

# Post-mortem digital identity on Facebook

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# A representation of the deceased as ***persistent*** and ***active***

## Death, society and media (general frame)

- *Denial of Death in XXth century (cf. in France: P. Ariès 1975, L-V Thomas, 1975)*
- *Omnipresence of Death in medias and its derealisation (Thomas, 1991, Morin, 1964 ; Potel, 1970 ; Rabatel & Floréa, 2011)*

## Digital representations of the deceased

- SNS: relatives express grief and mourning in SNS on the deceased's profile (Brubaker & Vertesi, 2010 ; Getty & al., 2011, Kasket, 2012 ; Roberts, 2012) and communicates with the deceased by this way (Odom & al., 2009 ; 2010, Brubaker & Hayes, 2011)

-> a representation of the dead as « ***persistent, active.*** » (Brubaker & Vertesi, 2010).

This practice keeps the distress of bereavement alive while easing the pain, and prolongs the mourning process (Brubaker & Hayes 2011).

-> linked to ***digital identity*** research field

## **ENEID. Digital eternities. *Post mortem* digital identities and new memorial uses of the web from a gender perspective.**

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Program « Sociétés innovantes »

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<http://eneid.univ-paris3.fr>

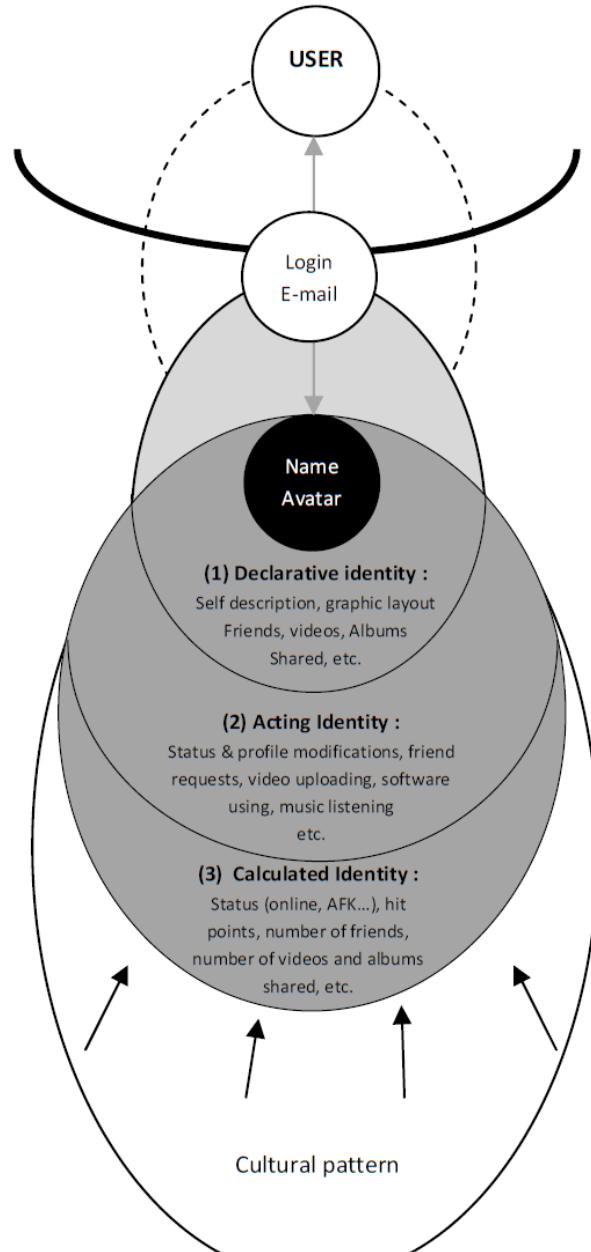
- *Multiplication of websites and digital services dedicated to memorial practices*
- *Increasing importance of social networks in relation to the aging of web users.*

**Digital identity and self-representation,**  
as system of signs manifesting the users  
identity on the www (Georges, 2005 sqq)

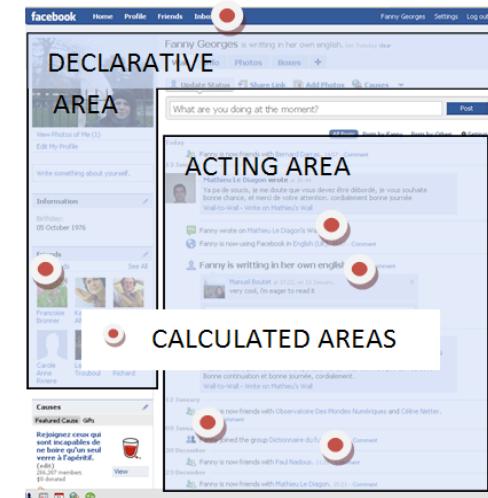
*What become of the identity data of web users  
after their death? Do they care about them  
when they are still alive? How do relatives deal  
with these data? How do major actors of the  
web, such as Facebook and Google, manage  
them?*

**A gender perspective**

*How does the gender of the dead person and of  
those who pay tribute to him/her structure the  
memorial uses and the construction of post  
mortem identities?*



# Digital identity from a semio-pragmatic angle



# Method

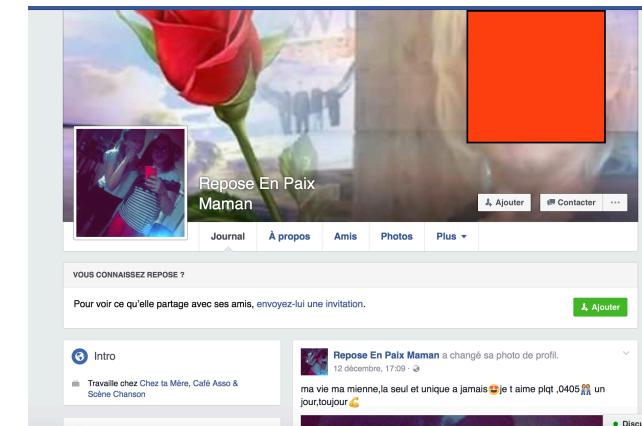
1er corpus: about the relation the subject of the discursive production have (the relative) with the object of the memorial webpage (the deceased) (Georges, 2013)

- 15 memorial pages
- Request « repose en paix » « RIP » « Hommage à » in Facebook search engine

2nd corpus: traces production and socialisation on the dead user profile pages (Georges & Julliard 2016)

- 45 Facebook profiles of deceased users
- Request « mort » in a press database to identify dead people whose death has been mediatised
- Request of their in in Facebook search engine

- + exploratory and open (spontaneous) interviews
- + non hidden discreet observation (Zhang, 2016)

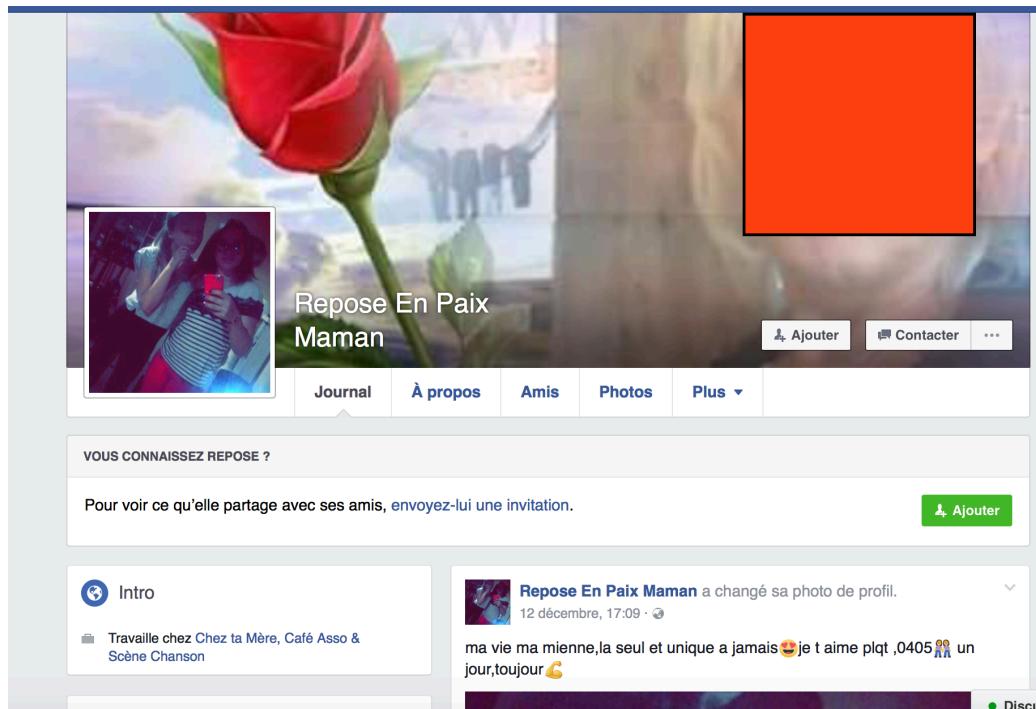


Commemoration page



Profile page

## Memorial pages

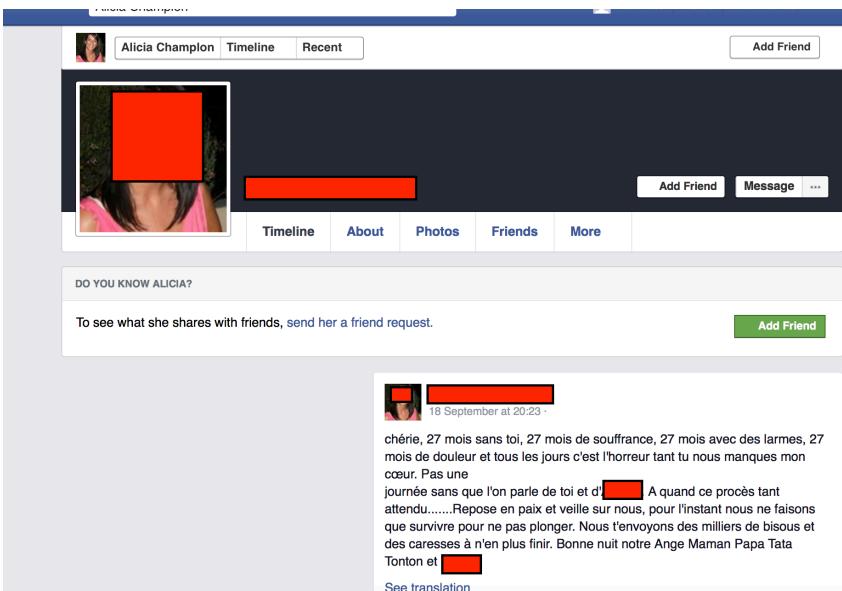


### Phases of publications by the creators in the corpus (15 pages)

- 1) Death announcement  
impersonal turns of phrase.
- 2) Revelation of the identity of the creator
  - refers to himself or herself in the first person singular and presents the object of the page (in our corpus)
  - prompted by private messages.
- 3) Maintaining the page
  - use of “I”
  - Expression of the mourning experience.

(Georges, 2013)

## Personal pages



Following a user's death, family and friends recompose forms of the deceased's identity "for themselves"

"Profilopraxie": the entourage reformulate their memory and reconfigure the traces that the deceased left during his or her lifetime.

Controversy, quarrels and rejection  
(Georges, 2014, Georges & Julliard, 2016)

Forms of socialisation between relatives who didn't know each other before

(Georges & Julliard, 2016)

# Conclusion-opening

## **Comparative approaches of cultural representations of identity and death**

- tributes paid to the deceased in sns in the context of Awazadian militancy (Georges, Lafay & Buquet, 2016; Lafay & Georges, 2015, 2016).
- ENEID programme: comparative study of online tributes to deceased persons in China (Julliard, 2016).

-> A different cultural relation to the publicisation of the picture of the dead



# ENEID Program

2014 and 2015

## WP1 Sociological approach+ gender perspective

*Survey about digital memorializing practices*

What are the uses of digital memorial websites and digital memorializing practices in France ? Does gender play a role in the uses of digital devices related to death ?

Bourdeloie 2015

## WP2 Media analysis + gender perspective

Transmedia circulation of tributes to deceased celebrities. What are the gender representations and gender based division of roles ?

Quemener, Dakhlia & Castex 2016

## WP3 Sémiotic approach + gender perspective

Semiotic analysis of digital identity on web memorials

Georges, 2013

Georges & Julliard, 2016

2016 and mid-2017

## WP4 Pluridisciplinary approach

Re-composition of gender and digital identities in the memorial uses of the web in France, in comparison with other geographic areas (China, USA)  
Towards digital eternities

First results: digital identity of the deceased is produced by relative's digital practices on the Facebook wall of the deceased

# Questions and method

**En quoi le mort appartient-il au monde des vivants sur Facebook ?**  
**How memory of the deceased is performed by the users/relatives ?**  
**/Comment la mémoire du défunt est performée par les proches ?**

- **Hypothèse**

C'est par les pratiques d'écriture que les vivants entretiennent la présence des défunts en continuant de construire leur identité numérique post mortem.

Communiquer avec les morts, c'est assurer aux morts « un surplus d'existence » (Despret, 2015, 11)

- Quelles sont les pratiques d'écritures associées à ces nouvelles formes de dialogue avec les morts ?

## Méthode: a semiotic approach

**1) Analyse sémiologique** (qualitative.  
Cf. Roland Barthes), observation ouverte discrète depuis 2013.

**2) Analyse sémiopragmatique**  
(Bernard Darras, Daniel Peraya) de l'**identité numérique post mortem**  
d'un corpus constitué de:

- 46 pages créées du vivant des usagers
- 37 pages communauté,

ces différentes pages référant à 43 défunt.

**3) Approche quali-quant**

**4) Des entretiens ouverts, quelques entretiens d'explicitation**

# Les réseaux sociaux

*Facebook – pages groupes à visée mémoriale*

The screenshot shows a Facebook page for "RIP Nelson Mandela". The cover photo features a large portrait of Nelson Mandela smiling, with his right fist raised in a gesture of triumph or freedom. To the left of the main image is a smaller portrait of him. The timeline header "1918 - 2013" is displayed above the main image. A quote from Nelson Mandela is visible on the left side of the cover photo: "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart". Below the cover photo, the page name "RIP Nelson Mandela" is displayed, along with the statistics "143,160 likes" and "827 talking about this". The "Like" button is present. On the left, there's a "Website" link pointing to "RIP Nelson Mandela, you will be remembered!". On the right, there are links for "Photos" and "Likes", showing "143k" likes. At the bottom, there are sections for "Highlights" (with "Post" and "Photo / Video" options), a text input field for "Write something on RIP Nelson Mandela...", and a "Invite Your Friends to Like This Page" section with a "See All" link and an "Invite" button.

# Résultats

**Tableau 1 Classification des formes de pérennisation des pages de défunts**

Corpus total	46 pages de profil
Profils présentant des publications publiques après le décès	23
Profils ne présentant pas de publication publique après le décès	18
Profils supprimés	4
Profils transformés en page commémoration	1

# Pratiques d'écritures (et de non écriture) et de dialogue intérieur avec le mort

## La fabrication du mort

- **Décision sémiotique** par les endeuillés que la page est un support signifiant du mort (caractère représentatif ou non) (Georges & Julliard 2016c)
- **Absence de pratique d'écriture** (Georges & Julliard 2016c) : consultation de la page comme dialogue intérieur avec le mort
- Apposition du stigmate de la mort (Georges & Julliard 2016a)
- La profilopraxie (Georges & Julliard 2016b): pratique d'écriture par suppression/modification-> Paradoxe de la suppression comme acte signifiant
- **Querelles et combats pour l'emprise des proches sur le souvenir du défunt à travers les pages mémoriales**

## La page du mort comme lieu de socialisation

- Nouveau rôle pris par les amis dans le processus de pérennisation du profil du défunt et par là, de sa mémoire
- socialisation du deuil sur facebook ouvre à de nouvelles sociabilités, cimentées par la mort du défunt.

# Some results of the semiotic approach

Comparative approach between France, China and Touaregs

- Digital identity of the deceased is produced by relative's digital practices on the Facebook wall of the deceased
- Interpersonal conflicts about the crystalized image of the deceased mediated by his/her web profiles on digital social networks
- Digital heritage, as "computer-based materials of enduring value that should be kept for future generations »
- Links to the individual identity and collective identity (ex.: Touaregs)

Digital Eternities: website of the program

<http://eneid.univ-paris3.fr>