

Digital Memories and Memorials_102215_pw1

Digital Memory and Memorials:

This evening, artists Gabriel Barcia-Colombo and Joseph Delappe and scholar Marita Sturken consider the new forms that memory and memorials take on in the digital age. Mirroring the speed and connectivity of social networks, creators of memorials avoid the permanence and materiality of stone in favor of the immediacy and accessibility of online media.

Gabriel Barcia-Colombo is a Senior TED fellow and an Assistant Professor of Communications at New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program. He has received an Art + Technology Lab grant to explore how future death memorials and rituals will deal with an abundance of personal data as well as increasing access to new media technology.

Marita Sturken is a scholar and Professor in the Department of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University. Her work spans cultural studies, visual culture, and memory studies with an emphasis on cultural memory and the cultural effects of technology. She is the author of the book, "Tangled Memories - An Investigation of the Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic and the Politics of Remembering," as well as "The Practice of Looking, An Introduction to Visual Culture."

Joseph Delappe is a Professor of the Department of Art at the University of Nevada where he directs the Digital Media Program. From 2006 to 2011, he created dead-in-iraq, a "fleeting, online memorial" within America's Army, a first-person online Army recruiting game, by entering the names of 4,484 U.S. military casualties into the game's text messaging system. He also created Iraqimemorial.org, an online "Call for Proposals" to commemorate Iraqi war dead.

I first met Joe, 'in-game', that is, he visited as an avatar, an installation of mine (along with LACMA Art + Tech grantee Nonny de la Peña) called Gone Gitmo. One day I received an image of Gandhi sitting in our Gitmo Camp X-Ray cage. The project was already novel; building a prison in a medium where walls have no substance, but to find Gandhi in Gitmo strained even our expectations. Joe had recreated Gandhi's Salt March by tethering his avatar (Gandhi) to his physical body using a treadmill - and in his walk across Second Life, someone known to me only by the name Cinco, brought him to our installation. Joe later blogged about the experience, which got back to me, thus making the connection. These works sensitized me to both the fragility and the fluidity of digital works of cultural memory - despite a "Keep Gitmo Open" campaign, our virtual Gitmo closed.

Marita Sturken: Thank you. Thank you, Peggy, for organizing this. I'm just going to let Gabe and Joe show their work first, and then I'm going to pose a few questions and then we'll open it up.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Hello, everybody, I'm Gabe. So, I'm going to start with a video that I made when I was 10 years old. This is a video called "Mummification," a documentary by me. And in the video I am re-enacting the Egyptian mummification process on my sister. That's me in the tunic. So, from a very young age, I was very interested in memorials and rituals surrounding death, strangely enough. I was very precise and serious, also.

But part of this, I think, comes from growing up in L.A. and going to the Natural History Museum a lot, I went there almost every weekend with my parents. So, you can see what happened. And we would spend a lot of time in front of these dioramas of animals that were - you guys have probably seen them.

But I was fascinated by the fact that these animals lived two separate lives, right? They lived their life when they were alive, and now they're living the separate life in this museum, and we're seeing them behind glass. And I thought this was really fascinating for a lot of reasons, but it actually informed some of the early work that I started doing as a digital media artist.

The first piece that I created was a piece that references this. It was a collection of my friends in jars also behind glass. It's a video projection piece. I filmed a number of my friends, and projected them using rear projection into these glass jars. So, I basically memorialized my friends from different periods of my life, and they react in different ways. And there's actually an interactive component to this piece where, when you approach it, there's an infrared sensor that sees you, and they can change their reactions based on how close or far away you are from the piece.

So, in a way, this is a moving diorama. And after creating this piece, I started to think, why did I do this in the first place? Part of it was, like I said, to memorialize these friends and to capture them at a very specific moment in time. So, now I have these friends from 2007 always on my shelf, right? It's a strange concept, but it's something that in our culture we're doing more and more of today, sort of capturing memories and storing them in jars, or vials, or on websites, and keeping these sorts of long timelines of all of our personal information.

The second piece I'll show you is a self-portrait piece; a self-memorial. Obviously, I can't fully memorialize myself. I'm still very much alive. But what I did was create this portrait that was interactive. You could punch a time card punch clock, and as you did it, the character on top would get older. And they're all representations of me. So, it starts off as a baby, and then it grows into a small child, and eventually gets to my current state, and then eventually goes to an older man. And then at the end, it goes to a black screen. So, the more you punch it, the older the person gets.

I like the idea of seeing sort of a whole life encapsulated in this jar, right? It's like a time capsule, but you can control the time capsule. You can advance the life of the person. So, there's an interactive component to it, as well. After a certain number of punches, the piece goes black, and it resets every day. What I liked about this was that this was a visual depiction of a memorial, but there wasn't any real data coming out of this piece. You didn't find out anything about me as a person from looking at this, right? It's just an image of me forecasting the future, in a way, and also just an image of my current body as it is.

So I was thinking a lot about biotechnology at this point, and a friend of mine runs a biotech lab in Brooklyn. It's a citizen science center where you can go, and anybody can learn how to do basic biotech. So, I thought about all this data that's available with biotechnology, specifically DNA, and how we have all this data encapsulated in us. So, I thought, what if I could take some of these concepts of people trapped in jars and encapsulate lives using just this DNA data?

So, I took a bunch of DNA samples of people. I got about 60 samples in the first edition, and I created a piece called "The DNA Vending Machine," which is synthesized DNA samples packaged and put into a vending machine that was then sold in New York City. You could go and buy the individual's DNA, basically. And you don't really see anything visually when you look at this. It looks like just like a floating glob, but you get a little picture of the person whose DNA you got on the back. It's like a collectible card reference.

But what I really like about this is, if you took the time to sequence the DNA, you would get a whole bunch of information. So, in a sense, these are little encapsulated memorials of people that, you know, you just get an image of them. You don't really

know a whole lot about their family history, but if you did synthesize the DNA, you would get all this personal information, all this personal data from it.

And so this piece is also partially about privacy, and it ended up in a show that just closed at the V&A Museum in London. The show was about luxury items, strangely enough. They were framing it as privacy being the ultimate luxury, which I believe is true that, you know, in the future, our privacy is going to be worth more than any of your diamonds, or gold, or anything like that. And so they had this sitting amongst all these luxury items in the museum.

And so, wrapping back around to the beginning of this short lecture, I started thinking about the Egyptians, again, and I was looking at the "Book of the Dead," and I did some research. During the new kingdom of Egypt, people would commission their own copies of the "Book of the Dead," and it would feature themselves; they would actually feature their own portraits inside these scrolls that would be buried with them. To me, that was super interesting. It's like the very first selfie - or not the very first, but it's, so self-important in some way as though it says, "I'm not going to go to the after world unless there's an image of me involved in my burial in some way."

And this reminded me a lot of the modern-day Facebook wall; just in the sense of sequential imagery, and the fact that there's text with embedded images, and the way you read it, and that you could scroll through it. There's a really interesting similarity to me between these two documents. Thinking about death online is a really interesting thing, and we're in a period of time where death is evolving online, and you're going to be around death way more than generations before us.

As an example of this, for instance I saw this birthday greeting from Richard to Michael that said, "Happy Birthday, #YOLO." "YOLO" means "you only live once," for those of you who don't know. But what Richard didn't know was that Michael had died the year

before. And, so, this message takes on a completely different meaning in this context, right? If we live in a world where you have birthdays after you die, what does that mean, right? What does that mean for society and how we look at death?

And another example of this is this is a DJ that I used to go see New York. This was a Tweet that appeared after he died. He had automated his tweets online, so his account continued to tweet even though he had passed away. How do we deal with this idea of dying a second death? Just like the animals in the Natural History Museum that are preserved, they're on display just like these profiles now will be on display. And what are the policies about taking these profiles down or leaving them up? And how does that affect the grieving process? How does that affect how we look at people in our day-to-day lives? How does that affect communication between people?

You probably all experience this now maybe that you've lost someone on Facebook or on other social media. In fact, there are 30 million profiles of deceased people on Facebook now, and they grow constantly. At some point, that number will get bigger than the amount of people that are alive on Facebook. And so then we've got a site that basically is just memorials, right, more predominantly memorials. So, that was never the intention of Facebook, I don't think. I think it was to pick up girls or something. But there you go, Mark Zuckerberg. It's very different.

And so, again, in thinking about Egyptian practices, Egyptians had this concept of the second death. They would write on the outside of coffins. They would actually write these poems and texts that would basically allow people to travel to the afterlife and not have their souls be damned. So the question is, do we have this concept of a second death today? And what are we going to do about that second death today that we all lead online?

That's the topic of my grant that I'm doing with LACMA, the Art and Technology Lab is called "TTYL" - "Talk To You Later" - a series of artistic explorations on how future death memorials and rituals will deal with this abundance of personal data. Like the DNA vending machine deals with your bio data; this is going to deal with all of your personal online data, and how we're going to develop practices around that. I'm working on a series of performances and sculptures over the next year that deals with this concept.

I'm doing a lot of research right now. There are very strange sites like, "If I Die," which is a place you can leave your own video testimonial that will get posted immediately to Facebook if you happen to die. And there's the site "The Tweet Hereafter," which is just the final tweets of people. You can go and see the actual last tweets people had. There's even an Instagram version of this where you can see the last photo someone took before they died. There is a cultural fascination with these sort of online memorials, but there's no context for them, really, because nobody knows really what to do with all this data that's out there. That's what I'm trying to figure out myself.

Just in terms of how people are using technology with this, some people are streaming funerals now for people that can't attend them. There's whole websites and services dedicated to streaming funerals. And that's on the lower end of how people think this is going to go, a tame version. Then there's also the singularity. Some people think of it as a wacky thing. Some of you might really believe in it. But the singularity is the idea that our consciousness eventually will be converted into data, and then we'll be just part of a network of people that won't be a physical world anymore.

If we don't live in a physical world, if we're all just data, then there's no death at all, right? And then in that sense you'd be living on forever. I don't know if I personally believe in that. It's a very techno-optimist kind of way of looking at the world, but people do think about that. And there's a large portion of people in these big tech companies

trying to make this happen. Hopefully, that gives you a little bit of idea of the kind of work that I'm doing and the stuff that I'm interested in. Thank you.

Joseph DeLappe: Hi, everybody. First, I just want to thank everyone who organized this amazing event; really great to be here. I'll try to go through this stuff pretty quickly here.

I've been working with memorials in my work really pretty solidly since this - and somebody might remember this (slides). In 2003/2004, there was a competition for the Memorial at the World Trade Center site. And I remember when this website was published; it was a big deal. It was in "The New York Times," and there are 5,200 proposals from around the world put online for everybody to peruse and it seemed this nice gesture, but it was also something that really put me in a place of questioning.

This was just less than a year after our invasion of Iraq. And I just speculated, thought to myself, we will never do this process for the civilian casualties in Iraq. And this process will undoubtedly somehow be involved in memorializing our soldiers in Iraq who were dying in ever-greater numbers at that time. And it led to two ideas, which I'll go into rather quickly. It was these questions and thinking, 'What are memorials to warfare, to casualties?'

Typical examples are the World War I Memorial in Toronto, Canada, a memorial to our glorious dead; the Iwo Jima Memorial; or Maya Lin's Memorial to Vietnam, which is a seminal work - really amazing as a scar in the landscape. All these things were in my thought processes, and, also, I was getting politicized as an artist with the Iraq conflict, and 9/11, and everything else, and kept coming back to thinking about that that notion, "What is a protest in the digital era?"

And if you know my work, I have a lot of background of doing performative interventions in computer games - and these are usually text-based interventions in game spaces. The "America's Army" game was something that came out in 2002. I remember when that came out, and thinking that this is a serious game, and that there is something that needs to happen in here. I wasn't sure what, but it was this 9/11 memorial process that jarred loose this idea of going into this space.

This is a video document of an intervention into the "America's Army" game. The "America's Army" game is a recruiting tool and marketing system for the Defense Department for the Army. And what I did was essentially to, in March of 2006, start going into this game. And instead of playing the game, you'll see here I'll drop my weapon, and I will move to a location somewhere in the game space. And rather than play the game, I'm typing in the names of actual American casualties from the Iraq conflict into the game space. I'll just do one sequence here so that you can get an idea of it.

This was an intervention in this space, and I looked at this as a memorial and a protest. These names would go across everybody else's screens, and then they would disappear. It was like the equivalent of the carving into the granite on Maya Lin's Memorial and the typified practice of names as being a big part of memorials in our culture.

This was, at first, a private gesture. I didn't really publicize this. It just was something that I started to do, and it went viral very quickly in game forums and different venues. I was interviewed on all kinds of media sources, and it became rather controversial. There were threats against my person, and it became this really interesting point of contention - most people focusing on it being a protest, where I was thinking of it probably even more than equally as a memorial, this way of, as a citizen artist, actually just reading through this list of growing names of soldiers, and typing this in very

carefully, and having it show up in this context as a cautionary gesture to possible recruits.

These are just some of the reactions of some of the other players, which tended to be rather vicious, but also signified that they were paying attention; that it was getting under their skin, if you will. I knew I was very successful when I was getting kicked out of a particular match, because that meant they were all paying attention. This was almost a Sisyphean kind of typing and getting killed, and then you come back in the next game, you type more, and it's just an ongoing cycle. I did this from 2006 to 2011, and actually finished it on the last day when we withdrew troops from Iraq - December 18, 2011.

There were a number of peripheral pieces created that were connected to this. This (slide) is actually a cardboard sculpture created from the dataset of my avatar extracted from the game. There are a number of other projects surrounding this that I'm not going to go into right now, but this was really an intense experience. Consecutive with this work, and, again, referring back to the 9/11 competition – was this idea of civilian casualties.

When I started *dead-in-iraq*, my first idea was actually to go into "America's Army" and actually type in the name of civilian casualties into the game. But that list didn't exist, right, because we weren't recording those, right? That's not something we pay attention to, and that became really pivotal in terms of sort of a shift. So, first, I was thinking, okay, maybe I can just take the actual code from this website and flip it, you know, kind of "The New York Times" yes men thing, which I was actually part of that, but I thought that was too easy.

The statistics surrounding civilian casualties consist of conflicting information. It's definitely controversial, but there are a number of statistics about civilian casualties in Iraq, and they're all generally really, really awful. But what I decided to do was actually

create a curatorial project called *iraqimemorial.org*, which invited artists, architects, and anyone to submit proposals similar to the 9/11 process for imagined memorials to the civilian casualties in Iraq. And of course, we would never build such a thing. That was part of the point, so there was no winner.

But I ended up getting all kinds of projects, from proposals to actual works people did. There's Matt Kenyon's *Notepad Project* – amazing work - Rashad Salim's project, which was a proposal to hold kite-building workshops on a bridge at the Tigris; *Tigris River*, and a couple of other projects here I won't go into in detail. But you can go to this website. There are about 200-plus projects that were submitted, and it's now an archive of these ideas about memorializing these victims, these others.

The work eventually became a physical exhibition, where we had jurors who actually chose their top 10 entries, and those were then invited to create proposal boards, the same size as the 9/11 proposals. It was a traveling exhibition; it started at the Sheppard Gallery at the University of Nevada, Reno, where I teach. The most significant exhibition was at Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, and this opened two days before the 9/11 Memorial was dedicated in 2011, and it really had a quite a resonance in that space. We had the proposals, objects, performances, all kinds of things, and it was a definitely quite an amazing show.

I've remained interested in civilian casualties, specifically related to drone warfare. This is a project called *The 1,000 Drones Project*, which was a participatory project I developed for the FSU Art Museum for an exhibition there. It was essentially playing off of the Thousand Cranes idea, with these very simple paper cutouts for people to cut out and write the names of a civilian drone casualty upon the drone. And these were then strung up in a kind of an installation that was essentially a trident in a triangular shape. It's really quite beautiful. And more recently, just some statistics about drone strikes.

And this is, again, contentious information, but I won't go into detail on some of this at this point.

A larger project that I worked on was called *The Drone Project, A Participatory Memorial*. This was a commission I did at Fresno State University last year. This was inspired by this video of a fallen drone that is actually being pelted with rocks by villagers. I worked on campus for two weeks with volunteers to create a large scale - it's a 100-percent scale, full-scale version of a predator drone out of yellow corrugated plastic, which we then installed on the campus, out on the lawn. And then we went through a process with Afghan immigrants reading the names, age, and date of death of civilian drone casualties that were then written upon the surface of the drone, both in English and Pashtun.

This was really a very moving, experience, quite emotional, actually, even to just talk about it. But the drone was eventually covered with these names. These are some of the volunteers who actually worked on the piece, which was really, really something. A work that's in progress is the *Metadata Project*. You might be familiar with this; it was just removed from the Apple site, actually.

But just to show you a map of the 400 plus drone strikes in the North Waziristan region – I'm working this project with a collaborator of mine, a friend, Pete Froslic, from Oklahoma State University. He and I are working on this installation, which is essentially a 3D print - 421 at this point in time – the number will probably go up as we have more drone strikes, physical drones, 3D prints, that are then going to be an installation creating a map, almost like a war room with the pegs.

This is a dry run of 25 drone strikes over this village, Mir Ali, and these have addressable LED lights under each one that will light according to a chronology of the drone strikes, and, they create these shadows on the ceiling in a kind of staccato.

There's a short video here you can see a test they did at Autodesk in San Francisco when I was in residency there. The shadows are actually quite dramatic.

We intend this to be a physical memorial installation, because when you actually look at the map and you draw yourself out, once you actually see these 400 strikes across the map, you really get a sense of the immensity of the warfare that we're conducting in this region. That's where I'm at and I have other projects that are going on that I'm sure we'll talk about as things move on. Thank you very much.

Marita Sturken: Thank you. I just wanted to say, I've been working on this broader project about thinking about memory and what's the era that we are still living in, which I think we can still define as the post-9/11 era. Some of that work is looking at some of the virtual proposals around memorializing the Iraq War, which, of course, is a war of colonialism, is a never-ending war, and hence, difficult to memorialize, right? Hence the virtual memorial.

Putting that and other works into play with the very official kinds of memorials and museums that have been constructed around 9/11 - and, very specifically, the 9/11 Memorial Museum and Memorial that has recently opened in New York City, I've been trying to think about questions of vulnerability. Judith Butler has written quite exquisitely about how our inability to confront our vulnerability is really at the core of this continued conflict, and that what we see in these cases are distinctions between what gets to count as a grievable life and what does not get to count.

It has been very much the case, I think, that a lot of the work that's been trying to deal with memory in this context has reverted to some forms that maybe we thought were out of date, like, the politics of visibility, like counting, right? And you see this a lot with the Iraq memorialization, as you noted, Joe, that a lot of it is about counting the numbers, thinking about the numbers of dead, or how to make those dead visible.

But I'd like to pose maybe an initial question that's really about media and how we look at these different kinds of media - because on one hand, both of you are working digital media forms, and I think for us to think about what they enable is really important. Do they enable particular kinds of experiences for viewers that pull us into different modes; modes of complicity, modes of participation, modes of empathy?

But at the same time, you're both also working with some very material old-fashioned media; like Joe, you're making stuff out of cardboard, and Gabe, you have these jars, right? And I have, actually, noticed in a lot of the work that I've been looking at, that drawing people, drawing from photographs is a very common theme. Almost as if the photograph has lost its aura; it's kind of banal. It doesn't do for us what it used to do.

And I would just say as an aside that the museum in New York - the photographs really don't convey much meaning or feeling. They're kind of empty. But the audio is really amazing, and it's the thing that everyone talks about after they go there. So, thinking then about how we want to narrate what it is that digital media enables here and, perhaps, also disables, right? But then what does it mean to put that in play with these other material forms, if you guys want to address that?

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: I think that there's a big argument right now about virtual reality and what role virtual reality could play in terms of creating empathy amongst people. If you see something - I'm teaching a course about this, but I'm not sure I believe in it myself, which is a weird way to teach a course - the course I'm teaching is called "In Their Shoes," and the idea is that you're filming scenes from someone else's perspective. For example, Chris Milk's work, *Clouds over Sidra*.

There are a lot of virtual reality pieces right now that deal with putting you in a perspective you'd never be able to go to, but part of that is really interesting, and part of

it feels a little bit like travel log documentaries from, like, the early 1900s where you're, like, "Oh, look at these exotic people, and now I'm in their place," you know? And so, to me, there's a weird tension there, I think.

And to speak to your idea of materiality, I think for me, the reason I use older objects is to have some connection to the humanity of these pieces. I think that by using ready-made objects or found objects, it's bringing the digital media into the real world in some way, which is important to me. And something that I'm struggling with the grant is, "How do we represent all this data in a physical form that's interesting and it doesn't look like a data visualization," right? That's not just numbers.

Maybe it's like a sculpture, maybe it's - you know, I'm working with vinyl right now and trying to figure out how to encode data into old records. And that's something that I'm working with for this grant. The ability to recognize the object is really important to me, I think.

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah, that sense of materiality is something I'm really concerned about. And part of it for me comes from James Young's writings on memorials in Nazi Germany, in particular, that was something I was researching when I really got curious and was deeply interested in memorials about ten or so years ago, and I was really fascinated by some of the works that he cites as being these counter monuments, such as those of Hoheisel. Some of his memorials, which were literally these voids, you know, like a fountain in Castle, Germany, that have been destroyed by the Nazis, and then they wanted to do a memorial to that. And so he proposed basically doing the inverse of this big monument into the ground where water pours in, and you walk over it, and you kind of become the monument, in a way, standing on it. And I really like that sense of the disappearance; you know?

He proposed for the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin to actually blow up the Brandenburg Gate, and grind up the dust, and then put granite walking panels over it so it - just was, this disappearance thing. And that really stuck with me in terms of – especially with my piece, *dead-in-iraq* – that disappearance or this kind of forgetting, this almost contemporaneous amnesia, that just these names are there, and then they're gone, and, then, where they're absent. I really was thinking about that.

I think in terms of the actual physical creation of these objects, that's a shift, because, well, you showed the Gandhi piece, which I didn't really talk about, but that pulling these avatars out of that virtual space into physical space was a different way of actualizing them.

Marita Sturken: You mean making the cardboard sculptures that look like avatars from the game.

Joseph DeLappe: Exactly. They are directly taken from that immaterial space and made material. And the more recent works, the drone works, particularly the ones that were participatory, it was just this really fundamental way of getting others involved in it so that it wasn't just me doing this thing, but actually - and particularly in the drone project, the large sculpture - those students and volunteers were completely invested in that work, and learning, and were talking about the issues surrounding it during the process. So, the process of doing it became this memorialization process, almost like a ritual.

Marita Sturken: It's interesting to think, because both of you have different kinds of participation that your works are enabling, and I wonder if you're thinking about the kind of immersive participation that you had with the games versus building a project in physical space together; like, what is it about the producing some kind of memorialization in digital media that allows you then to play with not simply enabling

that kind of participation, but also putting someone in that complicit kind of subject position?

Joseph DeLappe: I guess pretty important, because I'm really skeptical about memorials. I mean, that's some sort of a basis of a lot of this work and trying to see, through the process of doing it - asking, "Is this possible?" and is it possible to have this memorial process of actually making with others in order to create some sense of meaning or connection to the issue you're trying to address?

But I remain very skeptical of them. I think with the digital in particular - because it is this ephemeral state that you're working with that I think it really actually - I mean, the things that I'm making are impermanent, you know. If they're in cardboard, whatever, they're there for a while, they go away - that's something I'm really, really cognizant of.

Marita Sturken: So that impermanence is actually more like life, right -

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah.

Marita Sturken: - than the stone memorial?

Joseph DeLappe: Precisely, yeah.

Marita Sturken: But it also seems to me that there's a kind of liveness, aliveness? I'm thinking about the figures in the glass, and you said also that those people are older now. It reminded me since I just finished reading "Harry Potter" with my kid and that "Harry Potter" has all these people who are dead, but they're still alive in the paintings, and they're still moving. And I'm just wondering about that quality of aliveness that does something that the photograph can't.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Yeah, and I think that it's only going to increase as we get faster computers and more data storage. We'll have these documents of our entire lives. And the question is, at what point, I feel like I sound like such a nerd when I talk about this stuff, but at what point does it switch over to AI, right? Where we can actually have a program that makes decisions like we would make decisions or that can talk to us like a real person?

Something that I wanted to do was reanimate the dead in some way using just preexisting data. That's what photography does, that's what video does, right? We're moving in this direction of capturing more and more data of ourselves and other people. And now with 3D modeling, it's very easy to reconstruct somebody in 3D. And so at what point does this become this bizarre phantasmic aria, or does it actually seem real at any point, you know? I don't know.

Marita Sturken: So, you could say it's a kind of disavowing about death, right?

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Yeah.

Marita Sturken: If we're going to -

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Yeah, I think the singularity people, they're trying to beat death. I think they're trying to completely overtake the idea of their physical bodies giving out at some point, and they're putting a lot of computer power and programmers into this concept of trying to program themselves into a machine.

Marita Sturken: I think the Facebook example is also really interesting, because there we have this social media corporate aim to shape how we think about memory - oh, throwback Tuesday or, oh, Facebook is always saying to me, you posted this two years ago - so do you want to post it again? And sometimes the algorithm is pretty good

at picking out the picture that maybe I would want to post again, right? And the sense then when Facebook rearranged its timeline so that it was more like a photo album, it suggested that you needed to go back in and fill in your pre-Facebook life so that Facebook has your memories and is the container for your memories. And think about all the ways in which they're using that to keep us hooked in.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Oh, yeah, we're all addicted, and we all know that, right? The question is, what happens in 15 years when maybe Facebook isn't this website du jour anymore, right, and there's all these memorials on Facebook? What happens to those memorials? Do they get transferred over to the new social media or do they just disappear at that point?

Marita Sturken: I think Facebook is thinking that because they're there, they will still be there.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: They'll stay, yeah. But then you're trusting a corporation with your life, right, at that point.

Marita Sturken: Absolutely. Absolutely. It's really, really troubling. Before I turn it over to the larger group for questions, I do want to say something - ask something, really, about this question of ephemerality. And, you know, everyone has an example of a much labored-over project and site that's gone, right? Or that no longer has a server to be housed on or Peggy's *Gone Gitmo* project, right? We were just talking earlier about how it's just gone now.

So on one hand, that ephemerality can be very moving. It can be very much about how we remember and forget. And maybe it is more like the way in which our memories function, but it also seems like a problem. I mean, your site is now an archive, right?

Joseph DeLappe: The *iraqimemorial.org*, yeah; it's an archive. But there is, again, that physical component that exists. I don't know. I think of that certainly a lot of the game spaces where I have done performances are either no longer playable or sometimes they're emulated - like Quake is one that you can now play in a little emulator, but it's not the same experience. And I don't necessarily have any problem with that.

I think it's because I've approached these things. And I approached the "America's Army" game space as this kind of public square, and that's always changing. And if you were doing that in reality, you'd come back and there would be a new statue, or they tore it out and put it in something new; like, you know, Union Square in San Francisco, that type of thing. So, I don't have any problem with that necessarily.

I think it certainly is the typical thing where the documentation becomes really key. And in some ways, I felt kind of strange even documenting that process, because that's when it became art in a strange kind of way.

Marita Sturken: Well, it seems to fit, too, with your suspicion about memorials in general; like, one of the things that you think now when you go to Lower Manhattan is, what's this going to be like in 30 years? In 30 years, we're still going to be replaying and replaying and replaying the story of this day, right? And it's set in stone, you know? It's not going anywhere, right? So the permanence of some memorials is actually, you know, an odd project.

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah, very, very problematic.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Yeah, and the permanence of digital art - in general, I think people are now finding out methods to archive digital work, and I think they will be put in place over the next couple of years where you'll have video games that are being restored constantly. And, you know, Rhizome is a really good resource that is working to

archive digital art. But, it's a fairly new field, still. People are still trying to figure out a place for interactive art and video art involving sculptural work and that kind of thing.

So, it's a problem that I worry about a lot with my work as, you know, what happens when the program that runs the software is updated or changed, and do I go back to the person that has it in their house and fix it? You know what I mean? Like, it's different than necessarily, like being like, here's a painting. Now go, you know.

I also think that, because of that, we're favoring real-world experiences more when it comes to art. I mean, like the Rain Room is coming here, right? And the Rain Room is the best example of an immersive experience that everybody wants to be part of, because it's a real-life experience. You can't get that experience online, you know, very well. So, there is this trend. I think that's happening with immersive theater. Immersive art and performance, I think, is coming back a lot because of that.

Marita Sturken: All right. I'm happy to open it up to the larger group if you have questions.

Audience Member: [Question about the ethical issues and the potential of putting our will into a program.] Do you see an evolution of a governing body of ethics? How do you manage the after death image of yourself?

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Right. That's the big question right there. I think you stated it perfectly – it is the easiest way to do that right now. Facebook is making legacy contacts, so you can say, I want you to be the person that executes my online will, which means that when I die, you get control of my account. So, that solves a lot of the legal problems of, like, if I die suddenly, what happens to all my data online?

But in a future, thing that brings to mind is...remember the Tupac hologram at Coachella? I don't think Tupac put in his will, "It's okay to make me into a hologram at some point," right? That was a perfect example of reanimating someone's body and doing a performance with their body after they passed away. And that's only going to happen more and more. I think that if we don't start to think about the ethical issues with that, just imagine what you could end up as?

Marita Sturken: Hollywood lawyers have been making some contracts about digital rights to the image of dead celebrities for a while now. So, they're probably at the forefront of these issues.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: But the question is, when do you become public domain, though? Is it 50 years? I don't know. So, yeah, I don't know. I think that's a really interesting point, and I'm definitely, thinking about that, as well.

Peggy Weil: I really like the point you made about counting names or making names count. I just wonder if you wanted to say something about that, about making the virtual experience actually matter, as opposed to being, say, a novelty trip to Guantánamo.

Marita Sturken: One of the things that I have been thinking about in relationship to this is that in the era of the digital, we have a fascination with the valuing of linkages, aggregation and curation. We have an emphasis on the network rather than on visibility, standing up and being counted, what we might think of more as a politics of visibility. These things go in cycles, but I feel that, especially in the case of the post-9/11 wars, the question of counting and visibility became really important because of what was so uncounted, like the Iraqi war dead. Artists who were struggling with the question of how you make art about the war began to focus on that. Quite a few of the pieces on Joe's

website are specifically about counting: making Xs, counting figures, imaging how to count war dead.

Another piece that I've been writing about by Emily Prince is all about making drawings from photos. Even the title itself, *American Servicemen and Women Who Have Died in Iraq and Afghanistan (but not Including the Wounded, nor the Iraqis nor the Afghans)* points to those who are not counted. So, there's the sense that counting still matters, even in this era in which we're so inundated with information and images that we don't focus on that specificity anymore. I feel that that's re-emerged in a lot of the art projects, that very question of counting. Do you want to say something on that?

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah, sure. I think the danger there, it's like counting friends on Facebook.

Marita Sturken: Likes - counting likes?

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah, likes, and friends, and all that. And I think that's something that I have been really conscious of in these works. If you see the names in "Dead in Iraq," they're not numbered. They're dated. It's a chronology, but it's not listing like this is number 1,002, you know? I hope they become individualized as these names go across in that kind of escapist gaming space. But I think it's something you do because it's that thing of a million dead, as opposed to 10, you can't visualize it. And so I think in some ways, it is this effort of mine to try to make something where you can actually begin to visualize.

I do have to say in this discussion of Facebook, I can't help but think about a good friend on Facebook whose wife died two weeks ago, and he's been using Facebook as this memorial space constantly posting these pictures and bringing them up, and it's heart-wrenching. I mean, it's quite amazing how emotionally powerful that space can be at the

same time where you have all these abstract friends and things. So, I think there's great potential in making these connections in that space, and that's something I'm really interested in continuing to explore.

Marita Sturken: I will note one of the art pieces by Waffa Bila, called ...*and Counting*. He had tattooed on his back dots for the American dead which were done in visible ink, and then dots for the Iraqi dead that were done in ink that could only be seen under UV lights. So the whole piece enacted upon his body in a very intense way was about whose deaths are - it's back to the Judith Butler question - whose deaths get to count and whose don't, and the stark reality of how we value some lives over others. Other questions? Comments?

Audience Member: [Question regarding the potential of commodification and commercialization of digital memorials.]

Joseph DeLappe: Just really quick - I think that that we've all been really captivated and probably horrified with some of the video coming out of police experiences in recent memory. I think that's a good example of where it's actually possibly leading to some good. From my perspective, it would seem to me that that's one of the issues, specifically, with drone warfare is that video has been extremely controlled - where they do have those videos, and we're not allowed to see them.

And that's one of the reasons why it's just allowed to continue happening as it's really invisible, and we don't really care, as a nation, that this is happening on the other side of the globe. One of the motivating factors in doing this is - I feel like it's this small gesture of resistance in saying, no, this is happening, and it's happening in our name, and we're paying for it, and that's you. That drone is - that's *us* over there.

I think there are ways that I think it can really function to expose certain things, but, yeah, you do wonder about it. The live cam on your deathbed or whatever, that's stuff I'm sure that's going to be happening. I don't know what that means.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: I'll give you a specific example, not so much with the death stuff, but from when I did the DNA vending machine, and it sold a bunch of the samples out in the first show. And then I had a talk that was online about it, and I started getting these weird email requests from people that were, like, "I want 10 DNA samples from the machine."

Marita Sturken: You mean after you did a TED Talk?

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Yeah, yeah, and people were, like, "Oh, I want 10." And I got someone who was like, "I just want to buy the entire machine, but not as an art project." I was like, "It's an art project," and they're, "No, no, I just want all the samples in the machine." And I realized I was getting requests from pharmaceutical companies that wanted to buy the samples, because, to them, it's worth a lot of money to have DNA samples. So that was really interesting and unexpected.

But then at the same time, I got a request from a school teacher in Florida who's now going to make five DNA vending machines in their school and put them in the hallway of the school to teach about the privacy and ethics about buying and selling DNA. So for me, that outweighs the idea that I'm getting all these creeps; the fact that it's giving access to new ideas to the people that wouldn't necessarily think about these things before - that, to me, is the strength of art; that you're provoking something. And maybe some of it will end up in the hands of wrong-doers, but the good seems to outweigh the bad a lot of the time.

I also think about the ethics of creating things. I'm not going to necessarily make a camera to watch dead people, just out of my morbid curiosity; I'm more interested in provoking a conversation about something.

Marita Sturken: I think, as your example earlier from Facebook shows, is that we can have authentically empathetic kinds of experiences via these media. Even though they're also easily co-opted, right? Facebook is a really good example of this. We all hate the corporate structure of it, knowing all of that, but people do make very deep connections, to people from their past and other things, precisely because of what the algorithms enable us to do.

I want an artist to make - maybe someone's done it, and I'm just unaware of it - a piece in which you're really followed by a drone, and you really experience that - someone can do it. You could do it.

Joseph DeLappe: I'm actually -

Marita Sturken: You really experience that sense of being haunted by it and hunted.

Joseph DeLappe: Well, funny you should say that. Here's a piece, it's a very simple piece that I made last year, but it's a plastic model of one 70-second scale model of a drone that I made, and there's a device that attaches to your head so it's up behind you and it follows you around so you can never see it, right, because you turn.

But there's a more intense project that I'm working on; a computer game that I've been working on with some collaborators in Scotland. It's called *Killbox*. It's a turbulence commission, and it's a shooter game. It's a two-person shooter game, but there's only one shooter. You get the chance to play either the drone pilot or a civilian on the ground in Waziristan.

As a civilian, you have zero agency. There's no warning, so it really is trying to simulate that experience, because that's something I think that's important. I don't know if it succeeds in terms of creating that environment, but it's definitely intense watching people play and they are very anxious and it's very intense when they get killed.

Marita Sturken: I think that those experiences in digital media that ask us to confront our complicity are very particular in a certain sense, very medium-specific, right? It's very, very difficult to do that with a photograph for instance. JoAnn?

JoAnn Hanley: I don't know the details, but I think a couple of years ago - I think it was an artist in New York City - I don't know if you know about this or not - put up some signs downtown that looked very official, street signs that said that this area was being watched by drones.

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah.

JoAnn Hanley: And they got a big response. Evidently, people responded and were really upset when they would find those signs.

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah.

JoAnn Hanley: It was something about parking.

Marita Sturken: The drones were going to give you a parking ticket.

JoAnn Hanley: It would say, this particular area is now under drone surveillance.

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah, that's a Bay Area artist. He's a friend, Stephen Whisler, *Speed Enforced By Drones*.

JoAnn Hanley: Yeah, something like that.

Joseph DeLappe: Yeah, it was very effective.

Audience Member: [Question about ethics, issues critical to new systems of technology]

Marita Sturken: But when you say the issues of this work, do you mean issues in relationship to privacy and surveillance and violence? The refinement of them as a tool of war.

Joseph DeLappe: I think, *Shoot*, Chris Burden's piece, is something that I definitely think about, especially in terms of getting shot over and over again. And that's always been framed as his kind of response to the Vietnam conflict, as well.

And I actually have to say, I was ignorant of Chris Burden's amazing piece, *The Other Vietnam Memorial*, which was a memorial to the civilian casualties in Vietnam, until I started getting into my own project. And someone said, "Did you see this?" Because it's interesting how that's a piece that is really not talked about much in terms of his work. There's very little representation of it online, but it's an amazing project.

Audience Member: [Question re: corporate appropriation as a form of normalization, whether or how we might become desensitized.]

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: I think we've already normalized a large part of it. I think that is true especially with gaming. You can see gaming, the advances in gaming in the last five years have been incredible, and people are living videogames now, right? Second

Life was a good example of that in the first place. I think that's how that will translate to the art world - I think the art will just continue evolving and tackle new issues.

My goal as an artist is to provoke thought about these topics. I guess if the topics become mundane, then I need to find a new topic to work. I'm developing a performance as part of this grant, and part of that performance is not just to use Facebook as the venue for the performance, but also to make you consider things that tie into you as a person – things that we're all dealing with.

For instance, when I show you the images of people trapped in jars, there's a real human connection there that I like to play with, and it's not so much about the technology to me. It's more about the humanity of the piece. So, I guess that's somewhat of an answer. I don't know.

Joseph DeLappe: I was going to say the same thing. I think it has become normalized in that, and that that's part of what I think I'm interested in in creating these ephemeral memorials, is that it's a reflection, I think, of the way we have become in terms of dealing with this kind of subject matter. I don't know. For me, it partially is a critique of the militarism that has infected every aspect of our culture, every sports game, every - it's like it's just become this – I remember the end of the Vietnam War. I was, I think, 13 or something, it seemed shocking, this progression, of how much we now accept the fact that we have this continuous warfare for the last 15 years going on on the other side of the globe. It was unimaginable even 20, 25 years ago, you know? I think the flip side of that is, we have this constant flow of casualties. Even though it's minimal compared to other conflicts in the past, because of medical advances and all that kind of thing; it's still there.

I think I just saw online in The New York Times this morning, we just had our first casualty in Iraq since we moved out, our first American casualty. They still have the little

window in The New York Times of the Afghanistan American casualties, occasionally that pops up. So, I think it's just become this kind of typified thing in our culture, and that's part of what I'm interested in exploring in terms of trying to draw out this other side that we just don't look at.

It used to drive me crazy reading in the papers during the Iraq War how little attention was paid to the civilian casualties, or in Waziristan, or in Afghanistan. And then you see constant reporting about civilian casualties in Syria and all these other places where there's conflicts, but it's because we're not causing them, you know? So, I think we've become - I don't know - desensitized in a way or protected by our media, et cetera. So, yes, it's already happened.

Marita Sturken: I would just add onto that the question of privacy. I think because in the new world of data - and it's a world of data that's not only about government surveillance, but, obviously, about consumerism - there are different activities that we participate in where we adjust to new norms of privacy all the time. If you are a consumer in any way online, you adjust to these new norms where you're giving away, aspects of your privacy for convenience, right?

And that very practice that we participate in as consumers makes us more used to other kinds of surveillance. So, in a certain sense, it's the way in which they all work together, where then people might think, "Oh, my God the NSA is listening to all my phone calls. Oh, who cares, because Google already knows everything."

So, it's the way in which in this new world of data, which I think we're still really just becoming more deeply aware of, is in itself affecting what it means in our lives. Those different worlds interacting produces a kind of constantly-changing norm of what we have adjusted to.

Peggy Weil: I think we have time for one more question.

Audience Member: [Question about relation of analogue to digital in DeLappe's work: Do you feel a similar tension in the translation back into digital from the analogue pieces you've made?]

Joseph DeLappe: Interesting question. I don't know if I've ever really thought about it. I've always looked at sharing and talking about work for audiences like this as a really deep part of the processing that I go through as an artist. So it definitely is a way for me - because I'm not looking at these works every day - I'm onto the next thing.

So, it is this sort of refresh, reminding me, "Yeah, I did that, and here's why." So, it definitely is this memory bank of images, and experiences, and projects, and things - I'll probably have some idea later tonight - right? It's just how it works.

Audience Member: We're all being memorialized right now by a photographer.

Joseph DeLappe: Exactly. Exactly.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: I think it's interesting, though, especially with interactive art, because I'm showing you a video of other people interacting with it, right? And you're not having that experience of punching the punch card..

Marita Sturken: It's a little bit vicarious.

Gabe Barcia-Colombo: Yeah, you're living it. And so the documentation doesn't really give you the full experience of interacting with the piece. But the question is, how much does that matter at this day and age? I don't know. I think just getting the

message across is really important. But there are certain things that I want you to touch and hold at the same time. I think that's also very important.

Marita Sturken: Any last words of wisdom?

Joseph DeLappe: Thank you.

Marita Sturken: Thank you. Thank you for coming.

End of recording.