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COM75-964-01

2/1/24

### The Multiple Languages Of Loss: A Comparative Analysis of Memorialization Media

Just as the sunrise graces the timeline of our mortality, there must always be a final sunset to put that same light of livelihood to rest. As we all know, with a loss of life, the world moves on, the Sun continues to cycle, and we grieve through it all. It is in this grief and the expression of grief is where we find interesting cultural ways of memorialization. In our short lives, remembering and immortalizing someone who is no longer with us becomes a way in which we keep their memory alive. Memorialization takes shape in many different variations, shapes and forms, some being long standing, some being temporary. Some forms are accidental, whereas some are planned and thought out. However, no matter how or where these manifestations stand, "Grief is itself a medicine" (Cowper), and it is the way in which we communicate through physical manifestations that we are able to look into the window that we portray as grief. It is through these manifestations and the mediums of objects such as shrines, longstanding memorials, and a digital grave presence that highlights the way in which grief and the lasting impressions of those lost, shines through.

## Methodology & Context

In this section, I will be discussing three separate research sites being used for my Research Object (RO). First, I will define the parameters that I am using for analyzing my RO. I will then visit the context by first discussing the passing of Alanna Gallagher, a 6 year old girl with a brutal and unexpected death. I will discuss her temporary roadside memorial as well as a permanent longstanding memorial created in her honor. Lastly, I will be discussing the death of Kaitlyn Kotzmann, an 18 year-old young-adult who passed away in a car crash during her freshman year of college. I will be using examples of her social media platform on Instagram and how it became the primary mode of memorialization for those close to her due to limitations from the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Throughout this context description I will be explaining my connection to the sites as well as descriptions of the objects themselves. After discussions of the RO, I will discuss separate examples of living memorials, interactive memorials, temporary memorials as well as the more modern occurrence of digital memorials.

I believe that memorial media connects the body of the mourner to that of the medium, consequently bringing it back around to that of the dead. My intended outcome of this comparative analysis is that my conclusions will add to conversations of both memory studies as well as material culture studies. By looking closer at small scale occurrences as opposed to common scholarship on wide scale tragedy, I can bring a new light and new thoughts on the connections between grief and the way that they are expressed for the mourner into the materiality of the site. As stated by Erll “Just like memory, media do not simply reflect reality, but instead offer constructions of the past [...] what they appear to encode- versions of past events and persons, cultural values and norms , concepts of collective identity– They are in fact first creating”(Erll). Memory and identity are not interchangeable, but they do go hand

and hand. What we remember is our identity. Therefore, what we remember, who we remember, and how we remember it all weaves its own narrative in the landscape of individual, cultural, and collective memory.

### *Methodology*

For my methodology I will be using a comparative analysis of my three different sites of memory through the lens of both memory studies and visual/material culture. To guide my research I will be lead by the following research questions:

- How do these different media for memorials contribute to symbolic expressions of grief through the Placement/Displacement of the physical or virtual site?
- How do these different media reflect the priorities of those grieving/creating/maintaining the Memorial sites?

How do the dynamics of grief change when comparing High-Involvement memorials, like the street shrine of Alanna Gallagher, with Lower-Involvement forms such as digital expressions on social media?

To do this I will be basing a large sum of my argument around Erll's theories of dimensions of memory, I will also be pulling from Erll's theories of collective and individual identity (82-94). Specifically through these lenses I will be analyzing the memorials in terms of the Placement/Displacement and Low-Involvement/High-Involvement scales of the memorial along with the materiality of the medium. The Placement/Displacement of the site relates to the physicality of the site and and the relation to the body or trauma of the deceased. For example, in a typical graveyard the deceased would be in proper placement considering it is one of the least traumatic resting places as well as relating directly to the body. A roadside

shrine on the other hand would be considered a displaced memorial, considering there is a higher amount of trauma located at the death site, as well as a physical lack of correlation to the deceased other than their passing.

Low-Involvement/High-Involvement sites are determined in terms of the maintenance and upkeep needed to keep them working as a functioning memorial. I use this term as a direct correlation to how much commitment, revisiting and maintaining is needed in terms of keeping these memorial forms alive as working and active memorial sites. Using the same examples as prior, A gravesite would be in the Low-Involvement categorization seeing that it needs very little maintenance, and revisiting to remain an active memorial site. On the other hand, a roadside memorial would be considered High-Involvement because it comes together through the act of revisiting, placing objects, or maintaining the original shrine. The shrine itself needs upkeep and when upkeep is not given, it generally falters.

### *Context*

Alanna Gallagher was a young 6 year-old girl who lived in Saginaw, Texas, with her Mom, two Dads, and older sister. Like most kids, her neighbors claimed that they would often see her playing outside alongside fellow neighborhood children, often riding around on her purple scooter (Dallas Morning News). However, on the morning of July 1st, 2014, Alanna went missing from her usual outside playtime. Later that same afternoon, she was found deceased in a trash bag on the side of the road, brutally raped and murdered, roughly a mile away from her home neighborhood. Tragically, this event happened where I grew up, with her body being found by my two neighborhood friends just a few houses down from my own. Because of this, some details within this case come from my own memory. I would like to acknowledge this because this creates potential bias with something that I witnessed first-

hand. However, since I was able to witness the shrines and memorialization methods coming and going in real time, it offers more observational information than one might be able to find through a typical subject not found first-hand. I would also like to note that Saginaw, being a suburb, had much less crime than its bigger neighbor, Fort Worth. Statistically, violent crimes in Saginaw were 34% lower than the national average (Saginaw, TX Crime), which made Saginaw a desired place to settle down in the DFW area, specifically for parents with small children. On top of the cruelty of the crime, it is because of this sense of safety and security that I suspect made many people react outwardly with grief, making it more of a communal grieving process.

Although there were many memorialization methods used to deal with Alanna's death, I will first be focusing on a large street memorial that was placed in the spot where she was found. Similar to many collective street memorials, this one started small and grew with the help of the mourning community. Located where her body was found, this street memorial sat promptly on an average street curb, centered on the homeowner's mailbox (who was not affiliated with the Gallagher family). It initially began with just a few objects such as pictures, and candles. But, as the tragedy gained traction around Saginaw and began to be featured on News programs such as FOX4 NEWS, people from all around the city came by and dropped off a plethora of memorial objects, almost to the point of blocking the functionality of the road.

Most of these objects were items that could be properly categorized as child-like, such as stuffed animals. However, there were also messages and notes left for Alanna. Some of these notes were left from members of a local church. Considering that many of the objects left were religiously affiliated with the Christian faith, it is important to note that the parents of Alanna outwardly did not claim any membership in a faith community. This form of memorialization

was temporary and lived roughly around the 3-week mark until it grew so large that it became some-what of a nuisance, blocking cars from driving through. It was with this newfound nuisance that it was seemingly taken down over night. I do not know what happened to the objects found in the temporary memorial, but once the memorial was removed, there were no visible signs that it had been there in the first place. After it had been taken down, the physicality of the area went right back to a regular functioning mailbox and street.

For Alanna's second memorialization media, I will be discussing a permanent addition outside of her elementary school at Lake Point. After her death, her elementary school and a local motorcycle club fundraised to create a longstanding memorial. Unlike the temporary street memorial, this memorial was built to be a longstanding reminder of a young life lost, while acting productively to offer a space where children could read. It is still there today, almost ten years later. This structure was built directly outside of 6 year-old Alanna's classroom. Physically, the structure is a circle built in stone, with a covering and two sets of step-like seats. In the middle is an engraved stone circle. The circular marker appears to be granite, surrounded by dirt with newly planted purple flowers. The flowers turn this form of longstanding memorial into a sort of living memorial. It includes a lifeform that you would have to tend and take care of just as the life of a small child like Alanna. The marker is engraved with "Don't cry because it's over, Smile because it happened," a tribute to Alanna's life cut short.

For my last site, I will be discussing how the social media of Kaitlyn Kotzman was used as a form of digital memorial after her death. Kaitlyn was a close friend of mine throughout middle school and high school, but her death came a few years later. Kaitlyn's death occurred through a car crash during her freshman year of college at Dallas Baptist University in

October 2020. She was driving with her friends and fellow Dallas Baptist students on a Sunday morning. During this drive, the car carrying both Kaitlyn and her roommate Karina De la Rosa was hit by the car of a 21 year-old woman, killing them both at the age of 18 (Goldstein). Both drivers of both cars lived in this situation, but Kaitlyn and Karina did not. Considering her death was on October 4th of 2020, it puts this situation in a very interesting timeline in terms of memorialization. Seeing that it was in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic, it meant that for my friends and I that we could not grieve through physical options such as a funeral. Considering my friends and I did not have contact information with her parents, we had to find out information from news articles and Facebook posts. She was cremated and never put in a grave site, so there was seemingly no traditional way to mourn the loss of our friend. However, what I discovered is that on her Instagram account, there are many people who chose to express grief in the only way that they could for the time period, virtually.

Specifically, for this third site, I will be discussing Kaitlyn's Instagram account and how it was used in terms of grief management in times where physical grief management was made difficult. This of course is not a physical form of grief in the sense that it was built in the same likeness of Alanna's memorials, but it was built virtually by a group of friends, family, and mutuals in the same way that any other memorial would be built. However, this memorial was formed through pixels and digital space. As far as her account goes, it pictures 9 posts pre-passing, with additional tagged pictures which consist primarily from mutuals post-death. Her most recently posted picture shows in order from left to right, a young adult who appears to be a known friend, Karina, and Kaitlyn. The picture shows the three girls with their arms around each other at what appears to be a trip to the lake. This post is captioned

“Good times with good friends”. Underneath this post, we are able to see comments from before her passing, almost all with responses from Kaitlyn herself. But as we continue to read them, we see memorial posts start from right after the day of the crash. As we continue to look, these comments transition to comments that are still being received up to 3 years after the crash. We see these comments shift from initial statements such as Meghan Pottichen’s comment “Rest easy mama’s, thank you for always being the most kindhearted girl to me. God has gained an angel. Love you sweet girl” to an evolution of more reminiscent comments such as Aaron Travino’s comment:

“I miss you, I’m still thinking of you from time to time. I wish we could talk and write music together again. I remember being in the choir practice rooms and we wrote that song using your poem. I still have it and I just listened to it again. I still look at our old messages, I can’t imagine you are still gone.”

Unlike other memorials, this specific platform allows for people to air out their current feelings in an easily accessible space where others similarly still feel the effects of grief. It additionally offers a platform when analyzing the outward progression of people's grief through the emotions, thoughts, and feelings that they have publicly shared. As an additional note, Kaitlyn was an avid believer in the Christian faith and was known for being a close follower of Christ. This being said, it is more contextually sound for comments to bring up mentions of faith within her comments as opposed to that of Alanna Gallagher’s.

Although these are the sites I will specifically be researching, it is important to contextualize these with similar popular forms of memorials. In this next section of the context/description I will be describing more well-known and culturally significant memorials within modern western culture. Although these memorials will be less intimate than my



research object, I feel it is important to acknowledge them in terms of memorials and memory studies.

Living memorials “Mark the location of tragic events” and “Continue to live, intertwining their spirits with those who died at that location” (Bringham 22). Examples of this can be seen commonly in parks, where members can plant a tree in honor of a loved one. An interactive memorial, on the other hand, is a memorial that a person can physically interact with. Although these types of memorials can go hand and hand, they are two completely different methods. A good example of an interactive memorial is Berlin’s Holocaust “Field of Stelae.” This memorial consists of roughly 2,700 Concrete blocks, set in a grid-like pattern. The monument invites people to walk through it. As is stated on their website:

“In this context, the monument tries to develop a new idea of memory that differs markedly from nostalgia. We suggest that the time of the monument, its duration, differs from the time of human experience and understanding. The traditional monument is understood by [...] what it represents. Such a monument is not understood over time, but directly in space” (Eisenman).

What this means is that the direct method of memorialization is through the experience of interaction with the monument. In Alanna’s case, the freestanding reading center works as both a living memorial due to the flowers in the center as well as an interactive memorial to its intention to have children have a space to sit and read.

### *Memorials (context)*

Roadside shrines and memorials fall into categories of “temporary shrines,”

“Spontaneous Shrines,” or “Makeshift memorials.” These types of memorials fall into a form of public grief that more commonly happens after a more sudden, or tragic death (Maynor). However, it was with Princess Diana’s death in 1997 that these types of memorials are first noted as being polarized (Magry and Sanchez-Carretero 1). This new collective form of memorialization generally takes place in a very public place related to the death of the subject, and becomes a sort of hodge-podge of collective memory such as seen in Princess Diana’s case. Unlike interactive memorials that are generally planned and meant to be experienced over time, temporary memorials have a short life span, come to fruition solely through group effort, and are only maintained and kept alive by those who contribute to them.

Lastly, we have a more modern form of grief, which falls under the category of web memorials. In western culture, we are seeing more and more occurrences of digital legacy through death. By focusing on social media specifically, it shows a much more raw and intimate example than something that is made to be shown off. Creating a memorial on the social media platforms of those deceased not only-

“ expands the grieving experience. It provides a space for those that are not comfortable being vulnerable in front of other people and an opportunity for those that are far away in distance and those not a part of the immediate family to feel connected to others that know the deceased person.” (Sharpe 9).

This being said, this medium is important to include within this paper both because it is the easiest to access and maintain, while being the most newfound occurrence out of the three.

### **Literature Review**

For the remainder of this section, I will conduct a literature review which I have

separated into three categories, “Framework and Fundamental Theories,” “Grief In The Age of Digital Remembrance,” and “Grieving Through Physical Memorials and Material Culture.”

*Frameworks and Fundamental Theories*

The majority of my framework is going to be centered on works of Erll within memory studies, as well as Rose's Visual/Material communication theories within her book *Visual Methodologies*. I am basing most of my work around Erll's theory of the three dimensions of memory. The first of these dimensions is the “Material Dimension,” which is “Constituted by Mnemonic artifacts, media, and technologies of memory, ranging from symbols and landscapes to architecture and books to film and photography,” (Erll 103). Secondly, there is the “Social Dimension,” which consists of “Mnemonic practices, and the carriers of memory; Commemorative rituals; forms of storage, and recall of cultural knowledge; and the persons and social institutions involved in these processes,” (Erll 103). Lastly, there is the “Mental dimension,” which “includes all the shared schemata, concepts, and codes which enable and shape collective remembering through symbolic mediation as well as the effects that the activity of the remembering has on the mental dispositions predominant in a community- such as the ideals about time and history, values and norms, self-perceptions and the perception of others,” (Erll 104). Erll additionally discusses media as carriers of information stating,

“Just like memory, media do not simply reflect reality, but instead offer constructions of the past. Media are not simply neutral carriers of information about the past; what they appear to encode- versions of past events and persons, cultural values and norms , concepts of collective identity– they are in fact first creating.” (Erll 114)

Going alongside works of Erll, we have Roses' “Visual Methodologies”. Throughout

her text, Rose dives into multiple means of visual analysis throughout visual culture, focusing mainly on images and photographs. However, there is also discussion of materiality throughout the text. Stating that “objects are absolutely integral to human life: to identity, and to social, economic and political relations and institutions,” (Rose 309). She discusses the conflict faced by theorists between seeing both analog and digital images as “photography,” due to the materiality of the images (Rose 25). Visual and material culture is an integral part of this comparative analysis. Just as a camera can affect the way that we view an image, the medium in which we choose to express grief can affect the outcome and perception of said grief. I believe taking a look directly into the specific medium of these memorial sites will create an important point of analysis showing that the medium itself offers these constructions a deeper meaning behind why and how we choose to memorialize.

### *Grieving in the age of Digital Remembrance*

In my research, I have found many scholarly works on grief and the newly found expressions of grief through virtual remembrance and various social media platforms. In Tony Walters “The Pervasive Dead,” he discusses the grieving process seen traditionally within works such as that of Robert Hertz who discusses the dead as being “separated”. Hertz Additionally claims that the position of the body and spirit was seemingly mirroring the mourners (Hertz). This is an interesting take, but how does this idea shift when talking about memorials that take place away from the body? Walker proposes a new way of viewing the body/spirit/mourner system that he calls the “Pervasive Dead” (Walters 389). This piece of work denotes the idea that the dead are no longer separate from us and even assumes that the dead are something that we bring into our lives, specifically within social media. He discusses the new phenomena of those online who have died being pictured “not as souls locked up in

heaven, but as angels who return to protect the living” (389). This idea goes hand and hand with ideas of Molly Hales in “Animating Relations,” in which she “show[s] how the dead are brought to life as characters through constitutive relations organized around the partial, iterative, and fragmented qualities of the digital media that sustain them.” Additionally we see the similar notion of “Absent presence” shown in Avril Madrell’s “Living with the deceased: absence, presence and absence-presence.” Unlike others, this work is presented through the lens of private grief, as opposed to a lens of collective or private grief. Similarly in terms of digital remembrance, we see scholars such as Priscilla Ulguim in “Digital Remains Made Public” focus less on grief, and more on the cultural advances that we could create by utilizing digital platforms of the dead stating:

“The ‘born-digital’ records of humanity may be considered as public digital mortuary landscapes, representing death, memorialization and commemoration. The potential for the analysis of digital data from these spaces could result in a phenomenon approaching immortality, whereby artificial intelligence is applied to the data of the dead” (Ulguim 153).

This work in particular is very interesting compared to that of similar scholars, because it creates a working plan for those that have passed to be used in terms of research. We additionally have Ellen Lapper’s “Does Social Media Change The Way we grieve?” In this text, the author talks not only about what we can do with social media of the now-deceased. She also discusses how with the age of virtual grieving, we find a new issue of learning of someone's passing through said platforms. With this, we can shift the way we combat the grieving process. This also means and reaffirms my thought process that mediums of grief have the power to shift the grieving process. Lastly we have Candi Cann in *Virtual Afterlives*:

*Grieving the dead in the 21st Century*, where she discusses multiple different subsections of virtual memorial media such as “memorial websites, and saved voicemails that can be accessed at any time” claiming that “This dramatic cultural shift has made the physical presence of death secondary to the psychological experience of mourning.” (Cann).

Most of the scholarship within this category of digital remembrance deals with cultural implications through these mediums, yet doesn't focus on the implications within the self. Although a large part of mourning is dealt within the cultural and collective realm, there is not a lot of work on the individuality of grief in terms of memorials and memory studies as well as communications studies. This is where I would like to carve and start to make my own assumption apart from other works. Although I would like to talk about collective grief within my analysis, I would also like to have a primary focus on smaller-scale grief through my 3 defined research sites.

### *Grieving Through Physical Memorials and Material Culture*

Similarly to works surrounded around virtual memorials, many works centered through grieving and material culture deal with larger cultural implications as to that of the individual experience. However, these works of literature are still important to consider within the world of grieving. By looking at the larger picture, we can slowly dissect and break down these theories and works into smaller sections until we are able to magnify the individual experience.

First we have “Death, art and memory in the public sphere: the visual and material culture of grief in contemporary America”, in which Erika Doss discusses collective memorialization by analyzing the Oklahoma City memorial As well as memorials created to

commemorate Columbine High School. She ultimately asks—

“How and why such commemoration is organized—by whom and for whom? What do these practices and rituals—both seemingly spontaneous public practices and those managed by specific institutions—reveal about American attitudes toward death and grief? What do they tell us about who (and what) is deemed memorable in their absence, in US history, and in terms of an imagined national future?” (Doss 63).

Similar in analyzing memorials centered around wide-scale and popularized tragic events is Sorado’s “THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM: The Creation of a ‘Living Memorial’.” She focuses less on American attitudes, and more on discussions of creating a large-scale living memorial of a traumatic event, carving ways in which to commemorate and preserve tragedy. Although of course my content will be on a much smaller scale in terms of tragedy, this follows similar ideas that I plan to touch on when dealing with more traumatic young deaths. Bringing it back to the physicality of memorials, Madrell states that “Cemeteries and memorials are sites of identity markers and places of representation, and as such are socially, culturally, economically and politically embedded” (174). With identity also comes theories of identity, memory, and the homeplace as portrayed in works from Ratnam’s “Creating Home: Intersections of Memory and Identity”.

On the opposing side of permanent memorials, we have temporary memorials such as roadside shrines and makeshift memorials. We see conversations in Durbin’s “Expressions of Mass grief and Mourning ” where they discuss both the correlation between violent/tragic deaths, as well as a stronger urge to memorialize. Durbin argues that makeshift memorials themselves are an “Expression of sorrow” that can come from of course family members, but also strangers. (Durbin 22). We see similar themes emerge in the work of authors such as

Robert M. Bednar in works such as “Materializing memory: The Public Lives of Roadside Crash Shrines” as well as “Roadside Media: Roadside Crash Shrines as Platforms for Communicating across Time, Space, and Mortality in the early 2000’s”. The author speaks of memorials specifically in the medium of roadside memorials. He claims that roadside memorials are not only a way to speak to the dead, but also “for communicating with other platform users about the dead.” (Bednar 2022, 1). He additionally argues within “Materializing Memory”, that “these shrines transfer the life lost in an automobile crash to the life lived by the memory objects and spaces contained within them” (Bednar 2011, 1). Although the memorialization of Kaitlyn is not a physical memorial, we can tie this similarly to the car crash that took her life. Lastly we have Peter Jan Margry, and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero’s “Memorializing Traumatic Death,” which offers the new outlook of public memorials inherently inviting the rebuke of the public. (1).

All together, these works discuss means of memorials and memorial culture apart from the digital age. I think within my work it’s very important to distinguish the two as different, but with virtual memorials evolving more and more to become our most accessible source of relieving and maintaining grief. The medium in itself portrays how we view grief, and to what level of effort we are willing to go to express such grief through levels of involvement to the memorial.

## **Analysis**

### *Preface*

It is crucial to acknowledge both deaths being discussed involve young girls tied to a traumatic death. This context is important in terms of analyzing grief because it creates an



environment for more accentuated actions than one might not see with a natural passing. By using these cases, it allows us to see grief in a heightened manner that might otherwise go unnoticed in a more expected scenario. With this being said, a young traumatic death also creates less agency within how they are able to craft how they would like to be remembered due to its suddenness. This lack of agency is then given to the mourners to craft what aspects and forms to utilize in the memorialization process.

Throughout the remainder of this analysis, I will be analyzing the physical and virtual sites separately and together, explaining and discussing important aspects that might not be noticed at first glance. Specifically, this will be detailed in relation to the Involvement levels as well as the Placement/Displacement of the memorials.

### *Grief Tied to Temporary Shrines*

Alanna's passing, rooted in trauma and violence, prompted a large and immediate crowd response from those involved in the community. Soon after she was found, only a day or so later, I began to see small stuffed animals in the spot in which she was found. While to passersby it might have appeared to be a roadside crash memorial, it is important to see that it generally fits the category of "spontaneous shrine." Jack Santino defines this as "A genre of mourning ritual," also known as a "Performative Commemorative," which is a memorial that is set out before a public that in nature invites interpretation, as well as participation. (Santino 11). That is, unlike other common roadside shrines, this was not in a spot where she was killed from a car crash. Even more, this is not where she lived, and not even where she was killed. This placement of the roadside shrine is only where she was tragically found after her murderer dropped her there. Placement wise, this is one of the least personal places to grieve on top of being one of the most

traumatic places in relation to the body to express this grief. With this being said, this puts the death site in a displaced state. The only relation to this spot geographically is the spot in which she was found. This shrine is also categorized as a High-Involvement medium of grief. In its spontaneity, it needs active tending to, additional objects being added in remembrance, as well as a knowing host (considering the shrine was not located where Allana lived), and visitors/mourners.

As we look at Figure 1, we see the beginning stages of the roadside shrine. Pictured is the shrine within the first few days after Alanna was found. We see two neighborhood kids looking down at the group of stuffed animals as one might see mirrored in a picture of mourners looking down in a grave.



Figure 2

Stuffed animals, commonly associated with “playtime” but also comfort, were the go-to for most of the gifts left at the shrine, which carries a sense of irony, considering she was kidnapped while



Figure 1

she was playing outside. Now as we move into Figure 2, we see that more visitors arrived as the shrine grew larger. We see an even larger appearance of teddy bears, flowers, and balloons. When looking at this shrine, it

almost mimics that of a baby shower in terms of objects, which creates an ironic contrast between the stark similarities we see between the birth and death of a young life.

However, we then move to Figure 3, picturing a note left at this memorial. The note, although not all legible, is addressed to Alanna herself. This letter in particular is a great example of the extension of grief being put into a

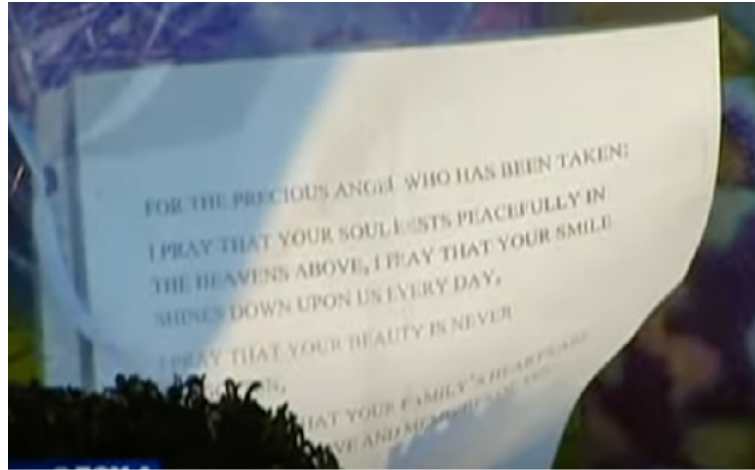


Figure 3

communal memorial such as this one through the use of Walter's "Pervasive dead". The note is typed, and put in a laminated sleeve assumingly, so it can be preserved. The note reads:

"For the precious angel who has been taken, I pray that your soul rests peacefully in the heavens above. I pray that your smile shines down upon us every day. I pray for your beauty..."

- Unknown

Within this note specifically, we see a shift from giving objects to Alanna, to speaking directly to Alanna. The author of the note prays for her soul's peace, as well as her beauty, and her likeness to be remembered with "your smile shines down". However, knowing that Allana was 6 years old at her time of death, and her parents were not affiliated with the Christian faith, this message begins to feel a bit strange. It is with this, that I question why grieving is presented in this likeness of someone who clearly was not associated with the Gallagher family. Similarly to Walters' pervasive death, the angel "represents an active and continuing relationship," which is "expressed through the dead-as-angel who has agency to receive messages from the living and to

respond by caring for them,” (Walter 396). This gives the dead a sense of agency that is ironically, not found within the memorial from the agency of the deceased. Although the memorial is intended to be personalized to the mourned, it simultaneously shows the reality of the deceased's lack of agency in the memorial itself, alongside an attempt for the mourners to bring that agency back within the small material objects. Because of this, it says much more about the mourner than the deceased in terms of this medium.

As the shrine grew, there was a stark growth in the number of objects found, balloons, even more teddy bears, flowers, and candles all of which seemed to be placed knowingly to not stand up to the test of time within this temporary memorial, specifically outside. The only thing within this memorial found with intention to be preserved was the note pictured above, which was encased in plastic. It is with this note that the materiality of the shrine is negated, resisting the spontaneity and short life span of the memorial. Just as the notes contents don't align with the short lived life of Allana, neither does the materiality of the object in comparison to the memorial with a life that is created to eventually be taken down. There is intention with this note for it to be preserved in a place where preservation is not an option.

Similarly to examples as shown in Goode's "I Called Off My Wedding. The Internet Will Never Forget," this kind of memorial creates a space in which you are bombarded with grief, being forced to return to that memory. Even if members of the community were just passing on their way to work, It was a visual that was presented to people in that area daily for weeks. Although this medium was temporary, it was also displaced and had a higher involvement, creating a higher concentration of grief that was difficult to escape.

*Greif Tied to Permanent Memorials*



Figure 4

As we look at Allana's long standing memorial as seen in Figure 4, we see what presents itself as a gazebo-like structure. As we know, this reading center is placed outside of her

elementary school classroom. In

comparison to that of the roadside shrine, this one was thoroughly planned, yet by the time it was erected, the communal trauma had seemed to settle. Although the placement of this was more typical than that of the roadside shrine, it still stood awkwardly within three confining walls of the outside of the elementary school. As a whole, the entirety of the structure is enclosed on three sides by the red brick of the institution, almost seeming cramped and unplanned. Similar to that of the street memorial, the placement acts as a reminder that it in fact was not planned. The structure seemingly is even clear to onlookers that do not know about the memorial, that the structure of the memorial was built well after that of the school. The planning and construction of this memorial spanned several years, resulting in a structure that many current students had no direct connection to by the time it was finally built. Nevertheless, unlike temporary memorials, this structure was intended to remain permanent, signifying a deliberate effort to establish a lasting tribute. Its placement within the school's landscape, while not originally part of the architectural blueprint, represents an intersection between intentional placement and displacement within the environment in which it stands.

[Wanting to relate more scholarship to Assman here but still figuring out how to do it]

In terms of user involvement levels, there was a dedicated team involved in planning and bringing this structure to life. However, once unveiled, the memorial required minimal effort to maintain. Upkeep primarily involves tending to the surrounding live flowering plants. As long as the flowers are alive and there are occasional visitors, this memorial works as a living memorial. This places the memorial at middle ground between high and low maintenance and thus high and low involvement.

What's particularly interesting about this memorial is its incorporation of living elements, and intention for interaction. However, standing as it does today, with a time gap between children who likely had no interactions with the Gallagher family, is it still a working memorial if there are no memories of the original users to base their memorialization off of? In this case, the priorities lie in having a memorial which can bring some sort of space for children to learn and feel safe. That no doubt honors Gallagher's memory to anyone who remembers her through the site, but is likely something very abstract to the current users of the site.

Now as we look to the middle of the plot of flowers in Figure 5, we see the emblem "Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened". Picked



Figure 5

for the reading center seemingly as an appropriate quote from Dr. Seuss, this quote affirms that the reading space intends to be constructive, despite its ties to tragedy. The engraved granite

circle itself, however, mimics that of a grave, words engraved in a stone in the ground with intention for people to view. This gives us seemingly the same sort of image of people looking to the ground just as they would with a traditional gravesite. Seemingly, although these memorials have different intentions, there is still a resemblance to a grave despite there not being a resting place used for a body.

What's interesting to note with this however, is that the flowers planted in the ground add a bridge between life and death, mirroring the tending that would be needed with a young child like Allana. The flowers add a level of involvement needed to tend, in order to make the memorial serve as it is intended to. This contests the harsh, durability and permanent materiality of the stone engraved in the center. Also differing from the roadside shrine, it creates a long-standing interactive space meant to cultivate an educational spot for children. Although, considering Allana was 6 years old, it is an interesting note similar to that of the letter in figure C, that if this had intentions to please Allana past the grave, would it be an effective memorial considering she most likely did not know how to read. That is, it is more about the designed purpose of the present users than the person being honored there.

### *Greif Tied to Virtual Memorialization*

Now in the case of Kaitlynn, she died in times of Covid, so unlike that of Allana, one of the only ways grief could be expressed was through social media. Her account was and still is public, letting anyone gain access as long as they could find her username, even if they did not already follow her. Unlike the shrines of Alanna, this works as an active timeline, showing her own curated moments from before her death below the more recent manifestations of grief over her loss. Every piece of photographic media pictured is from when she was alive, and posted by

her. They are all portrayals of something that she chose to be remembered by. In terms of being remembered in this case, it seems to be the most accurate representation considering that these were hand-picked by her.

Instagram reaches out to the relatives of the deceased to confirm whether they would like to keep their account up. In this case, the account is still up and available for viewing. We can

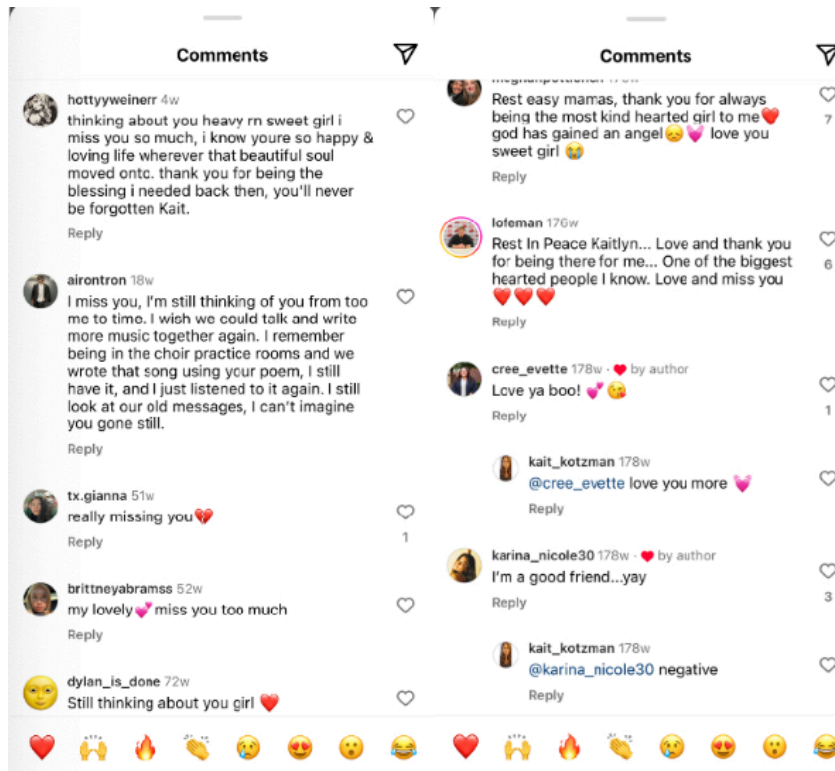


Figure 6

additionally see the transition within this medium between her liveliness and her passing. In her most recent post, we see comments “liked by author” with a short transition just two weeks later to condolences and comments flooding in. Examples of these comments can be seen within Figure 6.

Similar to that of the note in figure 3, these comments are addressed directly to her. We see comments such as

“My heart... looking through your profile showed you were so happy and lived [not knowing it] would be your last days... you have such a beautiful heart and God took you too soon, but I know he’ll take care of someone so pure. Rest in peace Kaitlyn.”

- Anonymous



In this comment, there is an acknowledgement of death, as well as her previous posts being a signifier of life. This works under the assumption that many of the mourners are taking social media posts at face value. We can assume that there had been troubles not mentioned in the social media realm, but ultimately the act of having her own curated photos to view and interpret after she passes makes this form of memorial more “Authentically ” an extension of the deceased.

[Wanting to expand, still trying to figure out how by using the “once-alive-ness” as mentioned in critiques]

When dealing with upkeep, Kaitlyn's social media acts as a Low-Involvement memorial. Simply obtaining an affirmation from an account official is all that's needed to sustain its presence over time. In terms of involvement, commenters are helpful in keeping it a memorial form, but also could function solely off individuals revisiting the profile. Although the account itself has an extra layer of memorialization by commenters of those associated with her, I argue that it would still be a memorial platform if it just had her photographs and was open to access through Instagram. This being said, it puts it in a place of a low Involvement memorialization medium seeing that you can open it as you choose and hide it away and trust that it will still be there. With this memorial in particular, the comments tend to lie closer to reminiscing as well as hopeful. There seems to be less of a traumatic tie to the grief. This can additionally be seen in comments stating “I love you and will always remember how funny, amazing, and kind you were. You will be so missed here on this earth” and “I know you’re dancing in the streets of gold in heaven. Love and miss you sunshine.”

Considering this was additionally unplanned and only considered a memorial site due to the circumstances of her death, this puts it in a middle ground between placement and displacement similar to that of the shrine.

### *Conclusions*

In all of the examples explored, a notable absence occurs: the lack of the direct physical connection between the mourner and the deceased through material representations, as one would achieve by visiting a traditional gravesite. In these examples we see homages to gravesites through things such as meaningful messages, carved messages in stone, and the act of looking down to the ground; they lack the direct connection of materiality to the life once lived.

Although Kaitlyn's social media platform has a direct connection from her life to the medium, there is no direct physicality considering the medium is not physical in nature. When looking at the first two forms of media, the extension of grief comes from the mourner, to the creation of the mourner. Making the memorials, less of a conversation to the dead, to more of a conversation for the dead. This brings us to the question: if the method of memorialization is not dictated by the deceased, can it truly be considered mourning for the dead, or rather, mourning for the idea of the dead? Though an essence of the deceased still holds true in those places, the lack of a physical body in those places fosters a communal mourning of memory of the dead rather than mourning the dead themselves.

Traditionally, a visit to a gravesite allows mourners to engage in a connection through the physical proximity of their bodies to the final resting place of the deceased. The presence of a mourning space offers a sense of closeness and security in the passing that is often comforting to the mourners. However, with physical memorials, the process of mourning unfolds through the

proximity of one's body to associated objects or locations where the memorials are held, sometimes not even directly related to the deceased's body or death site.

When you compare these levels of involvement and displacement, the social media memorial stands as the closest to Involvement and placement as that of a graveyard. But, in theory it stands furthest from that of a physical graveyard in the medium. To visually represent this, I've created a chart that can be seen within Figure 7. From an Involvement/Placement

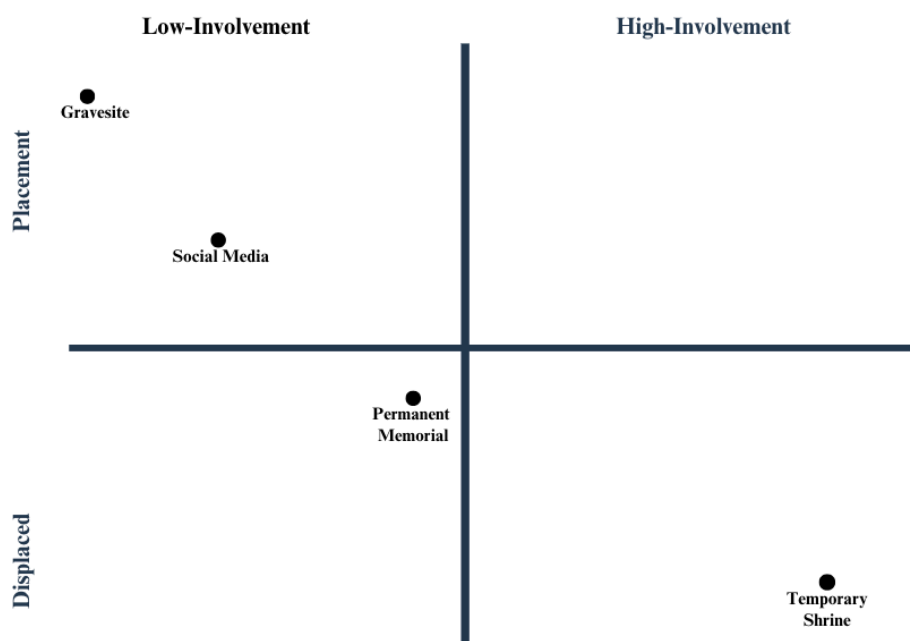


Figure 7

standpoint we can observe the visual correlation between a typical gravesite (top left corner) and a virtual memorial such as Kaitlyn's (below and to the left). This suggests it is not the traditional body to body connection that is needed in terms of long-standing grief, but the connection to the palpable likeness of who they were. In the age of social media, it might be true that the memorial form that feels most real to us is the one we are most familiar interacting with on a daily basis, the one that every day helps us maintain relationships with people who are not physically present for us, regardless of what we know about how social media is always already curated. The street memorial, for instance, being one of the least personal options in terms of

memorialization, served as one of the least practical and most temporary forms, emphasizing the dynamics at play with mediums in the process of mourning and remembrance.

In conclusion, throughout the comparative analysis of memorialization mediums, we have discussed dynamics of grief tied to that of temporary shrines, permanent memorials, and virtual memorialization, each offering new insights on the way people grieve and how they reflect themselves (the mourner) onto the deceased. We remember people by the memory we implant for them. This analysis of the media shows the human impulse to remember and commemorate those who have passed. The findings of this analysis point to the significance that physical proximity, placement, and involvement can have on impressions of mourning. Overall, it shows a discrepancy between the life of the deceased and the mourner within its sense of materiality by mourners speaking for the dead through media.

“ I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not.”

- Lauren Wise

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