Nakamura has noted that race has been made absent in many online contexts, and she argues that the
resistance to anything other than stereotyped racialised personas in online gaming, is in fact an insistence on whiteness, a kind of forced passing. She argues that the adoption of personas that rely on, for example, often stereotypical racialised characteristics, constitutes ‘identity tourism’ rather than an opportunity to become someone else. The term ‘identity tourism’ suggests a gap between the creation of an online persona and the complex and nuanced experience of being a person. The tourism metaphor also argues that a person engaged in online identity play can usually ‘return home’ at the end of the experience.

Online culture as a transcendent space, whether as Gibson’s cyberspace with its mind/body dualism, or the internet as a site for passing, or becoming the exotic other, seems to me to be a troubling and ultimately undeliverable transformation. Far from being a disembodied site, the computer and the network are intimately involved with the physical, and the gendered, racialised, variously able body is inseparably present in and bound with all use of and access to technology. For example, the user operates software through metaphors of sliding, pushing or swiping, placing one object on top of another, and so on. This simulation of the tactile and kinetic occurs through tapping the keyboard, sliding and pressing the mouse, listening to audio cues and monitoring changes in the pixelated image on the screen in such a way that the user feels that objects are affected by their touch. Software interfaces themselves rely on the user’s embodied, intending, experience.

An interest in the construction of a self online that is significantly different to the offline self relies on the view of online culture as a separate space, and is an extreme example of the rhetoric that describes technology as producing effects. While it is clear that for some users, there exists the possibility of a transhuman future, I do not see this as being a possibility that is innately present in either the internet/digital technology, or the self. The distinction between online and offline culture is blurring. It is becoming less relevant to speak of the internet as a separate space, something apart from everyday experience
offline. As the internet converges with other forms of communication and broadcast media and the boundaries between online and offline experience become less relevant, it may be that the study of cyberculture as a separate space becomes anachronistic. Cyberculture studies contains within itself the potential for its own disappearance, not because what happens online is a passing novelty, but because it is becoming so widespread and so entrenched that it may no longer be visible as a separate entity in culture. It may be that what happens online will become inseparable from the minutiae of daily life. Already, users routinely access the internet without the sense that they are participating in something markedly different from offline activity.

In this chapter, I have discussed some theoretical approaches to technology and social change, and accounted for my views of online culture and computer mediated communication. A view of the internet as a transformative entity has been a significant part of cyberculture studies, particularly during the emergence of the field. The work that has been done in science and technology studies and the philosophy of technology can be used to challenge this view, and the study of texts and social relationships online provide an opportunity to engage in observation and analysis rather than forecasting. In chapter four, I will discuss the specific field of web studies in more detail, noting the comparative deficit of formalist analyses of web sites in cyberculture studies. Taking up Manovich’s emphasis on the “semiotic codes” of the computer (2001 p 6) and following what is becoming an established practice (Chandler 2000, Cheung 2000, Wakeford 2000), I will discuss online memorialisation as a genre, and develop a topography of web sites: two strategies which allow me to address online memorials as texts rather than technology. I will consider the ways in which others have theorised online memorialisation (Geser 1998, Hardie 2000), and identify the generic features that I have observed in my visits to online memorial sites. I will then discuss eight exemplary texts, focusing on their formal qualities and observable textual features in order to illustrate the ways in which the makers of these
sites adapt aspects of death ritual and online culture to produce the practice of online memorialisation.

I have shown how cyberculture studies has produced an abundance of research that takes a determinist approach to online culture and assumes that the internet has the capacity for certain effects. The view that social and technoscientific and social change are mutually constitutive, and that society is always already technological provides the theoretical framework for my discussion of the way in which social and technoscientific change is played out in the case of online memorialisation. In the next chapter, I consider a genre of texts that have an identifiable social purpose, and a clear connection with offline cultural practice, and discuss the ways in which the practice of memorialisation is continued and adapted in the online context.
Chapter four

Online memorials

In this chapter, I will discuss online memorialisation with reference to eight exemplary sites that I have selected from the hundreds that I have encountered since my first visit to an online memorial in the mid nineteen nineties. What I at first thought of as another of the novel curiosities to be found on the internet I later came to regard as utterly relevant and practical when the person so commemorated was someone that I knew. I appreciated the way in which a web site was able to act as a place where photographs and stories about the life and circumstances of the death of the person being commemorated could be shared. When I was considering possible case studies that would allow me to discuss the relationship between technoscientific and social change, I realised that memorialisation offered the opportunity to study a social practice that is of significance to participants both on and offline and that, in the online context, continues to be part of the vernacular culture of the internet that is not yet (and may continue to avoid becoming) dominated by commercialised or high art production. Before I go on to discuss some examples of online memorials I will consider methods for the analysis of texts on the web, outlining my rationale for treating online memorials as a genre, the method I will use to discuss the formal qualities of these sites and features of the genre.

Over the period of my research, I have made some detailed observations of sites that do not appear in this chapter. In one case, as I have said, I omitted discussion of a site after a direction given by its author. There have been other sites that I have at some stage considered including but have left aside because they could no longer be found on the web. This may have happened because they have been removed by their author/s, or because their internet service provider has gone out of business, or because the author/s of the sites are no longer online at all. The sites I have selected appear to have a relative
stability. This has allowed me to return to them as my research and my writing has progressed. It is also likely however that, over time, the sites I have included will also disappear from the web. While the eight sites that I will discuss provide specific examples of the genre, the hundreds of sites that I have visited, sometimes briefly, and sometimes exploring them in detail, have all contributed to my identification of the generic features of the online memorial.

It is perhaps surprising that, given the abundance of texts on the web, the interpretation and analysis of web sites is not a more developed field. When compared to the extent of scholarly work on other forms of computer mediated communication, it can be said that web studies does not yet have the range or depth of material that, for example, the study of online communities has generated. Also, whereas in literary or media studies it is common for research to focus on the formal qualities of a text, perhaps a novel, a film or a television series, in cyberculture studies there is less emphasis on formalist analysis. Wakeford notes that while it is possible to do “a fine-grained reading of an individual Web page as a ‘cultural text’, it is equally feasible to take a broad view of the way in which the Web is becoming part of global culture and commerce” (2000, p 31). Cyberculture studies is rich in work taking the second approach that Wakeford identifies, and this can be understood in the context of the determinist accounts of the transformative possibilities of the internet that I have discussed in the previous chapter. Unfortunately, this body of work can be contrasted with a relative scarcity of ‘fine-grained’, formalist analysis of web sites as texts. Manovich puts it this way:

future theorists and historians... will find that analytical texts from our era recognize the significance of the computer’s takeover of culture yet, by and large, contain speculations about the future rather than a record and theory of the present. Future researchers will wonder why theoreticians, who had plenty of experience analyzing older cultural forms, did not try to describe computer media’s semiotic codes...

(2001, p 6)
This scarcity might be in part due to the difficulty of engaging in such work. Web sites are complex, with a multiplicity of textual features, purposes, and creators. Wakeford argues that

[i]n the face of such diversity, there is a need for a researcher to be as specific as possible about the types of page that are under investigation. One way to do this is to use a list of generic features which can operate as a template against which to analyse a specific page (2000, p 34).

Wakeford notes that Daniel Chandler has developed just such a list of generic features in his study of personal homepages and that this technique could be adapted to the study of other genres of web pages (2000, p 34). Using a genre studies approach to analyse texts on the web is one of the few established methods of formalist analysis of web sites available. Such studies often follow a recognisable pattern: the type of site being analysed is named, examples are described, and the significance and social and cultural impact of such sites are discussed. Even in the case of studies like Chandler’s, however, texts are often treated as though divisible into form and content, with textual and technical elements, and there is frequently a determinist focus on the social and cultural effects of the web with insufficient attention paid to the offline context. For my purpose, the most significant methodological approach that these studies of types of text (Cheung 2000, Chandler 2000, Mitra 1999) offer is that they are developing a paradigm for the study of web sites, laying foundations for the continuing analyses of texts on the web.

To summarise my rationale for studying online memorials as a genre: firstly, as I have discussed, genre studies is a methodology that is frequently used in web studies; secondly, a genre study can focus on the formalist elements of a type of text; finally, Manovich’s view that the underlying organising principle of new media texts is the database, with the production process involving the selection and combination of textual elements is congruent with the way in which genre operates intertextually, and a genre studies
approach can support a discussion of the ways in which this intertextual selection process has been deployed, particularly in the case of the online memorials that I will discuss.

Following the course Alan McKee (2001) lays out for textual analysis in cultural studies, I would also like to make explicit the questions that I have used to define the genre I am working with and to analyse specific memorial sites. In an analysis of the genre I have begun with such questions as: who makes these sites, who do they commemorate, and who visits these sites? What kinds of textual features are usual on these sites, what colours, what images, what sounds, what writing? What kind of interface and architecture do these sites employ? What kinds of connections are made between memorial sites and other online texts? What kinds of interactions between the creator and the visitor are possible?

While I do not set out answers to these questions in my discussion of each site, I have included them here as an indication of the approach that I have taken in my analysis. These questions are intended to reveal genre characteristics and the elements of online memorials. They lead me to a consideration of questions at the heart of my research, questions as to what kinds of continuity, adaptation and variation can be observed in the movement of memorialisation to the online context, and how can these observations be understood in terms of my broader question about the relationship between technology and social change.

Describing an online genre can appear to be an insurmountable task. As soon as the scholar states ‘online memorials often use soft pastel background colours’, all the sites that use bold, vivid colour, or no colour at all, come to mind. As I write that ‘sites often include links to support and advocacy groups’ I recall the hundreds of links that cannot be accounted for in this way and that appear to be impossible to categorise. The exceptions to any generalised statement are so numerous that it can seem as though every site is an aberration, and the only technique that is sufficient to the project of characterising these sites is to make endless lists of features, with additional lists of qualifications, additions
and exceptions, or to ask the reader to go to their favourite search engine and type in the phrase “In Loving Memory” and see for themselves the abundance, diversity and variability of the genre. Instead, I will give a general description of the design, media, connectivity and interactivity of the genre, and then discuss the eight online memorials I have selected as an opportunity to discuss specific examples of the genre, and to demonstrate the ways in which creators of memorial sites use features that are commonly found in the genre alongside exceptional features in a manner that is consistent with vernacular web sites in general.

The methodological questions that I have been compelled to address have led me to develop a topography of web sites that will allow me to avoid a division of these texts into form and content, or textual and technical elements. I consider four elements of web sites: design, media, connectivity and interactivity. These four elements can be further broken down into categories. Design can include graphic design, interface design and architecture. The media used in a site can be described as photography, graphic images, writing, verbal sound, musical sound, animation, and video. Connectivity is the term that I will use to describe external links, and other linking devices such as directories, and web rings. Interactivity can include the various ways in which information is harvested from the visitor to the site, whether that is explicitly through devices such as guestbooks, or by allowing the opportunity for the visitor to make email and other contacts, as well as less obvious data collection, such as counters and cookies. The maker of a web site uses the design of the site, the inclusion of various media, connection with other sites, and interactive features and the continuation and adaptation of forms drawn from death ritual and from online culture and uses them to create a meaningful text.

Sociologist Hans Geser (1998) discusses online memorialisation in a manner that is similar to the approach to web studies that I have previously noted. In “Yours Virtually
Forever:” Death memorials and Remembrances Sites in the WWW’, he begins by arguing for the importance of death ritual and mourning objects, pointing out that often this kind of material is all that remains of past societies for archaeologists to study. Geser describes the type of sites he is discussing, makes a phenomenology of web sites, and discusses the “socio-cultural antecedents” of online memorials. It should be noted that Hans Geser is writing from his perspective as a sociologist working in Germany, and while the kinds of mourning practices that he refers to are in some cases similar to those that I have studied, in others they are markedly different from those that I have observed in what can be seen as the broadest definition of English-speaking culture, including the multicultural societies of Australia, New Zealand, North America, and Great Britain.

Geser goes on to write about what he sees as the social functions and consequences of online memorials, arguing that online memorials are evidence of the permeability of public and private spheres online, and the increasing individualism and fragmentation of society and identity. Although Geser has a sociological interest in memorial sites on the world wide web, he is critical of what he describes as the aesthetic value of these sites:

they often tend to present very exuberant pages overflowing with sentimental pictures and sounds, with animated GIF-pictures emulating the flickering candles or smoking fires, and with all kinds of ornaments not adding up to a satisfying (aesthetical) whole.

He notes that online memorialisation offers “some functional capacities no other media or social institutions are presently able to provide” as they can be accessed by people in any location, and they are not events located in time. Geser argues that online memorials allow “heterogeneous and unpredictable forms of grief” and he cites evidence that shows that bereaved people will create online memorials even many years after a death has occurred. He predicts that online memorials will become increasingly popular as they are accessible, low in cost, and more people are acquiring the skills needed to make web sites.
Melissa Hardie (2000), in her study of web tributes to JonBenét Ramsay also associates online memorialisation with relations between public and private spaces and the representation of identity. Hardie has researched online discussion and investigation of the death of JonBenét Ramsay, a child who was murdered, as well as online activity that memorialises her. For Hardie the internet is a site for a combination of mass culture and private communication, and as such is a suitable setting for the mass mourning, investigation and debate that followed this child’s death. As a result of the manner of her death and circumstances of her life, photographs and video footage of JonBenét Ramsay became highly recognisable, and she could even be described posthumously as a celebrity.

JonBenét tribute sites memorialise her death through a significant resumption of the debate into another kind of private sphere paradoxically located on the World Wide Web. These websites reorient those questions on the relation between private and public sphere, mass publication, and mourning, describing an alternative space in which the affective encounter between strangers might be theorised. While, for example, the celebrity portraits of JonBenét are the logical accompaniment to the mass media mourning of her death, family snapshots of the ‘other’ JonBenét are (for me) the iconic images of these sites, in their celebration of an elusive ‘everyday’ precisely in the vocabulary of the singular, lost subject of elegy (Hardie 2000, p 157).

Hardie identifies the combination of generic forms – celebrity portraits, family snapshots, and elegy – employed to communicate the simultaneous loss of the person and creation of the celebrity JonBénet Ramsay. Hardie points out the way that texts on the internet can be sites where these various genres are adapted and reconstituted:

those moments of traffic, and their fluctuations draw together the forensic, the memorial, the archival/collectible and the informative as systems that inform the unstable relation between society and community located in the shifting debates and affective bonds that contour these elegiac and rebarbative excursions (2000, p 167).

Whereas Geser regards online memorials as having ungainly aesthetic forms, Hardie’s
identification of the quality of assembly of a range of forms, media and genres, can be seen as characteristic of new media, and especially of texts on the web. Web sites are in part difficult to study because their makers borrow liberally from a vast range of forms of communication, from both on and offline. Vernacular sites do not necessarily conform to principles of good web design, and have not always been constructed with particular skill, and the idiosyncrasy and inventiveness of many of these texts on the web exposes the extent to which other forms of cultural production are normalised and conventionalised. It is partly this at times unfettered and chaotic process of selection and combination that can make some vernacular sites so funny, shocking, compelling or moving.

Personal online memorials may be as brief as a name, a date of birth and of death, and perhaps a photograph or a message, or they may be detailed and elaborate decorative tributes. Architecture and navigational design may take the form of a simple list of links, a complex but easily navigable structure, or an apparently haphazard series of linked pages. Some sites can be methodically explored, while others have a structure that promotes wandering rather than navigating. Some online memorials are little more than a page, with images, text, and perhaps a few links to other sites. Some are a single long page that incorporates most of the site’s content, while others are large and complex, with the front page taking on the role of an orienting home page connecting to a series of linked pages on different topics that deal with different aspects of the person’s life or of the maker of the site’s experience of bereavement.

Memorial sites often use a formal, symmetrical placement of images and text with borders and decorative images. The graphic design of pages on a memorial site, and especially the front or home page, can be seen as an adaptation of some offline forms of memorialisation, such as the headstone and memorial plaque used at a grave site, the in memoriam notice placed in the newspaper, or the bricolage assembly style of the makeshift
memorial. Marguerite Helmers (2001) has noted the frequent use of a specific aesthetic in online memorials made to commemorate Diana, Princess of Wales. She describes this as a continuation of the aesthetic of the North American Sunday School movement, associated with protestant and evangelistic Christianity and the establishment of Sunday schools for religious and other instruction. This movement also incorporated the production and distribution of sacred images and texts. Helmers argues that this aesthetic is still used today in, for example, Hallmark sympathy cards. This aesthetic can also be observed in vernacular offline memorialisation such as the programs handed out at funeral services, some death or funeral notices, and some makeshift memorials. It is used in many personal memorial sites, and could certainly be identified as a type of site within the broader genre of online memorials. The look of memorial sites is also drawn from other kinds of vernacular web pages, such as autobiographical pages, fan and hobbyist sites.

Makers of memorial sites use their understanding of death, bereavement and mourning to choose often highly symbolic work for inclusion on the site, and demonstrate a familiarity with the repertoire of forms and images used in offline death ritual. The strongest common feature of the genre is the inclusion of the full name, date of birth and death date of the person being memorialised. A heading like that of the memorial site for Jon Postel “In Memoriam/Dr Jonathan B. Postel/August 3, 1943 - October 16, 1998” is the only feature that almost all memorial sites have in common. The name and dates of birth and death of the deceased are included in almost every online memorial that I have visited. They are also, of course, a common feature of offline forms of memorialisation, including headstones and plaques, in memoriam notices, as well as less conventional forms such as the roadside shrine. In an industrialised society our names are personal and familiar markers for our selves, but also important identifiers in many of the systems that record information about us. It is as though this were the minimum information required to establish identity, to show that the deceased has been. This use of text that is found in
many forms of offline memorial is usually accompanied by a selection of photographs, graphic images, writing, verbal and musical sound, animation and video images.

With the increasing importance of visual culture in industrialised societies, it is perhaps to be expected that the photographic representation of the face is beginning to be used as a means of establishing identity, and to be used more frequently in death ritual. Most memorial sites will include photographs of the person who has died. A photographic portrait frequently appears as part of the title section at the head of the front page, with other types of photography exhibited on the site: photographs of special occasions, like graduations and weddings, family photographs and candid photographs of everyday activities are all common. Photographs that depict the deceased with people, pets or objects that were of importance are also used illustratively, perhaps with a descriptive caption to explain the significance of the image.

While photographs have been an important way of remembering people who have died to the extent that post mortem photography or the preservation of photographs that take on the role of memorial objects has been a widespread activity prior to online memorialisation, the routine use of photographs in memorial sites is an example of the way that both the technical possibilities of online memorialisation (the ease with which a photograph can be incorporated into a web site, and the fact that authors of sites are likely to invest in acquiring the required skill to scan and include a photograph) has resulted in an observable difference in offline and online memorialisation. That is, while photographs are sometimes incorporated into offline memorials, such as gravestones, the inclusion of a photograph has become almost as common as the inclusion of name and birth and death dates as a means of documenting the deceased person’s life and demonstrating that they are remembered.
The images that are associated with some forms of death ritual in the offline context, such as flowers and butterflies, cherubs, angels, and candles, are also used on memorial sites, but where practical considerations and the conventions of offline forms may limit such use, the creator of a memorial site is able to include an abundance of such imagery. The almost rococo visual style of some memorial sites may be drawn from both the more ornate forms of Victorian mourning, and the emphasis on the highly decorative appearance of many other forms of vernacular site. Such images usually have symbolic meanings to the makers of memorial sites. The association of, for example, flowers with death ritual is another example of the continuation of a specific practice that can be adapted and can take on changing meanings. Francis, Neophytou and Kellaher have commented on the use of flowers in death ritual:

Flowers have always been the traditional gift of mourning, remembrance and love. One connection of flowers and gardens with death may lie in the fact that plants die. A garden unremittingly reveals the actuality of death, yet provides consolation that the skilful gardener can keep plants alive (1999, p 121–122).

Flowers are decorative, softening the appearance of a coffin or casket, and in times when the body was kept at home until the funeral may have helped to mask the odour of the corpse. The giving of flowers can be an act of love, or a way of marking a special occasion and certain kinds of flower might be especially associated with the person who has died. Flowers can be symbols of the brevity of life, but also of renewal. All of these meanings might be significant to the person who sends flowers to a bereaved person, lays flowers on a grave, or includes a floral border on a memorial web site.

The image of a candle, or a flickering candle animation is also a common inclusion in online memorials. Like flowers, the image of a candle has many religious and secular cultural associations. Lighting a candle has become a symbolic action that is used in both religious and secular death ritual.
Candles are used in Orthodox and Catholic wakes and funerals... A lit candle calls the spirit of the deceased down... and provides a focus for the person: its warmth, liveliness and comfort contrasting to the cold stone of the grave (Francis, Neophytou and Kellaher 1999, p 125).

The news and information site NewYorkCity.com (2003) includes a memorial page that invites visitors to ‘light a candle’ on the site to commemorate those people who died in the destruction of the World Trade Centre:

we have received thousands of letters of support via email from people of all nationalities and religions. Aside from expressions of outrage, sorrow, and offers of assistance, many people have expressed frustration at not being able to do more. We have shared in that frustration and it is in this spirit that we have created this virtual memorial... The diversity of those who light these candles mirrors the diversity of our city, which reflects the diversity of our planet. Our desire is that this act of remembrance and this show of unity helps send a message that extremism has no place in this world.

Visitors to this site are able to fill in a form that asks for their name, nationality and religion, and this information is placed under an animation of a flickering candle. There are hundreds of pages of entries on this site. A candle can refer to both the fragility and the continuity of life, and can be adapted to changing death ritual. A mourner might attend a candlelight vigil, light candles at a makeshift shrine, and use images of candles in the construction of a memorial web site. Sometimes visitors to a memorial site are invited to ‘light a candle’ to commemorate their particular loss, or to express their sympathy, especially where sites are intended to memorialise a group of people. These kinds of graphic images are often used in a decorative or illustrative manner, alongside pieces of writing.

Writing is an important, often central, aspect of many memorial sites. Makers of sites will provide narrative accounts describing the life and character of the person memorialised,
with detailed descriptions, memories and stories about the person, their life, family, friends and community, their beliefs, their interests, and the qualities that made them unique and valuable to the community of mourners. The story of how the person so commemorated died is a common inclusion in a memorial site. This may be a description of the way in which the maker of the site heard the news of a death and the details that they have pieced together subsequently, perhaps including the story of the symptoms, diagnosis and progression of an illness, or the circumstances of an accident or sudden death. Many memorial sites also incorporate an account of the impact of this death on the surviving community of mourners, their experience of bereavement, and statements that attempt to resolve or reconcile what bereavement counsellors call unfinished business. Web memorials that include descriptions of the person who has died and reflections on how they died are perhaps a continuation of the kinds of discussions that might be conducted amongst a community of mourners, or in unusual cases, be briefly described in an obituary or media report. This is an activity commonly engaged in by bereaved people to the extent that it has become the basis for one approach to bereavement counselling, where the client and counsellor create a narrative, “the story of their loss, recounting not just who and what has been taken away, but also taking on board the full meaning and implications of that loss” (Small and Hockey 2001, p 106). ‘How did it happen’ is often one of the first questions that occurs to a person who has just heard that someone they know has died. This can be important information for a bereaved person who is trying to make sense of their loss, but it is also a way of understanding how someone has died so that we can consider our own inevitable death in relation to the death that has occurred. Where a person has been killed violently or has suicided there may also be content on a memorial site that discusses these circumstances. A site may also advocate for change, such as changes in gun laws, or increased funding for palliative care, suicide prevention, an appeal to readers not to drink and drive, or warnings of the dangers of alcohol or other drugs, or appeals for greater awareness of deaths from a specific cause, or for research funding for
diseases such as breast cancer or HIV/AIDS. Writing about the experience of bereavement is a significant inclusion in many online memorials. This reflexivity is an important difference from offline practice, where memorialisation tends to be exhibited while discussions about the experience of being bereaved occur privately amongst the community of mourners, with friends and relatives, support groups, or in a professionalised therapeutic setting. A memorial site might also incorporate expressions of love for the person who has died, and some sites include writing that is addressed to the deceased themselves.

I have not visited a memorial site that includes a sound file of the voice of the deceased person being commemorated, although Hans Geser makes reference to such a site in his paper. Another example of the use of sound in memorialisation online is *The Sonic Memorial Project* (2002). Following the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, radio producers Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva constructed *The Sonic Memorial Project* for National Public Radio in the United States. This site includes oral histories, acoustic environments, and various sounds associated with the building of the World Trade Centre, the day to day activities that took place there, and what happened when it was destroyed. While this is a large scale, public memorial project, it indicates the potential for the inclusion of audio material in online memorials.

Many memorial sites include a midi file that plays music while the visitor is exploring the site. The music might be a song that is significant to the maker of the site, or something that was a favourite of the person commemorated. The use of midi files allows for only limited quality, and cannot deliver anything approaching the kind of musical experience that performed or recorded music provides. While it may be that bereaved people for the most part feel that images and text are the most appropriate ways to memorialise someone who has died, perhaps as greater bandwidth and the manipulation of recorded sound
becomes more accessible to the makers of memorial sites, the use of verbal and atmospheric sound, and higher quality musical sound may be included more frequently.

The way in which online memorials make use of the connectivity of the web is similar to other kinds of vernacular sites. There may be links to sites that would have interested the deceased, and I have visited memorials where the page of links from the web site of the person who has died has been included as a way of showing something about their life and character. There may also be links to sites that offer bereavement information and education, or information and support sites related to the cause of death. Some memorial sites are part of a memorial web ring. Some directories and web rings that group or link memorial sites are thematic and may be part of an information, support or advocacy site related to a specific cause of death, and with the emphasis often being on the preventability of these deaths. My experience in visiting directories or sites in a web ring differs according to the rationale for the connection of sites. Other such collections do not have an overt theme, and the experience of visiting these sites is similar to that of visiting a cemetery, or crematorium, where the deceased are remembered without reference to thematic connection.

A visitor to a web site may have the opportunity to correspond with the maker of the site. This can occur because contact information has been included on the site, or a guestbook has been incorporated, or through referral to an interactive space that is external to the site. The maker of the site may also include features that collect information from visitors, most frequently a simple counter that logs visits, and cookies could also be used to collect data about those accessing the site. Makers of memorials sites frequently give their email addresses, often with anti-spam measures, on their sites, although like many creators of personal web sites, they do not usually publish postal or phone contacts.
I have not encountered a private memorial site that incorporates chat space, but guestbooks are regularly included. Guestbooks are/cgi scripts that allow visitors to a site to fill in a form with a message that is then automatically uploaded to the site. It is a tool that is employed in all kinds of sites, including commercial and promotional, not for profit, hobbyist and government sites. The name refers to their similarity to the offline practice of keeping a visitors book, and guestbooks are a popular method for their authors to collect and display feedback about their site. This use of the guestbook is another example of the adaptation of offline death ritual and online convention into a unique form of online memorial. Usually the messages left by visitors to the site can be read by both the maker of the site and other visitors, although in some cases messages accessible only to the maker of the site can be left. When included in an online memorial site, they can be seen as an adaptation of the practice of those attending a funeral signing a condolence book, or sending condolence letters and sympathy cards. The online guestbook allows the wider community of mourners to express their sorrow, offer their help and support and share their memories of the deceased and can even provide an opportunity for strangers to offer their sympathies, an opportunity that appears to be most often taken up by people who have suffered a similar loss. A guestbook can also be used as a place for people other than the maker of the site to be able to write about their response to a particular death. A visitor to the site can also make comments about the memorial site itself, as would be usual in guestbooks on other kinds of sites.

*Caleb’s Dreambook* (1999) is a guestbook that has been set up by the parents of Caleb Barnhart. Caleb Barnhart died from sudden infant death syndrome. The guestbook includes messages of condolence and support addressed to the Barnhart family written by friends and relatives, but also from strangers:

I am so sorry to hear of your loss. I to lost my child to Sids & truely feel your pain. [sic] Altough [sic] the pain never goes away it does get easier. If you need a
shoulder to cry on I'll be here to listen (Ward in Caleb’s Dreambook 1999).

As could be expected given the variety of cultural practices that are gathered in the guestbook that is part of a memorial site, the messages that are left can range from feedback briefly praising the site to messages of condolence, support, offers of help, religious messages, and the sharing of memories of the deceased. Guestbooks are also used to write messages addressed to the deceased person themselves, and Caleb’s Dreambook, for example, includes messages written by members of the Barnhart family and addressed to Caleb. This kind of message can be seen as being similar to the cards and letters left at graves or other memorial places that contain messages addressed to the person who has died. The guestbook is a popular and accessible way to create a facility for interactivity on a web site.

The sites that I have selected for closer analysis in the next part of this chapter are consistent with the generic characteristics that I have described in their design, media, connectivity and interactivity. I have chosen sites that will be fruitful examples of approaches to memorialisation online, as they include features that can be found on many online memorials, making them somewhat representative of the genre, while they also include distinctive features that make them unique. In short, I have chosen these eight sites because they exhibit a range of typical and atypical features sufficient to allow me to discuss the continuation, adaptation and departure from offline forms of death ritual.

**Herbert George Ashton**

Included on the personal homepage of Paul Ashton is a one page memorial to his father, Herbert George Ashton (2001). The title of this page is *In Loving memory of my Beautiful Dad Herbert George ASHTON*. Paul Ashton’s commemoration of his father stands in contrast to the majority of memorial sites in its simplicity and brevity, but it nevertheless
conveys the warmth of the relationship between the two men. This site includes little more information than that which might be included in a death notice or on a memorial plaque: in fact it is more concise than many such memorials. Using nothing but the textual elements that are common to almost all memorial web sites – a name, dates of birth and death, a photograph, and the dedication ‘in loving memory’, as well as a page counter – Paul Ashton has created an intimate tribute to his father.

The page has a plain white background, and includes the name of the deceased and dates of birth and death. The only image included is an oval shaped photograph of Herbert Ashton which appears to be a digitally edited detail from a scan of a professional studio portrait. Unlike many of the other memorial sites I have visited, there is no information on how Herbert George Ashton died, nor any details of his life, his work or family relationships, or anecdotes or descriptions illustrating his character. The making and upload of this site, and its placement as a single page in a site that contains several pages of information and links about Paul Ashton indicates that his memory of his father is an important part of himself and his life. Paul Ashton’s memorial for his father is reminiscent of a photograph placed on a desk or shelf, a daily reminder that can be glanced at or meditated upon, keeping the lost person in some way present to the bereaved.

**Greg Vassagossis**

A memorial for Greg Vassagossis has been made by his sister (n.d.). The site is headed with the words “In Loving Memory” presented in a framing border with a decorative floral motif. Beneath this are the words “In Memory of my beloved brother Greg”. The site includes some writing about the maker of the site’s experience of bereavement, a photograph of brother and sister dancing on what appears to be her wedding day with the inscription “I love you!” digitally added above the heads of the dancers. One of the very few links on this site directs the visitor to [1000deaths.com](http://1000deaths.com), a support site for people who
have been bereaved by suicide. In addition to writing about her memories of her brother and the some of the experiences that they shared, the maker of this site has included a paragraph headed “How I Cope”:

How I Cope. I don’t really know if I am coping. I have read books and poems, and even joined several online discussion groups about Suicide. I don’t think anything can take away the hurt and disappointment of Greg taking his life, but maybe time will eventually ease the pain.

Unlike many makers of memorial sites, Greg Vassagossis’ sister does not write specifically about why she has made an online memorial. Perhaps it is another of the activities she describes, like reading books and poems, that she hopes might help her to cope with her bereavement. It may be that her involvement in online discussions groups has meant that the idea of making a memorial site has been recommended to her, or that visits to other memorial sites suggested online memorialisation to her as another way of trying to cope with her loss.

This site is stored at hometown.aol.com, and viewing the source code of the site suggests that at least some of the decorative features have been selected from a library provided by AOL (America Online), a straightforward example of the process of selection and combination that Manovich identifies in new media creation. The connectivity of the site is dominated by its location on hometown.aol.com. A changing advertisement is displayed at the top of the page, and at least three advertisements for AOL products also appear on the site, with two more possible advertisements presented as part of the maker of the site’s list of links. There is also a connection to a directory of AOL sites.

The inclusion of advertising on a memorial site can at first seem incongruous and even inappropriate. However, familiarity with offline memorialisation quickly reveals the extent to which death ritual is a commercialised activity in contemporary industrialised society.
Like the provision of internet services, the provision of funeral services is a business. Even a stroll around a nineteenth century cemetery in an Australian country town provides evidence of the commercial aspect of death ritual, as the careful observer can note the name of the stonemason carved into many headstones, just as in contemporary times a funeral notice in a newspaper is accompanied by the name and logo of the funeral director.

However, promotion and advertising of funeral services is generally very discreet, and what is at first shocking about the advertisements appearing on a memorial site (in this case they are likely to be a requirement of the web hosting service) is that, in contrast to the funeral industry, web hosts are not expected to attempt to efface their commercial aspect. While it is unlikely that a free web hosting service would modify the advertisements it displays on a site because the user of free web space has created an online memorial, it may be that a commercialised site created by the funeral industry would adapt the kind of discrete advertising practices the industry uses offline to the online context. In this case it is the incongruity of advertising appearing on an online memorial that reveals the extent to which the maker of a memorial site skilfully adapts offline death ritual to the online context.

Advertisements placed on sites in exchange for free web space stand in stark contrast to the carefully selected images and thoughtfully composed writing of the maker of this site.

**Jacqueline Paula Beck**

Lionel Beck's home page (n.d.) is an extensive collection of humour, opinion, poems and information about his interests. He has also made a memorial page for his daughter, Jacqueline Paula Beck. Lionel Beck uses a hierarchically structured navigational architecture to organise the pages within his site. A vertical strip on the left hand side of each page on Lionel Beck's site is used for navigation. Links to various pages are organised under headings: humour, interests, personal, poetry and politics and people. Each of these headings is further divided into subheadings. Personal, for example, contains the subheadings bereaved, friendship, two lives, viewpoint, websurfing, and
writing. Websurfing is further divided into links and site awards. The links that Lionel Beck includes on his site connect to sites that reflect his interests and the world view that quickly becomes evident to the visitor exploring his site. Amongst links to sites about the region that Lionel Beck lives in, his political views, his interests and outlook, and sites made by his friends, there are links to other online memorials, and bereavement information and support.

Many of the generic features of memorial sites that I have discussed can be found on this page: there is a photograph of Jacqueline Beck, dates of birth and death, the use of images of flowers, and a midi file that plays music. Lionel Beck has also included a piece of writing that describes his daughter's character, the day that he learned that his daughter had died in a car accident, and the impact of this loss and the way that it changed his life. The web site that Lionel Beck has made is not only a memorial to Jacqueline Beck, it also offers support to others who may be similarly bereaved. Scrolling text across the bottom of the browser reads “Believe me... you can survive the experience of outliving your child...”

I want to tell any of you out there who have recently experienced this kind of thing, that several years down the line, things do actually return to a kind of acceptable normality. Time does not heal — contrary to what people keep telling you. The pain is always there, but over time you do develop ways of living with it. Moreover, life sometimes has the surprising capacity to throw up certain kinds of compensation (for want of a better word) for your suffering... So, those of you who might now be in the depths of despair, take heart, and keep struggling along that difficult, shadowy, thorny path you are now on, because ahead of you lies the real possibility of sun rays through the trees, and a renewal of hope and purpose. You can become stronger. Your life will not be the same again, but it doesn’t have to be worse. You will gain new strengths.

For Lionel Beck, memorialisation is also an opportunity to offer help to others in his situation, and so to make bereavement meaningful by creating a memorial that will have
some social benefit. It is clear from his use of phrases such as "you out there" that he envisages an audience of strangers visiting his site.

Lionel Beck appears to be a skilled and active user of the web in pursuing and communicating his interests and sharing his experiences and beliefs. His memorial to his daughter conveys his sadness and anger, but it is also hopeful. While Lionel Beck may or may not have participated in bereavement counselling or an offline support group for bereaved parents, (and he does not mention any such activity), his site allows him to participate in mutual support in a way that is manageable and satisfying for him. He uses the internet to help him to understand his loss, and to enter into the process of reconstructing meaning and hope.

Makers of memorial sites such as Lionel Beck participate in various kinds of online networks. A bereaved person who is a member of, for example a mailing list, or a discussion group related to their interests and hobbies may inform participants of their bereavement and receive condolences and support from members of the group. The internet may be used by bereaved people who do not know each other offline but participate in online self help, support and advocacy networks for bereavement, or some other issue closely associated with the life or death of someone that they have lost. The culture of mutual support and self help online may be one of the contexts that have meant that a reflexive discussion of bereavement is so often a part of online memorialisation. The internet may also help to maintain communication amongst a specific community of mourners, sharing photographs and memories of the deceased, and their reflections on their loss.

Cassie Montemurro

Cassie Montemurro died from an illness when she was fourteen, and an online memorial
has been made by the Montemurro family (1998). The site begins with a note addressed to the community of mourners for Cassie Montemurro. It encourages, “all our friends and family who continue to visit our site...” to keep returning to the site in order to view updates. The title section of this site *Cassandra Beth Montemurro Memorial* is decorated with butterflies and flowers and the phrase, “Cassie: Forever in Our Hearts and Minds.” Beneath this title panel, a button links to information about the Candle Lighting Day organised by the Compassionate Friends, an organisation that supports people whose child or children have died. The site emphasises Cassie Montemurro as a unique and admirable person, and the importance of the contribution she made when she lived, with text on the front page of the site reading, “[h]er memory will be preserved with love and purpose by those who knew her best. Reflection on Cassie’s wonderful life will cause great and good actions in the world”. The memorial includes content that is common to many memorial sites, such as the story of how Cassie Montemurro became ill and died, and the affect that her death has had on her friends and family. The site includes a “mission statement” and a set of action goals that are intended to commemorate and celebrate Cassandra Montemurro and in some way to continue her “good life” through their own actions. The Montemurro family pledge to

honor Cassie’s life each day of our lives by remaining mindful of Cassie’s greatness and her humanity. Through community action, the Cassandra Beth Montemurro Memorial maintains truthfulness to Cassie’s enthusiasm for life and for learning, her respect for the individuality of others, and her ability to care and inspire.

Authors of memorial sites are often reflexive about their own practice, and explain why they have made the site, their plans for adding to and developing the site, the sources of the material that they have included and the significance of the writing or the images and sounds that they have chosen. For the Montemurro family, one of their responses to their loss is to continue what they see as the contribution Cassie Montemurro made to the world
around her when she was alive.

Cassie’s death will never make sense to me, but it is important for me to make sense of my life. The finest tribute I can pay Cassie, and that everyone who has ever known Cassie can pay her, is to cultivate his or her own intelligence and life-force: to live with passion, and with direction, and without delay, because life can be very short.

Like the site that Lionel Beck has made for his daughter, Jacqueline, the Montemurro family place an emphasis on using the practice of memorialisation for social benefit. The public accessibility of the web and the facility to maintain the site over time is of significance in this aim. This way of memorialising is especially prevalent where a death seems unnatural or unexpected – as when a young person dies, or when a death is sudden or violent – and is consistent with a contemporary secularised view of death, where meaning is often found in social benefit or the common good, as much as transcendent belief systems. This memorial to Cassie Montemurro appears to have been carefully planned, constructed and edited, and some aspects that are widely reported as part of bereavement have been excluded. This site does not express the despair, anger or sense of loss of meaning that the community of mourners for Cassie Montemurro are likely to have experienced. The Montemurro family’s philosophy of life and love for Cassie has led them to create a site that is more than an expression of loss. They pledge themselves and encourage others to preserve her legacy in their own lives. This site does more than memorialise: it is a plan, a promise, an insistence on continuity. The Montemurro family seem determined to look forward, to live full and meaningful lives, and to maintain their bonds with Cassie Montemurro.

David Schmoll

For some bereaved people who are very involved in online culture, or for people who have known someone who has died via internet communication, a web site may seem the
obvious choice for memorialisation, and the making of an online memorial may be
integrated into the everyday use of the internet for such a community of mourners. A
memorial site for David Schmoll has been made by Gaylene Gasson (1997). This site is
unlike any of the others I discuss in this chapter, in that David Schmoll and Gaylene
Gasson never met offline and their friendship was established and maintained entirely via
the internet. The memorial begins with David Schmoll’s name, birth and death dates, and a
photograph. The photograph Gasson has selected shows him sitting next to his
Commodore computer equipment. While it is possible that this may have been one of very
few, or even the only photograph of David Schmoll that Gaylene Gasson had access to, it
is also appropriate to the way in which she memorialises him. Her construction of this
memorial is intended to provide a place for the group of internet users who knew one
another through their interest in Commodore computers to become a community of
mourners for David Schmoll. Gaylene Gasson has written “[t]his page offers those who
knew him a way to say goodbye, and gives us a place to grieve”. This memorial site may
be the only opportunity this group had to participate in memorialising activity for David
Schmoll. In her description of the deceased Gasson employs a style of writing that is like
that of a eulogy, describing how she knew David Schmoll, some of her memories of him,
his character and the contribution he made to the lives of those around him.

Gaylene Gasson has included a memorial book on the site. The David Schmoll Memorial
Book opens with a technical note to explain that a guestbook cgi is, in this case, not being
used, and that the maker of the site is doing this in order to “make sure that the comments
added to the book are related to David, and not used for other purposes”. Contributions
for the memorial book have been sent to Gaylene Gasson and she has presented them on
the web. The contributions include memories of David, and many focus on his
contribution as a programmer software, and his provision of advice to other Commodore
users. From Gasson’s account, and from the contributions to the guestbook, it can be
inferred that David Schmoll could be a difficult person in life, and died in confronting circumstances. While Gaylene Gasson has not included a description of the circumstances of David Schmoll’s death, it is clear that he committed suicide. It is also evident that some of those who knew the deceased both online and offline at times experienced difficulties in their interactions with him. One contributor to the memorial has written:

David was a close friend, though we never met face-to-face. As a beta tester e-mail. [sic] Sometimes he agreed with my suggestions for his EZ-Loader, we often discussed bugs and “features” of his program for making the program better, but we often disagreed as well. I will greatly miss David and some of the lively discussions we had. I feel as if I have lost a true friend (Heberer in Gasson 1997).

Several memorial book contributions mention email correspondence that has taken place between David Schmoll and the contributor. The value of David’s work and advice, as well as the conflict that often arose in communicating with him, are common themes. As Gaylene Gasson writes, “David wasn’t perfect. He was often very opinionated about the way he felt things should be, and often expected more of people, computers, and programs than they could give”. The maker of the site goes on to tell how she knew David Schmoll, and recounts some of her memories of him. She makes particular note of the email correspondence that they had engaged in during difficult periods in each of their lives.

Gaylene Gasson has also written about David Schmoll’s role as his parents’ carer, and the problems he faced in adjusting to the loss of that role after they died.

Getting online and participating in conversations about the Commodore computer, and later using Email, allowed him a break from his day, and gave him access to the world outside the family home.

Gasson has included links to resource material for users of Commodore computers, a link to the Alzheimer Association’s web site (David Schmoll’s parents both died from this disease) and links to other sources of information on Alzheimer’s disease and on being a carer. These links are a reminder of the importance of support networks for carers and
provide a point of reference to information and support for visitors to the site who may face similar difficulties. Gaylene Gasson also suggests that mourners make a donation to the Alzheimers Association, a suggestion that is similar to the way in which, offline, it is common for bereaved relatives to request in a death or funeral notice that donations be made to a charity in lieu of gifts of flowers. This is another example of the adaptation of an offline practice to online memorial.

The site demonstrates Gasson’s familiarity with conventions of personal web pages, as is evident from the clear and simple layout of the page, the way in which she has organised links, and her placement of this memorial site in the context of her various online projects. On either side of the photograph of David Schmoll, Gasson has placed a graphic image of a rose. The symmetrical arrangement of the rose images is consistent with the aesthetic of offline memorial texts, and this feature recontextualises an everyday snapshot into a memorial image. The convention of using graphic images to frame and decorate photographs included on vernacular web sites and the selection of an image associated with death ritual through offline practices such as the placement of flowers on the coffin and at the graveside or memorial is an example of the ways in which the practices of death ritual and online culture are combined to produce the characteristic features of an online memorial.

Maria Pia Gratton

The online memorial to Maria Pia Gratton was made by her husband Enrico Gratton. This site, *In Loving Memory of Pia* (n.d.) focuses on remembering Pia Gratton as a beautiful, warm and loving woman, and Enrico Gratton’s belief that his wife is in some ways still present for him and that they will be together again. Some of the content of the site is written in Italian. Pia and Enrico Gratton migrated from Italy to America and the site reflects ties to relatives living in their first country as well as their new life in the United
States.

As is conventional, visitors to this site see first a photograph of Pia Gratton, with the title *In Loving Memory of Pia*. Scrolling down reveals a list of links, many of which are marked by more photographs of Pia Gratton. Other pages include information about a scholarship endowed in Pia Gratton’s memory, a short biography, memories shared by friends and family, a transcript of the eulogy given at her funeral, and poems written by those who knew her. As is also the case with the memorial site made to commemorate Michael Lewis that I will discuss later in this chapter, the content of the site is multi vocal, presenting a picture of Pia Gratton as she was known by many different people and in different contexts. While the overall design of the site is unified, various contributions to the site have been made by Pia Gratton’s husband, her children, other family members, friends and co-workers. *In Loving Memory of Pia* is an example of the way that material can be added to a site over time, as Enrico Gratton’s account of the scattering of Pia Gratton’s ashes, or ‘One Year On’, the page that contains more contributions by Pia Gratton’s friends and family, and a photograph of this community of mourners meeting a year after her death. Like many personal, hobbyist and corporate web pages, the memorial made for Pia Gratton acts as a a kind of expanding file of related material, its encyclopaedic structure holds the assemblage of memories, stories, photographs, and even information about the scholarship that Enrico Gratton has endowed in his wife’s name. While some forms of offline memorial are often maintained over time by bereaved family and friends (the most common example of this being the cleaning, plantings or placing of flowers and other care of a gravestone or memorial plaque), the memorial object itself is usually intended to at least appear to be permanent. Online memorials, however, can be redesigned, added to, and updated as frequently as their makers wish.

One important aspect of the site is a reflection on violence written by Enrico Gratton as a
response to the way that Pia Gratton died (she was murdered) and the media coverage of her death. This is a piece written by her husband that addresses both violence in society and the representation of violence in the news media. Enrico Gratton discusses the impact media coverage of his wife’s death had on those mourning for a warm and vibrant woman who died in violent circumstances. Enrico Gratton discusses the way that the reporting of the murder focused on sensationalising descriptions of the way in which she died.

According to Enrico Gratton, when a person was charged with this crime, reports in the media purporting to explain the murderer’s actions amounted to fabrication, but it was the way in which the crime was reported that was most offensive to the community of mourners:

From the moment that Pia Gratton was murdered on the night of October 31st, 1995, there have been an endless barrage of media reports – both locally and internationally. What shocked us about these reports was the repeated mentions of the grim details of Pia’s last moments rather than focusing on the tragedy of losing her.

In Loving Memory of Pia gives very little information about the circumstances of her death, and after reading Enrico Gratton’s statement, I conclude that a deliberate choice has been made to focus on Maria Pia Gratton as a person, with as little attention as possible being given to the way she died and the person responsible for her death. This site demonstrates ways in which online memorialisation can allow the inclusion of a range of different ways of responding to a loss. The online memorial that Enrico Gratton has made serves not only as a site to gather together the various memories and tributes created by her husband and children, friends, family and co-workers, but also as a public way of counteracting the way she was represented in media reports of her death. The community of mourners for Pia Gratton have chosen to remember “the beautiful woman, the caring mother, the loving wife, the dependable co-worker, the intimate friend, the devoted student, the patient teacher, and the daring traveller”, as Enrico Gratton describes her in the
transcript of the eulogy he gave at her funeral, and this web site is a powerful counter to the picture of her as the victim of a sensationalised killing that was represented in the news media.

P.J. Buth

*For the Love of PJ* (n.d.) is the title of a memorial site that commemorates the infant P.J. Buth. The site has been made by his mother, Darlene Buth, with assistance from other women whose contributions are acknowledged on the *PJ's Poems* page. Beneath the title at the top of the front page of the site is a photograph of P.J. Buth, placed so that he appears to be floating on a cloud with a cherub and a Disney illustration of a Dalmatian puppy. The background colour for the site is blue, perhaps depicting the sky, but also the pale blue colour used to celebrate the birth of a baby boy. This image is repeated down the left hand side of the front page of the site. A midi file plays Alabama's *Angels Among Us.*

As I have said, decorative images, such as angels and cherubs, are frequently used on memorial sites. In addition to these conventional pictorial decorations, the image of a Dalmatian puppy used on this site is an image that the maker of the site, Darlene Buth, particularly associates with her son. She refers to cot sheets decorated with Dalmatians, and recalls how often she “tucked him into his crib with all his Dalmatian friends...” A Dalmatian outfit was also selected by Darlene and her husband for their baby’s burial.

Beneath the first image of P.J. Buth is the story of his life and death, as told by his mother Darlene Buth. It is illustrated with photographs and decorative graphic images. Telling the story of a person’s life, and especially the way that they died, is often an important part of memorial sites. Jean Simons, one of the Co-ordinators of the the Child Death Helpline at the Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, discusses the importance of telling the story of a loss, often repeatedly, and notes that “[m]any parents have written, overtly as a tribute to their child, of their own experience...” (2001, p 159). While I would respond critically
to the implication in this statement that parents may have a ‘covert’ purpose for this writing that they cannot access or identify, nevertheless as Jean Simons writes, it is clear that “[p]resent calls to the Helpline indicate how important it is to parents to remember and talk about a child however long ago he or she died...” whatever the reasons for this may be (2001, p 160). Australian SIDS and neo natal death support groups (SIDS Western Australia, n.d) also state that telling the story of their child, or the story of their loss, can be very important to bereaved parents. Darlene Buth has told the story of her son, beginning with his birth, accompanied by a photograph decorated with clip art balloons and the words ‘It’s A Boy!’ She goes on to describe some of the difficulties she and her family faced after her P.J. Buth’s birth:

We all adjusted to the routine of having a new baby in the house. It wasn’t easy to do with a very active two year old running around, but somehow we managed. Before we knew it our little boy was 6 weeks old, and it was getting time for mommy to return to work... I loved the time off, but I knew there was no way we could pay our bills unless I returned to work.

Darlene Buth may lay an emphasis on her return to work because, as she goes on to relate, she was at work when she first heard that there was “a family emergency”. She describes her return home to discover that her child was on the way to hospital, and how she received the news of her child’s death. Her narrative goes on to include a description of funeral preparations, accompanied by a photograph of P.J. Buth in his coffin, dressed in the Dalmatian outfit that his parents selected, and with the coffin arranged so as to look like a bassinet. A photograph of P.J. Buth’s headstone, once again on the Dalmatian theme, is also included. The story of P.J. Buth’s life, and his death, concludes with the birth of another child to the Buth family, and a photograph of Darlene Buth with her surviving children ends this section of the site:

It was a very special day, July the 23, 1997. I gave birth to a bouncy baby girl... I went in the hospital on the 21st where they started to induce me. I was in the hospital
for 2 days with nothing happening... They were going to send me home, when all of a sudden I went into labor. Our precious PJ gave us his little sister on his 2nd birthday. Someone he will never get to hold...

Darlene Buth’s skilfully constructed narrative concludes with a sense of resolution through the gift of the new baby born on PJ’s birthday, mixed with the sadness she still feels for the Buth family’s loss and as part of her own experience of bereavement.

The photograph of P.J. Buth laid out in his coffin is one of the few post-mortem photographs that I have seen included in an online memorial, and all such photographs that I have observed have appeared on sites memorialising infants, and especially stillborn babies or babies who have lived only hours or days. Both the importance of being able to remember and share what their child looked like, and the importance of making and preserving photographic documentation of children in parenting in industrialised societies are two possible explanations for why the taking of post mortem photographs may be more usual in the case of the death of an infant. It is difficult to assess the extent of post mortem photography as a contemporary form of remembrance or to judge to what extent it is a continuation of the nineteenth century practice, or whether it occurs occasionally as a form of private remembrance without connection to the work of photographers in the past.

Of course, bereaved people in contemporary industrialised societies will usually have access to photographs of the deceased person taken when they were alive, whereas in the past the post mortem photograph may have been the only photograph of the deceased, or one of a very few ever taken.

Below Darlene Buth’s narrative of P.J. Buth’s life are a series of links: PJ’s Poems Page, PJ’s Links Page, PJ’s Awards Pages, PJ’s Webrings. Clicking on one of the Awards pages and scrolling down reveals a series of images, the awards, which are usually a graphic with some text and a border, making frequent use of images of angels and
cherubs, flowers or other images that are part of the visual language of many memorial sites. Some of these awards are made by people who have created their own sites memorialising a family member, especially a child, who has died, and would like to demonstrate their approval of the site that Darlene Buth has made for her child. Each is accompanied by a comment from Darlene Buth, sometimes just her thanks, and often including a link to the site of the person who has created the award. The practice of creating and bestowing awards is evidence of the kinds of networks of social relationships that occur online, some of which may be as minimal as the provision of a link to another site, and some of which may be the public manifestation of exchanges of emails or participation in discussion groups, or relationships that occur through a combination of online and offline communication. PJ’s Poems Page also includes contributions by people other than Darlene Buth, and demonstrates the way that the content of a web site can be part of a social relationship that occurs online. Darlene Buth acknowledges the help that she received in constructing the site and she has made links to other sites that commemorate deceased infants and children. In addition to this acknowledgement, the graphic style – the images and the way that they are laid out on the screen – that has been used in For the Love of PJ is recognisable as being similar to other memorial sites made for infants and children, and it is linked to other such sites, especially through hyperlinks in the form of awards. Part of the embodiment of this network is in the commendation of one another’s sites with awards, and the skill sharing that results in the making of these sites. I interpret these stylistic similarities, Darlene Buth’s acknowledgements, and the hypertextual awards linking to other memorial sites as evidence for the development of a network of bereaved parents who are communicating with one another via the internet, whether this is limited to an occasional email or whether it occurs via newsgroups, mailing lists, chat or in person communication. The existence of online social and support networks is a well established aspect of online culture that can be seen here to be adapted to the experience of bereavement and practice of online memorialisation.
Michael Lewis

A site memorialising Michael Lewis has been made by his mother, Roberta Bagshaw (2000). Like Greg Vassagossis and David Schmoll, Michael Lewis committed suicide, and an important part of the content of this site discusses this aspect of his death. Again, the front page of the site is headed with a photograph of Michael Lewis, standing with his bicycle and his dog, and the text above the photograph reads, “In Loving Memory/Michael G. Lewis/1st Jan. 67 – 6th Nov. 97.” Roberta Bagshaw opens the written content of the site with a paragraph that summarises who Michael Lewis was, how he died, and her reasons for constructing a web site:

These pages are dedicated to the memory of my son Michael Graeme Lewis who died on or about 6th November 1997. Michael, who was an artist, committed suicide after suffering for many years with severe ongoing depression, despite persistently seeking medical help and treatment. I would like to share some of the Eulogies which were read at his funeral service by family and friends. But firstly I would like to tell you briefly some of the events which led up to that terrible sad day.

Roberta Bagshaw goes on to describe the circumstances of her son’s death, his long struggle with depression, the support that he received during his life from family and friends, and the importance of his love of nature and his work as an artist. From the last sentence in the paragraph quoted above, it appears that the maker of the site expects that her writing will at times be read by visitors to the site who do not already know this story, perhaps friends or family who have not been given this information personally by Roberta Bagshaw, perhaps strangers.

While the site remembers his unique character, his love of nature and the contribution he made through his relationships and art making, it also describes the struggle and suffering that was part of his life. Roberta Bagshaw has written an account of Michael Lewis’ death that discusses his life and the way in which he died, and making this accessible on the
world wide web means that any interested person has access to this information. In this way, Roberta Bagshaw can explain her responses to what has happened and, as is often important in the case of a death by suicide, discuss her understanding of the reasons why it happened, without having to experience the kind of avoidance or embarrassment by family, friends and acquaintances that many bereaved people face after someone has died. Roberta Bagshaw has also included a copy of ‘Michael’s Message to His Friends’, the letter that was found with his body. It is noted that this letter was read at Michael Lewis’ funeral by his stepfather Peter Bagshaw, and the transcript of Peter Bagshaw’s introductory words make it clear why this letter was read, and why it has been included on this site.

To those of us who feel that, somehow, we must be to blame for the sad early death of this sensitive man, who was such a wonderfully gifted artist, we can take solace from Michael’s letter, which he wrote to all of us, and which tells us that, for him, there was no other way of gaining relief, and Michael specifically expresses his thanks for the help that everyone gave him and which kept him going all those years.

The content of the site does not focus on Michael Lewis’ struggle with depression and his suicide to the exclusion of other aspects of his life. Contributions written by friends and family tend to focus on happy memories, his love of nature, his work as an artist and his unique character. Images of his artwork are also included, and graphic images of a paintbrush and paint used on the site reinforce his identity as an artist. Pictures of the Australian bush, including a picture of Uluru, and trees, fruit, flowers and butterflies have also been used for this memorial. Baby photographs and photographs of Michael Lewis as a child at home with his parents are displayed on the site. These images document his growing up, but also, as Roberta Bagshaw has written, provide an opportunity to remember him as he was before he was so affected by depression. Much of this memorial is devoted to the good qualities that friends and family saw in Michael Lewis, and the importance of these people in his life. His death is described as a release from suffering by a number of
As is the case with many memorial sites, there are links to sites offering information and support related to the way in which death occurred. Roberta Bagshaw has included links to sites with information, help and support for people affected by depression and suicide, such as the SOLOS (Survivors of Loved Ones' Suicide) site, Mental Health Net, Suicide Survivors Rights, and Alt.Support.Grief.Suicide. She has also created a link to another site made by her friend, Jeri Landon, to memorialise Jeri Landon's daughter, an example of the way in which the maintenance of social relationships can be associated with online memorialisation.

Roberta Bagshaw has taken care to create a site that acknowledges and includes her son's friends as well as his immediate family, and caters to the diverse community of mourners whose point of connection is that they have known Michael Lewis. Eulogies written by his friends are incorporated into the site, as are poems, a song lyric, and quotations that reflect the themes of this online memorial. This site contains a thorough account of the way in which the community of mourners for Michael Lewis, and especially his mother, Roberta Bagshaw, have come to think about his death. The way in which Roberta Bagshaw writes about her son's friends, and her inclusion of contributions they have made to the site suggests that the community of mourners for Michael Lewis have negotiated a shared experience of bereavement that is represented in this memorial. Michael Lewis' memorial looks at the good and valuable things in his life, but also attempts to reconcile his bereaved family and friends to the illness he suffered from and the way he died. The memorial site for Michael Lewis incorporates a page that documents the simple ceremony that was devised for the scattering of his cremains. Roberta Bagshaw again provides written commentary.
Just over two and a half years after my son's death, we drove down to Albany and after placing a small bouquet of wildflowers on top of the rock I scattered Michael’s ashes to the winds, sky, ocean and earth... There was a certain contentment in knowing that it was a place he would have loved... its stark beauty, its untamed wilderness, and its complete sense of liberty.  

The return of Michael Lewis’ cremains to “sky, ocean and earth” is consistent with the theme of a love of nature that has been emphasised in the story of how Michael Lewis died (choosing a beautiful but isolated place in the bush), and how his family and friends remember him. This emphasis, and the view of death as a return to nature, provide a transcendent meaning for his life and death as they are represented in this site. 

I have described the general features of the online memorial genre, and discussed some examples of the way that these features are used in eight exemplary memorial sites. Memorial sites use customary and conventional forms from both offline memorialisation and online culture. These can be identified in the design of sites, the photographs, graphic images, sounds and writing that are selected and combined, the way that these sites are connected to other texts on the web, and the interactive features that the makers of memorial sites have employed. Visiting online memorial sites is a reminder of both the exceptional and everyday aspects of death. The sheer number of sites acts as a kind of memento mori that is intensified by the variety in the circumstances of each person’s life and death. During my exploration of online memorials I have often felt sadness, but also a frequent prompt to ‘remember my death’ in a way that heightens my love of life. While each of the deaths memorialised online has been a terrible loss for the community of mourners, these sites also show that the event of a death and the experience of bereavement are lived in the capillary, commonplace, everyday minutiae of life. 

An online memorial may be used by the maker of a site as a meditative activity, or in some way be addressed to the deceased person themselves, but the creator of the site is usually
addressing both the community of mourners and the wider public. The maker of a memorial site is restricted only by the need to ensure that the site they are making will be legible, acceptable and meaningful to their intended audience, and by the technical limitations of the world wide web and the skills and resources to which they have access. Makers of memorials sites select, assemble and combine elements from death ritual and online culture to create memorial sites in the way that a mourner making a panel for the AIDS memorial quilt assembles materials and imagery, or bereaved family and friends gather together significant images and objects to create a makeshift memorial. This technique of assemblage produces an intertextual construction of meaning, often combined with reflexive narrative. It is the intertextual, adaptive production of the online memorial that can create moments of incongruity or raw and sometimes shocking ways of commemorating the dead. Like many makers of vernacular sites, those who create online memorials value the integrity and veracity of the text they are creating over conventionalised principles of design. The emphasis is on meaning making through narrative, direct exposition, documentary and other content referring to the life and character of the person who is commemorated, and the use of a repertoire of images and symbols associated with death ritual from a variety of cultural sources.
Conclusion

We remember those who have died everyday. As we move through the landscape, we inhabit places marked by memorial highways, bridges, hospitals, swimming pools, sports grounds, libraries, clock towers, drinking fountains, park benches and trees. We may memorialise at the site where death occurred, the location of remains, and the settings of our private memories. We preserve photographs and objects that we associate with the dead and we mark both public and personal commemorative days. Memorial practice is so much a part of our own lives, our communities, nations and societies that it may frequently go unnoticed. The practice of memorialisation is not restricted to cemeteries and crematorium grounds or the calendar of national days of remembrance. It is part of our everyday landscape and our private observances, and online memorialisation has become another aspect of the everyday presence of the dead.

When I recall the expectations that I had when I embarked on this case study, I find that my conclusions now are consistent with Woolgar's (2002) observation that research outcomes in cyberculture studies are often counter-intuitive. I had expected the movement of memorialisation online to represent a break in the practice of death ritual, and that the internet would offer bereaved people a space in which to grieve in new, perhaps even in better, ways. As I began to research death ritual, it became clear that my study would not be so straightforward. I initially subscribed to the view of society as death denying, but as I began to consider the work that I have discussed in chapter one critiquing this position, and to read ethnographic and first person accounts of contemporary death ritual, as well as becoming more aware of the death ritual that was practised all around me in everyday life, my position changed. As I have argued in this thesis, a range of institutions and practices produce how we die and how we experience bereavement. The individual circumstances of a death can influence how a person understands death and bereavement, but these
experiences are also produced through social and institutional practices. Australian death ritual after colonisation was also influenced by both what was happening in Europe – the continuing process of secularisation, the funeral reform movement, an increased concern with public health – but also by the historical conditions of migration and colonisation. In contemporary times, life extending medical care has paradoxically meant that it is not unusual to know someone who is dying, while the hospice movement, campaigns to legalise euthanasia, the natural death movement, and mass mourning events have meant that death and bereavement are currently common topics for both public debate and private discussion. Even the confronting business of managing the corporeal remains of the deceased has been the subject of recent public attention, with events like the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, and the bombing of nightclubs in Bali prompting discussion of the pragmatic procedures for recovering, storing, identifying and preserving and transporting bodies and the significance of the corpse for mourners. Ways of understanding bereavement also change from, for example, an emphasis on mourning as a process concerned with the dead person moving from life to afterlife, to a pathologised model of grief as a condition or process from which the bereaved person should recover, to bereavement as an ongoing part of the life of survivors. There is a diversity of ways of responding to a death available to the bereaved person in contemporary times, ranging from mandatory practices to conventionalised and customary activity, to personal and idiosyncratic ways of mourning.

Amongst the variety in the kind of secularised, industrialised and individualised death ritual that I have described, memorialisation continues to be a prevalent and significant form of mourning. Memorialisation is of particular importance in the context of changing models of bereavement, where the relationship between a bereaved person and someone who has died may continue over the lifetime of survivors, and while some forms of memorialisation must be carried out within certain legislated or otherwise controlled
requirements (the procedures of autopsy, or guidelines for the material and dimensions of a memorial in cemetery or crematorium grounds, for example) many aspects of mourning activity, such as the planning of a funeral or memorial service, are regulated only by custom, what is thought to be proper, and what is affordable and convenient. A memorial can represent the unique person that the community of mourners has lost, and communicate this loss to the wider world. The process of making and maintaining a memorial can help to restore a sense of control and to reconstruct meaning from the sometimes shattering experience of bereavement, and can be an opportunity to express the continuing bonds that a bereaved person may have with the person who has died. Memorialisation is a way of responding to death in which people with different beliefs can participate and can allow the bereaved to connect their loss with transcendent beliefs or larger meanings.

The diverse forms of contemporary memorialisation, some of which I have discussed, are often continuations of older forms of death ritual adapted to social and cultural changes. Just as the memorial service uses some of the structure and elements of the funeral service, and the funeral service often includes memorialising activity, so the roadside shrine can be associated with both past use of makeshift shrines and the increasing popularity of the makeshift shrine in both mass mourning and private remembrance, and the AIDS Memorial Quilt can be seen as having been produced out of interpretations of the history of quilting, and strategies used to create other forms of memorial used to commemorate multiple deaths such as war memorials. Establishing that memorialisation is in itself a changing social practice in the offline context leads to a comparison with how memorialisation is practised online, specifically on the world wide web.

The benefits of online memorialisation are consistent with those that bereaved people find in offline memorialising activity, and while these sites can be compared with the offline
forms of memorialisation that I have discussed, they are not simply a kind of internet version of an obituary or a gravestone, or virtual version of what happens offline. An online memorial site may allow bereaved people to include material that has not been included in other forms of death ritual. The story of loss can be told in the creator of the site’s own words and for their own purposes, and an online memorial can be an opportunity to reflect on and interpret this story. Such a site can be a multivocal space incorporating contributions from a number of different mourners, and an online memorial can be particularly suited to connecting a community of mourners over time and in different geographical locations. It can also provide a point of reference to bereavement information and support for mourners. However, these benefits are not simply produced as a result of the technical possibilities of the internet, but are consistent with social changes of which computer mediated communication is a part.

Having read so many accounts like those I have discussed in chapter three, where the internet is regarded as a transformative technology, I began by thinking of technoscience and social change in terms of a causal relationship, and set out to investigate the ways in which the internet had changed memorialisation. Continuing research into cyberculture studies and particularly into the philosophy of technology and social studies of technoscience exposed the imperative to reconsider my initial expectations. To some extent, and however problematically, cyberculture studies has refocused theory on social and technological change. I have found the view of society and technology as separate spheres, with either one occurring prior to the other, producing, or even shaping the other to be of limited use. To place the practice of memorialisation and the online context in a causal or originary correlation limits a discussion of their relationship to a determinist framework. In chapter three I have discussed the work of those like Strum and Latour (1999), who have developed ways of speaking about society and material culture, and how for some, like Haraway (2000a, 2000b, 2002), the construction and perpetuation of a
division between the organic and the material/technoscientific is no longer meaningful.

However, as I have emphasised, I do not argue that the cyborg self or cyberspace transcends the biological, but rather regard the interactions and indivisibilities amongst the organic, technoscientific and social as constantly negotiated.

I have investigated the relationship between society and technology by researching how – or whether – a specific social practice (namely memorialisation) occurs online as compared with offline. In doing this I have to some extent reinscribed the separation of online and offline culture. I would like to emphasise that it is not my intention to make this contingent separation between online and offline memorialisation along the lines of the mechanical and the organic, the technical and the social, nature and culture. An investigation into the forms of offline memorialisation discussed in chapter two shows that they are made using an enormous variety of media, materials and processes. Those memorials I have framed in this thesis as online are made by digital material, software and programming, and are displayed on the world wide web, but I regard what I have framed in this thesis as offline memorialisation as being as much a product of technoscientific culture, corporeality and language, a society instantiated in material-semiotic production and processes, as an online text. The difference between these two categories is both created and upset in this thesis. As I have argued, the period in which the online/offline distinction can be taken for granted is passing, and I have begun to dismantle this separation in my own approach to the study of online memorials by considering it reflexively and through describing the similarities, differences, continuities and adaptations in memorialisation online and off. I have used the terms online and offline as a step towards the articulation of alternative ways of speaking about social relationships and the material-semiotic. My strategic, productive and contingent positioning of online and offline space as separate has paradoxically made possible an emphasis on the continuity and indivisibility across what are often represented as distinct spaces.
I have discussed the precedents for my use of a genre analysis of texts on the web, and the way in which such an approach can facilitate a formalist analysis of texts, and provides a means of discussing the methods of selection and combination used to create new media texts. The sites that I have visited, including those that I have discussed in chapter four show the skill and care that bereaved people use when creating online memorials, and their familiarity with the repertoire of both death ritual and online culture. Memorial sites share features that allow me to treat them as a genre, and this has allowed me to discuss similarities and differences rather than making potentially arbitrary comparisons between individual examples of individual memorials on and offline. The genre has developed its own conventions, intertextual references, and textual features. It appears to be created and used alongside other forms of memorialisation rather than as a replacement for offline activity.

To study an online practice without researching its offline context risks a limiting interpretation of that practice referring solely to the technological. My investigation of both death ritual and cyberculture studies has meant that I have not relied upon assumption and broad hypothesis in reading these sites, focusing instead on the way in which the text is produced through the conventions of online communication and mourning practice. I have treated online memorials as thoughtfully and carefully made texts that demonstrate the ways in which the makers of these sites have been able to draw upon a repertoire of mourning activity in which they have participated or observed, adapting offline death ritual to the online context. Makers of these sites have made selections from death ritual that they have known, participated in or observed, and used the conventions of computer mediated communication to adapt them to the online context. My emphasis has been on the connections between online and offline memorialisation, and past and contemporary mourning practice. My analysis of specific examples of online memorials shows the way
in which the makers of online memorials have selected images, symbols, language, and aesthetics from offline death ritual and textual strategies, other genres, forms, and practices of online culture, adapting and combining them to produce this emergent form of memorialisation. Makers of memorial sites have selected, adapted and combined material from both offline death ritual and other online genres and practices to produce this emergent form. While I do not support the view that online culture has been a site for a definite break, a paradigm shift or a revolutionary difference in memorialisation, I would say there are significant, if subtle, changes to be observed in the movement of memorialisation online.

Instead of looking for a cause, a seed, an embryo, a bang that can take on the myth of origin, this approach observes change as a process. The adaptive change that I have observed in online memorials offers a strategy for interpreting social and technoscientific development that leaves aside causality and origin in favour of an interest in material semiotic production and process: a study of online memorials in the broader context of death ritual provides an exemplary instance of the mutual constitution of society and technology. Communicative practices can change, and I have shown that the practice of death ritual changes. However, to remain legible, change must be gradual. To be meaningful, changing communicative practice must be adaptive, and retain some continuity alongside the differences. These changes may also influence how mourning is practised offline, and the ongoing development of death ritual as it occurs online and off will doubtless provide a rich field for further research.

Online memorials are a genre of texts that is part of a social practice. In the process of selection and combination, the adaptation of images, language and forms from both offline death ritual and online culture, there are opportunities for agency on the part of the makers of these sites. The process of adaptation involves small, detailed alterations in the way in
which memorialising activity is carried out, often accompanied by reflexive discussion about the processes and rationales used in the production of a site. I have shown the ways in which the makers of online memorial, and contributors and visitors to these sites, have demonstrated their acuity in the practice of death ritual and in the online cultural context in the design, use of media, connectivity and interactivity of the sites they have created. The authors of these web sites may practice memorialisation in the language of online culture, with its personal and informal mode of communication, expectation of mutual support and acceptance of personal revelation, and importance of hobbyist, vernacular cultural production. Many makers of memorial sites do not always appear to have high levels of production skills, but whether, like the maker of the memorial to Greg Vassagossis, they draw on a library of decorative objects that can be used on their site or, like Enrico Gratton, they use their own skills to exhibit material contributed by friends and family alongside their own creations or, like Darlene Buth, they access the skills of other people they communicate with online to assist them in the construction of their site, the authors of these sites can usually be said to be adept in the process of selection and combination that Manovich has identified as one of the underlying paradigms of new media texts.

I have emphasised that I have not observed an hiatus in death ritual through the take up of online memorialisation and the makers of memorial sites are not part of a revolutionary break in the practice of death ritual. However, in the context of the everyday experience of bereavement and the practice of death ritual, the emergence of this online form does offer evidence of continuing change. The changes that the authors of memorial sites make are often very small. In making an online memorial for his daughter, Lionel Beck is able to make contact with and offer support and practical assistance to other bereaved parents. Roberta Bagshaw is able to explain and make publicly available the way that she has come to understand the death of her son, and Gaylene Gasson is able to remember the valuable contribution that David Schmoll made to her life and to a specific online group. Death
ritual is not static, and technology does not hold within itself the inherent causes of social change. Change is gradual, and rather than being found in the effects of a technology, it can be observed in the skilled, knowledgeable and thoughtful activity of bereaved people adapting techniques and textual elements in the development of a genre of texts that depart from older practices, and yet remain legible and meaningful because of their generic interaction with older forms of practice. Online memorialisation is an example of the way that people can be skilled, knowledgeable and strategic actors in the process of technoscientific and social change, and participate in the complex ongoing negotiations amongst the biological, technoscientific and social.

In a recent visit to the Northern Suburbs Crematorium in North Ryde, NSW, I observed the way in which the crematorium grounds were laid out so as to provide a number of different kinds of environments for memorialisation. Walls and sculptural forms held small brass plaques that preserved the name, dates of birth and death, and epitaphs. Gardens of bush rocks and native Australian flora provided an alternative setting for memorial plaques and the interment of cremains. Surrounding the crematorium itself was a garden planted out with exotic species: trees, shrubs and especially roses. These different forms and landscapes where a graphic illustration of the diversity of death ritual even within the practice of memorialisation marking the location of remains. Walking amongst these varied memorial spaces I observed one particular memorial plaque alongside which, like many others, a fresh bouquet of flowers had been placed. Attached to the flowers was a bookmark sized laminated card. On this card was recorded the name, and dates of birth and death of the deceased person, with an oval shaped photographic portrait and some personal words of dedication, with all these elements laid out symmetrically on a pale lavender background. This card reminded me of nothing so much as an online memorial, and may well have been made on a home computer. I do not offer this isolated observation as evidence of the impact of online memorialisation on offline practice. Rather I see it as
an indication of the way in which the emergent genre of online memorialisation, produced through the intertextual combination of forms of the repertoire of death ritual and computer mediated communication exemplifies the ways in which the separation between online and offline activity is becoming less relevant. The concerns of the makers of memorial sites are consistent with what can be observed in much offline memorialising activity. Whereas I began my research by hypothesising that online memorialisation has offered an opportunity for bereaved people to express an authentic and therapeutically beneficial version of their grief, my analysis of the ways in which online memorials are like and unlike offline death ritual, and my investigation of theories of technology and social change, has resulted in a changed understanding of mourning, an unpacking of the boundaries between online and offline culture, and a view of technoscientific and social change as mutually constitutive.
Memorial sites


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Appendix

Details from online memorials

These images are details from the pages of the online memorials that I have discussed. I have chosen to include only these small details for two reasons. The first is that for ethical reasons, with the exception of the detail from the memorial to Jon Postel (who could be described as having been a public person), I have chosen not to include any photographic images of those commemorated by these sites. While the texts I have discussed are publicly available, it seems to me that to reproduce the photographic likeness of the deceased people commemorated in these sites is too intimate an act – perhaps the words of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Elizabeth Barrett have invested photographs with additional import for me. My second reason for including only details from the pages of these sites is that I would like to emphasise that any print representation of a web site is only a detail, a fragment extracted from the complete hypertextual version. While I cannot hope to represent the richness and variety of the memorial sites I have encountered, I have included these fragments as an immediate illustration of some of the features the makers of these sites have used.

I. detail from In Memoriam: Dr. Jon Postel
http://www.domainhandbook.com/postel.html
This detail shows the name, dates of birth and death, and photograph routinely included in memorial sites.
2. detail from Memorial for Greg Vassagossis
http://hometown.aol.com/vassagossis/myhomepage/memorial.html
Above the title section on this site the AOL Hometown brand and an advertisement can be observed.

3. detail from David Schmoll memorial page
http://cbm.videocam.net.au/dschmoll.php
The maker of this memorial site has framed a snapshot with images of roses.
This memorial page is part of a large and varied personal interest site.

http://maxpages.com/lionelbeck/jackie

In this memorial site, scrolling text in the browser window frame has been used.
6. detail from *Memorial for Cassandra Beth Montemurro*
http://www.cassie-memorial.org
This memorial site incorporates a decorative design of flowers and butterflies.

7. detail from *For the love of PJ*
http://members.aol.com/PAWS101/PJspage.html
Darlene Buth has used repeated images of cherubs and Dalmatians to illustrate links to others pages.
For The Love of PJ

8. detail from *For the love of PJ*
   http://members.aol.com/PAWS101/PJspage.html
   An example of one of the many awards made to this site.

9. detail from *Memorial for Michael Lewis*
   An animation of a dove has been used on this site.

10. detail from *Memorial for Michael Lewis*
    A graphic image of a candle has been used to head the poem that has been included on this site.