Cyber Cemeteries as a Challenge to Traditional Reformed Thanatological Liturgical Praxis

By

Frans Johann Nicolaas Matthee

27256473

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree:

PhD (Practical Theology)

In the

Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof Cas Wepener

Pretoria

August 2018

Abstract

Cyberspace and ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace are areas of immense complexity. This thesis explores ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace using network ethnography, with Facebook and the memorial website of Chester Bennington as the primary thanatechnologies and field sites. Key concepts include cyber cemeteries, liminality, network society/culture, post-mortal society and cyber ritual. These concepts are used to understand ritual liturgical expression as observed in the research data gathered at the field sites. Based on this data It was found that ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace was strongly influenced by the narratives of the individuals in encoding and decoding their bodies as they moved between the dimensions of cyberspace and corporeal space. It was also found that narratives were responsible for the construction of ritual liturgical space, and that the narratives that constituted the space in cyberspace could create a context where the sacred could be experienced. It is therefore evident that notions around the understanding of specifically embodiment and space are fundamentally challenged by the reality of cyberspace. The way in which these concepts are challenged raises critical questions about the thanatological liturgical praxis of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). This thesis adopts the stance that within the complexity of ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace, the opportunity exists for a new and evolved ritual repertoire to inform the current thanatological liturgical praxis of the DRC.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The Department of Practical Theology places great emphasis upon integrity and ethical conduct in the preparation of all written work submitted for academic evaluation. While academic staff teach you about referencing techniques and how to avoid plagiarism, you too have a responsibility in this regard. If you are at any stage uncertain as to what is required, you should speak to your lecturer before any written work is submitted.

You are guilty of plagiarism if you copy something from another author's work (eg a book, an article or a website) without acknowledging the source and pass it off as your own. In effect you are stealing something that belongs to someone else. This is not only the case when you copy work word-for-word (verbatim), but also when you submit someone else's work in a slightly altered form (paraphrase) or use a line of argument without acknowledging it. You are not allowed to use work previously produced by another student. You are also not allowed to let anybody copy your work with the intention of passing if off as his/her work.

Students who commit plagiarism will not be given any credit for plagiarised work. The matter may also be referred to the Disciplinary Committee (Students) for a ruling. Plagiarism is regarded as a serious contravention of the University's rules and can lead to expulsion from the University.

The declaration which follows must accompany all written work submitted while you are a student of the Department of Theology. No written work will be accepted unless the declaration has been completed and attached.

Full names of student: Frans Johann Nicolaas Matthee

Student number: 27256473

Topic of work: Cyber Cemeteries as a Challenge to Traditional Reformed Thanatological Liturgical Praxis

Declaration

1. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.

2. I declare that this dissertation is my own original work. Where other people's work has been used (either from a printed source, Internet or any other source),

this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.

3. I have not used work previously produced by another student or any other person to hand in as my own.

4. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.

SIGNATURE: Nicolas Matthee

Acknowledgements

I vividly remember the day Machdel received her bound and printed thesis and showed it to the family. I was somewhere in my teenage years when I witnessed this, and I thought, someday that's going to be me.

Finally, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my supervisor Cas Wepener. Thank you for teaching me valuable academic lessons and inspiring me to truly deliver the best work that I can. But more importantly, thank you for teaching me how to simply be human.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

"Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding..."

Gibson (1984: 51)

Many argue that the origins of the concept of cyberspace is to be found in the fictional work of William Gibson titled *Neuromancer* and published in 1984. In this novel Case, a down-and-out computer hacker is hired to investigate a super-artificial intelligence. During the course of the novel Case "enters" cyberspace to complete various tasks which culminate in two artificial intelligences integrating and transforming cyberspace. While only a novel, much of what Gibson writes has in a certain sense come to pass during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Cyberspace transformed the way in which we live, express ourselves and even the way in which we die.

Cyberspace and social media provide humanity with a repertoire of expression that is almost never ending. From the photo-filters of Instagram to the constantly updated animations and filters of Snapchat, modern human beings are provided with ample opportunity to express themselves in cyberspace. This is not only confined to our social spheres of life, but in many cases enters our spiritual and religious spheres. Tied closely to these spheres is the expression of ritual, and therefore modern human beings are engaged with ritual in cyberspace and, as discussed in this thesis, they participate in ritualising in new and exciting spaces.

Wepener (2015, 2014, 2011a, 2007) was not the first to explore an iteration of the current ritual liturgical landscape, but his study is the most relevant to what

is being explored here. The importance Wepener's work lies in the fact that the South African landscape is explored and therefore is a relevant point of departure for this thesis. Post[1] (2004) explored the ritual landscape in the Netherlands. Other notable contributions from Europe include Heessels (2012), Wojtkowiak (2012), Quartier (2011), Venbrux, Heessels and Bolt (2008), Mak (2015), Nijland (2015), Arfman (2014), Hoondert and Bruin-Mollenhorst (2016), Hoondert and Arfman (2013), Hoondert and Klomp (2012), Hoondert (2012) and Hoondert (2008), who explore a range of ritual landscapes. In his article Post (2004) presents an analysis of participation in various ritual-liturgical instances and touches on a few core concepts pertinent to this thesis. Post (2004, 37) elaborates on especially the ritual-liturgical domain of funerals in the Netherlands and indicates that this type of ritual-liturgical praxis is very relevant and demands a substantial level of participation. Post (2004, 39, 53) reflects on the church building as the liturgical locus for the community and mentions the disposal of church buildings as a challenge to ritual-liturgical praxis as is seen in the Netherlands, and then proceeds to identify the internet or cyberspace as a possible ritual-liturgical domain. Wepener (2011a) adopts this same paradigm, to explore various liturgical phenomena outside of the traditional Sunday church service, in other words outside of the traditional ritual-liturgical space, in a South African context, his focus being on the use of the symbol of the cross in these instances. In his search for these symbols Wepener (2011a: 265) also engages the controversial and fluctuating space of the internet and cyberspace as a possible domain of ritual-liturgical praxis.

In addition to the work of both Post and Wepener in their respective contexts,[2] the prominence of Facebook also opens up the possibility of preliminary observations regarding death and bereavement today. Facebook has the option of memorialising a deceased person's profile, thereby effectively creating a place of remembrance much like a physical graveyard for those who

---

[1] See also Post and van der Beek (2016) and Post, Grimes, Nugteren, Petterson and Zondag (2013). In these two works emerging ritual repertoires are explored and, in many cases, the ritual and liturgical expression are found outside of traditional liturgical spaces.
[2] Barnard (2006) also contributes to the discussion in his work *Liturgie voorbij de Liturgische Beweging. Over Evangelical Worship, Thomasvieringen, kerkdiensten in migrantenkerken en ritualiteit op het internet.*

were "friends" with the person on Facebook before the profile was memorialised. Despite the possibility of actually converting a person's profile into a memorial, many chose to simply have the "living" version of the profile remain on Facebook and this is used for the same purpose as one that was memorialised. This has great relevance for this thesis, for people tend to engage with these pages in a ritual-liturgical manner, as Wepener (2011a) indicates.

Other authors such as Barnard (2006), Duteil-Ogata (2015), Grierson (2004), Long (2009) and Roberts (2004) have also explored the area of cyberspace as ritual landscape for issues regarding death and bereavement. These authors and many others ((Chryssides & Geaves (2014), Cox, Bendiksen and Stevenson (2003), Dobscha (2015), Green (2008), Hajek et al. (2016), Mallon (2008), Moreman et al. (2014), Taher (2006)) represent schools of theology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy and economics in the exploration of this issue. It is clear that cyber cemeteries and remembrance in a cyber environment is surfacing across the human sciences, and therefore it becomes a crucial area of investigation for practical theology.

With the prominence of cyber cemeteries and other related forms of cyber liturgy[3] and ritual being discussed now, it is necessary to discuss the role of the Dutch Reformed Church and the current ritual liturgical landscape pertaining to this study.

After Wepener's (2011a) exploration of the current ritual landscape, he draws the following preliminary conclusions, which form part of the working hypotheses in this thesis:

- There has been a movement of the ritual landscape to other spaces outside of the traditional church space;
- There is a desire for a more individualistic mode of expression in liturgy;

---

[3] www.mydeathspace.com, www.online-funeral.com, www.theeternalportal.com, www.legacy.com and https://www.facebook.com/help/103897939701143, www.cemetery.org.

- There is a drive to make the liturgy more accessible to those participating in it;
- There is a desire for community and new ways to communicate with God through rituals;
- There is a claiming of spaces outside the church as ritual liturgical space.

With Wepener's (2011a) preliminary remarks and speculation on the changes in the current ritual landscape, along with the human sciences pointing to cyberspace as emerging ritual liturgical space, we look at the DRC's response to this.

A Visit to the DRC's website[4] reveals no apparent link to any liturgical resources and in the cases where liturgical resources could be found, nothing alluded or referred to death, bereavement or ritual. In addition to visiting the website, the official *Handleiding vir die Erediens* (Clasen, Bartlett, Carstens & Schoeman 2010) was consulted. This document serves as a guide and toolkit to perform and understand the different aspects of a church service and liturgy in the DRC. In this document a mere 3 pages (142-145) are dedicated to services related to death and funerals. These three pages contain two examples of such a service and nowhere is there any mention or acknowledgement of the role of cyberspace in the current liturgical landscape.

The argument could be made that the document (*Handleiding vir die Erediens*) is outdated, but even then the DRC website makes no further attempt to engage the very space it is occupying. The 2009 book *Ontdekkings in die erediens* by Wepener and Van der Merwe (eds), although not an official DRC document, attempted to illuminate the liturgical landscape and liturgical praxis in the denomination. Yet even this document has very little to say about liturgy and cyberspace.[5]

---

[4] https://www.google.com/?client=safari#q=ng+kerk. Accessed August 2016.
[5] Although liturgy and cyberspace are mentioned, not much is said on the topic. For more on the lack of research on liturgy in cyberspace see Matthee (2015: 45-48).

Three additional resources, *Gebedeboek met Liturgiese Voorstelle* by Van der Merwe (2001), *Soos 'n Blom na die Son draai* by Wepener (2011b) and Daar Is Meer, 'n Bronboek vir Roetemerkers by Lewensoorgange by Wepener and Bothe-Smith (2017), are frequently used to plan and facilitate liturgy in the DRC. Both these sources of liturgy contribute a wealth of ideas to general liturgical praxis, but have very little to say with regard to death and bereavement, and even less about liturgy and cyberspace.

Through this initial exploration of the question asked earlier, it is already evident that cyber cemeteries pose a real, relatively unexplored challenge to traditional reformed liturgical praxis in South Africa. Aside from an abundance of hypothetical statements and scenarios, as is evident from Wepener's work, the field is ripe for further research.[6] It is the contention of this thesis that the resources available to the DRC with regards to death and bereavement and the associated rituals and rites are inadequate when viewed through the lens of cyberspace and cyber cemeteries.

To fully explore the perceived problem, a very specific area of concern needs to be explored: the current state of cemeteries across South Africa. To explore this issue, the official document from SALGA (South African Local Government Association), compiled by Josephine Dambudzo, will be consulted.

The first area of concern that Dambudzo (2012: 3) mentions is the lack of land to expand the cemeteries that already exist, with a warning of an imminent shortage of cemeteries. Therefore, the number of so-called illegal burials is on the rise, where people break into cemeteries and bury their loved ones in illegal spaces, or simply establish a cemetery on a piece of land allocated for other construction or development purposes. Dambudzo (2012: 9) states that the problem appears to be most prominent in urban municipalities, which is relevant here, because it encompasses the majority of the DRC's members.

---

[6] There is abundant research on liturgy, ritual and death.

The second relevant issue raised in the report is that of the gradual loss of significance of physical cemeteries because of changing cultural values. One of the proposed alternatives that Dambudzo (2012: 6) raises is that cemeteries should become spaces with multiple uses.

The third relevant issue is the municipal response to the cemetery-related challenges. Municipalities are reducing the cost and keeping cremations at a low premium, and in addition to these measures are educating citizens in the different municipal areas about alternative means of internment to dissuade the public from considering only in-ground burials.

The state of physical cemeteries and their use in the 21st century is indicative of the migration of the expression of crucial life-moments to areas such as cyberspace. Cyberspace adds an entirely new context for everyday and by extension ritual liturgical expressions which, on the one hand and at the very least, provides people with more options for where they choose to express themselves. On the other hand, cyberspace might be a technological revolution similar to the communication revolution where print communication was revolutionised with the introduction of digital media.

To summarise, the preparation for this research identified that cyber cemeteries pose a definite challenge to traditional Reformed liturgical praxis as well as the current ritual liturgical landscape of the DRC with regards to death and bereavement. It was also found that research from the DRC perspective is very sparse into the area of cyber cemeteries and other related ritual liturgical opportunities in cyberspace concerning death and bereavement. With these two aspects in mind, this research addressed the notion of cyber cemeteries. It is necessary to keep in mind that the liturgical and ritual praxis being evaluated is rooted in the tradition of the DRC, but through cyberspace and in more recent times factors such as augmented and virtual reality, it is connected to a far larger global community that will aid in providing insight into the area of ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace.

1.1 Research question and working hypothesis

This study aimed to critically analyse the use of cyber cemeteries and other forms of thanatechnology (Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert (eds.) 2012:3) in a South African context, more specifically within the context of the DRC, and their potential to enrich the current and future liturgical and ritual landscape. This study also aimed to critically analyse existing liturgical praxis regarding rituals and rites concerning death and view these rituals and rites from the perspective that cyber cemeteries and other forms of thanatechnology contribute to our understanding of liturgy concerning death and bereavement. This thesis contends that cyber cemeteries are a challenge to traditional thanatological liturgy in the DRC.

The core research question of this thesis asks: *In what manner does the reality of cyber cemeteries and other thanatechnologies shape or alter ritual liturgical expression?* This question then serves the aim of this thesis in contributing new theoretical perspectives and insights on ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace.

This thesis intends to expand the way liturgy and ritual are understood in cyberspace and will broaden the liturgical imagination regarding what is perceived to be possible. On a more specific level this study will contribute to enhancing the cultural relevance of existing Reformed thanatological liturgical praxis, and the role of technology in participants' lives. These are areas of practice where relatively little research has been done.

Objectives of the research:
- This study seeks to examine cyber cemeteries as a challenge to traditional Reformed liturgy regarding funerals and the associated liturgical rituals and rites;
- It further seeks to critically examine current ritual liturgical praxis regarding death, especially with regards to the role of technology in

7

participants' lives, with a focus on continuity with the dead, strengthening of the bonds between those still alive and liminal communities of the bereaved;

- Explore cyber cemeteries and the ritual liturgical expression found there to investigate the expression of ritual dynamics and normative categories;

- Reflect critically on the place of technology in the praxis of funeral and death liturgy, with a focus on remembrance, networks and symbolic acts.

1.2 Structure of chapters

What follows is an outline of the chapters and the logic of their sequence. With each section, a short exposition will be provided to discuss the content of each chapter.

1.2.1 Theory and methodology

With the aims of the research in mind as discussed earlier, Chapter Two explores the theory to address these aims and the methodological implications. Chapter Two is divided into two main parts; the first is a discussion of the methodological character of the study and the second a discussion of the general theoretical character of the study. The methodological section devotes attention to the methods used in the thesis as they relate to practical theology (based on the work of Cahalan and Mikoski (2014) and Osmer (2008), amongst others). The second phase of the methodological discussion is more specific and discusses the field of liturgy as a component of practical theology. This discussion on liturgy draws on the work of Barnard (2006), Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) Berger (2017) and Post (1995; 2009) is used. Their work supports the exploration of liturgy and the network culture as core concepts in this thesis. In the last part of the chapter the methods of ethnographic and empirical research are discussed with special attention to the context of cyberspace as the chosen research space. As part of the discussion on ethnography the concept of a network ethnography is explored, combining

concepts from the worlds of liturgy and technology to explain how ethnographic research is understood in this thesis. The section on ethnography is concluded with a discussion on the ethical considerations as they pertain to the research done in this thesis.

The second section of Chapter Two explores the general theoretical character of the thesis and emphasises the concepts that are used to complete the research. The section starts with an exploration of the theory of ritual and the place of ritual in modern society. The work of Grimes (2014), amongst others, is used here. Flowing from the theory on ritual the discussion revolves around the theory regarding ritual studies and the importance thereof in the context of this thesis. The work of Post (2015) is used to guide this discussion and it is eventually integrated with the work of Grimes (2014) to discuss the dynamics of ritual. Grimes's work on the dynamics of ritual is then brought into dialogue with the work of Post (2013) and Post and van der Beek (2016) and ritual criticism. This discussion is followed by a consideration of the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014), who explore the core concept of liminality. In the concluding sections of this chapter important concepts such as disaster ritual and cyber ritual is discussed. The chapter is concluded with a discussion on some important concepts that are used throughout the study which do not necessarily relate to the dimension of ritual.

1.2.2 Findings

Death and by extension cyber cemeteries serve as the lens to enable the observation of liturgical ritual in cyberspace. As Heidegger (2002: 166) states: "death is something that stands imminently before human beings; it is something that life itself knows"; his point is supplemented by Fairfield (2015: 78) who says that "It [death][7] is not a certainty that comes to one from without, in the manner of an empirical discovery, but it is something that one already knows – that one's condition is one of absolute vulnerability in the face of

---

[7] The word in brackets was added by the author of this thesis.

death". It is because of this uncertain certainty and the imminent nature of death that it has been studied thoroughly across a multitude of disciplines. Therefore, death serves as a reliable lens through which ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace is studied. With this in mind, cyber cemeteries are the focal point granting access to the world of cyber ritual and its liturgical expressions.

Chapter Three presents and explores the findings from the field research. The chapter is introduced by reflection on the nature of the participant observation that was used as the primary ethnographic method in the empirical research. This section discusses the process of planning the research and it also introduces the field sites. The research reached saturation with five field sites used and the nature of these five sites is discussed. This is followed by some reflection on the limits of doing participant observation in cyberspace. The findings are systematically presented, one field site at a time. Each field is discussed in two phases. The first phase is based upon the prominent codes that emerged from the initial coding process. Examples from the field site are presented to explore the expression of the code. The second phase describes the process of axial coding. Prominent expressions recorded at the field sites are included. These expressions are discussed based on larger categories that include many of the expressions that were noted in the first phase.

After the account of the findings and observations made during the field research, parallels are drawn between the patterns that emerged from the data. Narrative is identified as a core them. To explore the relevance of narrative as core theme, equilibrium, liminality, disaster and disruption are explored as prominent concepts.

1.2.3 Narrative and cyber ritual

In Chapter Four the theme of narrative as identified in the field research is explored to elaborate on the understanding of embodiment in cyberspace and the nature of space in cyberspace. To examine these two areas and their

importance to ritual liturgical interaction in cyberspace, the chiastic structure of ritual and narrative is firstly explored.

The second topic of the chapter will explore embodiment in cyberspace as the construction and encoding of a storied body. In developing an understanding of the body in cyberspace, the work of Post and van der Beek (2016), Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) and Nünning and Nünning (2013), amongst others, has been used. This is followed by the exploration of the nature of space in cyberspace. The concept of space is approached from a perspective of boundedness, in other words space as it becomes evident by the factors that define it. The nature of space in cyberspace is explored with reference to the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) and Tinning (2014) in thinking about the broader concept of space, as well as others such as Berger (2017), Post and van der Beek (2016), Geraci (2014), Helland (2013) and Sumiala (2013) in exploring the notions of:

- Spatial proximity;
- Public space;
- Authenticity;
- Virtual worlds.

To conclude the discussion on the nature of space in cyberspace, the potential for a narrative construction of space in cyberspace is explored, and this is followed by a short critique of the concept of narrative as it is used in the context of this thesis.

1.2.4 Conclusion

The final chapter gives an account of the process of arriving at the conclusions. The important insights from the research and their role in addressing the research question are highlighted. These include the core themes of embodiment and space as these concepts relate to the cyberspace and ritual liturgical expression. The last section of the chapter will provide some

recommendations for further research based on the findings of this thesis. This chapter is followed by the bibliography and addenda.

2. Theory and methodology

2.1 Methodology

2.1.1 Practical theology

To study liturgy, it should be understood as part of practical theology. Cahalan and Mikoski argue in their 2014 publication *Opening the field of practical theology: an introduction* that practical theologians draw upon a multitude of different perspectives and therefore they engage the facets of practical theology with different methodologies and theological norms. With this diversity established, they concur that there are certain elements of practical theology that unite the field and they identify eleven values to substantiate this claim.

For the purpose of this thesis it is not necessary to discuss all eleven values. Only those that link this ritual-liturgical study to the broader picture of practical theology are dealt with. Establishing a relation between the content of this thesis and the broader practical theological landscape is important for at least two reasons:

1. The content of this thesis features substantial engagement with the dimension of cyberspace. With the amount of content attributed to cyberspace and explorations of its different facets, it might seem that this thesis has no real theological relevance, and much less any liturgical relevance;

2. This thesis holds that liturgical expression, performance and participation are of the utmost importance, especially in the context of cyberspace. For practical theology to be relevant in the 21st century it cannot function only within the known parameters of liturgical inquiry. Some commentators such as Berger, Böntert, Post, van der Beek are actively engaging cyber ritual and liturgical expression in cyberspace. The work being done by these researchers is preparing the ground for practical theology to be done.

2.1.1.1 Practice and performance orientated

The first link between a ritual-liturgical study of this nature and practical theology relies on it being practical and performance orientated (Cahalan & Mikoski 2014: 2). Cahalan and Mikoski are of the opinion that practical theologians in recent times have focussed on the "understanding and proposing specifically religious practices for individuals and communities". Although this is a very simplistic approach to understanding the task of the performance of practical theology (especially when compared to the work of Osmer (2008: 89-198/3256)), this approach highlights the necessity of understanding religious (liturgical) practices. This is especially important to this thesis, because the research is conducted from a very explicit position of not knowing. The unique contribution of this thesis is therefore an expanded understanding of ritual-liturgical expression in cyberspace. This in turn can provide valuable foundations for practical theology to be done.

2.1.1.2 Oriented to multidimensional dynamics of social context and embodiment

Cahalan and Mikoski (2014: 3) are of the opinion that practical theologians prefer an Aristotelian concretion and realism over Platonic notions of abstraction and idealism. The reason for this Aristotelian approach, according to Cahalan and Mikoski, is the fact that human lives are bound to a certain time(s), place(s) and culture(s). While this is true for the most part, the reality of cyberspace challenges this Aristotelian certainty about the concrete reality of human life and existence. Michael Hviid Jacobsen, a professor of Sociology, recently (2017) published a book titled *Postmortal Society: Towards a Sociology of Immortality,* in which he critically engages with the issue of death in the 21st century. This work by Jacobsen - along with other recent works such as those by Davidson[8], Moreman and Lewis,[9] Malone,[10] Brennan[11] and Sofka,

---

[8] Davidson (2016).
[9] Moreman and Lewis eds. (2014).
[10] Malone (2016).
[11] Brennan (2014).

14

Cupit and Gilbert[12] - highlights the fact that our lives and, more importantly, our deaths drastically challenge the perception that we are embodied in certain times, places and cultures.

This thesis engages with the uncertainty made manifest by cyberspace exactly because this is a crucial area of investigation and pivotal point of research of practical theological relevance in the 21st century. Cahalan and Mikoski potentially attribute too much weight to an Aristotelian certainty versus a Platonic curiosity, but they are correct in stating:

> The multi-layered and continuously changing aspects of embodied human life lived in particular contexts make it possible to see why practical theologians strongly reject the 19th century "applied-theology" paradigm for their work. Application of supposedly unchanging theological principles depends, in part, on a static and relatively uncomplicated target. If the target moves and has multiple dimensions, every attempt to apply theological principles without engaging in a serious effort to understand a particular context will miss the desired target.

(Cahalan & Mikoski 2014: 3)

2.1.1.3 Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary

At this stage the terms 'interdisciplinary' and 'multidisciplinary' will simply be introduced and their importance for practical theology discussed. The nuances of these two approaches will be discussed at a later stage in this chapter; for the time being it will suffice to note that these two terms are not to be used interchangeably for they convey distinct approaches. But this does not mean that they cannot be applied simultaneously. Practical theology cannot hope to be contextual or relevant if it does not engage with disciplines outside of the greater field of theology, nor can it hope to be theologically relevant if it does not reach across the disciplines within theology.

---

[12] Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert eds. (2012).

In this thesis a wide variety of fields and disciplines (for example, sociology, new media studies and philosophy) are consulted to explore ritual-liturgical expression in cyberspace. Without the multiple insights gleaned from a spectrum of disciplines, an inquiry of this nature would not be possible, or possible only to a very restricted extent. This thesis contributes to practical theology by incorporating ideas and innovative academic works from fields such as thanatechnology and ritual studies, amongst others.

2.1.1.4 Open-ended, flexible and porous

Cahalan and Mikoski (2014: 5) make an important point when they discuss this value of open-endedness, flexibility and porousness. The position that Cahalan and Mikoski take with regards to practical theology is one of open-mindedness and, one would risk saying, realism. With these values they express the adventurous character of practical theological inquiry, while also illuminating its innovative nature. This is exactly where this thesis positions itself, at the innovative frontier of practical theology and on its porous periphery.

Functioning within these exciting parameters does not mean that this thesis is not firmly rooted in theological tradition. This being the case emphasises the importance of constructing a thorough and comprehensive contextual framework and methodology from a theological point of view.

2.1.1.5 Osmer

The four values discussed up to this point prove to be extremely valuable in orientating the practical theological inquiry, but such an enquiry would be incomplete without a proper structure to frame it. The work of Osmer (2008) is used to provide a framework or model which can be informed by the values previously discussed from the work of Cahalan and Mikoski (2014) and therefore guide the practical theological interpretation.

It is important to indicate why the work of Osmer is being used rather than (say) the work of Miller-McLemore (2012) and the other contributing authors to the theory of practical theological interpretation.[13]

1. A deliberate decision has been taken to adopt a hermeneutical approach. The interpretation of the hermeneutic process as a spiral movement instead of a cyclical process is of utmost importance (Lategan 2009: 81-82). Within the methodological framework of this thesis, the aim is never to establish ultimate truths or infallible theoretical positions (if they even do exist), but rather to interpret certain episodes and situations through applying theory from theology and other disciplines. By doing this, our response can be guided to engage responsibly with the practice as it is happening (Osmer 2008: 92-96/3256). The end of this process (or the pragmatic task) does not provide a timeless response or solution, but rather a platform from which the spiral of interpretation can once again be initiated.

2. As Pieterse (2017: 3-6) indicates, Osmer's approach is extremely popular amongst South African scholars of practical theology. The author of this thesis has also used Osmer in the past (Matthee 2014, 2015), and found that this approach is accommodating of contexts that are fluctuating and difficult to define (cyberspace). Osmer's approach provides the researcher with a sizeable field of play, which is crucial when studying contexts such as cyberspace.

3. Osmer's approach can broadly speaking be reduced to four core questions (2008: 92-96/3256):
   a) What is going on?
   b) Why is this going on?
   c) What ought to be going on?
   d) How might we respond?

   It is in this method's inherent simplicity that its greatest strength lies, unimpeded interpretation. By not burdening the process of interpretation with complex parameters and unnecessary checks, new intricate areas

---

[13] Specifically, Part 2 of the book and especially the work of Brown "Hermeneutical theory".

may be explored, for this approach enhances the capacity to delve deep. Neuroscience utilises a popular term referred to as "cognitive load". This term was first popularised by Sweller (1988) and, without going into the intricacies of the term, it basically refers to the capacity to interpret and solve problems and also the capacity for learning. In other words, once a person experiences cognitive load, their working memory [14] has reached capacity and cannot process more information. The inherent simplicity of Osmer's model allows our theological working memory to be filled with new ideas and information, instead of being over-loaded because of overly complex methodology.

Now that the merits of adhering to the Osmer approach for practical theological interpretation have been addressed, an overview of the method is presented.

2.1.1.5.1 The descriptive-empirical task

Osmer (2008: 92/3256) starts by describing the descriptive-empirical task, or simply put, the "what is going on?" question. In this part of the process of interpretation we are concerned with the gathering of data and information to help us discern patterns and other indicators in certain contexts. In the case of this thesis data are gathered to discern patterns in the context of cyberspace with regard to ritual liturgical expression. Certain phenomena are observed relating to cyber cemeteries and religious expression using thanatechnology, and the question "what is going on?" is asked.

2.1.1.5.2 The interpretive task

With certain patterns and other indicators identified by collecting data relating to the phenomena, the question "why is this going on?" can be asked (Osmer 2008: 92/3256). To help answer this question we draw on theories from a

---

[14] The average human being can store around 4 (up to around 9) new bytes (items) of data in their working memory; for new information to be added, items need to be cleared from the working memory (Mi, Katkov & Tsodyks 2017).

diverse set of disciplines. Theories from the fields of sociology, philosophy, economics, management and theology, are used in this thesis, to name but a few of the prominent contributors in helping perform the interpretive task.

2.1.1.5.3 The normative task

Once progress is made in performing the interpretive task, the question "what ought to be going on?" can be engaged. The normative task within the context of this thesis appears to be the most complex part of the process of interpretation. Cyber ritual (Post 2015), e-religion and e-ritual (Post & van der Beek 2016), digitally mediated liturgical practices (Berger 2017), internet Apostolate (Tucker 2014), post-mortal society (Jacobsen 2017), sacred second lives (Geraci 2014) and the four-dimensional human (Scott 2015) are all attempts at answering the question of what ought to be going on. It is evident that this question is not easy to answer and, given the fluctuating nature of cyberspace and new developments such as virtual reality (Geraci 2012), artificial intelligence (Boden 2016 & Matthee 2013) and machine learning (Goodfellow, Bengio & Courville 2016), the conundrum does not seem to become any less complex.

2.1.1.5.4 The pragmatic task

The fourth aspect that Osmer (2008: 96/3256) addresses is the pragmatic task, or asking the question "how might we respond?" It is in this part of the process that strategies are determined or reflected on in order to enter into dialogue with the current praxis. The hope is that events can be shaped in a way that they facilitate reaching the desired goals, goals that are formulated from the process of interpretation (Osmer 2008: 178/3256).

With a practical theological framework established, liturgy is now discussed.

2.1.2 Liturgy

Considering the wider field of practical theology as discussed in the previous section, liturgy is now discussed with the purpose of positioning this thesis within a methodological framework.

2.1.2.1 Working toward a definition

For the initial positioning on the different methods of doing and researching liturgy, Wepener's (2004a: 23 see also Wepener 2004b; 2009) approach will be adhered to. Two pioneers within the field of liturgy, Marcel Barnard and Paul Post, identify nine possible (at the time of writing) methods or approaches to liturgical research.

Following the discussion of Barnard's and Post's contributions, attention is given to contributions addressing the network culture and liturgical reflection in the paradigm of the 21st century.

2.1.2.2 Barnard

In his 1998 publication *De weg van de liturgie: Tradities, achtergronden, praktjik* Barnard (1998: 94) discusses the field of liturgy as a scientific discipline and identifies four methods of liturgical research. It is important to discuss these four methods that Barnard identifies, for they are still relevant not only to liturgical research but also to this thesis. More importantly, these four methods illuminate the concept of liturgy and will aid in the formulation of a working definition of liturgy at the end of this section.

1. Anthropological approach (*Antropologische benadering*)
   An anthropological approach to liturgy has become the norm for many studies over the past couple of decades and functions as a solid basis from which to observe and record empirical mapping and the

exploration and investigation of liturgical ritual in different contexts and cultures (Pieterse 2015). Barnard (1998: 95) originally indicated that an anthropological method assists us in the investigation of symbol, symbolic language and other forms of symbolism, feasts and other celebrations and the arts. Barnard (1998: 95) refers to Lukken (1993: 14-17), who noted that an anthropological approach to liturgy works with other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, art history, language and theatre sciences as well as music and semiotics. The anthropological approach is especially important when studying cyberspace and liturgical ritual in cyberspace, where most of the disciplines mentioned above function prominently.

2. Systematic approach (*Systematische benadering*)

Barnard (1998: 95) elaborates upon this second method by emphasising the fact that the focus is on the "*wisselwerking tussen leer en liturgie*". This interaction finds it expression in the famous phrase[15] *lex orandi, lex credendi,* or the law of prayer, the law of faith. The reverse then is also a valid area of inquiry as Wainwright (1980: 218) argues, Barnard (1998: 95) summarises Wainwright's view as follows: "*Grammaticaal kunnen subject en predicaat evenwel omgekeerd worden, waardoor de betekenis ontstaat: wat geloofd moet worden wat gebeden mag en moet worden.*". For the purposes of this thesis the discussion on the systematic approach is sufficient up to this point. The core idea that is of importance is the interaction expressed in *lex orandi, lex credenda.*

---

[15] Geldhof (2015) explains that this phrase is derived from a sentence by Prosper of Aquitaine, a 5th-century church father who was (in this case) busy addressing an anti-Pelagian controversy on grace. The original sentence as reported by Geldhof (2015) reads "ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi". Geldhof (2015) further elaborates "The point that Prosper was making, was that the rightness of a theological position was additionally justified by the content of the prayers actually used in liturgy."

3. Historical approach[16] (*Historische benadering*)

Barnard (1998: 96-97) finds this method to be extremely important in liturgical studies and refers to 16th century and the renewed interest in liturgical history during this period. Barnard specifically mentions liturgical renewal (re-discovery) in terms of mass, prayer and baptism. It is evident that the historical exploration of liturgy is important for the development of liturgical praxis and academia. Barnard (1998: 97) is of the opinion that liturgical history has increasingly become part of a wider array of historical inquiry, specifically in social and economic history, history of art and religious history.

4. Biblical-theological approach (Bijbels-theologische benadering)

Biblical theology does not form an extensive part of this thesis, but it is necessary to note its function in concordance with the liturgical study of cyber cemeteries and by extension funeral rites and traditional biblical readings that accompany the rites. As Barnard (1998: 97) notes, it is especially from a Protestant point of view that biblical theology informs liturgical enquiry. This can be observed in the structure of the Protestant church service and therefore also in the funeral liturgies that flow from these biblically informed structures.

2.1.2.3 Post

In his 1995 publication Post distinguishes between eight different methods of liturgical research, many of which are reflected in the work of Barnard a few years later. Two of these methods, an approach from the arts and a pastoral-liturgical approach merit a short discussion in the context of this thesis. To briefly discuss these approaches Post's 2009 article "Rituele en religieuze identiteiten in Europa" is used:

---

[16] See also Van Tongeren (2006: 135-151).

1. An approach from the arts

   Within the context of the article, which deals with religious/church ritual in public spaces, Post (2009: 135) reflects critically on the place of liturgy and liturgical reflection in the context of the arts[17] (culture, history, museum and art). Post proceeds to discuss multiple instances of liturgy and art in the public sphere and concludes: "*Het kan gaan om ex- of impliciete referenties aan institutionele vormen van religie, maar vaker betreft het interesse in het irrationele, in mysterie en spiritualiteit*" (Post 2009: 136). The second part of the conclusion is important for liturgical research as conducted in this thesis. Within the context of liturgical ritual in cyberspace, the irrational, mystical and spiritual are prominently expressed.

2. Pastoral-liturgical approach or more specifically *Herdenkingscultuur*[18]

   The focus here is more on the liturgical aspect, but it cannot be separated from the pastoral as far as death and ritual are concerned. Therefore, the method of liturgical research is not primarily pastoral, but rather liturgical with a locus in the pastoral dimension of remembrance. Post (2009: 137) affirms that the dominant category is "*dodenrituelen*". He lists the myriad of rituals that seem to be popular in the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. He does not, however, mention rituals of remembrance or disaster ritual at this point. When examining his other work (Post 2003, 2015, 2016), it is implied that cyberspace can be added as a dimension of *herdenkingscultuur.*

2.1.2.4 Liturgy in migration

As Post (1995) and Barnard (1998:98) argue, these different methods are not mutually exclusive. The four methods outlined by Barnard with the added perspectives of Post have many areas in common and are generally used together in many studies on liturgy, especially ritual studies. In this thesis it is

---

[17] This line of thought is also echoed in Cilliers (2007).
[18] See also Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 284-287).

argued that liturgy is in migration,[19] in other words liturgy is not just a static, observable phenomenon, but a living, dynamic organism. In order to study liturgy in cyberspace, the migrational character of the phenomenon must be acknowledged. Berger (2012: xii-xiii) discussed the importance of migration as a marker in fields and methods such as the media and scholarly reflection.

Berger (2012: xiii) acknowledges the importance of the perspective of migration in the fields of religious studies, especially sociology of religion and ethnographic research. Therefore, the methods used in this thesis support an exploration of cyberspace where liturgical praxis is constructing new borders and migrating to find expression in a new space. Stefan Böntert (2012: 279-280) states the following about liturgical migrations in cyberspace:

> The internet and its social effects have been discussed and researched quite extensively by now. While earlier scholarship may have spoken glowingly of a "mythical" internet, a more realistic approach has now replaced such lyrical formulations. A broad consensus in the sociology of media holds that the internet entails pronounced changes in the understanding of the world and of reality as it develops entirely new social entities, so that traditional conceptions of community, relationality, and communication are put to the test. Because the internet represents such a transformative cultural dynamic, it ranks among the most far-reaching innovations in history.

2.1.2.5 The network culture[20]

Based upon the concept of liturgical migration and interpreting this concept within the framework of post-modernism and the information age, the metaphor of the network culture[21] aids greatly in understanding academic liturgical reflection in contemporary society. As Pieterse (2017: 7) states, the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) is ground-breaking in bringing liturgical ritual into conversation with the network culture. Their work will be discussed

---

[19] See Berger (2012) for how the concept is used in her work.
[20] The term "network culture" and "network society" are used interchangeably in this thesis. The specifics of the topic being discussed determine which term is used; generally with wider topics 'culture' is used and with narrow topics 'society' is used.
[21] Especially the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014).

more fully in the next part on liturgical ritual, but for now the focus is purely on doing liturgy in the context of the network culture. Liturgical research done in the 21st century cannot be oblivious to the reality of the network society. Castells (2010: xvii) identifies the current situation as one of disorientation, [22] disorientation as a result of radical technological communication transformation during the last 30 years.

Castells (2010: xvii) emphasises the shift from traditional mass media to the now popular horizontal communication networks. These horizontal networks are organised around the internet and with this wireless technology as central node, countless diverse communication patterns have emerged. Popular research from the business world yield results that support Castells's notion. Howe (2015) and Schrage (2013) who contribute to *Forbes* and *Harvard Business Review* respectively, indicate the same trend in their work – voicemail seems to be disappearing. Not just voicemail but even normal voice-based phone calls are declining rapidly in popularity as more and more mediums of communication become available to support the network culture. Already we can see trends of texting also declining in popularity with the availability of emojis and other visual communication technology. Facebook Messenger, which incorporates many forms of communication technology, reported 1.2 billion active users per month in 2017, up from 200 million active users in 2014.[23]

Castells (2010: xvii-xix), although writing before these data were available, states that "virtuality becomes an essential dimension of our reality." This statement is supported by Stengel and van Looy (2017: 51-56; 63-82) in their work on the digital age and especially the cleverly named chapter "Der Mensch

---

[22] This preface (Castells 2010) was published in 2010, while the volume was originally written in 1996. This disorientation that he speaks of has in a certain sense become intrinsic to the network culture. We can see this clearly from Apple's app store statistics. Apps (applications) first became available on the iPhone 3G when the Apple App Store opened on July 10 2008. In 2008 the Apple App Store held approximately 15000 apps available to users. While this is already a staggering number of nodes in the global network the number of apps in the store has grown to nearly 2.4 million not even 10 years later. (https://www.statista.com/statistics/268251/number-of-apps-in-the-itunes-app-store-since-2008/).

[23] https://www.statista.com/statistics/417295/facebook-messenger-monthly-active-users/.

im Digitalzeitalter: Sapiens 2.0". Critique could be levelled at this approach, asking why the emphasis on networks, given that social networks are (according to the Smithsonian[24]) over 130 000 years old. Both Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 72) and Castells (2010: xix) acknowledge this fact, but Castells justifies the position by saying:

> Moreover, while networks are an old form of organization in the human experience, digital networking technologies, characteristic of the Information Age, powered social and organizational networks in ways that allowed their endless expansion and reconfiguration, overcoming the traditional limitations of networking forms of organization to manage complexity beyond a certain size of the network.

Based upon this justification by Castells, it is imperative that any liturgical inquiry into the network society ask itself the question: Are the methods and theory used in this line of inquiry flexible enough to allow the study of contexts that are characterised by volatile expansion and sudden reconfiguration?

To conclude this section on the network culture, Castells' (2010: 500) definition of the concept will be critiqued and interpreted from a theological point of view to stimulate liturgical migration into the network society and beyond:[25]

> as an historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. While the networking form of social organization has existed in other times and spaces, the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure.

In terms of the dominant functions and processes, recent historical trends (attributed to the prominent works of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014), Berger (2017) and Post and van der Beek (2016)) indicate that religious life, and in this case liturgical life, holds a prominent place in the networks that

---

[24] http://humanorigins.si.edu/human-characteristics/social-life.
[25] For Castells' full definition and clarification of the points raised see Castells (2010: 500-509).

constitute the current social morphology. Therefore, the outcomes influenced by the diffusion of networking logic must also include religious life. Liturgical social organisation (between God, self and others) has long been a very distinct and unique social phenomenon. While none of the uniqueness of this phenomenon disappears with the advent of the network society, the uncertainty of space and time brings secular life much closer to religious life.

Viewing Castells's definition through a theological lens emphasises the value of the network society theory in constructing liturgy in the 21st century. Liturgy must always be open to critique, and the advent of the information age with the driving force of the network society challenges many liturgical certainties and traditions that have held for centuries. As Neijenhuis[26] (2012: 157) argues, when liturgy becomes immune to criticism, we lose the ability to develop understanding which helps us fulfil the desire for faith in the liturgy.

2.1.2.6 Working definition: Liturgy

The discussion up to this point has shown that liturgy is most definitely in migration. To explore liturgy in cyberspace a flexible, porous and networked definition is required. The aim is not to develop a definition which is infallible, but rather a definition that can provide context and guidance for liturgical exploration in cyberspace. Therefore, as a working definition:[27]

Liturgy – Liturgy is the Trinity's perichoresis kenotically extended to invite human beings into fellowship through ritual and symbol without the traditional boundaries of time, space and body, in order to fulfil creation's ultimate purpose in worshipping and glorifying God.

---

[26] Original quotation: "*Wer keine Kritik an der Liturgie verträgt, sondern sie immer gleich als Ausdruck von Unglauben zurückweist, wird wenig Verständnis entwickeln für berechtigte Anfragen an den Vollzug des Glaubens in der Liturgie.*" Neijenhuis (2012: 157).
[27] In this definition the work of Wepener (2004a: 30) and Fagerberg (2016: 12) is used in addition to all those discussed in the build-up to the definition.

2.1.2.7 Ethnography

Ethnography described from a high-level perspective assists theologians in understanding the connections and disconnections between theology and practice by analysing and studying the faith practices of ordinary people and congregations (Moschella 2012: 224). From a clinical perspective this makes sense, but this methodology warrants a thicker description. Wepener (2004a: 37) uses the work of Ammerman to reflect theologically on ethnography as method of doing liturgical research. According to his work (this thesis shares his opinion), God is already active in the world and therefore God cannot be introduced as an afterthought when studying lived life. Because of this, when we reflect on the order of things, we are already doing theology. According to Wepener, this warrants critical reflection on the way God and human beings communicate in and through the use of rituals. Therefore, by gathering data through ethnographic methods, we are not busy with groundwork in preparation for doing theology, but already doing theology in all earnest.

With a theological basis established for using ethnography as research method, we can now turn toward what Moschella (2012: 225) refers to as the practical theologian being but an interpreter of a community's faith, rather than a dispenser of universal or ultimate truths. According to Moschella (2012: 225-226), ethnography is complex and involves intensive processes that include immersing yourself in the communal and ritual life of a group. This immersion aids one in understanding the ins and outs of a group in order to study a certain aspect of it. The metaphor of an excavation is regularly used to describe the process of doing ethnography and, according to Moschella (2012: 225), this refers to ethnographer's quest to dig beneath the surface of group life and uncover the meaning that is to be found there.

While it is important to uncover these meanings and patterns of a group's life and by extension spirituality, the metaphor of an "excavation" is not adequate for a study seeking to explore patterns, ritual and symbol regarding death within a group. This study would rather opt for the metaphor of absorption. Much like

a drop of water on a sponge, the ethnographer is absorbed into the network of a group without "breaking" the surface, metaphorically speaking. Some of the ethnography done in this thesis has shown that the sponge does not allow for the drop to absorbed and become part of the network. Ethically[28] speaking, this resistance to breaking the surface must be respected. Therefore, one cannot speak of an excavation, for an excavation does not wait for the surface to absorb the excavation tool.

2.1.2.7.1 Participant observation

Participant observation and participatory action research are popular companions to ethnography and used in many theological studies. To engage the central research question of this thesis in determining the impact of thanatechnology and cyber cemeteries on the current ritual-liturgical landscape, one must observe instances of this phenomenon. As Conde-Frazier (2012: 234) states, our understanding is enhanced by our participation in different aspects of life. She (2012: 234-237) explores the history of the method and makes mention of the object-subject dilemma in the early stages of this methodology. As the method matured and developed, those who had previously been confined to being subjects now find themselves as subjects of and participants in the research. Conde-Frazier (2006: 324) summarises the method as follows:

> Participatory action research has become an umbrella term that includes several traditions of theory and practice. Participation recognizes the value of including practitioners, community members, citizens, employees and volunteers as essential to the generation of useful knowledge for major social, political, economic, technical, cultural and organizational problems. Action indicates that the research is intended to contribute directly to change efforts of the participants. Research indicates a systemic effort to generate knowledge. It may include historical, literary, theological and scientific forms. The major thrust is to direct knowledge toward improving the quality of living. Participatory action research is attached to the humanization of persons in communities. Unattached research tends to create policies that continue to oppress.

---

[28] More on the ethical considerations in section 2.1.2.7.4.

It is important to note that the Conde-Frazier has a very particular perspective as researcher, that of a Latina[29] pastor serving in a community that can be labelled as an "urban slum" (Conde-Frazier 2012: 234). Therefore, the author's emphasis on oppression and issues around oppression is justified. Conde-Frazier's definition of participatory action research is adequate as a baseline theory, but is overly romanticised and therefore poses some problems in certain contexts; this is explored in the next section.[30]

To conclude this section on participant observation it is necessary to mention that this is a qualitative method of research, and therefore it makes use of interviews and oral histories[31] to explore the narrative in question (Conde-Frazier 2012: 236-239). Participant observation and ethnography are also done from a grounded perspective (in this thesis as well); in other words, the research is designed without any preconceived answers or absolute truths to guide it. Contexts and situations are approached with a very explicit openness to what is new and may go beyond the theories that currently inform the study. The idea is to distil what is discovered into new concepts that may inform the current praxis (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Conde-Frazier 2012; Jacobsen 2017; Pieterse 2017).

2.1.2.7.2 Limitations of ethnography

Ethnography has been used for a number of decades to produce some of the best studies and empirical data in the field of liturgy and ritual. This is especially evident in the South African academic environment, where scholars such as Wepener and Cilliers are using ethnography in the field of liturgy and ritual. As mentioned by Pieterse (2017: 7), Wepener is a productive contributor in the field both locally (South Africa) and internationally.

---

[29] Latino and Hispanic people have been the victims of great oppression in the history of American social and political contexts (Alcoff 2005: 536-545).
[30] See 2.1.2.7.2 below on the limitations of ethnography and participant observation in the context of cyberspace.
[31] The study of oral histories in cyberspace takes many forms, while orality in an online context is difficult to define and narrow down to one consistent type of occurrence.

As is evident, many academics are profiting from the popularity of the methodology, and as a result the methodology is constantly being refined and one could say has hit a certain "sweet spot" in terms of its usability and the results obtained by using it. While none of this is inherently negative, the popularity and refinement of the method has certain implications. One of the most important implications for this thesis is that the more the method becomes refined, the less usable it becomes for contexts on the extremities of its boundaries. Cyberspace and human interaction in cyberspace (social networks) as a focus of ethnographic study are among these extremities and as a result do not resonate as clearly with the ideals of the method as one would ideally like.

Howard (2002: 550), who admittedly writes at a fairly early stage of the network society and the developments that have led up to the current state of affairs, says the following:

> Some organizational forms can be difficult to study qualitatively because human, social, cultural, or symbolic capital is transmitted over significant distances with technologies that do not carry the full range of human expression that an ethnographer or participant observer hopes to experience. Whereas qualitative methods render rich description of human interaction, they can be unwieldy for studying complex formal and informal organizations that operate over great distances and through new media.

Although Howard is arguing from an organisational science point of view, the same could be said of the study of liturgy and ritual in cyberspace. Matthee (2015: 14-20) engaged with the complexity of ethnographic research in cyberspace and decided to resort to the nuance of auto-ethnography to study liturgical ritual online. While auto-ethnography proved to be a flexible method of research, the empirical data gathered with the use of this method do not engage as many levels of perception and reflection as other methods of ethnography contribute. It mainly engages with the liturgical ritual phenomena as they are perceived by the researcher and only occasionally with the participants' perceptions (Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener. 2014: 54). For the

purposes of Matthee's study the nuanced method of auto-ethnography provided the desired data and aided in producing the findings of a very explorative study. For the purposes of this thesis, auto-ethnography will not suffice in providing the data necessary to reflect on the phenomenon.

2.1.2.7.3 Network ethnography

Thanatechnology provides an extremely complex context for the researcher to study. To aid in the positioning of ethnography in the network society, the work of Howard (2002) and Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) is discussed.

<u>Howard</u>

Howard (2002: 561) suggests the concept of "network ethnography". This type of ethnography does not exclude methods such as active or passive observation, immersion and interviews. The first important conceptual advance is the definition of field sites. In a traditional ethnographic study certain territories or sites are identified for study. In network ethnography the researcher has to identify a perceived community, and then select important nodes in the social network as "field sites". This is especially helpful, since the study of death and bereavement in cyberspace does not provide the researcher with the luxury of a physical site/space to study. These networks revolve around important nodes in the social network. In many instances the central node or "field site" is the Facebook page of the deceased, but as the empirical data show,[32] this is not always the case. As Howard (2002: 561) notes, the fact that the node in some cases differs from the position of the node in other cases does not dilute the data, for the object of the research – the social interaction between community members and their continued bonds with the deceased – remains constant.

The second important conceptual advance lies in the analysis of the network in question. When the node or field site has been identified, the network

---

[32] See Chapters Three and Four.

associated with that node is analysed; this in turn helps the researcher identify the most appropriate participants to help with the interpretation of the phenomenon. A simple but functional example would be contacts/friends[33] congratulating the deceased on his/her birthday, completely oblivious to the fact that this person has indeed passed on. Interviewing or having this person as a research participant (other than proving the futility of grief and bereavement online) would yield little in the way of usable empirical data. Therefore, with a network ethnography, networks can be analysed to provide the researcher with the appropriate research participants or direct the researcher to observe in the appropriate position of the network.

The third aspect Howard (2002: 562) discusses is the aid to sampling with the use of network ethnography. With the use of network ethnography and adhering to the node identification as discussed, large populations (as is common in social networks in cyberspace) can be dissected and in this manner specific nodes or cases are easier to identify. Howard (2002: 562) says that network ethnography empowers the qualitative researcher, who is then able to define the universe of cases themselves. This is especially valuable when studying online spaces, for the number of possible cases is massive and identifying cases can seem an insurmountable obstacle for the researcher. Although it must be said, in more recent times networks such as Facebook have made it decidedly easier to identify nodes in the network with their algorithms. As reported by Constine (2016), a writer for a popular technology blog and website, Facebook arranges your News Feed (or window into the network you form part of) mainly by using the following four characteristics.

- **Who posted it?** – Facebook[34] learns your patterns based on your interaction with a certain person's posts. The algorithms used are so complex that they can even detect when you slow down your scrolling to read a post.

---

[33] 'Friends' in this sense interpreted in the way Facebook attributes this status to those who connect with you in this space.
[34] To be technically correct, Facebook is simply branding; behind this branding (the back-end) it uses a multitude of complex programming languages to analyse the input of the user. These languages include C++, C, Java and Python, to name but a few.

- **How did other people engage with the post?** – This algorithm focuses purely on the popularity of the post and, in the case of death and bereavement, we can see that these types of posts are extremely popular and therefore more prominent in your News Feed.

- **What type of post is it?** – The more a user engages with a certain type of post, the more likely it will be that that user will see posts of this nature in their News Feed. If a user would frequently visit memorial pages, for instance, their News Feed would be populated with either updates to memorial pages or other people's posts regarding death or bereavement.

- **When was it posted?** – The News Feed will prioritise more recent news, but if the algorithm has identified your interest in a certain topic or person, your News Feed may be populated with older news that is more relevant to your interaction history.

The way in which the News Feed works can be expressed visually with the following graphic:
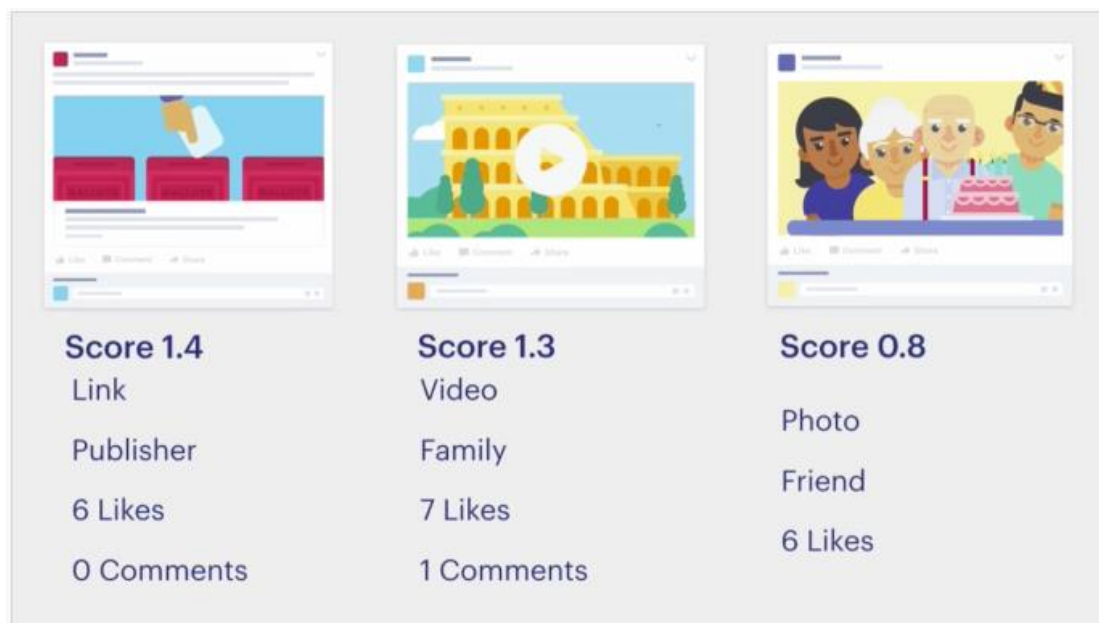
Figure 2.1
All rights belong to Constine (2016) and TechCrunch, graphic used for educational purposes.

In the picture the way in which the Facebook algorithms populate your News Feed is illustrated by using a scoring system (this is purely speculative as

Facebook does not disclose all the information regarding their technology). This scoring system, viewed from a network ethnographical perspective, aids immensely in identifying nodes in the network. In gathering the empirical data for this thesis, the researcher visited and viewed many Facebook pages regarding death or the bereaved, and the Facebook algorithms identified this trend in my searches and engagement.

This resulted in a News Feed populated by key nodes[35] in the network and thus relevant cases were identified with greater ease.

To conclude the discussion on Howard's (2002) contribution and his criticism of ethnography in a network society, it is evident that Howard contributed to the early criticism of the method and succeeded in proposing a theory for enhancing the method. With his thoughts on network ethnography, Howard aided in the conceptual development and migration of the method of ethnography specifically for the network society. As early criticism, Howard's suggestions are notably open and flexible, a characteristic of early methodological evolution. We now turn to the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) to further explore and illuminate the place of ethnography in studying the network society.

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener

Howard's (2002) early thought on doing ethnography in the network society and especially online contexts, yielded some interesting similarities when compared to the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014). Howard's idea of nodes in the network can certainly be interpreted as similar to the idea explored in the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 49-64) with reference to the dots on a blank page.

---

[35] When referring to key nodes in the network, this research refers to Facebook profiles of people that showed above average engagement with either the page of the deceased or the community of bereaved who mourn/celebrate the memory of the deceased. In many cases this was either a parent or sibling, but there were some deviations from this trend, sometimes being a close friend or employer.

It is necessary to note that the dots as they are used in the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener are used to discuss the instances of liturgical ritual studied. Therefore, the reflection at this stage will only be summative and the theory devised by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener will be discussed in detail later in the section on liturgical ritual. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 50) refer to their method of empirical qualitative research as follows "*Let us first describe our dot-splashing process, in other words, the basic research design that we use in our research on liturgical studies, and then return to the character of the dots*". They make the point that their methodology is primarily ethnography and describe the various approaches used to do ethnography, which include most of those discussed up to this point.

The researchers then (Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014: 53-54) discuss the character of these dots. Without going into too much detail, the character of the dots refers to the different levels of the interpretation of a liturgical ritual. This means that the dots can at their most basic level be interpreted as instances of liturgical ritual awaiting different levels of interpretation. This implies that they are very similar to the nodes in the network as understood by Howard (2002). These nodes are identified by the researcher, either in accordance with the researcher's own criteria, or with the help of an algorithm as is popular in cyberspace. These nodes then await interpretation by the researcher, but in many cases they already contain one level of interpretation by the participant, as is evident in contexts such as Facebook.

If we then equate the dots and the nodes with each other, the only differentiating factor is the canvas (or lack thereof). Although Howard doesn't pay much attention to this factor, we see a prominent emphasis in the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener. The blank sheet as understood by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 59-60) refers to the rite as it is ontologically understood. Again, this aspect will be discussed in much greater detail later in the section on ritual and liturgy. Thus, we have two perspectives, that of the nodes as part of the greater network canvas, and that of the dots on the blank sheet. In this thesis a synergy of the two perspectives is proposed and can be visualised as follows:
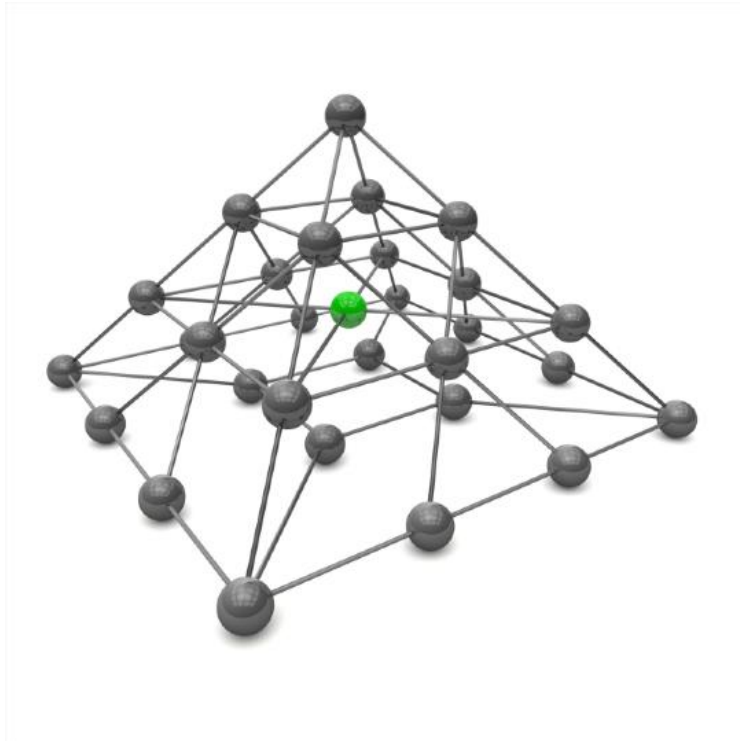
Figure 2.2
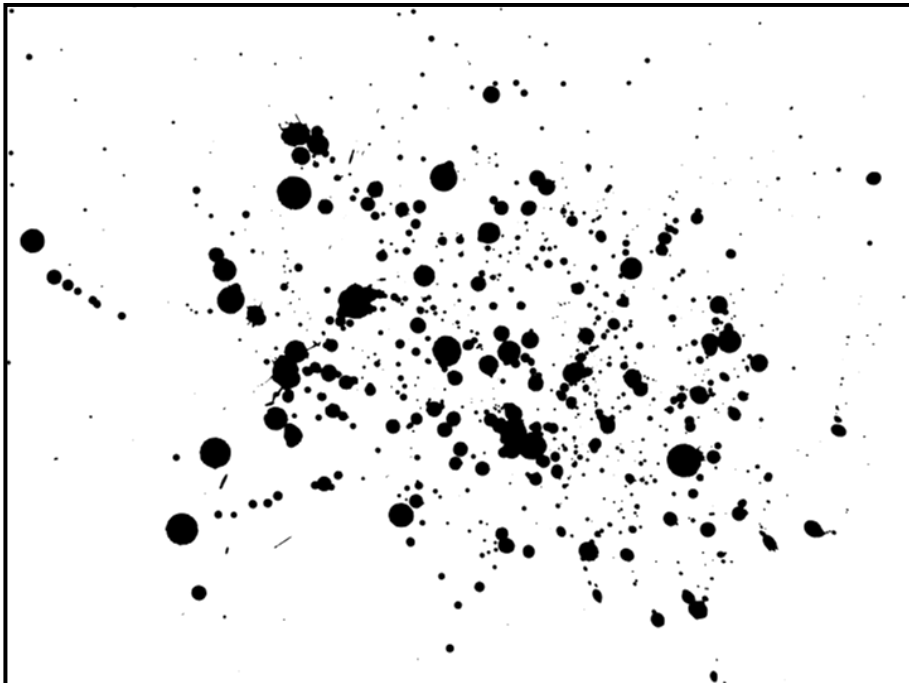
Figure 2.3

In this illustration Figure 2.2 is representative of Howard's idea of nodes within the greater network that it forms part of, while Figure 2.3[36] represents the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) and their concept of the dots on the blank sheet. Figure 2.4 below represents a synergy of the two perspectives:
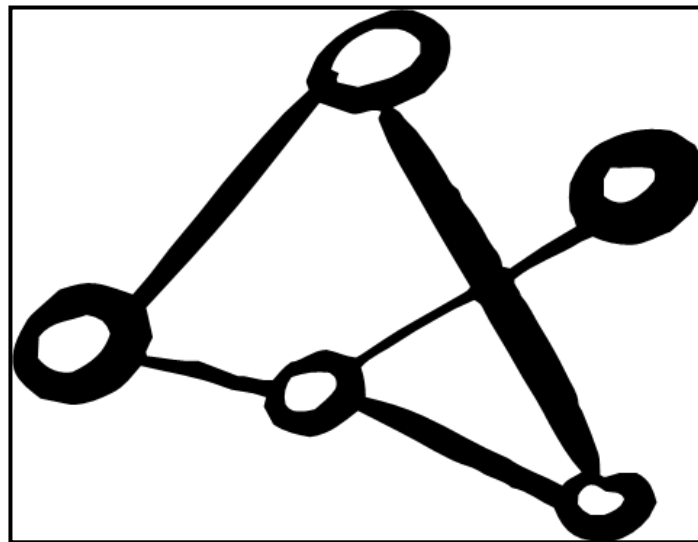
Figure 2.4

In Figure 2.4 we find the nodes concept (Howard 2002) integrated into the blank sheet concept (Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014). This synergy serves several purposes.

1. It isolates the nodes from the greater network in order to study them in a qualitative manner. When the nodes are still integrated into the greater network, they fluctuate frequently and may completely change character, which will make the process of interpretation extremely complex. In the words[37] of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 54-55): "*The process of adding the dots [nodes] to the blank sheet is pushed on by a process that can be verified and expressed in rational and discursive language.*"

---

[36] The border in Figure 2.3 was added to differentiate the canvas or sheet from the rest of the page.
[37] Phrase in square brackets added by the author of this thesis.

2. It aids in the identification of ritual liturgical markers. Within a network such as Facebook it is difficult to speak of "splashing dots" on the blank sheet. The central nodes or "field sites" are dependent on and constructed by their relation to the other nodes in the network. Therefore, the metaphor of "splashing" will not be illuminating. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 54-55) mention that the character of the dots does not only include splashing, but they are also laid out like graphics that can be imitated. This is much closer to the idea of nodes as they are understood in this thesis.

3. Continuing with the movement in the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 55-59) the idea of splashes turning into laid-out graphics takes the concept into the realm of art and artistic procedure. Howard's (2002) contribution on network ethnography and nodes is valuable, but does not allow space for the artistic and abstract nature of liturgy. Therefore, nodes are presented as part of a blank sheet or canvas to emphasise the artistic nature of the nodes in expressing the ritual being studied through ethnography. Networks such as Facebook, Instagram and even World of Warcraft (Matthee 2015) rely heavily on expression through image and sound and therefore a methodology that does not create space for artistic interpretation will not suffice, as is the case in Howard's original discussion.

4. It respects the ontological character of the rite. This is extremely important for studying liturgical ritual through ethnographic methods, especially in the network culture. Being a ritual liturgical study, this thesis is primarily concerned with the very nature of the liturgical ritual and how both the participants and researcher understand the ritual (Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014: 59). The blank sheet is in a certain sense the ultimate mystery, which once unravelled may show us the true nature of the phenomena we observe. Of course, speaking of unravelling is merely theoretical, for we are forever burdened by our own interpretations and those of others; therefore we can never truly grasp

the objectivity that eludes us. This highlights the paradoxical issue of studying ritual in the network culture, as Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 59) explains:

> "In other words, the blank sheet is the rite as it is ontologically understood. In this sense it is something in itself, although we have no other access to the liturgical ritual, to the blank sheet, than by way of the dots that we ourselves splash onto the sheet."

By laying out the nodes on the blank sheet, we sculpt a gateway into the nature of liturgical ritual in cyberspace which is illuminated by the nodes, and through our interpretations and those of others we can glimpse something of the nature of human and Divine interaction in this complex and beautiful space.

2.1.2.7.4 Ethical considerations

This thesis adopts a ritual-liturgical framework to study the way in which people are turning towards the internet (cyberspace) in expressing their grief. Ethnography that includes bereaved participants is already a sensitive area of inquiry, and with the migration of the bereaved participants' expressions into cyberspace, it becomes even more complex. Therefore, it is important that some time be allocated to the discussion of the ethical implications of studying bereaved communities and individuals in cyberspace.

The study of grief in cyberspace has only increased in popularity during the last 8 years; some academic work dealing with the issues includes Krysinska and Andriessen (2010), Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert (2012), Carmack and DeGroot (2014), Moreman and Lewis (2014), Giaxoglou (2014), Van Ommen (2016),[38]

---

[38] Although Van Ommen does not explicitly deal with cyberspace, he explores what he calls "chaos in life and the safety of the liturgy" (Van Ommen 2016: 132), which is a crucial point in the discourse of grief in cyberspace.

Hedtke and Winslade (2017). [39] With academic reflection becoming more popular in this particular context, so ethical responsibility increases.

During the preparation for the ethnographic reflection in this thesis, the ethics of the study of grief in cyberspace was a major point of discussion. To assist in theorising ethical research in cyberspace from a practical theological perspective the work of Carmack and DeGroot (2014) is used although the work of others such as Walter, Hourizi, Moncur and Pitsillides (2012), Eynon, Schroeder and Fry (2009), Lange (2007) and Musambira, Hastings and Hoover (2007) also inform the discussion. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 317) propose six categories that need to be taken into account in an ethical study of death in cyberspace:

- Privacy and anonymity;
- Researcher lurking;
- Language choices and changes;
- Topical sensitivity;
- Emotional impact on researchers; and
- Researcher responsibilities and obligations.

Each of these is discussed with reference to the particular focus of this thesis.

2.1.2.7.5 Privacy and anonymity

Issues of privacy and anonymity constitute a large part of the core discussion around the ethical study of death and grief in cyberspace, and consequently was also a major aspect of the research planning for this thesis. It is evident that researchers and users/architects of digital spaces such as Facebook themselves do not have a proper grasp on the concept of privacy in cyberspace.

Facebook has produced almost yearly iterations of its privacy policy (and sometimes this happens multiple times per year). This can be interpreted in

---

[39] When discussing grief and death, the work of Kübler-Ross (2014) comes to mind as being influential in the discussion. Hedtke and Winslade (2017: 42-45) discuss the five phases that Kübler-Ross conceptualised and they acknowledge her contribution to the field, while also being critical of the normative quality the five phases have acquired.

many different ways, but this thesis argues for two prominent interpretations. The first would be that the privacy policy is informed from a business perspective, which would make sense, since Facebook is a multi-billion-dollar company. The second interpretation alludes to the possibility that the company is also learning as time goes by and adapting its privacy policy as it encounters new issues within the context of cyberspace.

An example of the issues of privacy would be the recent epidemic of fake news that plagues social network feeds all around the world. Khaldarova and Pantti (2016), Kucharski (2016), Williamson (2016), Marchi (2012) and Holt (2007) all deal with the subject of fake news from different perspectives, with the common denominator being that a virtual public space or a networked public space (Ballantyne, Lowe and Beddoe 2017:21) is an extremely difficult space to apply the traditional concept of privacy. There have been little, although valuable, academic reflection on this dilemma, but we see a strong reaction from the public and internet journalists[40] to the issue of privacy in cyberspace.

Within the context of this thesis, the object of inquiry is Facebook for the most part, but also other space in cyberspace such as Instagram and various cyber cemeteries. The nature (public, private or controlled) of these spaces is a contentious issue in current technological and social discourse. It can, however, be concluded that these spaces are for the time being treated as public spaces or public networked spaces (Ballantyne, Lowe and Beddoe 2017), and even the closed or private group settings that Facebook implements only serve as a method of control and not to ensure exclusivity.

The Facebook Help Center discusses public space only vaguely and the only real mention of the implications of public space serves as a low-level legislative

---

[40] Ghosh and Scott (2018)http://time.com/5112847/facebook-fake-news-unstoppable/
Blue (2018)https://www.engadget.com/2018/01/19/facebooks-fake-war-on-fake-news/
Tiku(2018)https://www.wired.com/story/facebooks-latest-fix-for-fake-news-ask-users-what-they-trust/
Ong(2017)https://www.theverge.com/2017/12/21/16804912/facebook-disputed-flags-misinformation-newsfeed-fake-news

safeguard to protect Facebook against any legal implications resulting from violations to the privacy of its users. They do however state that:[41]

"Something that's public can be seen by anyone. That includes people who aren't your friends, people off of Facebook and people who use different media such as print, broadcast (ex: television) and other sites on the Internet. For example, if you use our services to provide a real-time public comment to a television show, that may appear on the show or elsewhere on Facebook."

This statement is supplemented with the following examples:[42]

"**Stuff other people share:** If other people share info about you, even if it's something you shared with them but did not make public, they can choose to make it public. Also when you comment on other people's public posts, your comment is public as well.
Posts on Facebook Pages or public groups: Facebook Pages and public groups are public spaces. Anyone who can see the Page or group can see your post or comment. Generally, when you post or comment on a Page or to a public group, a story can be published in News Feed as well as other places on or off Facebook."

Even with these statements as guidance to help us interpret the notion of public space, no concrete boundaries are established to delineate the public space from the private space. Facebook published what they call "community standards" to establish some form of boundary, but even here no mention is made of public vs private space; it is explicitly stated,[43] however, that a person's personal information may not be published without their consent. Personal information as understood within this context includes information such as a person's name, telephone number and email address.

---

[41] https://www.facebook.com/help/203805466323736?helpref=uf_permalink
[42] https://www.facebook.com/help/203805466323736?helpref=uf_permalink
[43] https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards

Therefore, people using Facebook and other social media are provided with the opportunity to become fully aware of the fact that when they are posting their thoughts/photos/emotions and whatever else they decide to post, they are posting this information to a space where the public can access it whether directly or indirectly. [44] In approaching this contested space ethically, the approach of this thesis is that these spaces are indeed public spaces[45] and that people posting in these spaces are fully liable for their own choice in posting. Burkell, Fortier, Yeung, Wong and Simpson (2014), in their article "Facebook: public space, or private space", draw a preliminary conclusion in stating that:[46] "we concede (as these data suggest we must) that online social networks are indeed viewed and treated by participants as 'public' spaces".

Even though this information (regarding the participants) can be used and accessed publicly, no names (or rather pseudonyms) are mentioned in this research. No photos of people will be shared in this research. No reference will be made whereby a person can be identified through a statement. This decision is made in order to be respectful toward bereaved communities as well as the expressions that people articulate without considering the public nature of their digital utterances.

2.1.2.7.6 Researcher lurking

Proceeding from the idea of cyberspace as primarily a public space for the time being, this brings us to the ethicality of lurking in these spaces. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 321) choose to use the word 'lurking', which is difficult to interpret positively. This might indicate their stance on the topic, but in this

---

[44] Directly refers to posts that are freely available and indirectly refers to posts that are shared by others.

[45] A selection of other research treating online social media as public space include the work of Ballantyne, Lowe and Beddoe (2017), Malone (2016), Burkell et al. (2014), Giaxoglou (2014), Moreman and Lewis (2014), Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert (2012).

[46] Full quotation: "In very limited circumstances, information found on Facebook is considered too personal to be shared, but such boundaries appear to be exceptions to a general rule that Facebook is a public space. If we concede (as these data suggest we must) that online social networks are indeed viewed and treated by participants as 'public' spaces, does it necessarily follow that there can be no privacy expectations with respect to the information revealed in online social network profiles" (Burkell et al. 2014: 983)

thesis the term "observation" is preferred. Observation represents the intention of the researcher in this thesis, i.e. not to lurk (hidden and potentially threatening) but rather to observe as objectively as possible. The aim of the observation was to learn about the way in which people express themselves in cyberspace and to use this knowledge to make a positive contribution to the relevant theoretical frameworks that inform the praxis in question.

Ethically speaking, the domain of the researcher as invisible observer in cyberspace is an area about which little research is available to guide observers. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 321-322) elaborates on two points that are important to this discussion:

Firstly, in the context of death and grief in cyberspace, the researcher generally tries to avoid further traumatising or disrupting the bereaved communities. One of the possibilities of researcher observation is that information can be accessed publicly (therefore legally), without the researcher actually interacting or disrupting communication within the bereaved community. A second possibility or possibly a risk, is what Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 321) refer to as "emotional rubbernecking". This term refers to people (researchers included) embracing the availability of grief online as a form of entertainment. As with the first option, if the public information is simply consumed without any interaction, the bereaved community is not disrupted, but in many cases people feel the need to comment on certain posts or other interactions, and then involve themselves in ways that are generally unfavourable to the community.

As is evident, this issue of ethics in cyberspace is a difficult area to address. In recent times a variety of social networking sites [47] have granted their communities the opportunity to have a private profile (the level of privacy differs depending on the options chosen), and these private profiles are only accessible to certain people. To an extent this blocks researchers and other people from lurking (or observing), even though there are many people who still share access to their profiles publicly.

---

[47] Examples of this functionality can be seen with Facebook and Instagram. Other platforms such as Snapchat and some dating apps such as Tinder also make use of these features.

In the preparation for this thesis much thought went into how exactly this issue could be engaged when conducting research amongst bereaved communities in cyberspace. As discussed earlier, participant observation is one of the primary methods of ethnographic enquiry in this thesis, and therefore enters the realm of "researcher lurking" when applied to an online context. To avoid the participant observation, (as done in gathering the empirical results) turning into "researcher lurking", the following decisions were made:

1. The owner of the page is notified that it is being observed for research purposes via a personal message on the relevant platform[48] and in cases where the original owner is also the deceased the relative/connection managing the page is notified. As these pages are public spaces, no notification is actually necessary, but to study these spaces ethically the choice was made to initiate contact with the relevant party(ies).

2. To respect the sanctity and ritual nature of these spaces, the decision was taken that the researcher may not participate[49] in the discussions and comments on the page. This choice was also made to avoid the risk of re-traumatising participants on the page.

Even with proper preparation and theorising on the ethicality of this type of research, many grey areas remain. As this study is in many ways explorative in nature, extreme caution was exercised in doing the research, informed by the most recent research on the ethicality of the issues at hand. Calvey (2018: 479) deal with this issue by labelling it as "covert research" and more specifically "cyber-ethnography". They are of opinion that:

1. The research domain (cyberspace) is public, therefore "researcher lurking" is not invasive or intrusive;

2. The research does not harm the participants in any way because of the distance and remoteness between the researcher and the researched.

---

[48] Primarily Facebook is used, but in some cases reference is also made Instagram profiles.
[49] There is one instance where the researcher did in fact participate in the community, although this participation occured before this thesis was conceptualised.

Calvey (2018: 479) hold that these two points are generally acceptable, but the whole issue becomes more complex when sensitive topics are studied, and therefore observation methods must adhere to a much more restricted and bounded investigation. Even though the participant observation as done in this thesis is limited to be as ethical as possible, the aim of the research is to contribute to the theoretical frameworks that support the current praxis of mourning and other ritualised behaviour in cyberspace. Therefore, the research at no point intend to disrupt or harm participants.

This thesis forms part of the complexity of the method as death is a sensitive topic. In treating ethical research and ethnography with the necessary mindfulness, especially from a theological point of view, the decision was made to have a very small sample size consisting of people the researcher knows/knew and therefore to only observe in these spaces. The way in which this thesis approached the topic of lurking is similar to that in the work of Kasket (2012: 64), where it is acknowledged that lurking (or observation as it is understood in this thesis) is part of the process of doing research, but that in doing so, all data observed that might identify a person should be anonymised.

2.1.2.7.7 Language choice/Language change

Language has long been an object of philosophical[50] inquiry, because it is immensely important in the conceptualisation and understanding of a person (self) and in the context of cyberspace the understanding of the post-human or post-self (Jacobsen 2017: 156-173; 216-234). In cyberspace we have (for the most part) only language (text) and image/audio to interpret as researchers.

Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 322) say:

> Given the pain and distress associated with death, it is not surprising that bereaved individuals' language would be raw and vulnerable, occasionally punctuated by profanity, offensive language, and errors. The use of profanity and offensive language

---

[50] Austin (1975), Habermas (1987), Searle (1969), Wittgenstein (1961, 1963) to name but a few of the classic works on the philosophy of language.

is often a way to communicate identity and its use in grief blogs is intentional, as authors see those words as the best way to communicate their reality and emotions.

In doing ethical research and reporting, a definite stance must be taken regarding the use of language. This dilemma places the researcher at a juncture where two (obvious) choices are available. Either the researcher can choose to alter the language observed during the observation, or use the original language the participants used. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 321-323) explores this issue at length, but where the study of death brings complexity to areas such as previously discussed, here it brings simplicity in making a choice regarding the use of language.

This thesis elected to use the original language of the posts verbatim. There are several reasons for this choice:

1. With sensitive topics such as death, language is generally loaded with multiple layers of meaning and expression. To alter the text damages these layers and this results in texts with different meanings and interpretations than was originally intended;

2. To change language is to intrude. Even though the researcher might have the purest of intentions in recreating the language, the subjectivity of interpretation can never recreate the character of the original utterance (textual utterances in this case);

3. To alter the language disrespects the position of the original author, especially within sensitive contexts such as death and bereavement. This an unethical way of reporting what was observed in the ritual space.

2.1.2.7.8 Topical sensitivity

Topical sensitivity is of utmost importance when attempting any study, but even more so with highly emotional and complex topics. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 323) emphasise the fact that researchers need to account for the effect their own values, beliefs and biases might have on the research data. To

ethically engage with the research data, one must strive to retain some semblance of objectivity, but nonetheless be honest about the layers of subjectivity included in any interpretation of data.

The topic of this thesis is death and bereavement, and therefore the position of the researcher is important. To study death and bereavement ethically, the researcher must be aware of his/her own experiences and how this influences his or her interpretation of the data.

The researcher personally experienced and is part of two communities of bereaved individuals. The first instance was the loss of a parent to prolonged illness during the conceptual phase of the research, and the second was the loss of the son of a close friend about midway through the research. Therefore, these experiences will undoubtedly have an influence on the interpretation by the researcher.

Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 324) warn against the possibility that without topical sensitivity the researcher may interpret the texts as inadequate or "wrong" ways of grieving, or for that matter wrong ways of performing ritual to keep the topic of this thesis in mind. The aim of this thesis is not to critique grieving in cyberspace; therefore no theory of interpretation is used to discuss the forms of online grief. A popular theory used to study grief is found in the work of Kübler-Ross (1969) and her five steps of grief. A critical position is adopted in this thesis towards the *stages of grief* theory (Stroebe, Schut & Boerner 2017); the stages of the grieving process are not viewed as a linear process. In fact, the process seems to become even more complex in the context of cyberspace and the post-mortal society as seen on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

2.1.2.7.9 The emotional impact of death and grief research on researchers

Up to this point the discussion on ethical research regarding death and bereavement as expressed in cyberspace has focused on the participants in the research for the most part. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 324-326) indicate

that ethical research on death and the expression of bereavement in cyberspace also needs to respect the emotional impact of the research on the researcher. They refer to the concept of "bracketing"[51] (Carmack & DeGroot 2014: 324), which holds that a researcher should consciously disengage their own emotion from the research process.

From a ritual studies perspective the concept of "bracketing" is counter-productive, as the researcher's emotion and other performative aspects form a core part of the observation. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 324-325) mention that a researcher's own experiences with death and grief enrich the qualitative nature of the research in helping the researcher to understand the nuances of individual experiences, which adds an additional layer of understanding to patterns that emerge from research data.

However, with the potential of richer interpretation of the research data comes the risk of physical, psychological or emotional strain. Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 325) reference the work of Dickson-Swift, James, Klippen and Liamputtong (2008) and Mitchell in explaining that these risks are difficult to pinpoint and attribute to specific stages of the research. If one is inclined to generalisation, one could say that these risks are primarily active in conducting of the fieldwork, but as indicated in the above-mentioned sources, these risks are prevalent from start to finish when studying death and grief in cyberspace.

Therefore, they are stressing the point that researchers need to be aware that the study of death and bereavement in cyberspace may have a degree of emotional, physical or psychological influence on them, and that they must

---

[51] Gearing (2004: 1429-1452) explores the concept of bracketing from a phenomenological point of view, referring to the work Husserl; *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology* (2014; originally 1913) as prominent in the development of phenomenology as a philosophical discipline and by extension the development of the concept of bracketing. Gearing (2014: 1430) states: "Essentially, to know is to see, and to see is to look beyond constructions, preconceptions, and assumptions (our natural attitude) to the essences of the experience being investigated. This process is reached through phenomenological reduction, epoche, or bracketing.". Gearing (2004: 1433) notes that there are essentially two components to what suppositions need to be bracketed. The first would be that of the internal and the second the external. The internal component refers to the personal presuppositions of the researcher such as personal knowledge, experiences and values, while the external refers to the suppositions revolving around the phenomenon being studied such as its history, environment and definition. Carmack and DeGroot (2014) interpret this concept very specifically, as referring to the actual emotional and, in a sense, "human" removal from the phenomenon being studied.

therefore also respect their own person in doing the research. The author of this thesis acknowledges the fact that there may be some personal repercussions from doing research of this nature.

2.1.2.7.10 Researcher obligations

The final thought on ethical research addressing issues of death and bereavement in cyberspace is a controversial and complex discussion initiated by Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 326-327). They refer to researcher obligations as the responsibility of the researcher to act in some manner when detrimental or dangerous behaviour is observed. A person posting explicit thoughts or implied actions regarding suicide, self-harm or even harm towards others would be examples of what is meant by detrimental or dangerous behaviour. What exactly is the ethical responsibility or obligation of the researcher when this behaviour is observed?

Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 327) raise an important point, as not many researchers are trained as counsellors or psychologists, and are in no position to offer assistance to the bereaved expressing their emotions in cyberspace. In terms of offering aid, this thesis holds by the stance taken earlier [52] and therefore the researcher does not participate in discussions at the field sites. The second issue raised by Carmack and DeGroot (2014: 327) concerns involvement based on legal obligation. This is a question that warrants more research for it is a serious grey area. The decision was taken that during research for this thesis no contact will be made with the participants being observed. Should a case arise where legal obligation becomes relevant, the situation will be referred to a legal expert and therefore not directly engaged by the researcher.[53]

---

[52] See section 2.1.2.7.6: "To respect the sanctity and ritual nature of these spaces the decision was made that the researcher may not participate in the discussions and comments on the page. This choice was also made to avoid the risk of re-traumatising participants on the page."
[53] The data gathered in doing this research is archived and stored for 15 years in compliance with the regulations of the University of Pretoria, the faculty of Theology and the department Practical Theology.

2.1.2.7.11 Conclusion

Based on the work of Carmack and DeGroot (2014) it is evident that there are major ethical implications in studying bereaved communities in cyberspace. Therefore, due consideration must be given to the ethical aspects of the research. The limitations of current research on ethical practice when studying death and bereavement in cyberspace are acknowledged, and with this in mind the research is conducted with a conservative approach.

'Conservative' here refers to respecting the information of the bereaved communities studied, and their privacy, although this is not strictly speaking necessary, as the information is in the public domain. The conservative point of view adopted in this thesis can also be seen as advocating awareness for the concept of "public privacy" with regards to sensitive topics (Burkell et al 2014: 983) as research into cyberspace becomes more popular. In doing ethical research one must avoid the lure of easy answers to complex questions posed by new contexts, such as the definition of space in cyberspace, because avoiding the complexities results in self-serving and unethical research.

Further comments on the ethical issues involved in the study of death and bereavement in cyberspace are made when the empirical data are discussed later in the thesis.

2.2 General theoretical character

This section elaborates on the theoretical character of the thesis. The way in which ritual and liturgical ritual are understood is explored, expanding on certain key categories such as ritual criticism, disaster ritual and cyber ritual. To explore these themes, the work of selected authors who have made considerable contributions to the field of ritual and liturgical ritual studies is reviewed. Within the framework of this thesis, which is rooted in the concept of cyberspace, the relevance of technology is discussed, while also including the sociological aspect of the post-mortal society.

2.2.1 Ritual

As is evident from research done, especially in the Netherlands and South Africa, studies in ritual science and research on ritual have been massively popular in recent times (Post 2006; Pieterse 2017). This is important and this thesis endorses and adopts the view[54] expressed by Wepener (2004a: 48) that the primary research object is the Christian liturgy, and the building stones of this liturgy are rituals.

2.2.1.1 Modern history of ritual

According to Post (2006: 102-104), the growing momentum in studies of ritual in the context on the Netherlands and the wider Western world can be traced back to the end of the 1960s. Although this movement was not evident at all during its initial years, viewing the development from a historical perspective evinces its progression. Post (2006: 102-110) explores the developments in liturgy and liturgical ritual of this period in a very critical manner, even alluding to this period in history as being counterproductive to the development of a relevant ritual repertoire. Post (2006: 102) focused on what he calls the

---

[54] Wepener (2004a: 48) was referring to his own thesis: "Die primêre veld van ondersoek van hierdie studie is die Christelike liturgie, en die boustene van liturgie, is rituele."

unprecedented and sudden collapse of ritual building in the Netherlands and the wider Western context.[55]

The period that Post (2006) discusses up until this point in time (2017) can be equated to the "trough of disillusionment" and the "slope of enlightenment" in the popular Gartner Hype Cycle.[56] The Gartner Hype Cycle is generally used to predict the rise and fall of new technologies; it was developed by a business analyst (Jackie Fenn) in 1995 and has been an industry staple since the early 2000s. The Gartner Hype Cycle can be visualised as follows:
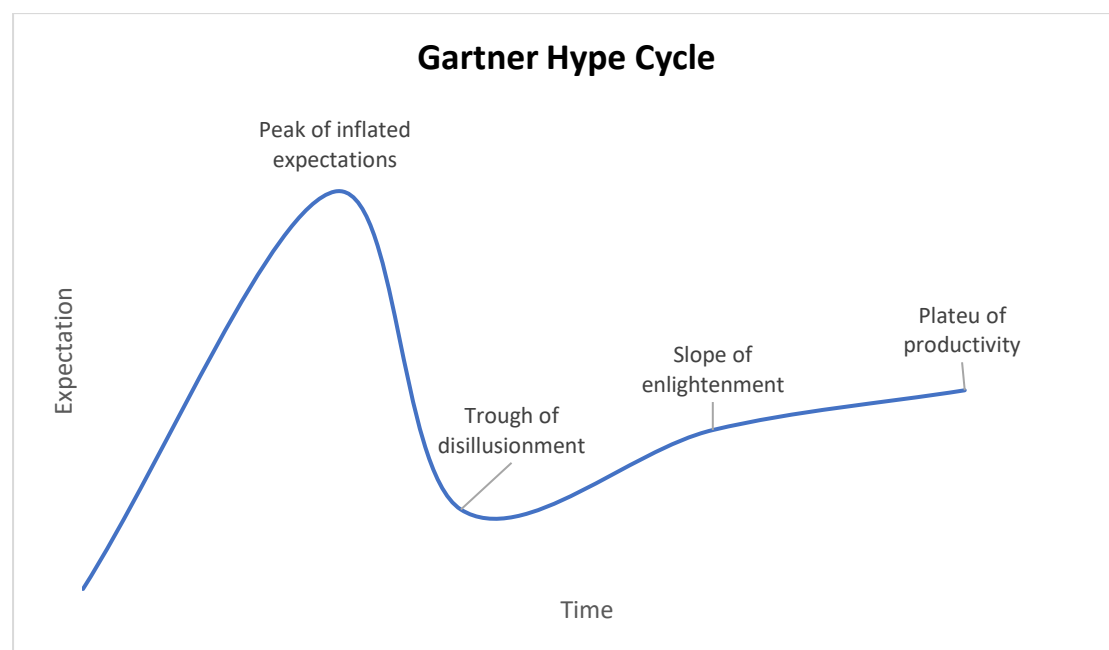
Figure 2.5

Graph reproduced with minor adaptations from
http://www.gartner.com/technology/research/methodologies/hype-cycle.jsp

The same trend can most probably be identified in the development of interest in the concept and the expression of ritual. The work of Post (2006), Lukken (2006) and Van Tongeren (2006) all mention the 1960s several times and that

---

[55] The full quotation from Post (2006: 102): "*Ik doel dan niet op de liturgische vernieuwingsbeweging maar op de ongekend ingrijpende en plotselinge ineenstorting, in Nederlandse, en ook wel breder westerse, context, van een tot in de jaren zestig dominant alle domeinen van het menselijk leven doordringend vertakt bouwwerk van ritueel en liturgie.*"
[56] Gartner is one of the world's leading research and advisory companies. They specialise in assisting business leaders make the right choices in a modern technologically saturated world http://www.gartner.com/technology/about.jsp.

these were metaphorically speaking, long years[57] years for developments in ritual studies. Post (2006: 92) refers to a growing consciousness of a crisis regarding ritual and rite, this being a direct consequence of the vacuum left after the "long" sixties. From the work of Post (2006: 92) it seems to be evident that the realisation of the crisis became concrete during 1975-1985; however, this period also saw a reaction to this "ritual vacuum" in the form of emerging rituals to fill the void left after the sixties. We also see the very important work by Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies,* being published in 1982.

Lukken (2006: 113) reports an explosion of rituals during the 1990s in especially the Netherlands but also other parts of Europe. According to Lukken, the resulting ritual landscape became known for its plurality and richness, almost to such an extent that Lukken (2006: 113) refers to the contemporary ritual landscape as a "wildlife park". It is further evident from the multitude of publications in the early to middle 2000s that the concept of ritual has become an important and crucial area of investigation and critical reflection. During this time Grimes contributed two extremely important works - *Deeply into the bone* (2000) and *Rite out of place* (2006) - to drive the momentum of the study of ritual. Other prominent works published during this time include *Rituals in Abundance* (Lukken 2004), the 22nd volume of the *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* (2006), which includes multiple articles engaging the concept and place of ritual in liturgy and *Modern Ritual Studies as a Challenge for Liturgical Studies* (Kranemann & Post 2009).

It is also during this time that Wepener (2004b, 2006, 2009) spearheaded the ritual "explosion" (cf. Lukken 2006) in the South African context. Pieterse (2017: 7) mentions the work of Wepener as focusing on the implementation of ritual theory and practice, while also mentioning that Wepener is a leader in the South African context in doing ethnography to study ritual, especially in African cultures.

---

[57] These years are frequently referred to as the "lange jaren zestig" (Post 2006).

The decade after 2010 is arguably the ideal time to be doing ritual studies or researching ritual. This is evident by the multitude of extremely high-quality work being published, constantly extending and expanding the boundaries of our understanding of ritual. Some of the prominent works of the 2010s include: *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Grimes 2014), *Worship in the Network Culture* (Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014), *Ritualized Faith* (Cuneo 2016), *Spielerische Rituale oder rituelle Spiele: Überlegungen zum Wandel zweier zentraler Begriffe der Sozialforschung* (Roslon 2017) and *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (Berger 2017), along with many articles for the *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek.* When comparing the topics and how they relate to the concept of ritual, it is evident that the 2010s have been exponentially more explorative in nature than any other period since the 1960s.

With this brief modern historical overview on the study of ritual, the Gartner Hype Curve is interpreted through a theological lens viewing ritual development:
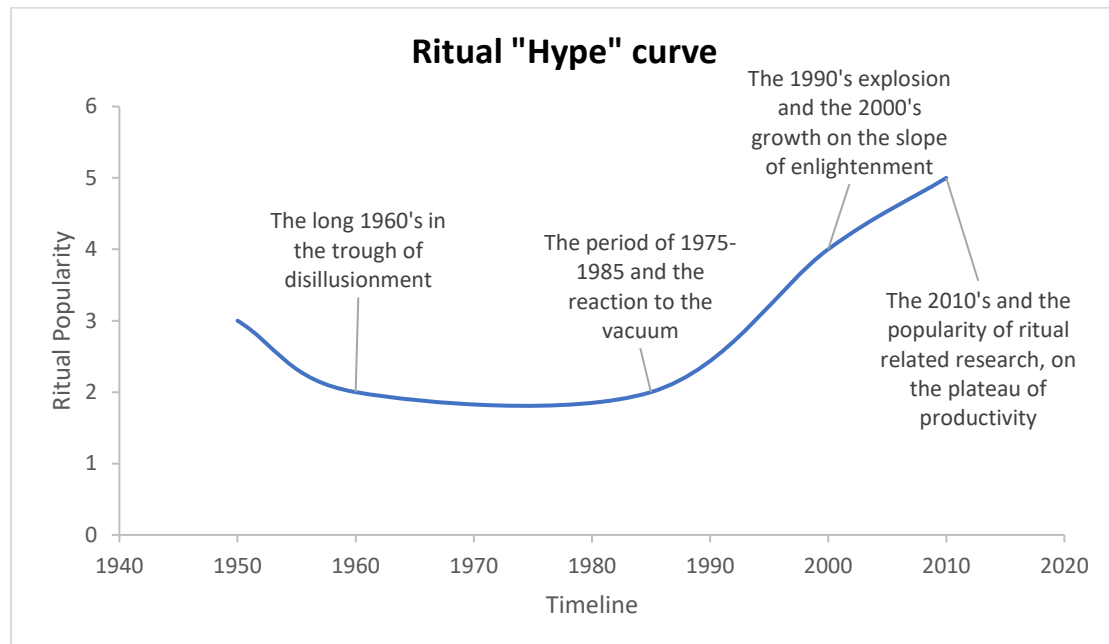
Figure 2.6

Depending on the reader's perspective, the current interest in the concept of ritual and ritual-related research has ascended the slope of enlightenment and is currently enjoying time on the plateau of productivity. It is exactly because of this that ritual can be studied in cyberspace. The concept of ritual and the study thereof have reached a place of stability and authority; therefore, it is no longer necessary to expand much effort in justifying the validity of the study of ritual; this effort can rather be exerted in studying the various expressions of ritual in the lived life of human beings.

With that said, it is still important to critically review the concept of ritual and its implications before one can discuss ritual studies and the extensions thereof. To discuss the concept of ritual, this study turns to the work of Grimes, who has been labelled as the "father of ritual studies" (Post 2013: 174; Post & Faro 2017: 1) and has delivered some of the most influential work on the topic in the last three decades.

2.2.1.1.1 Grimes

In Ronald Grimes's book, *The Craft of Ritual Studies,* he elaborates on the place and use of the concept of "ritual". Grimes (2014: 186) immediately sheds light on the paradoxical character of ritual by referring to its dual meaning in the field and in academia. Grimes also takes a critical stance toward the process of defining ritual, stating that the task of developing a consensus definition of ritual is impossible. This does not mean that one should approach ritual without exploring the concept and its characteristics, but only that a consensus definition would be of little use, as ritual and the way it is defined are extremely context-dependent. A few prominent academics have offered definitions of the concept of ritual:

Grimes (2000): "*sequences of ordinary action rendered special by virtue of their condensation, elevation, or stylization*"

Wepener (2009): "*Rituals can often be repeated, self-evident, symbolic actions, that are always interactive and corporeal, sometimes accompanied by texts and formulas, aimed at the transfer of values in the individual and the group, and of which the form and content are always culture, context and time bound, so that the involvement in the reality which is presented in the rituals remains dynamic*"

Post (2015): "*Ritual is a more or less repeatable sequence of action units which, take on a symbolic dimension through formalization, stylization, and their situation in place and time. On the one hand, individuals and groups express their ideas and ideals, their mentalities and identities through these rituals, on the other hand the ritual actions shape, foster, and transform these ideas, mentalities and identities.*"

These definitions of ritual help us to 'splash the dots on the blank canvas'. In other words, defining ritual helps us in identifying instances of ritual at a high level. It further guides us in deciding what we should study and record, and what we should leave out of our account. To give an example, should we decide to use video recording to study a ritual, having a definition can aid us in differentiating what we should capture on video and what does not need to be recorded (Grimes 2014: 186).

Grimes (2014: 186-188) refines the fundamental issue of the position of a student studying ritual down to the simple question: "Do you use your labels or theirs?" This is a fundamental question when studying ritual and can easily influence the entire movement and flow of the study. Grimes's work generally reflect on rituals in their physical dimension, as is evident from his brilliant exposition on the Santa Fe Fiesta (Grimes 2014). This thesis places its focus on ritual in the digital realm of cyberspace, so therefore Grimes's work should be adapted to include some reflection on the digital context.

Still reflecting on the fundamental question pose by Grimes, Matthee (2015: 32) opted to answer the question posed by Grimes by using his own labels (Grimes's) to study ritual. Hence Matthee (2015: 30-33) defined ritual as

embodied, condensed, prescribed and enacted. Along with the method of auto-ethnography, the present researcher used this definition to study ritual in cyberspace. The results of Matthee (2015) were successful in the sense that the study was defined as explorative and therefore set out to explore rather than describe ritual in cyberspace. The downside to this, however, was that the research never really penetrated to the core of the ritual studied in Matthee (2015) and therefore only delivered, metaphorically speaking, a low-resolution image of the ritual, where we would ideally like to see a crisp and high-resolution picture.

Grimes (2014: 187) is critical of the use of an authors/researchers own labels to explore a ritual and is of the opinion that it is proper ethnographical practice to use the labels as they become apparent in the context of the ritual. Grimes (2014: 183-195) elaborates at length on the difficulty of defining ritual and using that definition in doing research. His main points can be summarised as follows:

- Complexity of the concept of ritual – Grimes (2014: 187-188) explores the dilemma of defining ritual by juxtaposing the two extremes. On the one hand, there are those who expand the concept until it includes all human activity, with the implication that almost any human activity can be studied as ritual. The issue is apparent, if everything can be ritual there is no need to actually define it. On the other hand, there are those who isolate the concept until it reaches a point where it becomes a mere scholarly construction. Grimes (2014: 188) highlights the fact that we should not concede to the pressure of adhering to an all-or-nothing strategy in defining ritual. In defining ritual, we do not uncover the absolute truth behind the concept of ritual, nor do we arrive at the ontological absolute of ritual. In defining ritual, we simply reach an agreement on how the concept is used and understood at a certain time and in a certain place (Grimes 2014: 188).

- Inherent shortcomings of definitions – As discussed earlier, a consensus definition of ritual seems unlikely at the moment. This can be seen from

the definitions discussed earlier as well as in Grimes's (2014: 188-190) own work, where he lists some of the prominent scholars' definitions concerning ritual. Grimes reflects on these definitions by noting that "*every workable definition rules out something.*" This emphasises the inherent shortcomings of defining ritual; a single definition is not able to capture the essence of all instances of ritual. Grimes (2014: 188-192) explores the concept of ritual historically, alluding to the work of Buc and Asad,[58] who agree that the word "ritual" has not always meant what it does now. Yet it is apparent that definitions serve an important purpose in exploring the concept of ritual and its cultural relevance. "*Rituals are ways of keeping imperfection and disorder at bay, but they do so imperfectly*" (Grimes: 2015: 15). In this statement we see the inherent shortcomings of definitions of rituals as "perfect" constructs to study imperfect phenomena. Because of the shortcomings of attempts to defining ritual, Grimes offers a terminological division of labour regarding the term.

- A terminological division of labour – Grimes (2014: 192) resists a monothetic definition of ritual, and instead opts to divide the labour expected of the term into four supporting terms: "rite", "ritual", "ritualising" and "ritualisation".

- Rite – from the noun *ritus,* is used to denote specific enactments located in concrete times and places. Rites are generally named, examples include: "confirmation" (the rite in becoming an adult member of the DRC) and "Facebook official" (the rite of officially entering into a romantic relationship). Thus, rite refers to a set of actions which is widely recognised by members of a certain culture and these actions or behaviours are classified as not-ordinary and stand apart from ordinary activities (Grimes 2014: 191-192).

---

[58] Asad (1993).

- Ritual – from the word *ritualis,* refers to the conceptualisation of a rite in a specific instance. Viewing the concept from this perspective, ritual does not exist except in scholarly formulation in an attempt at defining the concept itself. Ritual then is the term that one would use in scholarly reflection and academic formulations while rites or rituals refer to what people enact (Grimes 2014: 192).

- Ritualising – is used to speak about the act of crafting or inventing rites. This term is specifically designed to indicate a process and not necessarily an end point. Very important to this thesis, the word "ritualising" is used to refer to activity that is not culturally framed as being ritual, but is interpreted by an observer to be a potential ritual. Therefore, this term has a pre-ritualistic nature and function. (Grimes 2014: 193).

- Ritualisation – Grimes (2014: 193) provides a concise definition: "*Ritualization is the repetitious bodily stylization that constitutes the baseline of quotidian human social interaction.*" In other words, this term refers to the way in which ordinary life is ritualised, thereby enabling participants to interact with enactments or rituals by condensing, selecting and arranging them. Grimes (2014: 193) notes that if these enactments are of a religious nature, they are referred to as liturgies.

In searching for a flexible enough definition for ritual, Grimes (2014: 193) concluded that defining ritual or a ritual is not as simple as categorising an act as ritual or non-ritual. He explains that there seems to be a continuum where actions and events are more or less ritualised, depending on the characteristics that define them. Grimes conducted a comprehensive analysis of definitions of ritual to identify common features that are prevalent in scholarly definitions and constructed a set of family characteristics which are visually presented below:

Ritual: Family Characteristics

Grimes 2014:
193-195
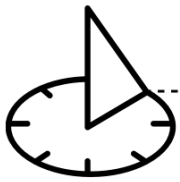
Traditionalizing them, for instance, by claiming that they originated a long time ago or with the ancestors.

Elevating them by associating them with sacredly held values, those that make people who they are and that display either how things really are or how they ought to be.
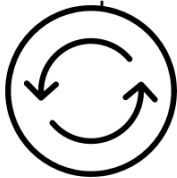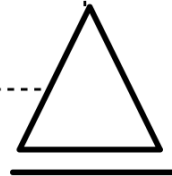
Repeating them— over and over, in the same way— thus inscribing them in community and/ or self.

Singularizing them, that is, offering them as rare or even one-time events.

Prescribing their details so they are performed in the proper way.

Stylizing them, so they are carried out with flare.

Entering them with a nonordinary attitude or in a special state of mind, for example, contemplatively or in trance.
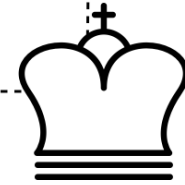
Invoking powers to whom respect or reverence is due— gods, royalty, and spirits, for example.

Attributing to them special power or influence.

Situating them in special places and/ or times.

Being performed by specially qualified persons.

2.2.2 Ritual studies

With the concept of ritual now addressed, the study of this concept or ritual studies is discussed. This section devotes attention to ritual studies in general as well as to certain nuances of ritual studies that are important for this thesis.

The field of ritual studies and the key points in studying this field are explored with special reference to Post's 2015 publication *Ritual Studies.* For most of this discussion Post (2015) serves as the framework, with contributions from other authors where they are relevant.

2.2.2.1 Multidisciplinary

As the concept of ritual became more popular and attractive to the academic world (as illustrated earlier with the "ritual hype curve" in Figure 2.6) the field of ritual studies emerged along with it. Therefore, the emergence of ritual studies as a field of research follows a similar pattern to the development of ritual since the 1960s. The term was officially documented for the first time in 1977 by the American Academy of Religion. It was also during this time that ritual studies became established as a field of research, and much of the impetus can be attributed to Grimes. With the publication of *Beginnings in ritual studies* (Grimes: 1982) the field of ritual studies began to rise through the ranks of becoming an established field onto the academic map, to eventually become a recognised academic field (Post 2015: 1).

An extremely important time for liturgy and liturgical studies was right after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), popularly known as the time of the liturgical renewal. The importance of this period of history cannot be overstated for the initial profiling and development of ritual studies. Initially ritual was still associated with terms such as "churchy" and conservative; in other words ritual was seen as static and uninspired, but a change in attitude could be detected, as Post notes. With this change in attitudes and thinking, symbol and rite saw a resurgence in academic, societal and cultural discourse (Post 2015: 1-2).

With the resurgence[59] of symbol and rite and the initial profiling of ritual studies, some other disciplines collaborated on the subject of ritual. In this collaboration there were also parallels with other multidisciplinary platforms. Disciplines examining ritual include: religious studies, anthropology, liturgical studies and theatre studies. As Post notes, it was primarily religious studies that provided a framework for analysis of ritual. For a time during the initial phase of ritual studies, it was seen as a subdiscipline of religious studies. This is an important development to take note of, for as is evident in *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Grimes 2014), the nature, profile and programme of ritual studies are disposed of. In the evolutionary process of ritual studies this is a crucial development, for it indicates a certain level of maturity with regards to the field of ritual studies. In reaching this level of maturity there is no longer as prominent a need to explicitly define and justify ritual studies as a field. The focus shifted toward justifying the different nuances within the field of ritual studies (Post 2015: 1-3).

To conclude this brief historical overview of the multidisciplinary nature and development of the field of ritual studies, it is evident that the rapid rise of the field from the 1960s up until the present (2017) has created a rich and open field where multiple disciplines can constructively and collaboratively work together in studying ritual; this positive sentiment is also echoed in the work of Wepener (2006b: 393-394).

Although the field has an open character it is important to at least describe a "soft identity"[60] as Post (2015: 3) suggests.

---

[59] Grimes played a major role in this resurgence as can be seen when his earlier works in the 1980s and 1990s are studied. Of special importance is his contribution at the 1992 *Reclaiming Our Rights* conference held at the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy. Grimes' expertise was called upon in the discussions following the Vatican ll Council; he was actually preferred above scholars such as Turner and Douglas because of his open and constructively critical point of view regarding liturgy.

[60] Post (2015: 3) understands a 'soft identity' as the answer to the question: "What is the identity, the profile, of this open platform of ritual studies?"

2.2.2.2 Toward a soft identity

As an introductory note, Post (2015: 3) identifies two profiles for ritual studies. The first profile can be seen as a general profile; in other words, this profile can be seen in conjunction with the development of the field of ritual studies. In this general approach, ritual studies is seen as a platform of systematic and academic research into ritual. Post makes a critical point in adding that the breadth of the general profiles and its interdisciplinary content may change. In a certain sense this profile can be seen as the common, traditional or even conservative approach, as it is quite firmly rooted in the paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s and the way ritual was studied at that time.

The second profile is identified as the open or broad approach to ritual studies in which all studies of ritual are included (Post 2015: 3). This profile is characterised by its multidisciplinary (as discussed earlier) and multi-method approach to studying ritual. As Post (2015: 3) states, all ritual comes into view with this profile "*past and present, high and small ritual, religious and civil ritual*". As far as profiles are useful, this thesis locates itself within the paradigm of the second profile or the open approach to studying ritual.

Within this second or open approach to ritual studies, three qualifiers are identified to assist in conceptualising a "soft identity"

2.2.2.2.1 Ritual acting

The first of four qualifiers sets apart ritual acts or practices as the central object of ritual studies (Post 2015: 3). This qualifier is extremely important for this thesis, for it is with this qualifier that a certain tension can be identified. Post (2015: 13) identifies this tension by saying:

> … there is the perspective that traditional concepts and theoretical frameworks are inadequate in cyberritual, that one has to look there and study in completely new and open ways. And that will then give new impulses again to ritual studies.

This thesis explores ritual studies from the perspective of cyber ritual, where the central object is still ritual acting, although the corporeality of the acting differs from that in the traditional concepts and theoretical frameworks. It is encouraging to see that recent definitions of ritual provide more space for the interpretation of ritual acts; this refinement of the definition is evident in Post's (2015) definition [61] quoted earlier. Where ritual acts once encompassed corporeal acts such as the breaking of the bread or the baptism of an infant, the context of the network culture has extended the ritual acting repertoire to even include acts such as posting a picture on Facebook or clicking on a button to light a virtual candle.

2.2.2.2.2 Plurality of methods

The multidisciplinary nature of ritual studies has already been discussed, but as a second qualifier for the identity of ritual studies we look toward its characteristic as a plurality of methods. Post (2015: 3) makes an important observation in stating that ritual studies is not a method; in other words, it does not derive its identity from a certain methodology. It is in fact the complete opposite in that ritual studies finds its identity in a plurality of methods. This identifier of ritual studies places it within the exciting area of innovative research (Post 2015: 3).

2.2.2.2.3 Characteristics

Post (2015: 3) bases the third qualifier on the work of Grimes (2014) and specifically on Grimes's ideas on the theory and method concerning ritual. Post (2015: 3-4) is very clear that ritual studies is primarily interested in theory and therefore not as interested in the application of said theory. In studying and searching for theory, Post identifies three groups of ritual studies scholars:

- Traditional scholars;
- Exploring scholars;

---

[61] See section 2.2.1.1.1.

- Deconstructivist scholars;

Keeping the dilemma around a definition of ritual in mind, a soft identity makes it possible not to get tangled in the complexity of the concept in the abstract, and move on to the use of the concept for the study in question.

2.2.2.3 Grimes

It is practically impossible to discuss the field of ritual studies without mentioning the work of Ronald Grimes. The work of Grimes can be discussed with many of the categories pertaining to the ritual studies discussion, as his work has greatly influenced the development of the field as already discussed. Although it is necessary to mention that other scholars such as Post and Berger are pioneers in taking traditional ritual studies theory and exploring emergent spaces such as cyberspace.

2.2.2.3.1 Dynamics of ritual

In addition to the work of Grimes already discussed in this thesis, the section he entitles 'dynamics of ritual' (Grimes 2014: 294) is important for the exploration and study of cyber ritual in this thesis. In this section of Grimes's 2014 work *The Craft of Ritual Studies,* he elaborates on and explores the question 'What does ritual do?' In answering this question Grimes identifies four functions of ritual based upon the dynamics of ritual as identified by him. Both the dynamics of ritual and the four functions are discussed below.

Rituals empower and disempower groups
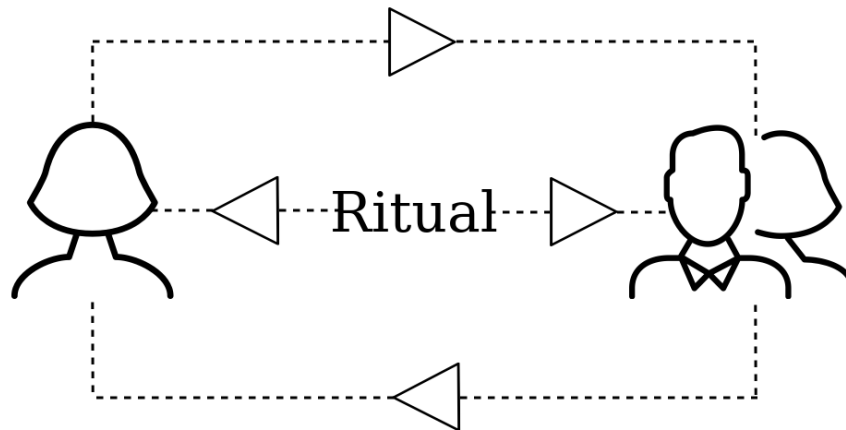
Figure 2.7

The first of the four functions is empowerment or disempowerment of groups through rituals. Figure 2.7 illustrates the basic premise of this function. "Rituals constitute individual identities by embedding persons in groups" (Grimes 2014: 302). These groups become empowered through the individuals who form part of it. Therefore, the first function of ritual operates within the constant flow between individual, ritual and group. In discussing this function of ritual, Grimes (2014: 302-303) refers to the influential work of Durkheim (2001 [1915]) and emphasises that, theoretically speaking, the flow illustrated in Figure 2.7 exists to enhance social solidarity. Although the function of ritual cannot be reduced to simply being a tool to facilitate social solidarity, it is nevertheless an important aspect of this function of ritual, especially when discussing cyber ritual.

Grimes (2014: 302) uses the metaphor of "carpenter's glue" in discussing rituals empowering and disempowering groups. In this metaphor ritual is compared to glue in the sense that it helps to hold together a particular society, nation or tribe. But just as rituals can empower groups in this way, they also marginalise other groups and therefore disempower individuals who form part of those groups and therefore the groups themselves. In studying rituals one needs to

pay attention to the shifts in power and balance between empowered and disempowered groups. This is explored in practice with the interpretation of the empirical results in 3.1.5.1.1.[62]

Rituals attune and disattune bodies

The second function of rituals that Grimes (2014: 306) identifies relates to the human body and its role within the context of rituals. When studying ritual in the physical dimension (where all our senses can be used), it is generally not difficult to observe the role of the human body in these rituals. However, when studying ritual in cyberspace it becomes exponentially more complex to describe the role of the human body in the ritual. Grimes (2014: 307) highlights the dualism between mind (cognition) and body in this regard, and the problems this dualistic approach presents to a study of ritual.

Chapter Four of this thesis discusses at length the issues concerning the body in cyber ritual, so it suffices here to only mention that the body in liturgy and cyberspace is a popular topic in current academic discourse across a multitude of disciplines, as can be seen in the work of Berger (2017, 2012), Jacobsen (2017), Senn (2017, 2016), Abdel-Fadil (2016), Bosman (2016, 2015), Heidbrink and Knoll (2016), Faimau and Behrens (2016), Piasecki and Malekpour (2016), Sbardelotto (2016), Bell, Bailey and Kennedy (2015), Gibson (2015), Frost (2014), Kern, Forman and Gil-Egui (2013), Nugteren (2013), Forman, Kern and Gil-Egui (2012), Walter, Hourizi, Moncur and Pitsillides (2012), and du Preez (2009).

To conclude the discussion on this function of ritual without anticipating too much of what is discussed in Chapter Four, it is necessary to note Grimes's argument that our bodies (and therefore our minds) are inscribed[63] (attuned)

---

[62] This is one of the examples from the field sites of ritual empowering and disempowering groups. In this specific case a participant asked for photos of the deceased with the other participants and therefore the ritualised behaviour of posting photos empowered a certain group of people who had photos as requested, but disempowered those who did not have photos.
[63] Grimes (2014: 306-307) uses a variety of words to describe his concept of 'attunement' including 'condition', 'entrain' and then from a postmodern point of view 'enscribe'.

through rituals. The implications of bodily [64]attunement are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Rituals reinforce the status quo and enact transformation

The Day of the Dead rituals are popular Latin American rituals that form part of celebrations in remembering the dead (simplistically speaking). Just like the Day of the Dead rituals, there are many other rituals that focus on remembering the dead or preserving the memory of the deceased. A popular example from cyberspace is the Day of the Dead celebrations in the popular computer game, World of Warcraft. During this event, players of the game are encouraged to visit cemeteries around the world of Azeroth. Many of these virtual grave sites are preserving the memory of people who have passed away in the real world. A popular grave that people visit during the festivities is that of Gary Gygax, one of the founders of the Dungeons and Dragons world.[65]

The third function of ritual that Grimes (2014: 312) identifies, explores the functions of preserving and transforming as a result of ritual. The purpose of this section is only to introduce this function of ritual. This function is elaborated on when the empirical results are discussed and the actual preserving and transformation that can be observed are discussed there. Suffice it to say that at this stage it is important to acknowledge the importance of preserving and transforming when it comes to ritual in cyberspace.

Rituals make and unmake meaning

Debating the 'meaning of things' is hardly a new phenomenon; it has been a central feature of academia for a long time. For centuries thinkers from a wide variety of disciplines have asked the question of the meaning of something, or even the meaning of meaning itself. Ritual and liturgy have also been scrutinised to ultimately determine their meaning. Staals's (1975: 9) article titled

---

[64] Azeroth is the digital world populated by the avatars of the people who play World of Warcraft.
[65] This area was briefly touched on in Matthee (2015).

"The meaningless of ritual" is a prime example of a critical evaluation of ritual and its meaning, while Cilliers's (2014) article "A royal waste of time? Perspectives on liturgy as space against waste" applies this critical question of meaning to the liturgical practice.

Grimes (2014: 318-320) introduces his third function of ritual via the paradox of meaning. Taking a definite stance on whether ritual has meaning or not is crucial for one's interpretation of a ritual; the author of this thesis agrees with Grimes (2014: 318) that "Even so [referring to the article by Staal], I persist in treating rituals as meaningful". In the post-modern, even post-mortal paradigm, meaning is much less of a certainty and demands proper thought devoted to the value of the concept. So this thesis does not blindly support the position Grimes argues for, but rather supports this position based upon previous empirical work (Matthee 2015: 57) and Haverinen (2014, 2015).

To talk about ritual, especially ritual in cyberspace, symbols are crucial counterparts. Symbols form a massive part of our interaction in cyberspace and are in many cases our primary way of interacting in these digital spaces. Symbolic meaning in cyberspace is not so different as to be completely detached from symbolic meaning and actions as we know them from our corporeal reality. Just as the washing of hands can be a normal daily action to maintain hygiene while also being able to attain symbolic meaning as part of a ritual, the same can be observed with the 'Like' function on Facebook. Liking a post or photo can be as mundane as washing your hands as part of your daily actions, but liking a post that remembers the deceased can attain symbolic meaning as part of a ritual. Grimes (2014: 319) states: "*Rituals make meaning by performatively activating sets of symbols, thereby embedding values in webs of significance.*" He adds that one should be careful about claiming that rituals *are* symbols; they rather contain and give life to symbols.

To continue discussing the function of ritual in making and unmaking meaning, Grimes's (2014: 320-322) list of theories of ritual symbols is presented. This is

quite an extensive list and its contents are important for exploring ritual in cyberspace.

Table 2.1[66]

Number	Theories
1	Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols.
2	Symbols can appear in many different genres and media, e.g. ritual, myth, advertising.
3	Rituals orchestrate, or choreograph, key cultural symbols.
4	Symbolism can attach to any element of a ritual, e.g. objects, actions, persons, words, places.
5	Symbols attract each other, sometimes linking into systems and traditions.
6	A symbol typically has many meanings, not all of which are active at any one time.
7	A symbol has different kinds of meaning (synonyms are in parentheses): a) exegetical (verbal) - what people say about, or in relation to, a symbol; the meanings that can be accessed by talking or asking questions; b) emotional - feelings associated with a symbol; accessed by both talk and observation; c) positional (syntactic) - meanings implied by placement; accessed by observation and inference; d) pragmatic (operational, behavioural, functional) - meanings implied by actions with or in response to the symbol; also accessed by observation and inference.
8	Symbolic meanings may be coherent or dissonant.
9	Symbolic meanings may be intrinsic or extrinsic.

---

[66] The entire table is the work and property of Grimes (2014: 320-322).

10	Symbolic meanings may be word-like (dependent on semantic reference) or dance- and music-like (dependent on kinaesthetic or sonic patterning).
11	The emergence or decline of meanings is situational, determined partly by the intentions of ritual participants and partly by social context.
12	Some symbols are core while others are tributary or instrumental.
13	Merely conventional, or weak, symbols are reducible to analogies or ways of speaking (e.g. head of the table), and their metaphoric power is negligible.
14	Symbols can either point to or be identified their affiliated meanings.
15	When they are materially or causally connected, the one is an index of the other.
16	When they become identified with their referents, they are metaphoric.
17	Metaphoric symbols are often treated as ultimate and therefore protected by a shroud of sacrality.
18	In religious rituals participants enact their ultimate values, highest aspirations, and most intense feelings.

These 18 theories of symbol in ritual help us understand how ritual functions and they are useful markers to carry into cyberspace. In the corporeal dimension we have many activities that are not symbols nor symbolic in many cases, while in cyberspace there are very few interactions that are not mediated by a symbol. Cyberspace is very much an intentional space, and this only increases the relevance of the symbols present.

This discussion only serves as an introductory outline and these issues are incorporated into the analysis done in Chapter Four.

2.2.2.4 Post

While Grimes provides a solid basis for a general theory on ritual, academics such as Post give this theory life in a variety of contexts, notably ritual criticism,[67] pilgrimage and ritual in cyberspace.[68] This section discusses ritual criticism based on work by Post (2013) and Post and van der Beek (2016). Post articulates his perspective on ritual criticism in his 2013 article published in the *Jaarboek voor Liturgie-onderzoek,* He initially held that ritual criticism fell into three main categories:

- Ritual criticism and ritual performance;
- Ritual criticism of normative frameworks;[69]
- Ritual criticism and theorising ritual.

Along with these categories he elaborated on ritual criticism as it specifically pertains to e-ritual or ritual in cyberspace. In his 2016 work with Suzanne van der Beek these three categories are expanded to include *ritual criticism as a research perspective.*

The discussion below on these three frameworks and the reflective category mentioned by Post and van der Beek (2016: 18-23) is followed by the critical reflection on e-ritual as presented in Post (2013: 194-197). Before discussing the different facets of ritual criticism, it is necessary to briefly discuss the value

---

[67] This thesis acknowledges the work of Grimes (1990) but chooses to use Post's work as the lens for ritual criticism specifically because of the contexts he explores.
[68] Some of Post's prominent writings relevant to this thesis include:
Post (1995);
Post (2000);
Barnard and Post (2001);
Post, Grimes, Nugteren, Petterson and Zondag (2003);
Post (2006b);
Post (2010);
Post, Molendijk and Kroesen eds. (2011);
Van Tongeren and Post (2011);
Post (2013);
Post (2015a);
Post (2015b);
Post (2016);
Post and van der Beek (2016).
[69] This category was originally labelled "Ritual criticism vanuit normatieve kaders" (Post 2013: 178).

of ritual criticism as it pertains to this thesis. The work of Grimes (1990, 2014, among others) had a sizeable influence on the development of and theorising on ritual criticism; consequently Post and van der Beek (2016: 17) present their perspective in the light of Grimes's work stating that ritual criticism is "*that structural link between ritual acts and critical consideration and evaluation of ritual*". This is an important point when studying ritual in cyberspace, and in this case studying ritual from the perspective of cyber cemeteries. The ritual acts as observed in cyberspace need to be critically evaluated within the larger context of ritual studies, for they enact and maintain completely new repertoires, and in many cases form no part of any discernible frameworks. With this in mind, ritual criticism is discussed in further detail below.

2.2.2.4.1 Ritual criticism and ritual performance

Few aspects of ritual are as prominent as its performative nature. Hüsken (2007: 21-165) dedicated six chapters to discuss scenarios where mistakes and errors[70] were observed during ritual performance. In general performance-orientated ritual criticism has been directed at rituals that seem to entail at least some form of prescription as to the manner of the performance.

The six ritual performances that Hüsken (2007:21-165) discusses comply with some form of prescribed performance, and the same can be said of the examples used by Post and van der Beek (2016: 18-19). In Grimes's (2014) case, he reflects on the Santa Fe Fiesta*,* which also has generations of tradition informing the ritual performance. This is in stark contrast to the context of ritual in cyberspace, especially with respect to cyber cemeteries. In the vast majority of cases reflected on in this thesis, there were very few explicit texts informing the performance of the ritual acts. This contrast is not intended to reduce prescribed ritual performances to simplistic constructs, but rather to illuminate the difficulty of reflecting on ritual performance in cyberspace. Nevertheless, the first framework for ritual criticism as identified by Post and van der Beek

---

[70] 'Performative glitches' would be an apt interpretation or parallel terminology for performative error in cyberspace.

(2016: 17-18) and Post (2013: 177-178) is as relevant in cyberspace as it is in the corporeal dimension.

2.2.2.4.2 Ritual criticism of normative frameworks

In adopting a critical stance toward normative frameworks as they arise in a ritual context, we detect a much wider field to study than discussed in the previous section. This wider approach offered in the second framework (ritual criticism of normative frameworks) as Post and van der Beek (2016:19-21) and Post (2013: 178-180) describes it, provides a valuable point of critical reflection on ritual in cyberspace.

Since the launch of Facebook in 2004, people using the social network have established certain norms and standards for interaction. The "Like" function discussed earlier is a good example of a normative framework arising around the use of the symbol. From a ritual liturgical point of view, these normative frameworks provide space for critical reflection and therefore an opportunity to engage in ritual criticism in cyberspace. Post and van der Beek (2016: 20) correctly state:

> Christian liturgy and the knowledge of liturgy in past and present constitute in many ways an area in which normative frameworks constantly give rise to critical considerations. The knowledge of liturgy can in many ways be seen as a systematic form of normative and ideologically inspired Ritual Critcism.

Ritual criticism of normative frameworks as they arise in digital spaces provides a window of opportunity into studying the ritual wealth on offer in these mystical spaces.

2.2.2.4.3 Ritual criticism and theorising ritual

Post and van der Beek (2016: 21) state that reflection of a theoretical nature on ritual action leads, whether directly or indirectly, to ritual criticism. This third framework as identified by Post and van der Beek (2016:21-22) opens the field

as a rich platform for multidisciplinary study. A few examples to prove this point can be seen in the work of Hedtke and Winslade (2017), who discuss the indirect rituals around grief; Coombs (2014), where young people talk about death by means of ritual; Stringer (2015) who theorises public ritual; Fukushima (2015) who theorises the digital body; and Giaxoglou (2014), who studies Facebook memorial sites.

Even these few examples already include a wide variety of disciplines ranging from theology to media studies, all theorising ritual actions with various degrees of directness and therefore engaging in ritual criticism. The third framework as discussed here is simultaneously complex and simple in stating that any theorising on and of ritual cannot be separated from ritual criticism.

2.2.2.4.4 Ritual criticism as a research perspective

Post and van der Beek's (2016: 22) view is adopted in this thesis in the sense that the three frameworks discussed above play a constant role in the study of the phenomenon of cyber ritual. Their writing has the notion of pilgrimage as its primary focus, although the context of their study positions itself both offline and online.

Even with pilgrimage as their primary focus, they make a critical observation that informs the position of this thesis with regards to ritual criticism. Post and van der Beek (2016: 23) are of opinion that ritual criticism has from the very start been an integral part of cyber religion and cyber ritual. Therefore, this thesis is rooted in the same paradigm as the work of Post and van der Beek (2016) in saying that the three frameworks discussed above are integrated and always function in the background both heuristically and analytically.

2.2.2.5 Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener

Worship in a network culture entails a comprehensive foray into the world of ritual and liturgy. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) explore a wide spectrum

of topical issues relating to ritual. As Post (2014) also states in a review on their work, their exploration of ritual and liturgy is not just topical but also offers a synopsis of new research in the topics discussed, while linking these topics to the context of the network society.

The research material and findings of this thesis have been presented at a variety of local and international academic conferences. [71] On one such occasion in February 2018 an academic colleague made the statement that ritual repertoire in cyberspace is in essence "nothing new". The ritual and liturgical actions we can observe in cyberspace are simply extensions of their counterparts from the corporeal dimension. While there may be some truth to this statement, the work done by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) takes the first step towards a new interpretation of the core categories of liturgical ritual, showing that we can indeed, in the light of the modern network culture, observe entirely new iterations of ritual liturgical practice.

Post (2014: 201) concludes his review of the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener with a critical note, stating that network culture is fully explored in this work, but it tends to favour the offline life of network culture. Therefore their work and the aspects discussed there provide a valuable stepping stone into the online life of network culture and how liturgical ritual can be interpreted in these spaces. The guiding principle in the work of Barnard, Cilliers and

---

[71] This research (at the various stages of its development) was presented at four international conferences:
1. International conference between PThU (Netherlands) and UP (South Africa) at the University of Pretoria, 26 September 2016. The title was "Cyber cemeteries as challenge to traditional reformed thanatological liturgical praxis";
2. Paper at Societas Liturgica in Leuven Belgium, August 2017. The title was "Cyber Cemeteries: Searching for the Sacred";
3. Paper at the UP and Humboldt University conference - Methods and Theories of Practical Theology: Applications to African Contexts and Development Issues, 7 February 2018. The title was "Ritual: Equilibrium and Disequilibrium – Disaster and Liminality";
4. Paper presented at a ritual masterclass in Tilburg with Professors Stewart and Strathern. The title was "Ritual (cyber ritual)".

In addition to the four opportunities above the research was also presented at a postgraduate colloquium at the University of Pretoria attended by fellow students in the Department of Practical Theology.

Wepener that is discussed explicitly is liminality. This concept provides valuable guidelines in studying ritual in cyberspace.

2.2.2.5.1 Liminality

The concept of liminality is not new but has seen considerable popularity in recent times. Arnold van Gennep originally conceptualised it in his 1909 work *The Rites of Passage,* where he laid the foundation of our understanding of the three phases of rites of passage. The liminal phase was later explored in more depth by Victor Turner in his 2008 [1969] publication *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener 2014: 67-68).

Since Turner's work, many academic disciplines particularly from the social sciences have embraced the concept of liminality. Amongst these are two mainline disciplines that are of particular significance here; practical theology and ritual studies (which can be argued is the birthplace of the concept). There have been many interpretations of the concept of liminality in these two disciplines, as can be seen in the work of Dawson and Cowan (2004), McClymond (2009), Cilliers (2010), Davies (2010), Miller-McLemore (2012), Raj (2013), Brennan (2014), Moyaert and Geldhof (2015), Hoondert and Bruin-Mollenhorst (2016), Roslon (2017) and Hedtke and Winslade (2017) to name but a few from a variety of academic backgrounds. It is clear that the concept of liminality is a valuable and fruitful concept in both the world of ritual and of liturgy.

Although the works listed above provide valuable insight into the concept, this thesis is particularly interested in the perspective adopted by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) and their understanding and exposition of the concept of liminality. The two areas of particular importance from their work include their thoughts on "liminality in the network society" and their discussion on theological perspectives on liminality. These two concepts are discussed below as they are important for studying ritual in cyberspace in the context of cyber cemeteries.

Liminality in the network society

Although liminality in the network society and culture has been explored in previous academic works, the insights formulated by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) aids this thesis in studying death and bereavement in cyberspace as it consists of a variety of liminal communities.

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 71) state that their fundamental understanding of the place of liminality is that it is positioned as a central notion and a dominant state in the current world. Three years have passed since the publication of their book and their position and understanding of liminality is still relevant, specifically to this thesis. It could be said that it is even more relevant now, as the world is experiencing wave after wave of information innovation. This means a constant flow of economic, financial and cultural information regularly being transformed and crossing thresholds (Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener 2014: 71).

The specific object within the context of the network society studied in this thesis is the liminal communitas brought forth in the wake of a disruption (death). Within this context the flow of information (expression) across the boundaries of cyberspace is ever increasing. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014:72) mention Turner's (2008[1969]: 108) comment[72] and add that what he described as weak and marginal is now central to the current state of global culture. Within the post-modern context and currently dominant perception of liminality it should come as no surprise that people strongly resonate with liminal spaces and choose to express themselves in these spaces.

With all this in mind a concrete link between cyberspace and the network society is implied but not specified. In the light of the insight of Castells (2010:

---

[72] Original quote "the powers of the weak, or, in other words, the permanently or transiently sacred attributes of low status or position" and they have often "magico-religious properties" (Turner 2008[1969]: 108).

500)[73] and the interpretation of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 73) the following pattern becomes evident:
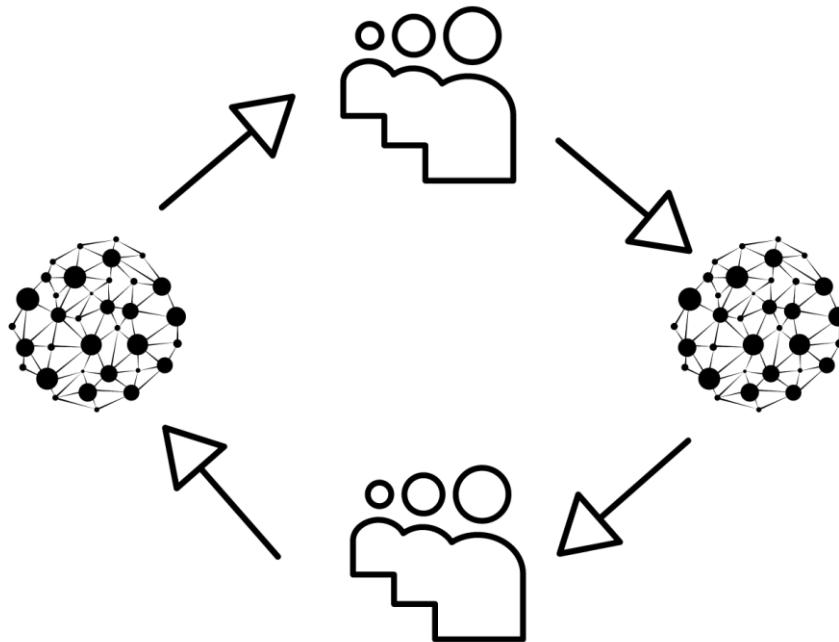
Figure 2.8

In Figure 2.8 we see an illustration of the modern movement between social structures and new forms of network. In line with Castells' (2010: 500) thought mentioned earlier, new forms of social structures are continuously emerging based on the way that information technology integrates with the current social structure.

A broad example of this movement can be observed in the progression between the Myspace, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat eras. Myspace launched in 2003 and was very popular amongst teens and young adults as a networked social structure providing the opportunity to share one's ideas with the world. Myspace saw considerable use in the realms of pop culture and music, and was mainly used as a promotional network. Myspace profiles were generally

---

[73] Quoted earlier in section 2.1.2.5.

group orientated, and to hark back to early 2005, [74] the question asked regarding Myspace was "het julle 'n Myspace?"[75]

Myspace peaked in 2007, but Facebook overtook them as the most popular social networking platform in 2008. Facebook, although launched in 2004, saw its reach extend to global networks only in 2006-2007. With the new information technology available, Facebook changed the fundamental question regarding networked social structures from "Do you(plural) have a Myspace profile?" to "Do you (singular) have a Facebook profile?" This brought about a new social structure where the networked space focussed on individuals and their lives.

Information technology advanced once more and beautiful photos and other media were at every smartphone owner's fingertips. Instagram launched in 2010 and saw rapid growth as people were given the opportunity to connect with each other through the media, instead of the text and media mixture they were used to with Facebook.

Around the same time that Instagram launched, another media-focused application Picaboo was launched in 2011, only to be rebranded later as Snapchat. With the privacy issues currently plaguing digital platforms, Snapchat opted for a social structure where thoughts could be shared and then disappear after 24 hours. The CEO of Snapchat[76] Evan Spiegel (2012) wrote in Snap.com's first blogpost[77] that:

"Snapchat isn't about capturing the traditional Kodak moment. It's about communicating with the full range of human emotion — not just what appears to be pretty or perfect. Like when I think I'm good at imitating the face of a star-nosed mole, or if I want to show my friend the girl I have a crush on (it would

---

[74] The author of this thesis participated in the Myspace social network as administrator of a promotional page for a heavy metal band (https://myspace.com/stateofoblivion).
[75] The Afrikaans phrase translated would be: "Do you (plural) have a Myspace profile?".
[76] Various CEOs of leading technology companies have warned that Snapchat is also already heading toward irrelevance, highlighting the liminal nature of social structure in cyberspace (Levin 2018).
[77] https://www.snap.com/en-US/news/page/8/ accessed January 2018.

be awkward if that got around), and when I'm away at college and miss my Mom…er…my friends.

We're building a photo app that doesn't conform to unrealistic notions of beauty or perfection but rather creates a space to be funny, honest or whatever else you might feel like at the moment you take and share a Snap."

With these four platforms, a definite movement between social structure, technology and networks can be observed. This supports the opinion of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 75) that a state of liminality is now a central feature of society and that more structured and closed identities now tend to manifest at the margins of the network society.

Liminality, practical theology and liturgical studies

Following the thoughts of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 76), the concept of liminality in the network society is now applied to the context of practical theology and specifically liturgical studies. Other authors such as Ohlendorf (2016), Post and van der Beek (2016), Scott (2015), van Nuenen and van der Beek (2016), Duteil-Ogata (2015), Wepener (2015, 2012), Barnard (2010) and Cilliers (2010) also explore this topic, but the focus here will be on the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014).

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 76-77) approach this issue from the perspective of the Pentecostal influences on liturgical performance along with the Praise and Worship movement. Irrespective of the approach taken to explore the liminal character of modern liturgy, the core findings remain the same; Christian ritual is performed worldwide, in other words across multiple networks, by any person who chooses to do so. This is an important point for studying liturgical ritual in cyberspace with reference to cyber cemeteries, for funeral liturgy forms part of newly accessible networked liturgical expression.

Continuing with the argument of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 76-77), the concept of liminality challenges traditional concepts that have become

normative in liturgical expression such as space, performance, actors/embodiment and time. Therefore, it is crucial that these traditional concepts become more open and flexible to be applied to the new contexts of cyberspace in doing practical theology and liturgical research. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 78) mention the context of life-cycle rituals (Bell 1997: 91-102) and that the traditional order that this genre of ritual depends on has changed with society. While they (Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener 2014: 78) focus on the life-cycle rituals and the marriage ceremony as liminal state, the same can be said about the life cycle rituals concerning death and bereavement. In the light of the post-mortal society, life-cycle rituals concerning death and bereavement are fundamentally challenged in their conceptualisation of space, time, body and performance.

To conclude, liminality is a valuable concept for practical theology and liturgical studies. The concept of liminality helps these disciplines to re-evaluate the significance of liturgical spaces and rituals to understand them better in the context of a network culture and a post-mortal society.

2.2.2.6 Disaster ritual

Disaster ritual is an important concept in this thesis and, while the concept itself is not the focus of the research, the practice of cyber ritual to mourn the dead is in most cases ritualising as a result of a disaster[78]. The concept has been explored in depth by the likes of Post, Grimes, Nugteren, Pettersson and Zondag (2003), Bell (1997), and is an established field on inquiry.

In Post et al. (2003) a prominent number of the case studies presented are the results of death-related disruptions. The death of Diana, the Dutroux affair and the Estonia ferry tragedy, to name but a few, prompted ritual action by virtue of a disaster characterised by numerous fatalities. It is part of the working hypothesis of this thesis that disruption specifically related to death is one of

---

[78] Disaster as it relates to death will henceforth be used as disruption. See section 2.2.2.6 for an explanation on this decision.

the strongest catalysts for public ritual expression. Wooden or plastic crosses are placed next to the roadside to ritually remember those who have passed away at certain locations on various roads (in South Africa at least). Like these crosses next to the road, there are many cases where other public spaces are consecrated to become ritual spaces in the wake of a disaster. In the context of the network society the ritual expression that is associated with disaster has found a new space in cyberspace.

At this point it is necessary to make clarify how disaster is understood in this thesis. As indicated above, it was disaster that led to the deaths of people in the various scenarios. Death was/is not necessarily a disaster in itself. Death is understood as a disruption[79] rather than a disaster. Therefore, the context of disaster ritual is still relevant as most of the field sites had death as a consequence of a disaster, but the death itself was not necessarily a disaster. With this is mind, the discussion proceeds on cyberspace as conducive to ritualisation stemming from disaster.

A very prominent example of the relevance and longevity of these cyber ritual spaces can be seen in the memorial site to the late Chester Bennington. Disaster struck millions of music fans across the globe when Chester Bennington, the lead vocalist of the popular group Linkin Park, chose to take his life on 20 July 2017. In the wake of this disruption, the website http://chester.linkinpark.com/ was launched where people could remember Chester and interact via Instagram-type messages. As soon as the website went live, hundreds of thousands of fans flocked to ritually express their grief in the wake of the disaster of Chester's death. During the final stages of this research the researcher visited the website again (28 Feb 2018) to observe this form of cyber cemetery and disaster ritual. It was found that thousands of people are still expressing their grief in this virtual space and many ritual

---

[79] In the initial phases of the research death was understood as a disaster in the sense that it means to lose something. When this research was presented at a masterclass on ritual in Tilburg, some of the academics in attendance, including Stewart and Strathern from Pittsburgh University, raised some critical questions regarding the use of disaster as understood in this thesis. Based on this feedback the way death is understood was adapted to the concept of disruption instead of disaster.

expressions were still being posted such as hymns, virtual candles and even prayers.

This observation emphasises two important points in the context of this thesis. Disaster is immensely strong in acting as a catalyst for ritual; and as Post et al. (2003) also note, people look to rituals in the wake of a disaster. In the wake of disaster and with the disruption of death people find themselves in a liminal space which is conducive to ritual interaction.

Cyberspace provides fertile ground for ritual expression. Even the most tragic of disasters such as 9/11 did not have longevity of ritual expression at the consecrated space in the corporeal dimension. But in cyberspace the possibility of ritual expression is available for bereaved individuals, for as long as they need it to be available (within current technological parameters).

Danbolt and Stifoss-Hanssen (2017: 355-358) explores disaster ritualising and identifies two important aspects of the observable phenomena: individual/personal recovery and social/communal recovery.

Individual/Personal recovery

According to Danbolt and Stifoss-Hanssen (2017: 355), individuals draw on common ritualising to promote individual or personal recovery. This aspect was prominent during the observations of the various Facebook pages studied. The majority of participants to the ritualising process on Facebook expressed personal grief and documented their personal journeys to recovery. In many cases this encouraged responses from the bereaved community in question, yet the original purpose was not necessarily to support the community, but rather to express their sense of loss individually.

Social/Communal recovery

In Danbolt and Stifoss-Hanssen's (2017: 357-358) discussion of the communal recovery resulting from disaster ritual, it is evident that for a community to recover from a disaster, shared mourning is one of the common ritual expressions. This shared mourning includes common and communal symbolic responses, identification of emotional locations and the development of stories (Danbolt & Stifoss-Hanssen 2017: 358).

Disaster ritual and the network culture

Danbolt and Stifoss-Hanssen (2017) meticulously separate these two spheres of recovery (as they label them) between the individual and community. While this is a valid point of view, the concept of the network culture challenges this notion. In the context of a network society and especially the space of cyber cemeteries, individual ritual expression is unequivocally a communal expression, whether this is intended or not. Hypothetically, individual expression could have taken the form of a physical journal entry stowed away in a drawer, only to be perused by the grieving eyes of an individual trying to make sense of the disruption of death. When individual expression materialises in cyberspace, the network is immediately involved and, by virtue of the individual ritualising, the network then becomes a community of bereaved. As a result, the individual connects to the network.

To conclude, within the context of disaster ritual in cyberspace the different layers of the network society is evident. The discrete identity of the self and its incorporation into a community are the foundation of the cyber cemetery (Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener 2014: 71-76, Castells 2010:3).

2.2.2.7 Cyber ritual

Cyber ritual is the primary (and only) ritual expression observed and analysed in this thesis. As Post and van der Beek (2016: 76) note, the field of cyber ritual

has been developing since the 1990s mainly as topics in the fields of New Media and Digital Culture. Contributions to the development of the study of cyber ritual have come from many sources, but some of the most productive writers include Campbell (2005a, 2005b, 2011, 2012a, 2012b), Campbell and Lövheim (2013), Campbell and Grieve (2014) and Campbell and Lassiter (2014), Campbell and Garner (2016), and the contributors to the *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet,* which has been publishing journal articles on religion and the internet since 2005. Some of the important contributors to the journal include Campbell (2005b), Heidbrink and Miczek (2010) Heidbrink, Knoll and Wysocki (2014), Helland (2005, 2010), Lövheim (2005), Miczek (2008), Radde-Antweiler (2008a, 2008b, 2006).

In this thesis the conscious choice is made to use the term 'cyber ritual'. This term is still in flux as the field is developing and the notion has been named differently by a variety of authors, for example, virtual ritual (Kluver & Chen 2008; Casey 2006), online rituals (Miczek 2008), rituals online (Radde-Antweiler 2006), techno-ritualisation (MacWilliams 2006) and e-ritual (Post & van der Beek 2016). The decision to use the term 'cyber ritual' is based on the actual space that constitutes this ritual expression. The two aspects of cyber ritual studied in this thesis are space and embodiment. The space, which is cyberspace, determines and enables the reflection on time, actor and performance and other elements of ritual in this particular space. Therefore, the term 'cyber ritual' speaks to the fundamental character of the ritual expression as it can be observed in cyberspace.

Post and van der Beek (2016: 77) are of opinion that there are two online contexts that are important to ritual on the internet (specifically here cyber ritual): the web and chat rooms. While this is not technically incorrect, the complexity of cyberspace is highlighted when a context such as Facebook is studied as a ritual space (as is the case in this thesis). Facebook incorporates both elements that they mention in its architecture; Facebook is primarily hosted on the internet as a website where multimedia data are stored and connected via the pages (Post & van der Beek 2016: 77) of the users, while

simultaneously making synchronous interactions possible. Their description also does not account for the world of applications that enable access to the internet from one's smartphone or tablet. According to research done by *StatCounter* (March 2016 - March 2017),[80] which is an online stat tracking tool, the desktop vs mobile vs tablet market share in Africa is represented by these numbers:

Market share

2,91 — 36,81 — 60,28

■ Desktop ■ Mobile ■ Tablet
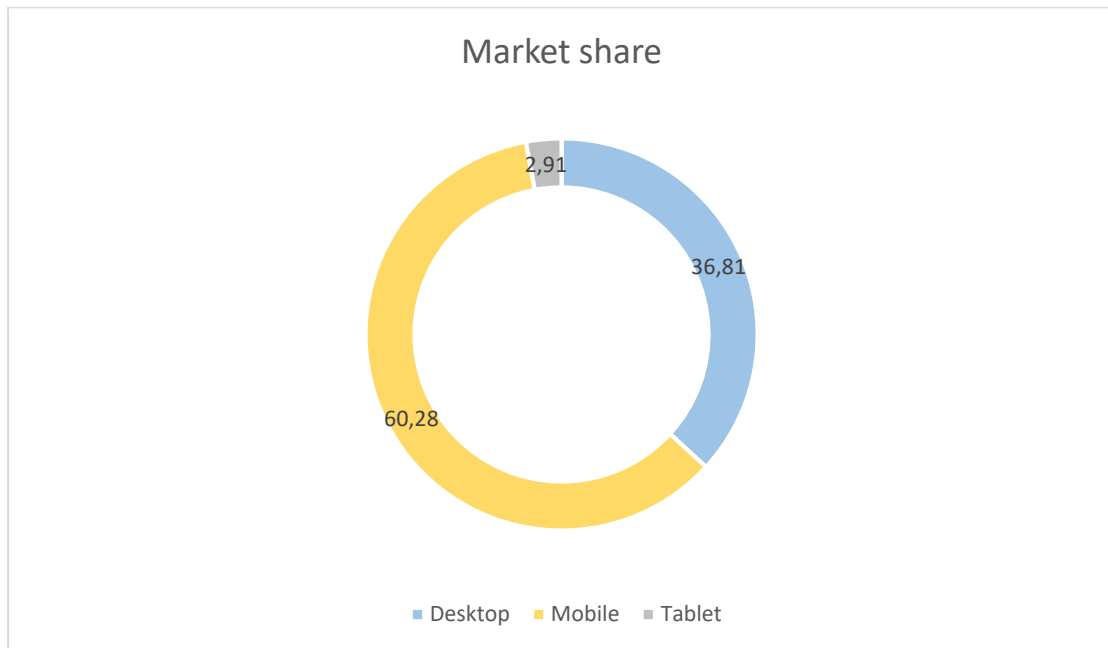
The implication derived from these figures is that many participants in cyber rituals do so from a mobile device such as a phone. It is therefore acknowledged that the approach to cyber ritual in this thesis, and the context cyber ritual is studied in might not exist in five years' time or have undergone such fundamental changes as to invalidate much that is posited here. This knowledge emphasises the importance of cyber ritual and the study of such rituals in identifying patterns and constants in this highly liminal space, that can advance future studies of this context.[81]

---

[80] http://gs.statcounter.com/platform-market-share/desktop-mobile-tablet/africa/#monthly-201603-201703-bar accessed November 2017.
[81] While this thesis disagrees with the categories of 'web' and 'chat room' that Post and van der Beek (2016: 77) identify, the contents in the rest of their chapter (2016: 77-87) is valuable in studying cyber ritual in the context of the network society.

2.2.2.8 Important concepts

This section discusses some important concepts that inform this thesis. Some of these concepts have already been discussed briefly in the introduction to the thesis, but they are explored in more depth and detail here.

2.2.2.8.1 Thanatechnology

Thanatechnology is an important concept when studying death and bereavement in cyberspace as technology is the lens used to study the phenomena. While thanatechnology is not a new term, it is constantly supplemented to broaden its scope as technology changes and advances. The term was originally developed in the work of Sofka (1997: 553-574), who stated that thanatechnology is:

"technological resources such as videos, computer-assisted instruction programs and interactive videodiscs that can be used to gain information about topics in thanatology."

From the language used it is evident that this definition was conceived in a different technological paradigm than the current one. Technology such as videodiscs (CDs and DVDs) has largely become irrelevant as this technology has been replaced by streaming in most cases. (Streaming refers to the process of playing back videos or audio without necessarily downloading the files. With a good-quality internet connection, live television can be viewed on your computer or streaming device)

The problem of definitions in the field of technology is that they do not stay relevant for even a moderate amount of time, as is evident from the Sofka (1997) definition quoted above. Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert (2012: 3) expand on the original definition by including all forms of communication technology that can be included in death education, grief counselling and thantalogical research.

In this thesis social networks such as Facebook and Instagram are understood as thanatechnologies as they enable the study of grief and serve as a space for the expression of grief where bereaved communities can connect. Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert (2012: 7-8) provide what they refer to as a "thanatological death system" to illustrate the influence of thanatechnology on the study of death:

Element	Description	Traditional example	Thanatechnological example
People	People either directly or indirectly involved with death.	Funeral directors, clergy and florists.	People who are memorialised or use technology to express grief and seek social support. Virtual mourners at a virtual funeral in Second Life[82] or in online gaming communities; participants in an online support group. Virtual grief counsellor.
Places	Locations of death.	Cemeteries, funeral homes and battlefields	Virtual locations of death, such as online chat rooms, virtual funeral chapels, cyber cemeteries and social networks.

---

[82] Second Life is a virtual online world 'playable' on a computer. Many people view Second Life as only a computer game although it shares similarities to World of Warcraft in its complex and multi-layered social structure and communities.

Times	The "when" of death.	Anniversaries, periods of mourning and remembrance, times associated with rituals.	Cyberspace is not time bound - communications is instant and may confers digital immortality. Standardised time across multiple time zones for a virtual ritual (Monday Pet Loss Candle Ceremony); "real time" versus "asynchronous" time for chats and meetings.
Objects	Items associated with death.	Casket, obituaries and grave markers.	Technological platforms (websites, blogs). The paraphernalia associated with technology that can be used to communicate and cope with death, such as cell phones, computers, handheld devices. Virtual candles, virtual flowers left at virtual cemetery plots; memorial or tribute websites.
Symbols	Representations of death.	The color black, flag at half mast,	Virtual reality is inherently symbolic as it involves the translation of tangible objects and

		crosses next to the road.	people into computerised renditions. Emoticons;[83] Chatspeak.
Functions			
Warnings and predictions	Alerting a citizenry of impending death or factors that could hasten death.	Sirens, labels on smoking materials.	Security options on social network sites that memorialise the deceased; text messages and e-mails warning of potential disasters. Death Clock (predicts date/time of death). Informational support (physical indicators of impending death on hospice sites).
Prevention of death	Social structures and institutions designed to protect the citizenry.	Inoculations, public sanitation and military forces.	Suicidal individuals reaching out to friends on Facebook; digital immortality so that in the virtual world one does not die; online medical advice.

Care of the dying	Ways in which a culture treats and ministers to the dying.	Providing comfort measures by family and medical personnel, religious rituals.	Online support groups for the dying and their caregivers. Webinars for hospice workers; posts on sites such as "The Caring Bridge".
Disposal of the dead	Ways in which a society dictates the removal of the body from the living.	Burial, cremation, desiccation.	Virtual cemeteries, retail websites for funerals goods such as caskets and urns. Internet Memorial Societies such as Facebook etc.
Social consolidation	The means by which the social group can provide support and remain functional after death.	Family coming together for the funeral, rules of inheritance, lines of succession.	Online communication via SNSs (social network services) such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and email; virtual funerals, cyberfunerals, cyber cemeteries and actual funerals broadcast to family and friends who cannot attend physically (FaceTime, WhatsApp video call, Skype).
Making sense of death	Social construction of what death	Religious and philosophical views, shared	Sharing grief through SNSs; finding coherence through

	means - finding coherence.	interpretations of the death by families and social groups.	internet support groups; experiencing online therapy sessions through such venues as Skype; thanatologists conducting internet-based research. Niche blogs or websites that discuss the meaning of life and death, the afterlife, or spirituality and death.
Socially approved killing	Killing that is legal and approved by society.	Capital punishment, military actions.	Online games that involve military actions or killing; advocacy sites for the right-to-die, pro-abortion/pro-choice, and the death penalty.

Table 2.2

This table is based on the work of Sofka, Cupit and Gilbert (2012: 7-8) and the thanatechnological examples have been supplemented with additional detail to represent the context as it has changed since the publication of this table in 2012.

As is evident from the table discussed above, thanatechnology forms part of the core of enquiry into death and bereavement in cyberspace. Thanatechnology as a concept (Jacobsen 2017; Cavuoti & Smith 2014; Goldschmidt 2013; Sofka, Cupit & Gilbert 2012; Sofka 1997) helps to identify the tools that people use to express themselves in cyberspace and it therefore forms a crucial part of the study of ritual in cyberspace. As thanatechnology is

the primary means to study the context in question, the forms of thanatechnology that are used in this study need to be specified.

Facebook is the primary technology that is used to study death and bereavement in cyberspace with the aim of exploring ritual liturgical expression. To supplement Facebook, Instagram is also used in select cases and some formal cyber cemeteries are used. This thesis does not use blogs, official memorial societies, email, support websites, augmented and virtual reality as sources to study the context at hand. The reason that Facebook is chosen as the primary technology is to provide the research with a constant in the already shifting context of cyberspace. It might seem simple to include a variety of social networks to support the study, but the entire social structure and use of the technology shifts dramatically with each different platform. An example to illustrate this would be the fundamental difference in functioning between Facebook and Snapchat. Facebook is characterised by the permanence of your content; you are frequently reminded of events from many years ago and you can choose to share it again; compare this to Snapchat where content lasts for only 24 hours and then it disappears from cyberspace for all practical purposes. Both platforms are legitimate areas of inquiry, but the methodology would differ if one studies an architecture such as that of Snapchat.

Thanatechnology is the guiding concept to study thanatalogical phenomena in cyberspace and is used as such in this thesis. But the term itself is not used in abundance in the study; reference is rather made to the specific technology that is applicable (Facebook, Instagram etc.). It is, however, important to be aware of the larger paradigms these technologies form part of, even they are used differently in specific instances.

2.2.2.8.2 Post-mortal society

The concept of a post-mortal society is important in this thesis as this phenomenon fundamentally changes the experience of death and grief. The concept of a post-mortal society also challenges the normative frameworks in

terms of dealing with these experiences and therefore challenges our understanding of liturgy and ritual in the context of death and bereavement.

Sofka, Gibson and Silberman (2017: 173) identify[84] a few of the key issues informing the discussion around a person's digital afterlife or the post-mortal society stating that technology is advancing at a rapid pace and humans are creating digital content at an unprecedented pace. When we die, the digital content we have created then becomes our digital legacy. This digital legacy will only increase in importance as the information age flourishes, as the digital content created by people provides a rich reflection of the actual people who created the content. This position then presents two possibilities for studying death in a post-mortal society:

1. The death of a living being and how it affects the digital world;
2. The death of a digital object and how it affects a living being.

These possibilities are not mutually exclusive and as technological advances integrate with social structures, the likelihood of these two options working in unison become even more prevalent. In the context of this thesis, the first option was frequently found in the research data when compared to the second option, although cases emerged where the two options functioned together, but none included only the second option.

Sofka, Gibson and Silberman (2017: 174-177) presents a literature study in order to establish some common terminology to further explore the topic of the post-mortal society and digital death. Much of the research revolves around the idea of people attempting to immortalise themselves, which isn't in itself of relevance to this thesis. This thesis is concerned with understanding the implications of a post-mortal society for the study of death and bereavement, and therefore only literature relating to this aspect is discussed.

---

[84] These issues are derived from the work of Carrol and Romano (2011) and Pitsillides, Katsikides and Conreen (2009).

Sofka, Gibson and Silberman (2017: 175) use the work of Basset (2015) to elaborate on the concept of digital immortality or a post-mortal society. The first aspect identified relates to two sets of data; the first is the category of digital data; this type of data relates to what is referred to as the "digital legacy" (Sofka, Gibson & Silberman 2017: 175) and includes data such as passwords, account information and digital assets. The second set of data is referred to as the "digital selves" and this data includes personal messages, blogs and photos. This set of data is also referred to as "digital memories" (Sofka, Gibson & Silberman 2017: 175). In studying death and bereavement, these are valuable concepts as both the digital legacy and the digital selves are prominent in the ritual space being studied. The reality of these concepts can also be seen in the policies of digital service providers such as Facebook:

Twitter	✕		✕	✕
Instagram	✕		✕	
YouTube	✕			
Amazon	✕		✕	
LinkedIn	✕		✕	
Facebook	✕	✕	✕	✕
Pinterest	✕		✕	

	Policy on deceased user?	Can user dictate preference in advance?	Can 'next of kin' dictate post-death?	Are there options to memorialise an account?
Yahoo	✗		✗	
Hotmail (Googleac and MSN count)	✗		✗	
Gmail (Googleac count)	✗	✗	✗	

Table 2.3

Reproduced from the work of Gibson and Silberman (2016) with minor alterations

Basset (2015) takes this concept further and discusses the issue of intentionality vs accidental digital legacy and selves. It has recently become more important to give some thought to our digital legacies and what should be done with this data after we die. In all the participant observations conducted for this thesis not one profile was an intentional digital legacy, all were incidental. Therefore, no or little thought went into the digital legacy of the deceased. Sofka, Gibson and Silberman (2017: 175-176) make an important observation in saying that accidental immortality has the ability to transition into the intentional realm. They share an interesting example of the story[85] of a son who finds his deceased father's ghost driver[86] in a racing game. The son then

---

[85] Originally told in Trevor Owens (2014).
[86] A ghost driver is a representation of the record holder's car while you race in real time. The aim is to learn from the better driver and eventually improve on the record by mimicking and beating the ghost driver.

does not try and beat the father's ghost lap so that he may preserve the father's high score.

Sofka, Gibson and Silberman (2017: 176) refer to the work of Lisa Hensley (2012) as part of the Bereavement in Online Communities Project, and critically note that virtual world participants (participants in cyberspace) experience a complex relationship with online representations of individuals and that rituals occur in cyberspace to mourn the real-life deaths of online participants.

Sofka, Gibson and Silberman (2017) provide a visual illustration (Fig. 2.9) of the roles of digital and social media in coping with loss and achieving digital immortality. This thesis primarily works with the top four categories of the pyramid in order to ascertain the transformation and progression between the bottom three categories and the top four categories. Current ritual liturgical practice, at least in the DRC, focuses most of its energy on satisfying the needs of the third (from the bottom) category, although within the post-mortal context the pyramid no longer stops with the third category, and therefore ritual liturgical practice is being challenged.
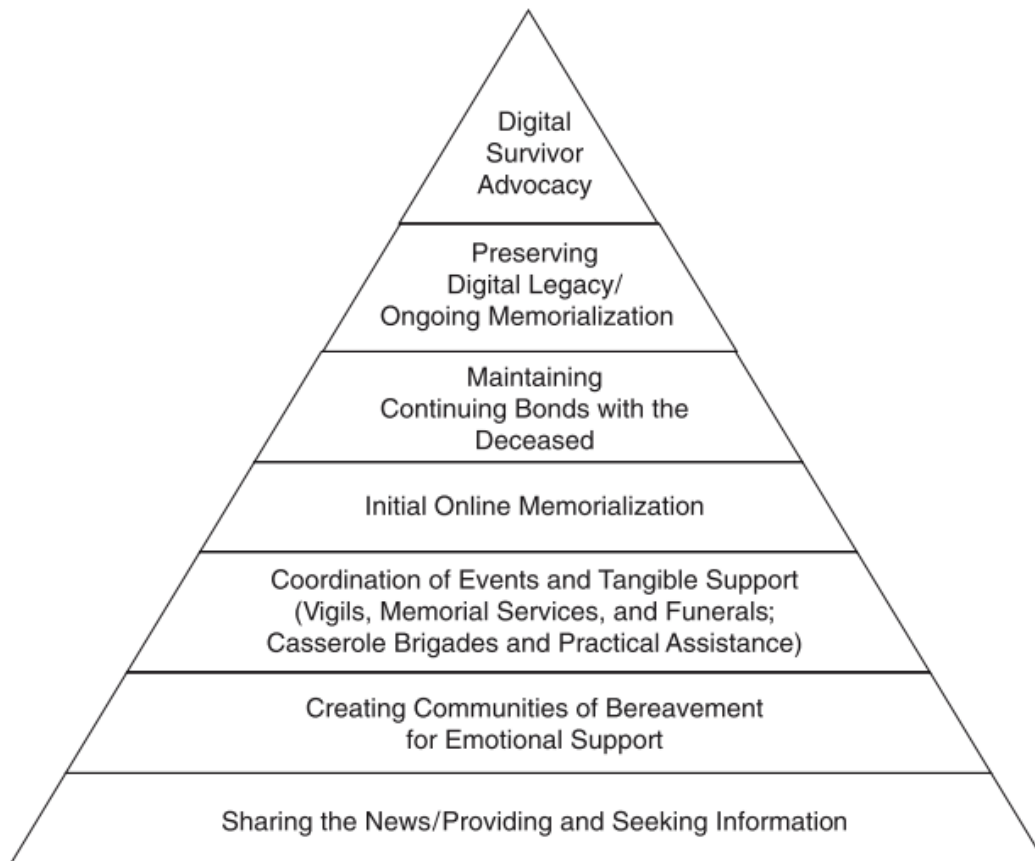
Figure 2.9

Therefore, it can be concluded from this short discussion that the post-mortal society provides a wide variety of challenges to normative ways of dealing with death and bereavement, and therefore poses challenging questions regarding the relevancy of current ritual liturgical expression in engaging this new context. In reflecting on the current religious (ritual liturgical in this context) discourse Bainbridge (2017: 198) poses three questions that the post-mortal society raises:

1. Will religion vanish through secularisation?
2. Will religion survive because it performs essential functions?
3. Will religion be transformed by science and technology?

From an African perspective, secularisation is not yet as great a challenge as in many Western contexts and hence the first question that Bainbridge raises does not fully engage with the African context. Even though this is the case, the network society implies that people are connected globally and to this extent

the question does indeed apply in the networked sense of the 21st century society. Therefore, by virtue of the network society, Africa is included. The context of the working hypothesis of this study, however, does indicate that a possible answer to these questions lie somewhere in between the answers to the second and the third questions, as will become evident as the thesis progresses.

3. Findings, observations and descriptions

With a theoretical basis now established the empirical findings may now be discussed and elaborated on. The results of the empirical research were codified and analysed to inform the contents of Chapter Four. In the discussion of the findings in this chapter only descriptions of the empirical research are given and reflected on in the results at the end of each section. The reflection and integration of these findings are the subject of Chapter Four. With each field site (case study) the empirical data are presented based on the prevalence of the prominent themes (codes) identified in the field research. In most cases the themes relate to ritual space, time, actor and symbol as they correspond to the thanatological (thanatechnological) death system indicated in Table 2.2.

All the findings discussed in the sections that follow are subject to the ethical considerations discussed earlier and all discussions are consistent with the guidelines identified.

3.1 Participant observation

3.1.1 Introduction

This section of Chapter Three focuses only on the empirical data gathered by means of participant observation. Here the process of participant observation is elaborated on with descriptions to accompany the exploration of the empirical data. The process of selecting the field sites or "nodes" is described as an extension of the discussion earlier[87] in the thesis, and the restrictions and limitations of this method are also indicated. As noted earlier, the study of death and bereavement in cyberspace raises many ethical considerations, which form a crucial part of the research process. These areas of ethical concern are briefly elaborated on without repeating the lengthy discussion in Chapter Two.[88]

---

[87] See 2.1.2.7 for a discussion on the methodology related to ethnography.
[88] See 2.1.2.7.4 – 2.1.2.7.11 for a discussion on ethical implications as an aspect of the methodology.

The structure of this discussion will be a linear consideration of the five cases of participant observation of bereaved communities in cyberspace, namely the four ritual sites on Facebook and one as an independent website. Each of the field sites is discussed in detail to illuminate the area of ritual in cyberspace, and descriptions convey the details without alluding to any information that may relate to the participants or their actual identity, unless this has been explicitly requested by the participant. With the conclusion of the exploration of the five cases, the data were codified and analysed to yield certain patterns and themes, which will form the basis of the discussion in Chapter Four.

3.1.1.1 Identifying the field sites

The field sites identified for participant observation in this thesis were meticulously chosen based upon their rooted nature in cyberspace and their connected nature through the context of death in other words, based on their context as cyber cemeteries. As a primary expression of cyber cemeteries, Facebook[89] is used in four of the identified spaces and the other case is the memorial website[90] for Chester Bennington, the former song writer and vocalist for the popular rock band Linkin Park. Holding to the concept of network ethnography as discussed earlier,[91] the field sites are visually depicted[92] as follows:

---

[89] Facebook is primarily a social network and therefore it is interpreted as such.
[90] Although webpages are not necessarily used as social networks, the memorial website dedicated to Chester Bennington functions similarly to the Facebook pages of the deceased studied in this thesis.
[91] See section 2.1.2.7.3.
[92] See the discussion of Figure 3.1.
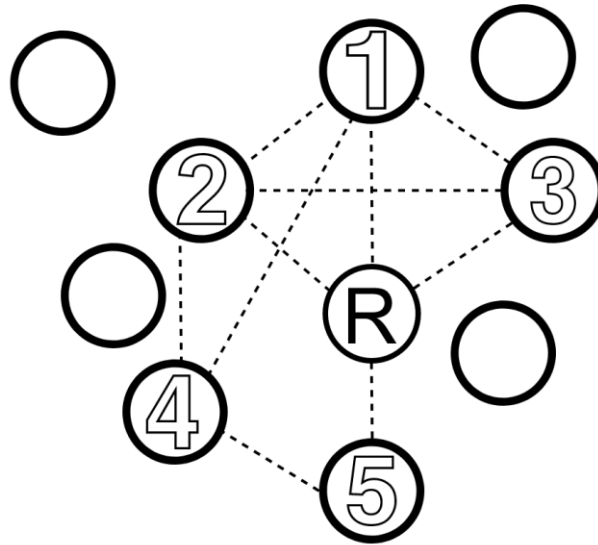
Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 illustrates the structure of the participant observation and the positioning of the field sites that were studied:

- Every circle represents a field site approached for study during the participant observation for this research.
- The circles with numbers refer to field sites that were explicitly chosen to be observed and studied based on a list of criteria.
- The empty circles represent the sites that were not adequate, "outliers" or *ex post facto* information.
- The circle filled with an 'R' represents the position of the researcher in the network.[93]
- The dotted lines indicate the way in which the field sites (nodes) are connected to each other or to the network. Therefore, the connection between the sites and the researcher becomes apparent.
- The circle with a '1' represents the field site of a daughter gone too early, which was the first site that was studied. The nature of this site was that

---

[93] See section 2.1.2.7.3 for more on the integration of nodes into the blank sheet as methodology for doing participant observation in cyberspace.

of a Facebook page, with the owner of the page being the deceased daughter.

- The circle with a '2' represents the field site of son gone too early, which was the second site that was studied. The nature of the site was also that of a Facebook page, with the owner of the page being the deceased son.

- The circle with a '3' represents the field site of a grieving father, which was the third of the studied sites. The nature of this site was that of a Facebook page, with the owner of the page still living.

- The circle with a '4' represents the field site of a friend's sudden passing, which was the fourth and final site that was a Facebook page.

- The circle with a '5' represents the field site of Chester Bennington's memorial website. This site was the last one studied before the data reached saturation point. This site differed from the others as being a webpage that was populated via interactions from Instagram and Twitter.

With this visual representation (Fig. 3.1) in mind the field sites were identified based on a set of criteria determined by the researcher and discussed briefly. Before the criteria are discussed the issue of data saturation is addressed.

3.1.1.1.1 Possibility of ritual liturgical expression

This study is a theological study reflecting on ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace, viewed from the perspective of cyber cemeteries. Therefore, the field sites used in the participant observation must enable the researcher to reflect on the core theme of the research. Initially 27 field sites were identified as potential areas of inquiry and participant observation. As the aim of this thesis is to explore the depth of ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace, the field sites needed to be narrowed down. The researcher made the choice that a maximum of five primary field sites (therefore excluding any irregular or *ex post facto* observations) were to be observed. In curbing the initially identified field sites a list of criteria was used that includes:

1. The primary interaction observed at the field site must be of a Christian[94] nature.

2. The interaction at the field site must at some point make reference to rituals or ritual liturgical expression as it is performed in the corporeal dimension; this might include something as simple as a prayer to something as complex as a Tenebrae service.

With the requirements mentioned above, nine of the initial field sites were removed from the potential list of field sites to be studied. These sites either made little or no mention of anything relating to religion or Christianity or were explicitly atheistic or agnostic, and had the character of an "anti-liturgy". With the initial 27 sites measured according to the requirement of a possibility of ritual liturgical expression, the remaining sites were ethically evaluated.

3.1.1.1.2 Ethical framework

The remaining 18 field sites were analysed according to the ethical considerations discussed earlier[95] in the thesis. The primary concern was to be as transparent[96] as possible when studying death and bereavement in cyberspace, and therefore field sites that required the researcher to push the boundaries of ethical research were discarded as potential field sites to study.

---

[94] This study is a theological study reflecting on ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace, viewed from the perspective of cyber cemeteries, therefore the researcher is primarily interested in a theological interpretation. The term "Christian" in this context is widely used in grouping interactions that (vaguely) refer to either the Christian God, Christian constructs such as heaven, hell, angels or demons, prayers and other liturgical references and Christian community. In this thesis it is argued that sites with a "Christian" nature have a greater probability for ritual liturgical interaction and not simply ritualised behaviour. Therefore, a wide and inclusive approach is used in defining "Christian" so as to include as many sites as possible for selection. Interestingly some of the richest ritual expression in cyberspace found during the empirical research was rooted in occultist and pagan contexts, this though falls outside the boundaries of this research.

[95] See 2.1.2.7.4 - 2.1.2.7.11 for a detailed discussion on the ethical dimensions of this study.

[96] In her doctoral thesis Haverinen (2014b: 62) went to extreme lengths in being transparent in her research in cyberspace. She recorded the details of her research on her Facebook profile and on her profile in Second Life. She also had a wordpress.com website where she updated her research details. In her research she had many respondents who were not known to her and part of establishing this level of transparency online helped them in identifying her as a real person in the first place, and secondly as an actual researcher (based on the information she provided on herself).

Specific attention was given to the following aspects based on the work of Sofka, Gibson and Silberman (2017), Bassett (2015), Cann (2014), Carmack and de Groot (2014), Pitsillides, Waller and Fairfax (2013), Kasket (2012), Phillips (2011):

- Specific attention was given to using the data gathered from the field sites in a respectful manner. Even though Facebook pages are public spaces and therefore public field sites, a deliberate choice was made to ask for consent in the cases where this was possible. These cases included field sites where the actual field site is the Facebook page of a living person. In the cases where the field site was the Facebook page of a deceased person, the same ethical and respectful use of data was applied but the "owner" of the page could not be contacted for consent. In the cases where a field site was memorialised, the legacy contact[97] was approached for consent. On this point alone a further eight potential field sites were discarded. Two of the potential field sites were memorialised; in the first case the legacy contact refused the researcher access to study the specific field site, and in the second case the legacy contact did not respond to the request. Two potential field sites had living "owners" who did not respond to the research request and were therefore discarded, and a further four potential field sites had deceased owners, but the researcher deemed the content of the pages as too sensitive[98] and therefore discarded them as potential field sites.

- Specific attention was given to limit researcher lurking where possible. To minimise the lurking factor in doing ethnography in cyberspace, the researcher made the choice to observe field sites that already formed

---

[97] A legacy contact is a person who is elected to have access to a person's Facebook profile after they pass away and the page is memorialised. They have certain privileges pertaining to the deceased person's page. They can do a pinned post on the profile to share memorial service details, for example, respond to friend requests, update the profile picture and request the removal of the account. A legacy contact cannot change any information and posts on the page, read the private messages or make new friends. A full description is available at https://www.facebook.com/help/1568013990080948 accessed 2018/03/22.

[98] Material regarded as too sensitive includes situations where a disgruntled family member would post derogatory posts to the deceased's Facebook page, including text, photos and videos. Other cases include proximity to criminal activity, or suicide cases of other people relating to the death of the deceased.

part of his current network. Therefore, no friend requests[99] were made with the purpose of studying the page of a random person. As mentioned in the previous bullet point, the relevant communication was also delivered to cases where it was applicable.

- Specific attention was given to the emotional impact of the research on the researcher. This was a crucial aspect in the identification of the field sites to be studied. Based on previous experience,[100] the researcher explicitly avoided field sites where the researcher had a vested interest. Based upon this requirement, a further two potential field sites were removed from the remaining ten sites. Both these field sites belonged to close relatives or friends of the researcher who had passed away close to the start or during the period that the empirical research was conducted. Relating to this aspect, one field site was chosen and forms part of the five field sites that were studied. This field site is that of a close friend of the researcher, but was chosen as the person passed away in 2009 and therefore judged by the researcher as emotionally safe to study. A last aspect considered regarding the emotional influence of the research on the researcher was field sites with a context of a violent or cruel death. The choice was made that field sites based on deaths of this kind are not to be studied as the emotional toil would prove unhealthy.

Eight potential field sites were left that complied with the criteria in their theological and ethical nature. As stated earlier, a maximum of five field sites were allowed for study and therefore a further three sites needed to be discarded, unless they offered exceptional data to support the research. In the case of this thesis the three discarded sites did not offer anything exceptional

---

[99] A friend request is a function of Facebook used to grow your network and provide visibility to the requested friends' content via the algorithmic adjustment made when that person becomes part of your network. A friend request can be both sent and received, and the receiver of the request has the power to either accept or deny the request. Friendships can be "broken" at any stage and then a new request is required to be connected again.

[100] In the process of preparing this thesis the researcher considered a field site of which the owner was a relative. Even browsing the interactions at the site was emotionally intense and therefore the choice was made to avoid sites like these. With an abundance of emotional involvement, it is even more difficult to do unbiased and systematic research.

when compared to the others and therefore a preliminary synopsis was done to identify the five best sites to use in the research. The synopsis was based on three sets of data; the first data set was simply the amount of activity relating to death as primary posts,[101] the second data set was based on the amount of interaction by the network on these posts;[102] and the third data set was based upon the number of posts (primary or network based) relating to Christianity, whether explicitly or implied.

	Case[103] 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8
Primary posts	180	144	207	128	>50000	200	24	114
Network posts	1745	104	4293	74	0	745	412	23
Posts relating to God	647	102	2469	43	>5000	2	189	23

Table 3.1

Based on the data gathered from the eight remaining field sites, the three with the least amount of available and relevant data were discarded. The three sites that were discarded did not only contain the least amount of relevant data, but they were not necessary as a satisfactory degree of saturation was reached in using the other five sites. The initial four sites that were based on Facebook already provided enough data for saturation to be achieved, although the choice was made to add the fifth site (Chester Bennington memorial) to ensure some variety in the data and context. This was also done to add to the data

---

[101] Primary posts are posts that are directly posted to the Facebook "wall" of the field site. The Facebook "wall" then refers to the publicly visible space of the field site.
[102] The network interactions include interactions such as comments on primary posts, likes and other emoticons on the primary post as well as any relating to the comments, any form of media posted as a reply to a primary post and any shares of the post.
[103] Cases 1 to 5 as they are presented in Table 3.1 refer to the same 5 sites presented in Figure 3.1.

structures that lacked some saturation when compared to the prominent categories of the data. Table 3.1 shows that the five cases selected as field sites provides the largest set of data to advance the research.

3.1.1.2 Restrictions in doing participant observation

During the course of the participant observation there were some constraints that merit discussion. Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013: 83-84) identifies four drawbacks of participant observation, of which three were relevant to this thesis:

1. Participant observation is potentially and unpredictably time consuming. This was evident in the thousands of Facebook interactions that were read, recorded and analysed between August 2016 – December 2017. This differs from traditional participant observation as the researcher was not required to visit any physical field sites, since all the sites were located in cyberspace and could therefore be accessed via computer, cell phone or tablet. This meant that the time spent doing participant observation was 100% spent in cyberspace. Issues that complicated the participant observation and therefore increased the time spent at the field sites included internet connectivity issues,[104] pages refreshing and therefore defaulting back to the most recent post on the page, new interactions on old posts, and recording the data from the posts accurately.

2. Participant observation is highly practitioner-sensitive. According to Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013: 84), this means that the data may be idiosyncratic and therefore difficult to compare with other findings or simply be biased. This was true prior to and after the gathering of data.

---

[104] This was in many cases the most time-consuming issue. At one stage during the initial identification and recording of the field sites, the researcher lost access to the internet for two weeks due to infrastructure upgrades and therefore two weeks went by without access to the field sites. Another issue that proved time consuming was the refresh rate on old posts at some of the field sites; when trying to load (view) comments on some of the older posts it could take up to half an hour to load and in many cases the comments never loaded, and the process was initiated anew.

113

Prior to the gathering of data there were little other relevant data to compare the methods of this thesis with, and after the gathering of data there were little other relevant data to use to reflect upon the gathered data. Some of the resources available to aid in these aspects include Jacobsen (2017), Bell, Bailey and Kennedy (2015), Burkell, Fortier, Yeung, Wong and Simpson (2014), Carmack and De Groot (2014), Cavouti and Smith (2014), Frost (2014), Giaxoglou (2014), Goldschmidt (2013), Moreman and Lewis (2014), Kern, Forman and Gil-Egui (2013), Sofka (2012), Walter, Hourizi, Moncur and Pitsillides (2012), Krysinska and Andriessen (2010), Calow (2007), Sofka (1997). Although this list might appear substantial these resources merely aided the process in broad strokes; the actual data gathering needed to be improvised based upon these works.

3. Participant observation provides data that are very specific, especially in the case of this thesis. According to Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013: 84), this is problematic when the data are used to reflect upon other sites and circumstances. Therefore, the potential of the data is limited for interpreting other sites. The data gathered in this research were gathered with the context of cyberspace in mind, although it is impossible to gather data that will inform every possible iteration of cyberspace. Therefore, the data can be used to reflect on a wide variety of cyber contexts, but isn't comprehensive enough to reflect all of the possible instances.

4. This is not one of the points mentioned by Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013), but following from the previous point, this also means that it will be difficult to replicate the research done in this thesis. Cyberspace offers a challenging context for participant observation and the spaces being observed are liminal in their very nature. This means that these spaces adapt to the needs of the people that use them and when they serve no further purpose these spaces end up very literally as cyber cemeteries.[105] In a rapidly iterating and changing digital world and

---

[105] The concept of cyber cemeteries has on occasion been used to refer to dead websites, in other words websites that have either cancelled their hosting and therefore have been removed from the servers that host them, or websites that see no traffic and are therefore seen as "dead".

network society, Facebook has been a constant companion for more than a decade and therefore offers a context that can be studied with some consistency. The same trend can be seen with World of Warcraft in the field of digital game studies. World of Warcraft is the subject of many studies as it has been around long enough for multiple studies to collect data regarding the game and therefore the data can be evaluated and analysed with other data sets that are similar. While it is difficult to replicate a study in cyberspace (based on the vast technological advances that completely change the architecture of the space itself), spaces such as Facebook provide some stability for data to be evaluated and compared with similar data sets.

The three aspects discussed above are general shortcomings inherent to the method (Guest, Namey & Mitchell 2013: 83-84) and along with these some other difficulties or restrictions were experienced during the empirical data collection:

- During the period of data gathering (August 2016 – December 2017) one of the field sites was removed from Facebook. In the data gathering process certain pieces of data were recorded for use in this thesis; the rest of the data was studied on the relevant Facebook page as a manual capture of all the data would have been impractical and using data harvesting apps is illegal, or ethically speaking very dubious, as seen from the Cambridge Analytica scandal.[106] This meant that only the recorded data were used in the analysis. This was certainly a constraint, but enough data had been gathered to ensure the site was usable, while

---

[106] The Cambridge Analytica scandal refers to the recent event where the company Cambridge Analytica harvested data (this includes posts you liked, photos posted, posts viewed, time spent viewing, therefore basically data on all your interactions) of about 50 million people to compile psychological profiles that were targeted in the U.S presidential campaign in 2016. Some popular articles that explore the topic include: Satara (2018) https://www.inc.com/alyssa-satara/if-you-dont-fully-understand-cambridge-analytica-scandal-read-this-simplified-version.html, Swan (2018) https://www.forbes.com/sites/andyswan/2018/04/02/does-the-cambridge-analytica-scandal-mean-facebook-is-doomed/#e3f4d2c4ef5e, The Guardian (2018) https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/cambridge-analytica-files, Tiku (2018) https://www.wired.com/story/zuckerberg-will-testify-before-congress-on-cambridge-analytica-scandal/, all accessed on 2 April 2018.

also providing a unique set of data to reflect upon the actual end of a ritual in cyberspace.

- Self-revelation was not a restriction to the actual process of gathering data, but rather a restriction on the way the research was conducted. Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013: 88) differentiate between three approaches to self-revelation in the context of participant observation: 1) Full disclosure – Where the researcher presents him/herself to all participants in the research setting; 2) Partial disclosure – Where the researcher presents him/herself to only some of the participants in the research setting; 3) No disclosure – Where the researcher presents him/herself to none of the participants in the research setting. The second option was used in the process of data gathering for this thesis, because as Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013: 88) note, a full disclosure method is impractical in many cases. It was judged that a full disclosure methodology was impractical in this case as it is impossible to even know who all the participants are at the field site. The picture below (Image 3.1) illustrates the point; a post may have no or little direct interactions but can be viewed by hundreds of participants and there is no way of knowing the identity of these participants (without using a data harvesting application).
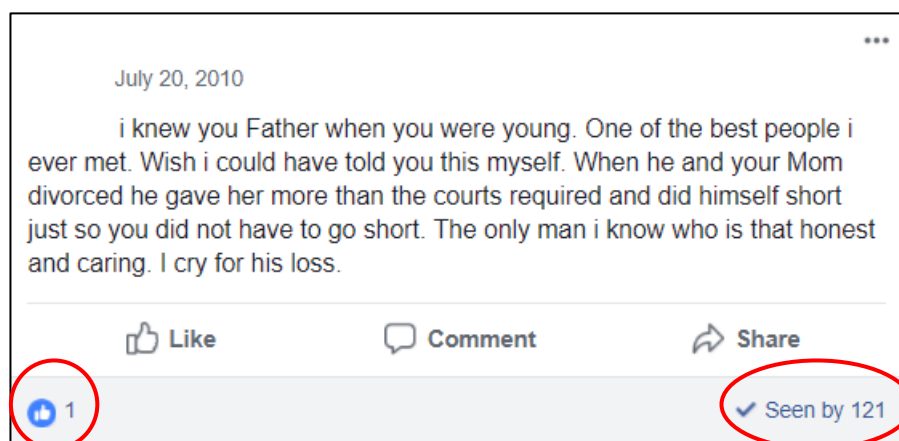
Image 3.1

3.1.2 A case of a daughter gone too early

The first field site that is discussed is that of the case of a daughter gone too early. Without compromising the identity of the profile owner (in this case

116

deceased), some details are provided to provide some context. The owner of this profile was a young adult woman who passed away suddenly due to issues with medication. She was well loved by her friends and family, and was an active member of her local church (Dutch Reformed).[107] She was also a leader in the local community and university groups she formed part of. Her untimely death shocked the community. Especially her close friends, people from the congregation and her family.

In total 180 primary posts were studied that were posted on the wall of the field site; these 180 primary posts consisted of 1 745 interactions by the network of the deceased and of these 647 were religious in nature. As mentioned earlier when the restrictions of participant observation were discussed, this field site had been removed from Facebook when the researcher tried to visit it again on 28 March 2018. Prior to this date, the last time the site was visited was on 18 December 2017. As is evident from the data collected, the process was finished for all practical purposes and therefore the site still forms part of the five field sites used in this research. The empirical research done at all the field sites is discussed based on Figure 3.2, which in turn draws on the work of Saldana (2009: 12) with some minor adjustments. Figure 3.2 is a visual representation of the way the data from the field sites were coded to eventually arrive at the core themes and concepts that inform Chapter Four.

---

[107] It is important to note that the interpretation of the posts and participants at the field sites is completely based on the content of the posts themselves. It might have been that she was not liked very much while alive, but based on the posts on her Facebook page it would seem that she was well liked. It is also important to note that ritualised behaviour as observed at the field sites does not need to be truthful to be authentic; participants weave the narratives of their ritualised posts to perform what they want them to perform. This is true for all the field sites.
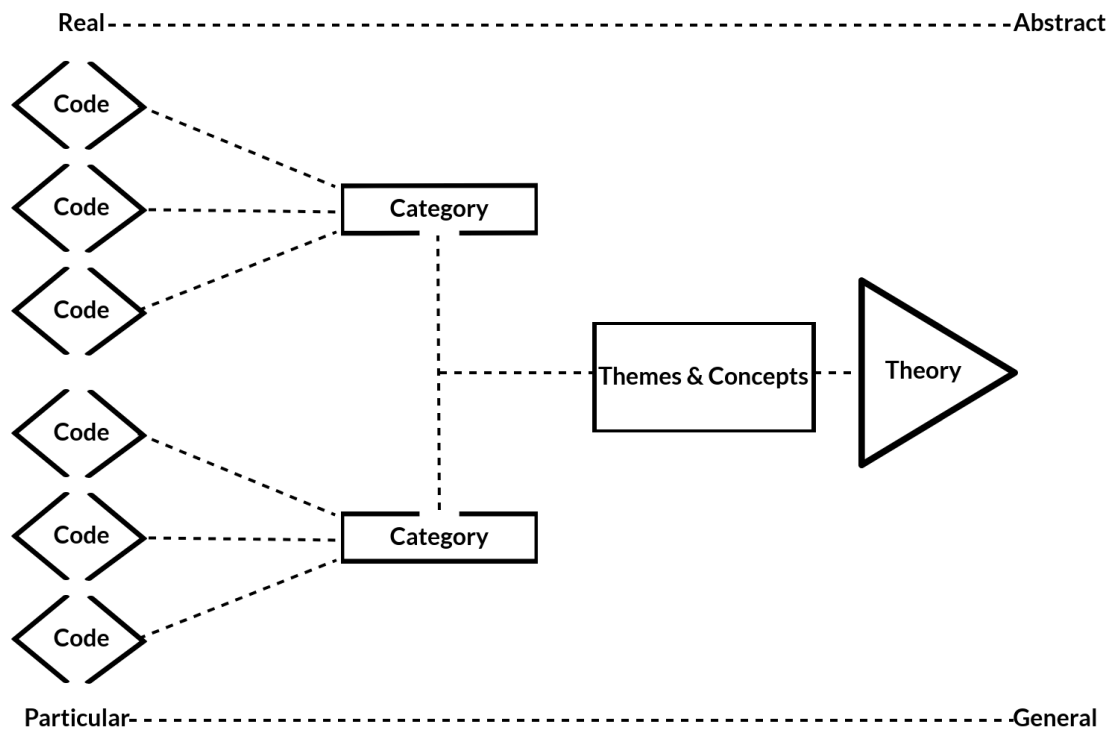
Figure 3.2

3.1.2.1 Phase 1 – some prominent codes empirically explored

In the first phase of the discussion of this field site some of the prominent codes are presented and weighed along with some examples from the empirical resources. This phase entailed open coding for the most part. The reason for using an open coding approach (Blair 2015: 17, Saldana 2009: 74-78, Theron 2015:4) is to identify codes as they are presented in the data instead of imposing pre-conceived codes on the data, especially as this study explores a less documented space.[108] After the open coding was done, a period of 3 months was allowed to reflect upon the data and further distil the relevant codes based upon the context of the thesis and the research objectives.

---

[108] It is important to note that even though the process was kept as transparent and objective as possible, the researcher cannot fully remove himself/herself an interpreting observer.

The data presented below are representative of a stage of analysis after the initial or open coding but before the axial coding to arrive at certain categories, themes and concepts.

3.1.2.1.1 Remembrance

As is generally associated with interactions relating to death and the deceased, remembering the dead is common in these contexts. While the proof of this is evident from physical cemeteries around the world,[109] the last 15 years have seen the same trends in cyberspace (Bell, Bailey & Kennedy 2015, Frost 2014, Goldschmidt 2013, Kern, Forman & Gil-Equi 2013, Calow 2007, Haverinen 2004), as people are increasingly being remembered in online spaces. This was reflected in the research data and roughly 93% of posts at this field site remembered or were in remembrance of the deceased. Some examples showing the different contexts of remembering include:

---

[109] This statement means that physical cemeteries and the way the dead are remembered developed in the context of physical cemeteries. People still visit cemeteries to remember the dead, but certainly less so in modern times.

Image 3.2[110] **#remembrance**

In this first example (Image 3.2) a group of friends remembers the deceased by posting a photo collage (obscured to protect the identity of participants) to share some of their memories with the text engraved in the picture stating "Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)". In the context of this field site this method of remembrance was quite popular and posts including pictures made up 37% of the primary posts. Posts that included a picture with text such as image 3.2 made up 15% of the primary posts.

---

[110] English translation of the original post: 'One of our SPY girls went to heaven today but leaves us with a great longing. Thank you for every great memory since primary school!!! Condolences to your family, we are praying with you, may the Father comfort you as is written in Matt 5:4:..'

Image 3.3[111] #remembrance

In this second example the deceased is remembered by a stranger, although they were connected through their shared time at university. Even though there is no way to trace the seven community interactions (Likes), the assumption can be made that some of these interactions may be from other strangers viewing the post via the news feed of the poster. Text-based posts such as Image 3.3 were very popular at the death of the profile owner, but they became less prominent as time passed. In total text-based posts[112] made up 55% of the total interactions studied in the collecting of the data.

Image 3.4[113] #remembrance

In this third example of remembrance a more personal message is conveyed to the deceased rather than the message of a stranger as in Image 3.3. As already noted this was a popular method of remembering at this specific field site.

---

[111] English translation of the post: 'When someone from X dies, whether I have ever talked to you or not, my heart is broken because you were my "sister". So beautiful and so young. Another dynamic lady gone to Jesus. Heaven is certainly better and prettier with all the … flowers. Rest softly and have a good sleep with Jesus, "poppet".

[112] Text based posts does not include song lyrics, poems or news they were categorised as different for the purposes of this study. This holds true for all field sites.

[113] X my dear friend I miss you so so much. Today I have been married for a month and I wish you could have been there physically to enjoy the event with us. I love you. I think about you so much.

3.1.2.1.2 Direct speech

A common occurrence at this field site (and the others) was the tendency of participants to directly address the deceased, as if they were in a position to read/see/hear the post. All of the examples in the previous section are also examples of this, where the participant chooses to directly address the deceased in their post and in their remembering. Other studies that reflect on death, grieving and mourning in cyberspace already make note of the tendency 'keep a person alive' (sources) and this tone of voice can be interpreted as a method of ritually keeping a person alive, which is both a testament to the context of a post-mortal society and the influence of the network society. An explicit example of this can be seen in Image 3.5
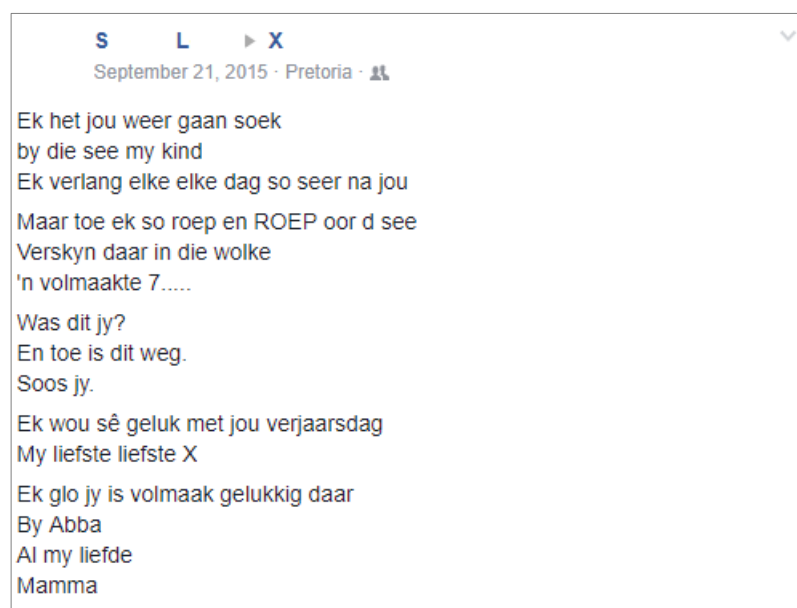
Image 3.5[114] #directspeech

---

[114] English translation of the original post:
'I went to search for you again
at the ocean my child
I long so painfully for you every every day

But when I called and CALLED out over the sea
There appeared in the clouds
A perfect 7

Was it you?
And then it was gone.
Like you.

Kern, Forman and Gil-Equi (2013) conducted a study of memorialised Facebook pages and included 550 of these pages in their qualitative study. In their analyses of these 550 memorial pages they quantified the number of times the first, second and third person voices were used, and found the following:

- 1st person voice = 24.78%; an example from this research would be "my liefste vriendin ek mis jou so so baie" (my dearest friend, I miss you so much) (Image 3.4).

- 2nd person voice = 42.26%; an example from this research would be "Ek verlang elke dag so seer na jou" (I long so painfully for you everyday) (Image 3.5).

- 3rd person voice = 26.72%; an example from this research would be "Nog 'n dinamiese dame na Jesus toe" (Another dynamic lady gone to Jesus) (Image 3.3).

Comparing their data to the findings of this research with relation to direct speech or posts in the first person, the data collected for this research showed that 57.69% of posts were in the first person.

3.1.2.1.3 Religious posts

From a ritual liturgical perspective, it was important that the field site showed substantial religious interactions[115] to be able not only to study the network interaction with regards to the deceased, but also to reflect upon the divine encounters facilitated in the process of mourning. An example of a divine encounter in the corporeal dimension shared in the cyber dimension:

I wanted to congratulate you on your birthday
My dear dear X

I believe that you are perfectly happy there
With Abba
All my love
'Mama'

[115] See section 3.1.1.1.1.
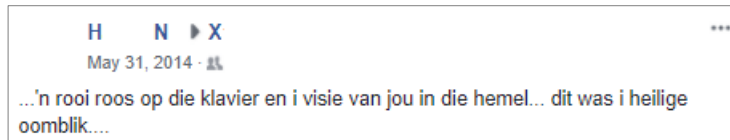
Image 3.6[116] #religious

These posts were common around significant dates at this field site. There were some posted on and around the time of death of the profile owner, and then a significant number were posted after the physical funeral, of which Image 3.6 is one. Similar posts could be seen on birthdays, anniversary of the date of death and Christmas.

3.1.2.1.4 Expression of grief

This code initially did not exist but was created as some of the other codes had significant overlaps. Therefore, the expression of grief code consists of the original codes of hopelessness, heartbreak, missing the deceased and expression of love. As one would assume in the context of death and bereavement, this code formed part of 96.34% of all posts at the field site. Below are some examples of the four codes contributing to the expression of grief.[117]
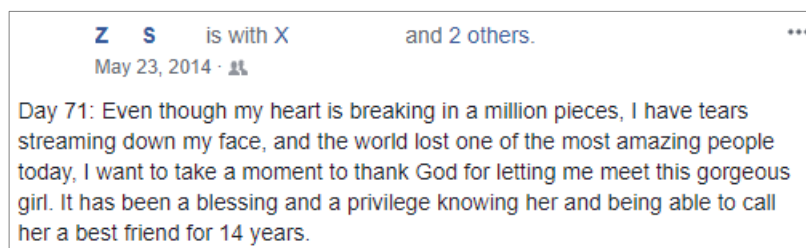
Image 3.7 #heartbroken

---

[116] English translation of the original post: '… a red rose on the piano and a vision of you in heaven… it was a holy moment'
[117] Examples of expressions of love can be seen in Images 3.4 and 3.5
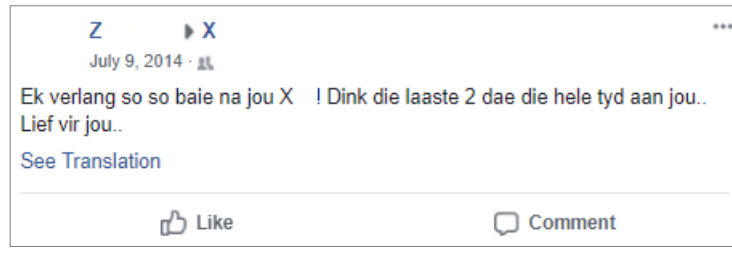
Image 3.8 #missingthedeceased[118]

Image 3.9 #hopeless[119]

Although expressions of hopelessness appeared in only 15% of posts at the field site, these posts were some of the most revealing about the liminal phase of life that participants experienced in the wake of the death of a loved one. These posts are also indicative of the *communitas* forming at the field site by

---

[118] English translation of the original post: 'I miss you so much X! The last two days I have been thinking about you a lot. I love you.'

[119] Top half of the photo obscured to protect the identity of participants. English Translation of the original post: 'D and X you are together now… how does one go on if one doesn't know how…'

virtue of the ritualised interaction, or the call for the formation of a *communitas* of the bereaved.

3.1.2.1.5 Narrative

Narrative is an extremely important code in the context of this thesis and one of the most prominent ones, apart from the codes one would generally associate with death and bereavement. Elements of narrative were found in 73% of all posts at the field site. The prominence of this code was also the first anomaly when compared to other studies of death and bereavement in cyberspace. These studies (Bainbridge 2017, Hedtke & Winslade 2017, Stroebe, Schut & Boerner 2017, Davidson 2016, Malone 2016, Bell, Bailey & Kennedy 2015, Frost 2014, Haverinen 2014, Kern, Forman & Gil-Equi 2013, Walter, Hourizi & Moncur 2012, Valentine 2008, Haverinen 2004) all make mention of the function of narrative, not necessarily from a ritual perspective, but rather as a function of remembering. This is important for the discussion in Chapter Four,[120] where the findings of the study are discussed and developed. There are many good examples of narrative from this field site, but one example will suffice as illustration:

---

[120] Chapter Four has narrative as the core theme for most of the discussion and therefore the concept is important in the context of this thesis.

Image 3.10 #narrative[121]

This private (public) narrative by the romantic partner of the owner of the page is a prime example and a common occurrence of cyberspace being used as a narrative space. 52% of the posts at this field site were personal and private enough to have been labelled as insider posts, but regardless of their content being so personal that many participants might have no reference, these posts garnered substantial interaction from the community.

---

[121] English translation of the original post: 'Wow my dear!!!! You would not believe everything happening here on earth, jeez.… I miss you daily and think of you the whole time. I so wish you were still here. When I walk into our room then I only have photos left of you and so many future dreams and plans we had. But now they will just stay dreams… I just want to thank you for everything you were and that you loved me and that you were always there and WOW thank you for being part of my life, was maybe not that long in the eyes of others but you have been with me since before last Christmas and we got up and went to sleep together every day and lay in bed for long having pillow talk and getting to know each other and shared everything etc…. You will always have a big place in my heart and will remain my partner and future wife!!!! It doesn't matter what anyone thinks or says and you were my best friend… everything was such fun and I smile when I think about you which is always Ai hehehe I miss you so much and it is difficult for me my dearest wife darling… I don't understand why you had to go it is so unfair…!!!! We still had our whole lives before us with all our dreams… I would switch places with you anytime if I could!!! You are my everything and you stay alive in my heart and you make me smile every day and make me feel special because we were part of each other's lives. You are in my heart and in my thoughts every second of every day. Ah, I love you so much Miss X.

3.1.2.1.6 Symbols

From a ritual liturgical perspective symbol is an important aspect and only increases in importance when discussed in the context of death and bereavement in cyberspace. In chapter four symbols are discussed as cyber necessities for ritual performance and cyber counterparts for ritual objects.

Image 3.11 #symbol

In Image 3.11 emojis are used as symbols used to express grief in cyberspace. Emojis and emoticons were not used very often at the field site; there was just one occurrence of a post consisting solely of emojis (Image 3.11) and only 14 others that incorporated emoticons as part of the text. The post displayed above did not garner any network interaction, and many other posts that were saturated with emoticons revealed the same trend of little to no network interaction.

Image 3.12 #symbol[122]

Compared to Image 3.11, symbolic posts such as in Image 3.12 proved to be more popular and garnered significantly more interaction from the network. To further contextualise Image 3.12, the deceased loved flowers and 7% of all posts studied included pictures of flowers. This could also be an extension of funeral and grieving practice from the corporeal dimension, but in all the cases studied the posts relating to flowers were personalised and specific to those the deceased would have liked.[123] Picture containing flowers formed 30% of all pictures posted to the wall of the deceased.

---

[122] Bottom part of the photo obscured to protect the identity of participants. Translation of the original text of the post to English: 'Jeez you would have liked these flowers. XxXxX thinking about you a lot.'
[123] The interaction relating to flowers and the deceased's love of flowers is implied at the field site.

3.1.2.7 Consecration

The last code from phase one that is explicitly discussed is consecration. At this field site a surprising number of posts brought objects from the corporeal dimension into cyberspace (in all the cases by means of a photo) and consecrated these spaces on the wall of the deceased. These posts were very active in terms of network interactions, and these interactions were not only Likes but some resulted in substantial comment strings that discussed the site with reference to the participant and the deceased.
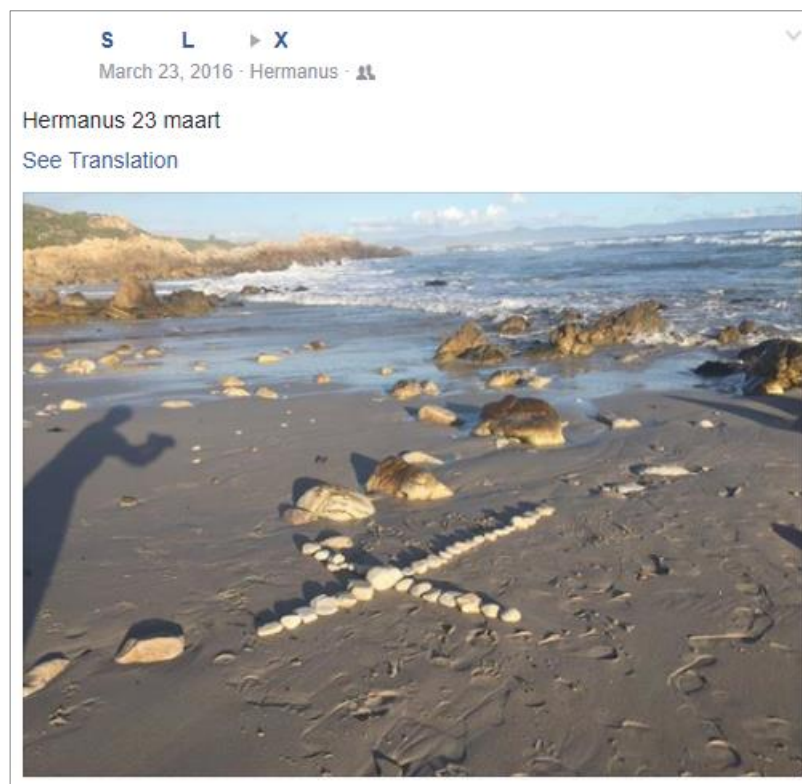
Image 3.13 #consecration

In this case the dialogue in the comment section mentioned family members building a cross with rocks and writing the name of the deceased in the sand as an act of remembrance, but also because they experienced God in the moment they were one the beach. In doing this and posting the pictures to the deceased's wall, a normal strip of beach was consecrated and brought into cyberspace as something sacred.

3.1.2.2 Phase 2 – Axial coding

In phase one some of the prominent codes were discussed (which had already gone through some axial coding) that were identified in the initial coding and data analysis process. With phase two and therefore the axial coding and data analysis phase, the aim is to reconstruct the fragmented codes from the open coding and arrive at the dominant codes recorded at this field site. Once some categories have been established, they are presented with the properties that constitute them (Theron 2015: 5). This method holds true for all of the field sites.

3.1.2.2.1 Prominent categories

Following the open coding process and the reflection period of three months, the codes were sorted according to the prominent categories that emerged from the data. Before the categories were established, the codes were weighted and any code that did not reach at the minimum a 1.0 weight in relation to the other codes was integrated into the more dominant code that it formed part of. These codes still form part of the properties of the categories discussed later, although they were integrated into their dominant codes to facilitate the process of analysis. In Table 3.2 the prominent categories are listed with their weight in relation to the field site's data; it is important to note that some posts contained many of the codes and overlapped in many cases.

Table 3.2 – Categories and weights: site 1

Category	Weight[124]	Integrated codes
Remembrance	1.84	Remember, think back, you would have, you won't, thinking of you, naming the deceased

---

[124] The weights were calculated based on the frequency of the code appearing in the primary posts, therefore a weight of 2.0 would mean that a code appeared in all the posts and a weight of 1.0 means that a code would appear in roughly every second post.

Perspective	2.0	First, second, third, passive and disembodied voice
Prayer	0.52	Asking, begging, questioning
Religious statement	0.84	Faith statement, confession
Heartbreak	1.0	
Narrative	1.20	Stories, narrator, hopelessness
Personal (insider posts)	0.76	
Support	0.65	No mention of deceased, tagging of participant in question, mentioning family, mentioning loved ones, speaking to the network, calling the network up, tagging others in the post
Transcendental experience	0.68	Dreams, prophecy, vision, visitations
Keeping alive	1.0	Point of view, tagging of deceased, look, search, try to find, where
Post-death posts	0.15	Posts by the deceased, birthday congratulations
Expression of love	0.60	
Symbols	0.84	Pictures, flowers, emoticons, text-pictures, typography, seven, age, number of years/months/days

		since death, time since death
Expression of longing	1.0	Miss, reflection, funeral arrangements, news article, information
Consecration	0.66	Loaded picture, relevant physical representations

In section 3.2 these data will be analysed along with the data from the other field sites and be further refined to establish the themes and concepts such as illustrated in Figure 3.2 above.

3.1.3 A case of a son gone too early

This is the oldest field site studied, in the sense that it refers to the date of death being the furthest back in time; 2018 marks the ten-year anniversary of the death of the owner of the page, who passed away after a vehicle accident. The page was created barely 16 months after the global launch of Facebook. Therefore, the interactions at the site provide good insight into the different iterations that Facebook has gone through and as well as into the nature of cyberspace as liminal space. There were no posts by the deceased's parents or older family members for the first four years after the owner passed away; this is because the technology (thanatechnology) was still in the phase of early adoption and the trough of disillusionment as described in the Gartner hype curve in Figure 2.5. The interactions at this site were mainly from the deceased's real-life friends and Facebook friends who mostly consisted of family (cousins etc.) and people who went to school with the deceased.

In total 144 primary posts were studied that garnered 104 community interactions. In the primary posts and community interactions, 102 instances of religious interactions were recorded. As stated earlier, the low number of community interactions is because of the age of the field site, which is approaching 10 years and in terms of cyberspace and the technologies that support it that is a long time. One observation that can be made at this point is that the primary posts do not differ much from those at field sites that are just three years old; the big difference is the level of the community interaction. The textual interactions (comments) do not differ much, but Facebook added a multitude of tools that allow people a wide repertoire for interaction that was not available to the mourners at this site for a long time. Data collection at this site was completed by 24 November 2017 and it was last accessed on 7 April 2018.

3.1.3.1 Phase 1 – some prominent codes empirically explored

In this section some prominent codes are discussed that emerged from the data collected. The same process was followed as with all the other field sites. It is

not necessary to repeat examples of codes that already formed part of the discussion at other field sites; therefore only new codes are discussed, or important examples of codes already discussed.

3.1.3.1.1 Keeping alive

Keeping the deceased alive was a prominent code from this field site, much more so than at any of the other field sites. This was especially evident in birthday messages, congratulating the deceased as if he was still around to celebrate the birthday or implying that he is celebrating in heaven as we would celebrate on earth. In the example below a more personal and narrative example is presented. This type of personal, first-person and narrative post was dominant codes throughout the field sites.

Image 3.14 #keepingalive[125]

In Image 3.14 a participant at the field site is keeping the deceased "alive" by including him in the happenings of the corporeal dimension, in this case Rugby, promising to keep the deceased updated on the progress of the team which they both support in the competition. From this narrative it is evident that the participant acknowledges that the deceased is dead with the implied distance, but by keeping the deceased updated, there is some attempt at keeping him/her alive.

In the second example of keeping the deceased alive a participant congratulates the deceased on his birthday, completely oblivious to the fact that

---

[125] English translation of the original post: 'Hey O. Your team played like real Bulls tonight. We are playing the final against the Sharks. I'll keep you updated!'.

he has have indeed passed away. It will be argued later that these kinds of interactions, although they enter the ritual space, do not contribute to the ritual.

Image 3.15 #keepingalive[126]

Of the 144 primary posts, 68 were posted on the day of the deceased passing or shortly thereafter. Of these 68, posts only two were concerned with keeping the deceased alive. There were 54 posts from the remaining 76 that were coded as keeping the deceased alive. This indicates the importance of the deceased in the construction of the various mourning narratives at the field site.

3.1.3.1.1 Heaven

Another prominent code at this field site was the mention/assumption that the deceased is in heaven. This code made up a third of all the primary posts at the field site, and was generally accompanied by some form of narrative:

Image 3.16 #Heaven[127]

---

[126] English translation of the original post: 'Congratulations E!! I hope the rest of the year is great..'.
[127] English translation of the original post: 'Hey E, I miss you. Was at our school the other day and spoke with Miss W, we cried a bit together. I hope you and G are enjoying your time

In this example the assumption is made, or the belief is held, that the deceased is in heaven. Again, the first-person perspective and direct speech is used to convey a personal narrative, and in this case another deceased person is mentioned as spending time with the owner of the page in heaven.

3.1.3.2 Phase 2 – prominent categories

Table 3.3 – Categories and weights: site 2

Category	Weight	Integrated codes
Perspective	2.0	Direct speech, 2nd person, 3rd person, passive
Narrative	0.71	Prayer, hopelessness, Personal (insider posts), divine experience, symbols, death of another, consecration, blog
Keeping alive	0.77	Network engagement, Christmas, birthday, searching, see again,
Missing the deceased	0.75	Remembrance, heartbreak, news, support, expression of love, R.I.P
Heaven	0.63	Jesus, God, Oubaas, Groot Man, Pappa, big J, big G, Here, angels, dreams, religious statement

---

together up there. Look out for those of us whose hearts are broken – the longing never goes away *sad face*'

3.1.4 A case of a grieving father

This was the only field site where the owner of the page is still alive. In this case the field site was studied because of the parent mourning their child and the ritual space and interaction created around this. As the owner of the page is still alive, the researcher chose to first obtain the owner's consent to study these interactions and this was granted. This field site proved to be valuable as it showcased different instances of ritual in between the normal activity[128] at the field site, compared to the other field sites where the page was for all practical purposes turned into a memorial. This was also the most productive site in terms of community engagement and religious interaction.

The studied data consisted of 207 primary posts, which had 4 293 network interactions and, of these, 2 469 were religious. These data were emotionally very difficult to study as the posts were in many cases raw and honest, and in some cases the grieving parent was attacked in the comments section for publicly ritualising their journey of mourning.

3.1.4.1 Phase 1 – some prominent codes empirically explored

As with all the field sites, some prominent codes that emerged from the data recorded at the field site are discussed. Only codes not previously discussed, or exceptional cases, are dealt with in this section.

3.1.4.1.1 First-person perspective

All other field sites are the pages of people who had already passed away, compared to this field site where the owner is still alive and mourning his son who has passed away. In comparison, the other sites showed a prominence of a direct form of speech to directly address the deceased, whereas this site

---

[128] Normal activity in this case refers to the daily interactions on the owner's page. These include the day-to-day posts of other aspects of the father's life, work and family.

showed more of a balance between different perspectives. A direct form of speech was still the most prominent occurrence, but the first-person perspective was used only 7% less than a direct form of speech. This is because of the father narrating his own journey of mourning. In the example below the first-person perspective of the narrative is evident.
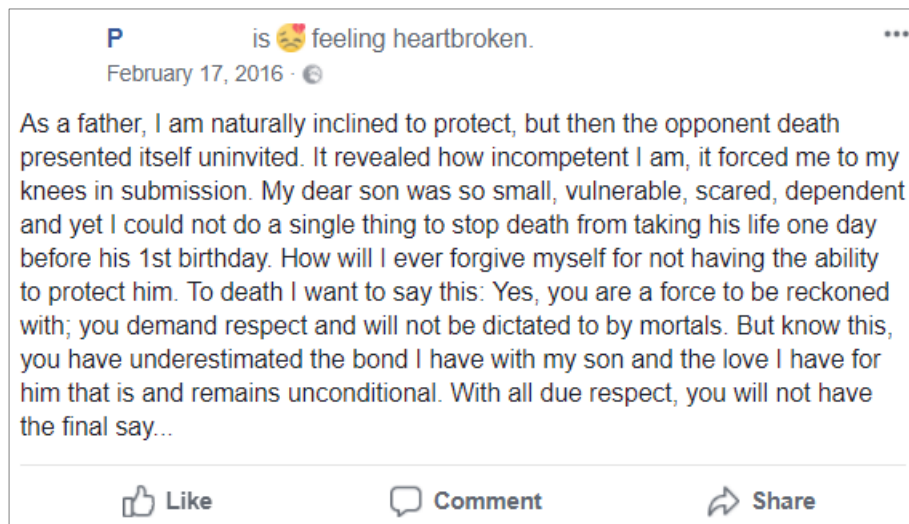
Image 3.17 #firstpersonperspective

This narrative mode of interaction was strongly supported by the network and each primary post garnered hundreds of interactions in the form of Likes, shares and comments. There was also a downside of ritualising the mourning in such a personal way; some participants at the site misunderstood or disagreed with the expression as it was presented and interfered with the narrative. One such example is listed:

Image 3.18 #firstpersonperspective[129]

3.1.4.1.2 Missing the deceased

Unlike the second field site that was discussed, this code featured as the most prominent expression of feeling towards the deceased. The same trend could be seen with regards to keeping the deceased alive (a low number of posts on or close to the death of the deceased and a much larger number found throughout the rest of the interactions at the site), although the number of posts keeping the deceased alive was much lower, contributing to only 8.5% of the primary posts. Most of the posts were similar to the example below:

---

[129] English translation of the original post: 'No I have not lost a child, but I see it every day. Every day I see people lose what is important to them and none of them place it on Facebook to gain sympathy, they cry in their private spaces, they live their lives to the best of their capabilities for the sake of those who are left behind. I am not unsympathetic. But if he is so traumatised he should get help and not announce his pain and suffering on Facebook. He is a X and should know better and if he doesn't know better he can phone me and I will refer him to a proper psychologist. Grieving on Facebook is not how you mourn.'

Image 3.19 #missingthedeceased[130]

This post on missing the deceased also illustrates the point made in the previous section on first-person perspective posts. The community interaction is evident in the likes and other interactions and also the liturgical comment of "Kyrie Eleison".

3.1.4.1.3 Consecration

While posts of consecration are not prominent in frequency they are prominent in terms of the journey and narrative of mourning. This field site had many instances of consecration, some were from the network such as an instance where some of the network members wore black bands to support the owner of the page and remember the deceased and another where the father consecrated the 27th of every month as a day to remember his son. Perhaps one of the most striking consecrations can be seen in the example below:

---

[130] English translation of the original text: 'My dear child, daddy misses you so much….'

Image 3.20 #consecration

A similar example was shown with the first field site (Image 3.13) and again an ordinary tree is brought into cyberspace by means of a picture and consecrated as a sacred object within the context of the page.

3.1.4.2 Phase 2 – prominent categories

As with the other field sites, the prominent categories are listed as well as the codes that constitute them.

Table 3.4 – Categories and weights: site 3

Category	Weight	Integrated codes
Perspective	2.0	Direct speech, 1st person, 2nd person, 3rd person, passive
Narrative	0.84	Heartbreak, hopelessness, personal (insider posts), keeping alive, expression of love, symbols, consecration, poem, song, candle, philosophy, hashtag, wordless,
Missing the deceased	0.51	Searching for the deceased, remember, birthday, Christmas, pain, tears, dream,
Support	0.52	R.I.P, comfort, thanks, bible verse, prayer, video, picture, poem, song, strength, heaven, power from above, thoughts, liewe Jesus, Seun, God, His, Here, Lord, Vader, Pappa

3.1.5 A case of a friends sudden passing

The fourth field site is also an old site (almost 8 years old) and is unique in that, while it still exists, it had not seen any interaction in 18 months at the time of

the last visit, which was 26 December 2017. The owner of the profile passed away in a head-on collision with another vehicle during a time of massive celebration in South Africa. The owner was religious, but had many friends who were not and therefore there were fewer religious interactions at the site than at the other sites studied. This site is also unique for the researcher participated at this cyber cemetery in 2010 to remember and mourn the deceased.

This site consisted 128 primary posts, which garnered 74 network interactions, of which 43 were religious. Although the number of religious interactions was low, after the coding process the figures were much higher, as many of the posts were implicitly religious rather than explicitly so.

3.1.5.1 Phase 1 – some prominent codes empirically explored

As with the three previous field sites, only unique or exceptional codes are discussed in this section as to not repeat what has already been discussed.

3.1.5.1.1 Pictures

All the field sites featured the use of pictures to remember the deceased or express some part of a narrative visually. At this field site though there was an explicit call to share these pictures and photos and tag the deceased in them. The original idea was to use the pictures to compile an album for the mother of the deceased to remember her son, and while this succeeded in its goal, the sharing of pictures became a prominent part of the narrative at the field site and also of the mourning journeys of the participants.

Image 3.21 #pictures[131]

Pictures were used consistently throughout the interactions at the field site and four of the last seven posts were pictures. Most of the pictures used were actual photos of the deceased with friends/family and a few were pictures with text to accompany them as seen in the example below:

Image 3.22 #pictures

3.1.5.1.2 Decline and death

When studied only from a frequency perspective, this code is not prominent at all, but viewed in terms of its weight of importance at the site, this code is

---

[131] English translation of the original post: 'Can everyone who has pictures with g please tag them in the group, I would like to use them to put together a nice photo album for his mom featuring him and his friends. I would appreciate it a lot. Thank you.

prominent. Decline and death refers to the field site showing a massive decline in activity from October 2014 until it eventually "died" on April the second 2016. This period of time saw only five primary posts relating to deceased compared to the 123 that came before. This is an important code and category to keep in mind when the ritual nature of cyberspace is discussed, and the way ritual space is demarcated is reflected on.

3.1.5.2 Phase 2 – prominent categories

Table 3.5 – Categories and weights: site 4

Category	Weight	Integrated codes
Perspective	2.0	1st person, 2nd person, 3rd person, direct speech, passive, wordless
Narrative	0.7	Pictures, poem, remembrance, Keeping alive, another deceased, thoughts
Missing the deceased	0.56	News, network engagement, expression of love, R.I.P, tears,
Religious statement	0.51	Goodbye, symbols, see again, heaven, wings, Jesus, Here, God, Angel

The fourth field site was the last of the sites studied in the context of Facebook; for the fifth site a different iteration of cyber cemeteries is described.

3.1.6 The case of Chester Bennington

The fifth field site is important not only because of its different thanatechnological context, but also because of the number of interactions at the field site which number 50,000 and more. The last time the field site was visited for observation purposes was on 16 December 2017. The site has since been visited (outside the period of data gathering) again and continues to grow with thousands of primary posts on a daily basis. This field site is also unique as the identity of the deceased is not obscured in the analysis, for the field site (http://chester.linkinpark.com/) is a public memorial open to anyone. The memorial remembers Chester Bennington of the rock band Linkin Park, who ended his own life on 20 July 2017. The memorial also shares some information on suicide prevention. The use of this site is further important for it allows critical reflection of the other four field sites, as it uses different (although not fundamentally) thanatechnology and therefore phenomena observed at the other field sites can be evaluated in more detail in the light of the fifth field site.

There is no actual method to post something at the site itself and all the posts are done via Twitter and Instagram using a variety of hashtags or tagging the accounts of the deceased in your post. Some of the popular hashtags include #RIPchester, #320changesdirection, #makechesterproud, #fuckdepression, #onemorelight and #chesterbennington. Once a post is made on either Twitter or Instagram containing the correct hashtag or tag, it is reposted to the cyber cemetery. Participants are therefore providing their data to be reposted where it can be accessed publicly, even more so than would be possible on Facebook for there are no authentication processes to access the memorial and view the cyber cemetery.

3.1.6.1 Phase 1 – some prominent codes empirically explored

As this field site had thousands of primary posts, the open coding process was lengthy and was only conducted for a period of one month, between 15

November and 16 December 2017. The site was observed for a longer period but the coding applies to the month of the observation.

3.1.6.1.1 Visual art

One of the prominent codes to emerge from the data was that of visual art. While similar occurrences were observed at the other field sites and usually coded with consecration in general, visual art was prominent enough at this field site to be coded as its own method of consecration. Visual art was interpreted broadly to include a variety of sketches, painting, digital art and editing and video. Two examples are provided below:
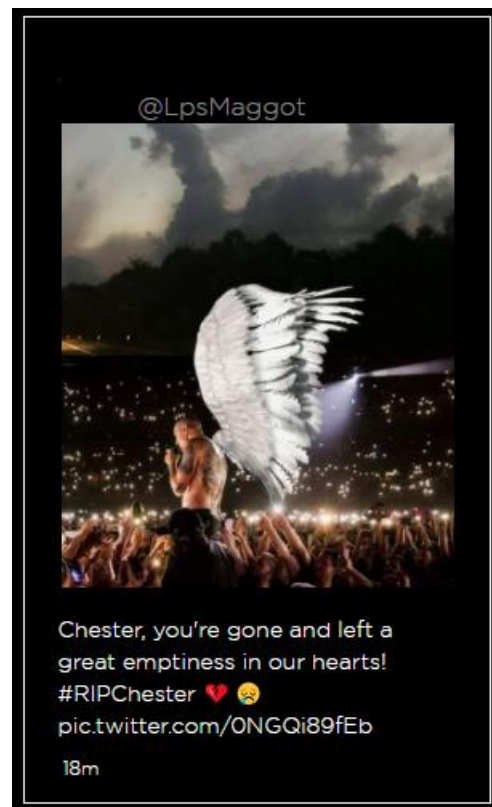
Image 3.23 #visualart

Image 3.23 represents a very prominent type of post at the field site, as there are thousands of posts that used digital editing tools to give Chester wings. In general, there were many posts implicitly or explicitly presenting the belief that Chester is in heaven.

Image 3.24 #visualart

In Image 3.24 a more traditional form of art is used. The participant painted what he refers to as "Chester ascending". Along with the visual art forms already mentioned, the posting of tattoos was also a prominent way of interjecting the participant's own narrative into the narrative at the field site.

3.1.6.2 Phase 2 – prominent categories

Table 3.6 – Categories and weights: site 5

Category	Weight	Integrated codes
Perspective	2.0	Direct speech, 1st person, 2nd person, 3rd person, passive, proclamation
Narrative	1.12	Keeping alive, reframing suicide, sharing of struggles,

		hashtags, depression, suicide
Visual art	0.96	Pencil art, drawings, paintings, tattoos, digital edits, memes, captions
Angels	0.54	Wings, ascension, heaven, halo, hands reaching out
Remembrance	1.46	Day/month counts, photos, support, lyrics

Table 3.6 concludes the presentation of the findings made during the empirical data collection and participant observation. Up until this point the prominent codes and categories were discussed and weighted in terms of their relevance to the various field sites. In the next section the focus will shift to the analysis of these data and the identification of a dominant or core theme from the research.

3.2 The core theme – narrative

In keeping with the method discussed in Figure 3.2, the aim of the empirical research is to arrive at a point where a dominant theme can be identified. This theme then informs the practice observed at the sites and also the theories used to explore the phenomena. In this section the dominant theme is identified as narrative and the process is discussed by which this theme emerged from the data.

3.2.1 Initial working hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework for this thesis, the participant observation and the initial reflection on the data, a working hypothesis was constructed to find the core theme implicit in the data. A diagram was developed to facilitate this process, as discussed in the next section.

3.2.1.1 Pre-disruption to post-disruption

3.2.1.1.1 Equilibrium and liminality

While the concept of equilibrium can be understood in many contexts, the most notable of them, the use of equilibrium in physical sciences and the laws of motion, is the Encyclopaedia Britannica[132] definition[133]

> "A simple mechanical body is said to be in equilibrium if it experiences neither linear
> acceleration nor angular acceleration; unless it is disturbed by an outside force, it will
> continue in that condition indefinitely. For a single particle, equilibrium arises if
> the vectorsum of all forces acting upon the particle is zero. A rigid body (by definition
> distinguished from a particle in having the property of extension) is considered to be in

---

[132] Available at https://www.britannica.com/science/equilibrium-physics accessed 24 April 2018.
[133] This definition is the modern iteration a classic work saying: "that in any machine, the Weights which balance each other, are reciprocally to each other as their Virtual Velocities." (Whewell 1874: 333).

equilibrium if, in addition to the states listed for the particle above, the vector sum of all torques acting on the body equals zero so that its state of rotational motion remains constant. An equilibrium is said to be stable if small, externally induced displacements from that state produce forces that tend to oppose the displacement and return the body or particle to the equilibrium state."

The use of the concept of equilibrium, although standard in the physical sciences, has not been confined to these sciences and has been used in various other disciplines and cases (Vandermeer and Goldberg 2013: 81; Bailey 1994: 117).

As Bailey (1994: 117) mentions, sociologists in particular were concerned with the concept of balance or stability, and this conceptual potential is valuable to sociological study. A disparity, however, became clear in the difference in usage between sociologists and those from the field of thermodynamics. On the one side, the concept of equilibrium was used to conceptualise balance, harmony and stability (from a sociological perspective) and, on the other side, the concept did not describe stability but rather system death or disintegration (Bailey 1994: 117).

Initially the concepts of equilibrium and disequilibrium were the guiding concepts in understanding the effects of death on the lives of bereaved individuals. In light of the discussion in this section (3.2.1.1.1), the use of the concept of equilibrium to study death and bereavement in cyberspace was discarded as it was not the dead being studied but the living in relation to the dead in ritual space and within a context of liminality. The phases of the rites of passage as established by Van Gennep (1960[1909]) and elaborated on by Turner (2008[1969]) serve as a better framework to understand the movement between disintegration and reintegration than the concept of equilibrium. One of the clear advantages of this perspective is the relation of the chosen framework to the complexity of a societas or structure of a person's life. The concepts of societas, liminality and communitas provide a much better representation of the different cycles of life (Cilliers 2010: 333) relevant to the

framework of the working hypothesis. The concept of liminality becomes even more valuable in the context of the network society.

3.2.1.1.2 Liminality and disruption

Liminality is a critical social concept as observed after disruptions on Facebook. During the observation of the different field sites, it became evident that the deceased in all of the cases formed part of different societies (societas) in their network. That is to say, while they were alive they were part of different structured networks, each including a range of people in their networks. These included groups such as their general society when viewed from a broad perspective, and smaller groups such as their circle of friends, church groups, university groups and many other instances from a more detailed perspective.

In this thesis death is viewed as a disruption and, as discussed earlier, disruption is in many cases part of the context of disaster rituals. Disaster ritual is interpreted as the ritualising that occurs as a result of a disaster. Implicit in this understanding is the idea that disaster ritualising cannot start before the actual instance of the disaster and the disruptions caused by the disaster, and this is also reflected at the field sites. Sumiala (2013: 92) interprets the concept of liminality within the "media age", as she refers to it, and argues that the media reflects social liminality after a disruption, and in this new state the order (structure) that preceded the disruption is no longer in existence. While this is not much different from Turner's views, she (2013: 93) adds that this undefined (liminal) state open up new opportunities, and these opportunities allow the mediated community to create connections among one another that are not possible under normal circumstances.

Therefore, there was a move away from the theoretical concept of equilibrium to the concept of liminality (including societas and communitas) to enable reflection on the social processes that occur after the disruption of death. It can be visualised as follows:
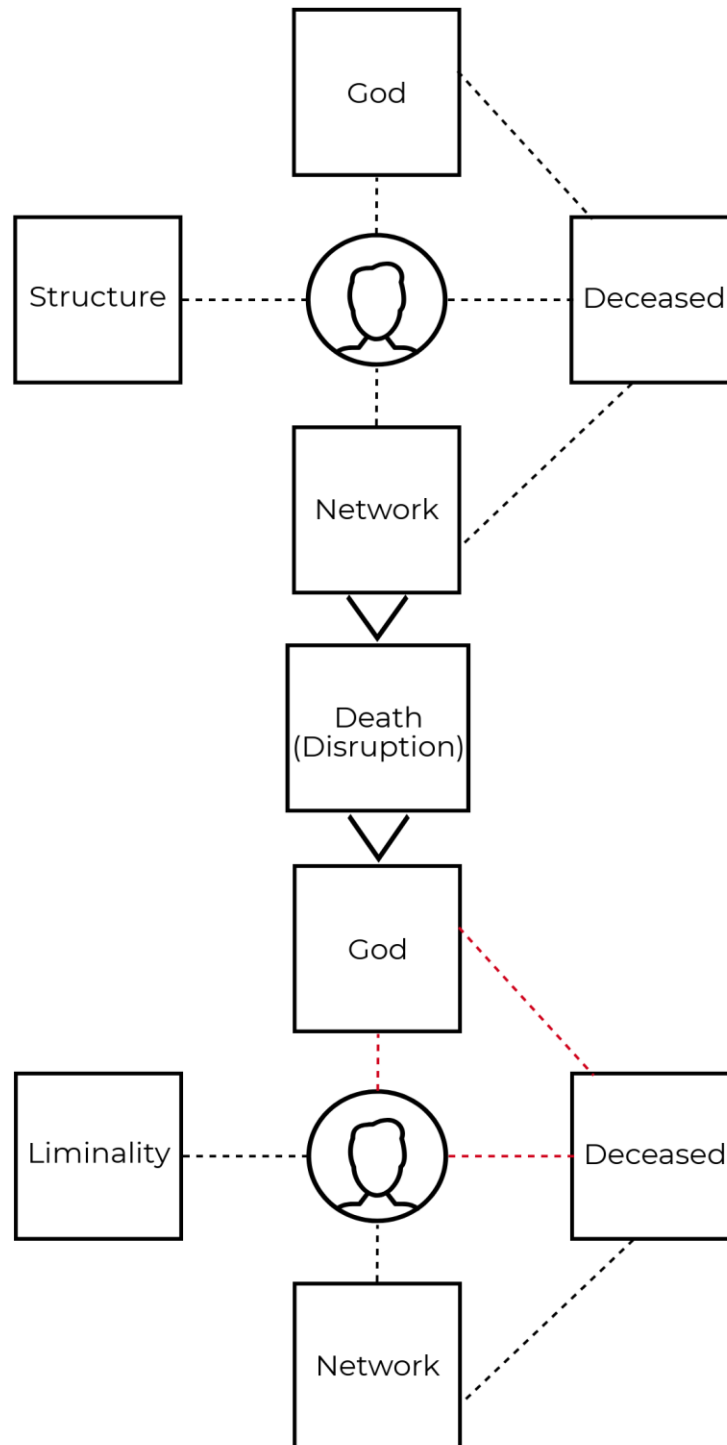
Figure 3.3

Figure 3.3 is a visual representation of what was observed at the field sites. The top half of the figure represents the *societas* phase before the event of death. The person represented in the middle the diagram is not the deceased, but rather a representation of each participant at the field site. In the top half of

the structure this participant forms part of a structured society (or societies). From a ritual liturgical perspective and the data studied, three prominent categories were identified in this state of structure:

1. The participant's relation to God or idea of divinity;[134]
2. The participant's relation to the deceased;
3. The participant's relation to the network.

With the event of death this structure is disrupted, as one of its categories is fundamentally changed, that of the participants' relation to the deceased, who had been a fundamental part of the structure up to the time of death.

With the fundamental shock to the structure of the *societas* each participant enters a phase of liminality. The intensity of this phase differs among all of the participants depending on their relation to the deceased and how prominently this relation featured in the societies they form part of. An example of a very brief liminal phase[135] can be seen at the first field site, where the participant posted the following to the wall of the deceased: 'Betty thinking of you and the family of your friend that passed away. I pray that god will provide you with power to face this and that He will wrap you in His love.'[136] In this case the participant supported another participant with a relationship to the deceased and therefore they experienced merely had brief moment of liminality. A second example from the third field site illustrates a much more intense experience of liminality:

> For the first time in my life I understand what it means for planets to leave their orbit; what it means to refer to something as a cataclysmic-apocalyptic event…. our dear son was declared brain dead yesterday afternoon, 1 day before his 1st birthday. I am devastated, deeply saddened and heart broken by this. Someone told us that losing a child is like losing a limb, let me tell you it is nothing like this. It is like losing everything

---

[134] This category includes general beliefs such as 'God is a good, loving God', 'God has power over life, death and destiny (predetermination)' and the belief that a construct such as heaven exists to name but a few.
[135] In these cases, the change to the *societas* was so minor that liminality was merely a flicker for these participants.
[136] English translation of the original post. The name of the participant has been changed.

from the neck down. I need to reconstruct, redefine, reinvent and rediscover myself. Let me say this, I will always love my son unconditionally. I will love him until eternity and beyond. Never will I ever forget him. His life and death will form a fundamental part of the new me.

In this case the liminal phase was more pronounced and in terms of this particular participant lasted much longer, as confirmed by the participant's subsequent posts at the field site.

These are two examples of the extremities of liminal experience. The field sites had many examples of the spectrum in between but the interaction between participant, network, deceased and God was constant, although it differed in intensity.

In the bottom half of Figure 3.3 some of the connections between the categories are coloured in red; in the figure they are examples to illustrate areas where the participant is experiencing the most significant sense of departure from the structure that prevailed before the death event. This is identified by the nature of their ritualised interaction at the site. Some of the interactions are easily identifiable as the participant trying to make sense of the death of a young person and asking how God can allow such an event to occur: 'I cannot believe it!! But God picks the prettiest flowers first',[137] while others have complex layers of meaning and ritualised interaction, such as the example mentioned in image 3.10.

The discussion above on figure 3.3 represents the working hypothesis developed after the empirical research was completed and the initial period of reflection has passed.

---

[137] Transcription from the second field site shortened and translated into English by the researcher.

3.2.2 Narrative as core theme

Figure 3.3 and the theorising involved in its development were useful to condense the initial observation into a coherent model showcasing the prominent categories of experience at the field sites. While this was immensely useful in making sense of the data, the core element of the ritual interaction at the sites - whether by means of pictures, emojis, text, consecration and the other ritual elements - was still lacking.

In the second phase of the data analysis and with the help of extensive axial coding, certain core themes and concepts started to emerge from the data. Many of these themes were generally associated with death and bereavement such as remembrance, keeping the deceased alive, expressions of longing and heartbreak. These themes are all important at the field sites and can be observed in many of the ritual interactions at the sites.

These themes are familiar and widespread in the study of rituals associated with death and bereavement, especially themes relating to the process of physical death to social death (keeping alive) in the work of Kjaersgaard and Venbrux (2016: 17-19) and Malone (2016: 90-97), the place and role of music in death rituals in the work of Hoondert and Bruin-Mollenhorst (2016: 87-104), remembrance in the work of Hedtke and Winslade (2017: 53-83) and Walter, Hourizi, Moncur and Pitsillides (2012: 282-283), perspectives in the work of Kern, Forman and Gil-Equi (2013: 2-10) and Frost (2014: 257-261), community and the network in the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) and Haverinen (2004: 7-22) to name but a few of the contributions to explications of the dominant themes in the field.

The ultimate aim of this thesis is not the identification of themes and concepts that can be observed in death rituals in cyberspace, but rather a quest to find what enables these themes and concepts to exist and come into fruition in the context of cyberspace. While these two dimensions can never be separated, the focus is rather on the roots of these themes and concepts. Upon concluding

the data analysis and empirical research, it became evident that one theme occurred consistently throughout each field site and was prevalent in almost all of the interactions at the field sites namely narrative.

The results indicated that narrative was the lifeblood of many of the interactions at the field sites, that the ritualising occurring at the field sites was narratively constructed. When the participants enter the phase of liminality after the death event, the relevant structures in their lives are disrupted. From the research at the field sites it was evident that narratives or stories were used to cope with the disruption, but they also formed the basis for the formation of new communities and in some cases the integration into new societies. The stories told at the different field sites gave life to inanimate objects such as Like buttons or shares; therefore communities and individuals were empowered to construct powerful narratives that were used in the ritualising and therefore the eventual exit of the liminal phase.

Narrative is not the only theme that is important in the study of cyberspace as a ritual space, but it will be the focus in this thesis. Cyberspace is a large, but not yet fully explored, context for ritual liturgical interaction and therefore there are many possibilities for exploring this context. In the next chapter the concept of narrative is used to explore both space and embodiment in cyberspace as core themes or categories that became evident from the field research. Narrative is not the only perspective that can help us to understand these concepts, but it is the perspective that this thesis has adopted based on a process of ethnographic field research and the resulting coding of the data gathered in the observations.

4. The narrative nature of cyber ritual

During the course of this chapter the core theme of narrativity is applied to different elements of ritual. The purpose of the application of this theme to some ritual elements is to help in the conceptualisation and understanding of these elements in cyberspace.

4.1 The narrativity of ritual and the rituality of narrative

Nünning and Nünning (2013: 54)[138] explore this topic and then refer specifically to its chiastic character. This chiastic character is important in the study of cyber ritual and the way that liturgical expression is constructed in cyberspace.
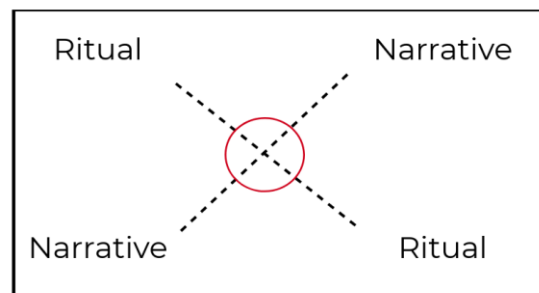
Figure 4.1

The point of intersection between the narrativity of ritual and the rituality of narrative provides access to the context of cyber ritual, and it is here that the phenomena can be studied. From the qualitative data gathered and studied, two elements of ritual were identified that were important to this discussion:

- Ritual space in cyberspace as narrative space;
- Storied bodies (embodiment in cyberspace).

---

[138] The subheading of 4.1 is derived from the work of Nünning and Nünning (2013: 54).

These two elements are explored in this chapter, but first a question needs to be resolved; How exactly are ritual and narrative related?

4.1.1 Ritual and narrative

It would be reductionist to say that cyber ritual is constituted only by the narratives of the participants, and that is not the point of this argument. There is, however, an important correlation between these two concepts which becomes evident in the context of ritualisation in cyber cemeteries. Nünning and Rupp (2013: 1) explore this relationship and note that these concepts may seem worlds apart, but when viewed together they have many attributes that complement each other notwithstanding the conceptual complexity of ritual and narrative separately.

Nünning and Rupp (2013: 1-2) work from the hypothetical point of departure that narrative structures and therefore the telling of stories play a fundamental role in rituals and ritual practice, and that storytelling often consists of an explicitly ritualistic character. They add that both ritual and narrative provide structure and meaning to the lives of participants, a claim that is supported in the findings presented in this thesis.[139] Furthermore, the findings also support the notion that narrative plays a fundamental part in ritualising and this was evident at the field sites, especially with 'narrative' as the key concept emanating from the research data. Many of the other ritualised behaviours observed at the field sites - whether they were remembering through a picture, consecrating an object at the cyber cemetery, expressing longing or heartbreak - contained strong evidence of a narrative means of ritualising at the site.

From the perspective of this thesis, narrative is also a flexible concept that is useful in exploring the unexplored space of cyber ritual. Referring back to the work of Cahalan and Mikoski (2014) discussed earlier,[140] the concept of narrative also allows the practical theological inquiry into the subject of cyber

---

[139] See Chapter Three and Chapter Four.
[140] See section 2.1.1.4 for more on the perspective of Cahalan and Mikoski.

ritual to be open-ended, flexible and porous. This is important as the concept of the narrativity of ritual allows the exploration of cyber ritual and the mapping of some of the elements that were observed.

Nünning and Nünning (2013: 54-58) identify 12 areas of structural similarities and functional equivalences that are important for a discussion of the different elements of ritual; these areas are outlined below:

1. **The situatedness of narratives and rituals:** Nünning and Nünning (2013: 54) use the vague concept of 'situatedness' but explain it as the particular cultural moment in which a narrative or ritual is embedded. This position or 'situatedness' of the phenomena has an influence on the design of the narrative or ritual performance. In the context of this study, rituals are situated at the cyber cemetery after the death event. The narratives that accompany this ritual are situated within the expressions of the participants but also forms part of the participants themselves. The situatedness of the ritual in the context of death has very specific design implications for the rituals that accompany this situation. From one of the official liturgical resources in the DRC (*Handleiding vir die erediens* 2010: 142-145) this situatedness prompts the liturgist to use the liturgy designed to facilitate the ritual(s) for a funeral, or a mourning or cremation service. These physical rituals and their performative texts do not explicitly mention stories or narrative, but in certain cases it is implied. In cyberspace there are no performative texts for the rituals but, as is evident from the empirical data and research at the field sites, the narrative element is central to the ritualisation at the different sites, one could almost say constitutive of the ritualisation.

2. **The creation of a world which changes:** The first important aspect of this category is the aspect of "world creating". Nünning and Nünning (2013: 55) emphasise the fact that both narratives and rituals create a world of their own. This world differs from the ordinary and participants find themselves in this newly constructed context. The creation of a new world or a new space is even more prominent in cyberspace, as this

space has no way of accommodating the physicality of the participant, and therefore the imagination (or power to create) of the participant is actively engaged. These spaces usually have the effect of transforming the participant and, as Nünning and Nünning note, this transformation is usually of a psychological nature rather than a physical transformation. [141] This is an important aspect of liturgical ritual in cyberspace, as these rituals and the narratives that form the basis of the liturgical character aim to bring about transformation.

3. **The narrative structure of narrations and rituals:** This was illustrated in the field research and the interactions at the field sites. While many rituals have rigid structures and specific texts that must be adhered to, it was evident from the field sites that the ritual liturgical interactions were based upon the specific narrative at the field site. Therefore, each individual site differed (substantially in some cases) based upon the narrative created by the participants after the death of the person in question. Some field sites had the narrative of a celebration and many of the ritual interactions were light-hearted, remembering the good and fun times. Other sites such as the third field site (the father who lost his son) had a personal and intense narrative, inviting the participants into ritual interactions that were personal and dense.

4. **The perspectivity of narratives, rituals and ritual stories:** From the data gathered at the field sites this was a crucial, and one could say central, function of ritual liturgical interaction in cyberspace. As Nünning and Nünning (2013: 56) note, perspectivity is central to narratives; depending on the perspective in the narrative, different elements of it either become evident or are obscured. From the field research it was evident that the first-person perspective was prominent in ritual liturgical interaction at the field sites, and this first person perspectivity inspired other ritual liturgical interactions at the site to follow the pattern set. These patterns were identified at the field sites and took on the form of the post that preceded them. If the perspectivity of the narrative of

---

[141] The participant might be represented via an avatar in cyberspace, such as an Elf in World of Warcraft or a Rockstar in Second Life, but these transformations are temporary and have no lasting physical effect on the participant.

mourning was expressed by sharing a photo with a memory, other participants followed this form of expression until it later became the prominent mode of ritual interaction at the site. Therefore, the perspective found in the narrative of the mourner/participant fundamentally shaped the nature of his/her ritual liturgical interaction at the site.

5. **The experientiality of narratives, rituals and ritual stories:** Nünning and Nünning (2013: 56) hold that this aspect of experientiality is a defining characteristic of narrativity, and aids in exploring and understanding ritual in cyberspace. They understand experientiality as follows: "while the experientiality of people engaged in performing or observing rituals is marked by fleeting perceptions and feelings as well as more lasting impressions, which are often made up of very heterogeneous, if not contradictory elements, the experiences of characters or narrators in stories are formed – and thus ascribed meaning – by the use of language and narrative." This is by no means a new or emerging concept, but the combination of the narrativity of ritual and the rituality of narrative form a compelling synthesis when viewed in the context of cyberspace.

6. **Narrative as a part of rituals:** In many cases rituals consists of narrative elements, some more explicit than others, but they are still to be found in many ritual expressions. Nünning and Nünning (2013: 56) use the example of stories told about the bride and groom during a wedding ritual to illustrate the point, but this is even more prominent in funeral liturgies. Funeral liturgies (at least in the DRC) consist in large part of storytelling and remembering of the life of the deceased. This narrative element of ritual is of particular interest in this thesis as it was consistently present at the field sites in the ritual interactions. As discussed earlier, narrative was a profound part of every field site and the recorded interactions at the site; one could say that it was prominent to the degree that (in many cases) it became the text for the ritual interaction at the site. This was especially evident at the third field site, of the father who lost his son. The narrative of pain, mourning and longing provided the basis for the

ritual interaction at the site, and almost all ritual interactions related to this narrative in some way, whether it was a Like, a picture or lyrics posted, or any of the other interactions recorded at the site.

7. **The performative power of narrations and rituals:** Another similarity between rituals and narrative is their performative natures. Performance is a key aspect of studying and participating in rituals and rituals are generally constituted by the performance of the different actors and participants that engage in the ritual and liturgy. In the context of this thesis and therefore the context of cyber ritual, performance is gauged differently in terms of the physicality of the participation, but whether the performance is physical or virtual it is still crucial to the progression of the ritual. Nünning and Nünning (2013: 56) note that from a perspective of narratology, recent developments have focussed on the mimesis of narrating, namely the study of how the event of narrating tells us more about the performance of the narrator, or in the case of this thesis, the participants at the field sites.

8. **Closely related to this performativity is the power of both narratives and rituals to create and change worlds:** This point that Nünning and Nünning (2013: 57) illustrate differs slightly from the second point on this list as this, world creation and change is directly related to the performativity of rituals and narratives, and not to rituals and narratives in general. The performative nature of both the narratives and the way they are presented ritually aided in the creation of the ritual space. This was clear from the research data and the participant observation that the way in which the narrative was performed, whether personal or reciting and remembering the narratives concerning the deceased aided in creating and forming the ritual space. In cases where the narratives were performed as celebrations of the life of the deceased, participants followed suit and their narratives were constructed to support the space created based on the performativity of the narratives that preceded their own interaction.

9. **Ritual narrations, narratives and narrative genres are some of the most important media for the transmission of rituals:** The ninth point

that Nünning and Nünning (2013: 57) make does not reveal much about the chiastic structure of ritual and narrative, but nevertheless is an important consideration in the context of this thesis. In the collecting of data the primary source was the interactions (primarily posts) that participants used to interact at the various field sites, and many of these posts were ritual narrations used to mourn, remember or provide support. These media were not only important but fundamental to the transmission of the ritual in a cyber context. This thesis does not extensively explore the different narrative genres to be found at the field sites; suffice it to say that there are different genres to be found in the interactions at the field site, but they have no bearing on the aims of this thesis.

10. **The combination of rituals and narratives in ritual stories:** Nünning and Nünning (2013: 57) highlight an important feature of their tenth point in their list on memorial and ritual sites: "material traces … become narratives and with that points of reference for a new cultural memory". As discussed earlier during the presentation of the field research data, narrative was a prominent category. This category coded as narrative could in many cases be said to be ritualised storytelling. Material traces are embedded within these narratives or ritualised stories and therefore they change from simply being traces and pieces of narrative into transformative catalysts for a liminal community. Ritualised storytelling therefore aids in the construction of a new cultural memory regarding the deceased, eventually enabling the liminal community to progress and re-integrate into society. Cyber ritual as canvas for storytelling is therefore a prominent aspect from the findings.

11. **The self-referentiality of rituals and narratives:** This notion is also supported in the work of Bell (1997: 176-177) and Rappaport (1999), although Rappaport refers to this concept as rituals being "indexical". Ritual performance is generally seen as being self-referential as each new iteration of a ritual is woven into the larger tapestry of the ritual history in question. This point is especially interesting for cyber ritual as the self-referentiality mainly refers back to the physical versions of the

ritual and their history, and then finds subtle new expressions on cyberspace. Nünning and Nünning (2013: 57-58) hold that self-referentiality as related to narratives and their cultural basis, is rooted within certain pretexts that inform these narratives. The value that is to be derived from this aspect of the chiasm between ritual and narrative is that the narratives raise the self-referentiality of ritual because the narratives are in many cases ritualised themselves. This is an important aspect of cyber ritual as studied in this thesis as the narratives and their ritualised nature provide the basis for ritual interaction and the expansion of the ritual repertoire by providing a cyber context for self-referentiality.

12. **Rituals and narratives are characterised by a structure of agency:** Agency is a central concept in both rituals and narratives, and indicative of the actors and performance as they are expressed in either rituals or narratives. Nünning and Nünning (2013: 58) frame agency as part of rituals and narratives as indicative of who has the possibility to act and is also indicative of whose perception is represented. This final category that Nünning and Nünning discuss is important for understanding ritual in cyberspace as the agency as expressed via the narrative identifies the actors in the ritual as well as those who are invited to participate.

Based on this discussion of the relation between ritual and narrative, it is evident that these two concepts have much in common. As this thesis works from a liturgical and ritual studies perspective, ritual is the primary concept and narrative is the supporting concept to explore the context of ritual in cyberspace. The next section explores four ritual concepts in cyberspace with narrative as the guiding concept to understand the themes as identified in the field research.

4.2 Storied bodies

The first core concept of ritual discussed is that of embodiment. Embodiment can generally be understood in two ways in the context of ritual.

The first and probably the most prominent understanding of embodiment within the context of ritual is the relation of the concept to the physical bodies of the participants and actors.[142] Ritual liturgical resources (at least in the DRC) frame rituals as almost always having a physical actor and participants. Some examples include *Woord en Fees* (Orsmond, Botha & Bartlett 2013), which is a comprehensive ritual liturgical guide based on the church year, specifically Year A including Advent 2013 up until Ordinary Time 2014. This document includes more than 56 ritual and liturgical guidelines. Many of the sections include comprehensive plans for the liturgy, detailing a variety of rituals and responses. All these resources either assume the presence of a physical body or explicitly detail the roles and functions of the physical bodies in the ritual liturgical interaction. *Soos 'n blom na die son draai* (Wepener 2011b) is another good example of the current ritual liturgical repertoire[143] as presented in the context of the DRC. This resource has its focus on the church service in general, with some propositions for other special services. These special services include funerals and liturgical guidelines for so-called "committal services".[144] Embodiment in the context of the Wepener (2011b) liturgical source is evident as being physical, and the word "voorganger", or translated to English 'liturgist', is used throughout to accompany the performance of the

---

[142] Grimes (2013: 195) leans toward this interpretation of embodiment as it pertains to ritual when he says "Ritual is embodied. An obvious feature of ritual is that it is a human activity. People do it, and they do it in overt, bodily ways. Because it is in and of bodies, ritual is also cultural, since bodies are enculturated. Ritual is not only in the mind or the imagination, even though it can be both mindful and imaginative. If an action is purely mental, it is not ritual even though mental processes clearly underlie ritual action. However important ritually inspired memories or fantasies may be, we should not call them ritual. Ritual, insofar as it can become the object of study, is evidenced by gross motor movements (or a studied, practiced lack of them) in the body, hence the qualifier "embodiment."

[143] The current ritual liturgical repertoire of the DRC will soon be updated with a new publication (Wepener & Greyling n.d.), which will expand the current understanding of embodiment in liturgical ritual.

[144] Wepener (2011: 128-130) uses the term "committal service" to refer to special services regarding funeral liturgy such as the placement or release of the ashes of the deceased.

ritual liturgical interactions. There are many other examples found in Clasen, Bartlett, Carstens and Schoeman (2010), Wepener and van der Merwe (2009) and van der Merwe (2001). These resources all display the same interpretation and understanding of embodiment as a physical manifestation as it pertains to the context of liturgical ritual.[145]

Embodiment can also be understood as the representation of something in something else. This concept is fundamental to ritual studies as many abstract constructs such as hope, fear, love, grace and redemption are embodied in a variety of ritual elements. To provide an extreme practical example: during the early to mid-2000s a movement called *maak jou huis skoon*[146] swept across many Christian communities in the South African context. This movement held that various Disney characters and other superheroes such as Spiderman embodied evil traits, and were even "Satanic" in many cases and had to be ritually removed from one's house. This is an extreme practical example, but serves to illustrate the point. From an academic and theoretical point of view many authors have published works that explore this iteration of embodiment; Hedtke and Winslade (2017) on the embodiment of constructs such as hope in the crafting of grief; Jacobsen (2017) on the embodiment of the self in the post-mortal society; Hoondert and Bruin-Mollenhorst (2016) on the embodiment of culture in rituals; Moyaert and Gledhof (2015) on the embodiment of God in different religions and their rituals; and Bell (1997) on the embodiment of tradition in cultural memory and life. There are many other authors exploring the topic, but these will serve to illustrate the current academic discourse on the topic.

As noted earlier, embodiment either as physical or symbolic construct tends to fall into one of these two categories. This distinction or grounding of the concept has proven to be valuable as part of ritual and liturgical studies for many years. The growing popularity of cyberspace, however, does challenge the normativity

---

[145] In defence of the current ritual liturgical repertoire of the DRC, the resources primarily focus on the church service in general. This reality may potentially explain the lack of concepts such as embodiment being explored in greater depth.
[146] The title translates as "clean your house".

of these two categories. For the time being cyberspace is not a physical space, although technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality are challenging the boundaries of what might be possible. Cyberspace is also not exclusively a symbolic space. The rise of cryptocurrencies[147] have shown us that objects that are completely crafted in cyberspace can have very real consequences for the corporeal dimension.

Space is discussed in greater detail in the next section. It is evident both from the results of the field research and the context of the modern world that cyberspace poses fundamental questions that challenge the foundations of categories that have become normative in understanding the concept of embodiment. The discussion that follows argues in support of the concept of "storied bodies" to understand the concept of embodiment in cyberspace as it pertains to the physical/virtual bodies of liturgists and participants to liturgical ritual in cyberspace.

4.2.1 Body and identity

The data gathered during the field research and participant observation highlighted the question of body versus identity. To phrase it differently, the ritual liturgical interactions observed at the field sites emphasised the need for critical thought concerning the concept of the physical body and if the physical body can or needs to be represented in cyber ritual. In the context of this thesis it is understood that the participants succeeded in participating in liturgical ritual. In addition to participation in liturgical ritual, many of the dynamics of ritual and the family characteristics of ritual as explored by Grimes and discussed earlier in the thesis could be observed in the narratives at the field sites.

---

[147] Blockgeeks is a popular technology company specialising in understanding and training people on the latest internet and cyber technologies. They explain cryptocurrency as follows: "Cryptocurrency is a medium of exchange, created and stored electronically in the blockchain, using encryption techniques to control the creation of monetary units and to verify the transfer of funds." They identify two core characteristics of cryptocurrency: 1) It has no intrinsic value (therefore only value as generated in the corporeal dimension by human beings); 2) It has no physical form and exists only in the network. https://blockgeeks.com/guides/what-is-cryptocurrency/ retrieved on 6th of June 2018.

This does not mean that the physical body becomes irrelevant in the context of ritual and liturgy, but the reality of what was observed does indicate that cyberspace fundamentally challenges how these concepts find expression. Therefore, the concept of identity arose from the data as providing a means to understand the conceptualisation of embodiment in cyber ritual.

Academic discourse on the topic of embodiment in cyberspace, as it pertains to ritual or liturgical ritual, is sparse. However, with the rise in popularity of the concept of the network society, the topic has been increasingly investigated in important academic works. Two studies, Post and van der Beek (2016) and Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014), offer insights into embodiment as it can be understood in the context of ritual and liturgical ritual.

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) are clear in their understanding of especially worship and performance being tied to the corporeality of the body. To quote their own formulation (Barnard, Cilliers & Wepener 2014: 215):

> There is no worship apart from a bodily and corporeally performed liturgy. The notion of embodiment refers to the bodily and corporeal configuration of human existence and culture. Therefore, embodiment is not just a mere reference to "flesh" but it includes the way that a specific culture codes the body; it includes the meanings that are attributed to the body in a specific culture.

In their book they approach worship and therefore ritual and liturgy from the perspective of the network society, and according to this thesis the network society includes both the online and offline (virtual and corporeal) components of human and societal existence. Therefore, by placing such a large emphasis on corporeality as qualifier, it appears as if the virtual component of modern society is disqualified. It is doubtful whether this was the explicit intention of the authors.

Paradoxically, in the same paragraph where the virtual is metaphorically being condemned to the abyss of irrelevance, we find a crucial passage that may

redeem the concept. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 215, 217-218) refer to the fact that bodies are not just "flesh" but also made up of codes. Bodies are codified through cultural and social influences and experiences (Sample 1998: 20); essentially bodies are codified through the networks they form part of.

Coding is the crucial term used by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014). This term is not only valuable semantically but also architecturally in the way that architecture relates to the construction and foundation of cyberspace. While the social and cultural codification of bodies is not a new notion, the way in which these authors use this term holds important implications for the concept of embodiment in ritual liturgical interaction in cyberspace. Essentially embodiment comprises of two important ingredients when it comes to participation in liturgy. Woven into one another we find the corporeality (flesh) of our bodies and the networked codes which relate to our identities or sense of self.

During a ritual in the corporeal dimension we can only ever physically observe one of these two ingredients, that of the physical body, the flesh. Though we can see only the body, we know that the body in question is codified through the networks it forms part of; therefore the body gains the ability to engage in nuanced interaction. To phrase it differently, during a ritual or/and liturgy in the corporeal dimension, the flesh is observed and its codified nature implied.

This thesis argues that the reverse is true for cyberspace: the codified nature is observed and the body is implied. This statement raises the question: why should the lack of the physical presence of the body disqualify certain authentic human experiences and interactions from the realm of ritual? It goes without saying that during the field research no physical body was observed. Despite this fact, authentic ritual liturgical interactions were observed rooted in liminal communities of mourning people.

During a ritual in cyberspace we can only ever observe one of the two ingredients - the codified body as it is expressed through the narrative of the self. In cyberspace and specifically the context of cyber cemeteries we can observe the identity of people as they express themselves through their ritual interaction and, while we cannot observe their physical bodies, we know that the self expressed is the consequence of a physical body that has been codified through the networks it forms part of.

As with the rituality of narrative and the narrativity of ritual, a chiastic structure comes to fore once again as the codified body versus the embodied code. The possibility of a theoretical distinction between the reality of ritual in cyberspace and corporeal ritual is better understood in the light of the work of Post and van der Beek (2016).

Post and van der Beek (2016: 85-86) provide three categories to aid in the discussion on the difficulties and challenges of understanding ritual in cyberspace.

- The virtual;
- The physical;
- Interference.

Each of these three categories is briefly discussed with special attention given to the concept of interference, as much has already been said on the virtual and the physical.

The virtual

Cyberspace and virtuality are inseparable, at least as technology currently stands. Post and van der Beek (2016: 84-85) make an important point in stating that the virtual is much too easily equated as being inauthentic or unreal. This is the core challenge of cyberspace to liturgical ritual in cyberspace. Cyberspace challenges age old notions and concepts that depend on the physicality of the human body in the context of ritual and liturgy. Post and van der Beek (2016: 84-85) are correct (according to this thesis) in stating that the

relationship between virtuality and authenticity is a complex one, but most importantly, they do not disqualify virtuality on the basis of it being unreal or inauthentic.

The physical

The physical is the constant counterpart to the virtual and without one or the other, the discussion as conducted in this thesis would be possible. The physical represents the dimension where liturgical and ritual studies are comfortable. Most of the theories from these disciplines are rooted in the corporeal dimension. Within the context of cyber ritual Post and van der Beek (2016: 86) are explicit in their understanding of the relationship between the virtual and the physical by stating "Virtual ritual is also physical". They (2016: 81) briefly mention one aspect of the physicality or corporeality of cyber ritual in referring to the fact that someone is typing on a keyboard or staring at the screen. In this thesis not much is made of this aspect of physicality and virtuality as there are other aspects that serve the conversation much more efficiently and effectively.

Post and van der Beek (2016: 84) frame it differently but essentially their view is that "ultimately, the 'virtual' reality becomes 'lived' reality through manifestations and actions of people in daily life", which refers to the concept of coding as discussed in this section. When exploring ritual and liturgy in the corporeal dimension, concepts and language are used that pertain to the reality in which the phenomenon is observed. Again, it raises the question; why do many of the attempts to understand cyber ritual use concepts and language that pertain to the corporeal dimension? The concepts of codified bodies and embodied codes are much closer to the context of cyberspace and therefore these concepts facilitate greater cohesion in discussing and theorising on cyber ritual.

<u>Interference</u>

The point Post and van der Beek (2016: 86) are working toward is to understand how these two dimensions relate to each other, and more specifically how we can understand these two dimensions as partners in human expression rather than one excluding the other. To answer this question Post and van der Beek use the concept of interference. When one assumes a position as offered with interference, cyberspace (the virtual) and corporeal (the physical) space are profoundly interrelated. Post and van der Beek (2016: 86) offers the following insight, "Virtuality to a large extent exists by virtue of that open, interactive relationship, which is not necessarily competitive or exclusive."

Much was said above of the relationship between cyberspace and the corporeal dimension, which is essentially one of interference between the two. This concept of interference as it stems from the dual influences of the virtual and the physical is the foundation of understanding a narratively expressed body in cyberspace.

The data gathered during the field research offer strong support for the hypothesis put forward by Post and van der Beek. It was evident that the virtual and the physical are profoundly interrelated, that physical bodies were indeed codified and expressed through the narratives found in the ritual liturgical interaction at the sites. Further evidence from this research supports the statement that Post and van der Beek made regarding the authenticity or "realness" of the virtual.

Based on the observations and discoveries made in this research and supported by the work of previous pioneers such as Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener and Post and van der Beek, the concept of storied bodies came to the fore as a possibility for enhancing the understanding of embodiment in cyber ritual.

<u>Storied bodies</u>

Certain key concepts have been established so far:

- While the body is physical, it is also a vessel that is encoded by different elements such as culture;
- Cyberspace and the corporeal dimension can exist together; one does not necessarily exclude the other;
- Though different in nature both spaces are spaces of authentic human expression and experience.

In the context of this discussion one crucial question remains. Much is known about the physical body and its role in liturgical ritual, and for all practical purposes the role of the body in liturgical ritual as observed corporeally has been decoded. The same cannot be said of the codified body. Within the current ritual liturgical landscape, academics from various disciplines are trying to decipher the codified body. The concept of the storied body forms part of these attempts and views the deciphering process as the body being narratively constructed in cyberspace.

Nünning and Nünning (2013: 61) use the term "life-story" to describe what was observed at the field sites in terms of the narrative expression of the participants. Life-story as interpreted in this thesis is a low-level phrase to describe the complex process of interference between the physical body, the codified body (virtual body) and the deciphering of the code in the narrative. When exploring cyber ritual, the movement between the physical and the virtual is not a linear process but rather a hermeneutic spiral where the embodied code and the codified body are constantly in flux. The diagram below illustrates the process as observed in the context of cyber ritual and specifically at cyber cemeteries:
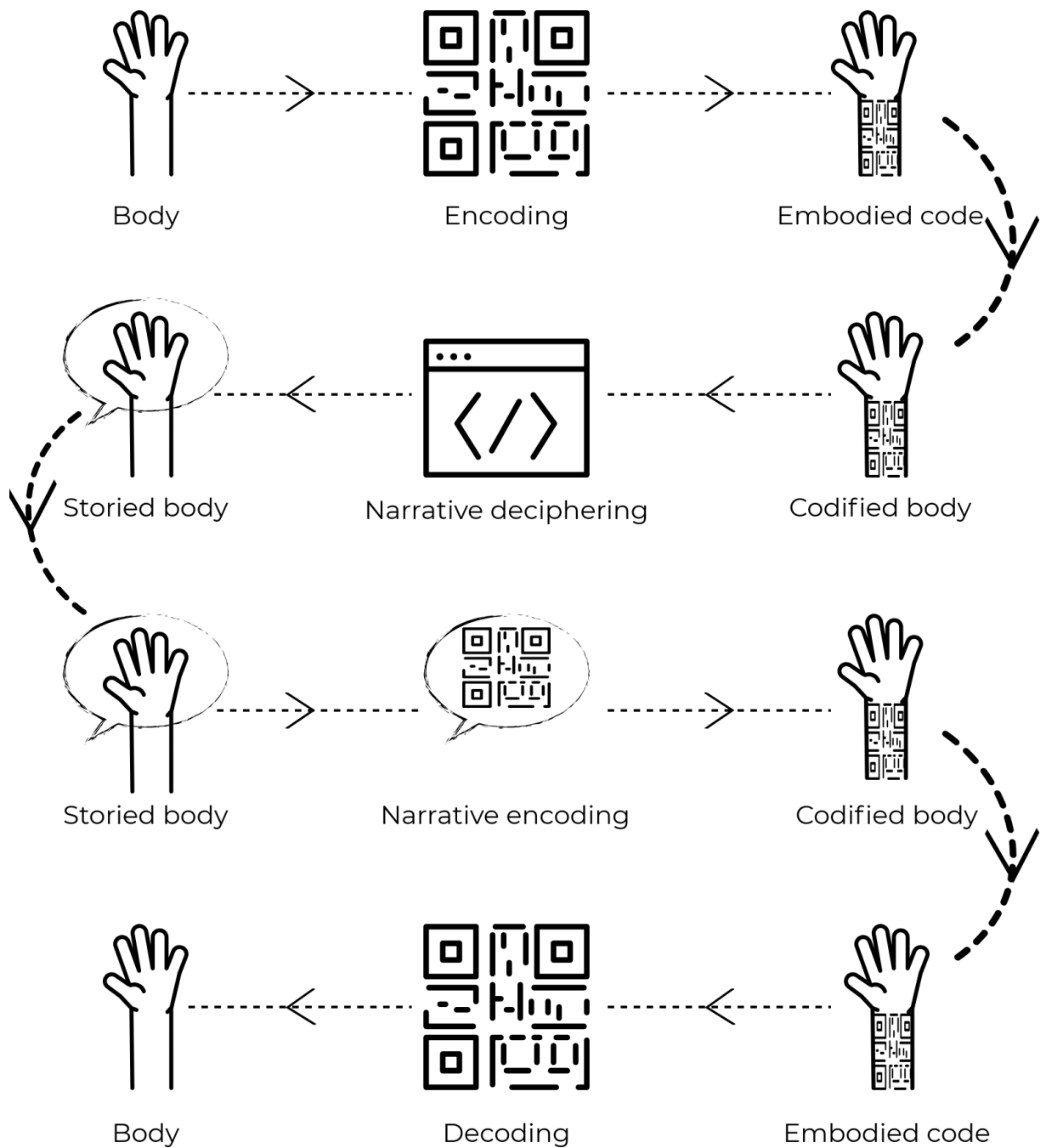
Diagram 4.1

In Diagram 4.1 the process of interference is explained as it pertains to ritual in cyberspace. The process as explained here starts with the physical body as understood in the corporeal dimension. This physical body undergoes different

processes of encoding via cultural, social and other influences. This results in embodied code, in other words a body that can be observed interwoven with code that cannot be physically observed. As the process turns the bend into cyberspace, the embodied code transforms into the codified body. In other words, body loses the potential to be observed physically, and the code gains the potential to express the body. In the context of this thesis a process of narrative deciphering took place where the codified body was deciphered. During the deciphering the potential of the code was realised and expressed through narratives at the field site. The narrative(s) posted at the field sites constructed a body which could be observed through the story told about it, and therefore the deciphering delivered the storied body. If the process was linear, this would have been the end and the process would restart from the body as described at the start. As the process is a hermeneutical spiral the storied body is also encoded through the narrative (its own or other narratives expressed at the site). As the process moves back to the corporeal dimension, the narrative encoding of the body results in a newly formed codified body. From a ritual liturgical perspective this codified body is not the same as the one that entered moments before. The code has been changed based on the experiences in cyberspace. As the person logs out of Facebook or the platform of choice, the body regains its potential for expression, expression that is rooted in the codes interwoven in the body. The new code is deciphered and the body is enhanced in the process.

For the duration of the ritual interaction at the field site this process repeats itself, each time adding to the code. The additions to the code are rooted in interference as the code in both the realities changes with each iteration. A good example of the expression of the storied body is found at the field site of the father who lost a son.

Over a three-year period during which the site was observed, there was a definitive progression in the storied body of the father as illustrated below:

- First post - "I am devastated, deeply saddened and heart broken by this. Someone told us that losing a child is like losing a limb, let me tell you it

is nothing like this. It is like losing everything from the neck down. I need to reconstruct, redefine, reinvent and rediscover myself."

- 6 months later – "The last couple of days I had to walk past my son's grave...a true test of my sanity."
- 6 months later – "Dedicating this day to my dear son. How ridiculous it is to touch your face on a fridge door photo ... senses are not senseless, it remains an existential necessity for a mortal."
- 6 months later – "So if you pause a while and look closely, you will see I am in fact carrying all three my children. If you wonder how, simply due to my unconditional love for them."
- 6 months later – "Death and love are an uncomfortable delightful tango"

These fractions of narratives are but a minute representation of the narrative as it was expressed at the field site, but they serve to illustrate the point. During the period of observation the narrative deciphering of the father's codified body gave participants a storied body to understand the father's journey. Nünning and Rupp (2013: 11) express this as follows:

> Narratives create a world with an inherent set of values and beliefs. Quite often, narratives confirm, popularize and disseminate cultural values, sometimes they modify or subvert them. Especially stories that are "tellable" in Bruner's sense that is, stories that are interesting in that they do not only repeat well-known schemata – construct their own morality; they establish text-internal norms which supply the reference according to which the behaviour of the characters and/or narrators is to be judged.

With the first post we see the father deciphering his grief and constructing a storied body akin to a decapitated body. One could equate this to a grieving widow, helped into the church building by close family members as her body is wracked with grief. As time progresses we see the father being able to walk, touch, carry and eventually even dance. Through the sharing of his experiences, he constructs a storied body[148] and through his storied body he is embodied in the ritual, in cyberspace.

---

[148] The following point is not important in the context of this exploratory study although it is important for further thought on the nature of the storied body. It is possible that participants in cyber ritual may narratively construct storied bodies that reflect what they want it to reflect and

Dücker (2007: 8) notes that rituals are sequences that one remembers, because they are significant for one's own life history and which have become symbolic points of reference in the narrative and therefore they generate meaning because of their significance.[149] Nünning and Nünning (2013: 61) adds to Dücker's statement by emphasising the fact that rites of passage (liturgical ritual regarding the passage from life to death in this case) are connected and play a central role in the structuring of the individual life-story. They expand on this statement by saying that narratives and ritual come together in one's life-story as a central element of constructing identity.

Conclusion

To conclude this section on the storied body, it is evident that the current constructs and theories in ritual and liturgical studies regarding the body and embodiment need to be expanded and enriched to include new ritual and liturgical contexts. For the time being it is impossible[150] for the physical body to be present in cyberspace. The physical body cannot disqualify or make ritual liturgical expression inauthentic; this is evident from the field research for this thesis. Therefore, the concept of the storied body is presented as a lens through which to understand embodiment, a concept rooted in the theory of interference. Rooted in interference with the storied body as expression, the hermeneutical spiral of encoding, deciphering, encoding and decoding becomes a possibility.

---

are not necessarily reflective of the current reality. This is not necessarily a problem, as coping mechanisms form part of the mourning journey, but it warrants some critical reflection.

[149] The text is the author's own interpretation from the original text "Es sind insgesamt Handlungssequenzen, an die man sich erinnert, weil sie für die eigene Lebensgeschichte bedeutsam und zum Bezugspunkt eines sinnbildenden Erzählzusammenhangs geworden sind."

[150] Even technologies such as virtual and augmented reality are nowhere close to bringing the physical body into cyberspace. Some aspects of the physical body are better represented in cyberspace with modern technology, but a full integration is not yet possible.

4.3 Narrative space

The second important aspect of ritual as discussed in this section is that of space. In the discussion above on embodiment attention was devoted to the transition or process of interference as the body crosses over into cyberspace. Much is known about offline ritual spaces, which have been explored in detail. This does not mean that physical space is not a complex space, although the fact that it is observable with all the human senses allows further scope for inquiry. Cyberspace, on the other hand, is a much newer space available for inquiry. According to Campbell (2005: 309), computer networking within organisations has been studied since the 1970s but a more focused approach encompassing the internet and religion can only be traced back to the mid- and late 1990s. However, she does mention that the relationship between religious practice and computer use has been documented since the 1980s. Campbell and Lövheim (2013: 1083) point out that a decade and a half of research has been done on the topic of religion online (that would be two decades of research at the time of writing of this thesis). Because of this we can make educated claims about the impact of the internet on religious culture and social phenomena (Campbell & Lövheim 2013: 1083).

Campbell and Lövheim are correct (according to this thesis) in stating that educated claims have become more reliable and it is around this time (2014) that journals such as the *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* [online] rapidly increased in popularity. Prior to 2014 (2005-2014) only four volumes had been published, and eight volumes have been published since 2014. What is observed in the growth of the journal in question can be observed in the work of other prominent academics, as we see with Berger (2012, 2017), Post (2013), Post and Faro (2017), Post and van der beek (2016) and van der Beek (2015), to name but a few. While these academics and others have generated large amounts of theory to help explore cyberspace, much of the theory is general in nature. Therefore, specifics of cyberspace are not explored in as much detail as the umbrella or broad theories of cyberspace.

This section explores the perceived space of cyberspace. This is no small undertaking, as space in this context is a complex concept and can be interpreted from many perspectives. The perspective adopted in this case is rooted in the context of the field research, i.e., space as it can possibly be understood when created in a ritual liturgical context to mourn the dead in cyberspace. Therefore, perspectives on space in cyberspace - as in the work of Bryant (2001) - are not taken into account. Bryant (2001: 154) approaches space in cyberspace as being the result of various parts of hardware and software, kept together by cables, routers and radio waves. This thesis approaches space in cyberspace as an abstract concept, one where humans shape the formless space in cyberspace through their codified bodies into a space where ritual liturgical expression becomes a possibility.

To systematically guide the discussion to its conclusion, the work and interpretations of various academics are used as they are relevant to the discussion of space in cyberspace. The concepts used are those of:

- Spatial proximity (Berger 2017);
- Public and semi-public (Sumiala 2013);
- Cyberspace as ritual place (Helland 2016);
- Virtual worlds (Geraci 2014).

Before these are discussed, it is necessary to provide some context to explain why these concepts are important and what exactly their function is.

4.3.1 The walls of cyberspace[151]

4.3.1.1 What exactly is being walled?

The question can be approached either from the position of Tinning (2014), as the walls reveal what is being walled in, or from the perspective of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014), seeking an explanation in the semantic roots of

---

[151] The subheading is derived from the work of Søren Tinning (2014: 99-119), *The Walls of Public Space*.

ancient Greek. This thesis argues that both approaches are valuable, although the route of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener is followed first and then the work of Tinning is brought into the dialogue.

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 293) introduce their initial thoughts on space as "Western, African and Network Society perspectives on space". At a later stage in their chapter they discuss the concept of space in more detail and with a more specific context, but the general character of their initial reflections is ideal for the context of this thesis. Their general thoughts on space show that the concept is flexible and porous enough to engage with the context of cyberspace.

Their first contribution to answering the question: "what exactly is being walled in?", is their theorising on the Greek word *chora.* Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) provide valuable insight into the nature of space in their exploration and eventual perspective on the concept of *chora.* They attribute the formulation of the concept to the early Greek thinkers and especially the work of Plato, who developed the concept further. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 293) proceed to make the important point that *chora* then evolved conceptually into a life-giving space, in other words a space of possibility, superseding chaos.

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 293) make the point about *chora* "The given space thus unlocks the potential or capacity for intellectual and spiritual understanding – it is a carrier or a container of meaning that arises especially within discourses". Their concept of *chora* provides a helpful lens for understanding space in cyberspace and by extension cyberspace as ritual liturgical space.

They conclude that space is both imaginative and anticipatory in nature, and therefore a carrier of meaning. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014:293) also incorporate the concept of discourse, based on the work of Derrida. They don't make much of the concept itself, but it is a point of intersection with the narrative perspective in this thesis.

In this thesis narrative is understood as the combination of story and discourse - more specifically the discourse between the participant and the deceased, and between the different participants, and how these discourses build up the stories told. The narrative point of view is explored in more detail at the end of this section.

It can be deduced so far that *chora* is a space in the sense that it is inherently a place of possibility, and that the possibility is in many cases realised within discourses. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) then develop four potential categories of space, and consider the place of liturgical ritual in these spaces.

These four categories are:

- **First space:** They understand the first category of space as a physical space. The qualify physical space as something that can be mapped and therefore a geographical location;

- **Second space:** This is an imaginative space, therefore made up of concepts and ideas;

- **Third space:** A lived, or existential space would be an apt description of this space. Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 294) describe this space as decorated with personal items, a space where people move from day to day. While they make reference to a number of physically observable attributes of this space, certain elements of cyberspace would not be out of place in this category. Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn pages and profiles are every bit as existential and "lived"[152] as some of the physical spaces in our lives;

- **Fourth space:** This category is close to what is found in the second space, but as Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 296) note, the fourth

---

[152] Archer (2018), Constine (2018) and Esquire (2018) discusses a new Instagram functionality that provides a glimpse into the amount of time people spend in cyberspace. This new functionality notifies users of the amount of time spent on the app. It's been a few years since Facebook and Instagram made their usage numbers public, but it is estimated that the average person spent 2 hours and 42 minutes per day on their phones; 86% of this time is spent in apps (Shontell 2014). It would be safe to assume that this number has increased in the last couple of years as apps and the companies that make the apps are ever increasing their ability to engage society with their products. But with the old figure of 2 hours and 42 minutes, this is still a comprehensive amount of time spent in cyberspace.

space transcends the second space and provides an environment of anticipation that is firmly rooted in transcended realities: "The transcendent reality really enters your immanent reality…"

With these four categories in mind Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014: 297) attempt to situate "liturgical ritual space" within these parameters. They initially note that liturgical ritual space in its general understanding can be linked to the first and third spaces. The very nature of liturgical ritual, however, strives to link itself to the second and fourth spaces, and therefore become a space of imagination and anticipation.

It is interesting that these four categories of space correlate with the work and thought of Martin Heidegger and his theory of the fourfold (Heidegger 1971: 147). Heidegger enquires into the concept of building, dwelling and thinking, and at this particular point in his book the concept of dwelling is discussed. All these authors are theorising on the way in which human beings relate to space. The diagram below illustrates the correlation between the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener and that of Heidegger:
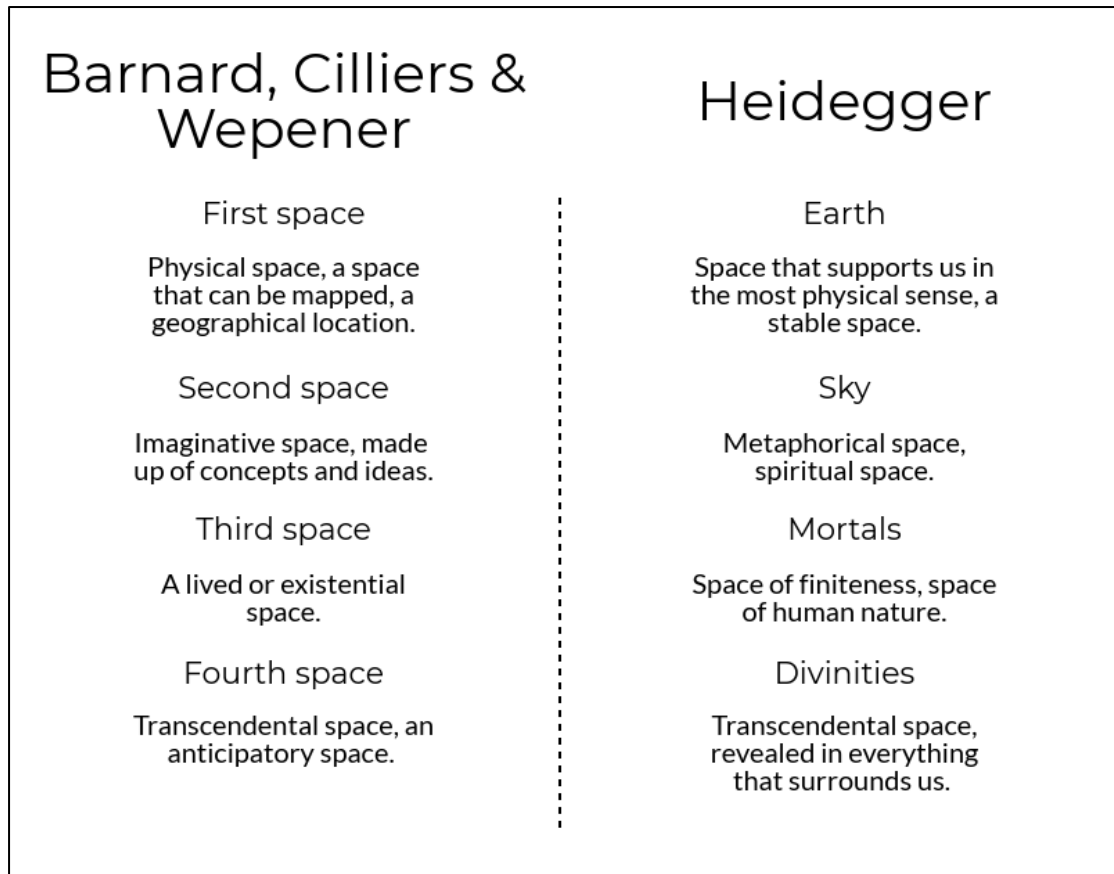
Diagram 4.2

Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) view their four categories as individual expressions of space where Heidegger (1971) holds that the fourfold as it pertains to dwelling, is a unity. It is therefore evident from the categories of space (Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener), on the one hand, and the aspects of space (Heidegger), on the other, that liturgical ritual and its expression in cyberspace can be best understood from the perspectives of the second (sky) and fourth (divinities) aspects.

This answers the question asked earlier; what exactly is being walled in? A space of anticipation and imagination, of sky and divinity, is to be found behind these walls.

As mentioned earlier, the subheading of this section is derived from the work of Søren Tinning (2014: 99-119) entitled *The Walls of Public Space*. Although Tinning works with the concept of public space, he separates the theme as

being place and public space. Within this context his concept of 'limit' becomes valuable. The next question then is: how does 'limit' help us understand a space of imagination and anticipation?

4.3.1.2 Walls, boundaries and limits

Tinning (2014: 102) refers to how the essence of something (in this case space) is determined according to the limits that define it. He argues that the question of limitation is inherent to the very concept of definition, stating that "a de-finition is the demarcation of the limit of something, of the point at which it ends and can be held in its full unity, as bounded." (Tinning 2014: 102). This is also reflected in Heidegger, who adapts the Aristotelian idea of *horismos* (definition) and couples it with the Greek term of *peras* (limitation or boundary). When combined, the terms for definition and limit deliver the concept of boundedness (Tinning 2014: 102).

Boundedness in its philosophical sense (Tinning 2014: 102-103) is what makes a 'thing' be revealed in its most essential way. Therefore, it can be understood that the defining aspect of a thing, or defining aspects of space in this thesis, are the limits and boundaries of that space, and these limits define the space as the distinct space it is (Tinning 2014: 102).

The concept of boundedness as understood by Tinning (2014) is the basis of the four concepts identified earlier: spatial proximity, public and semi-public space, ritual place and virtual worlds. These four concepts are not used to define and understand the general concept of cyberspace but rather the specific ritual liturgical space as outlined below. Therefore, the spaces as explained by Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014) become relevant to this discussion, especially the second and fourth space.

4.3.1.3 Spatial proximity

The first aspect of the boundedness of ritual liturgical space in cyberspace that came to fore was the limit of spatial proximity. This limit is closely related to the question of embodiment discussed above, although the focus was on understanding the individual body and its presence in cyberspace.

Berger (2017: 37) raises the issue that the lack of spatial proximity and the prominence of simultaneity in cyberspace presents significant conceptual problems for conventional liturgical scholarship.[153] While this is true, the perspective taken in this thesis views the lack of spatial proximity (at least in the way it is understood in the corporeal dimension) as a challenge to conventional liturgical scholarship in expanding its own boundedness to include a larger variety of spaces for ritual liturgical expression.

Berger adds that for digital immigrants[154] the reality of "gathering for worship in cyberspace" (Berger 2017: 37) is a challenging development. This may hold true for those who came before widespread access to the internet, but this reality is not as strange or challenging for millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, who are digital natives. Scott (2015: 386-405/3596) tells the following story that illustrates the ease with which modern human beings can transition between a space of physical proximity to a space lacking such physical proximity:

> Consider this anecdotal evidence taken from my old-fashioned pastime of gawping at the people opposite me on public transport. In a Piccadilly Line carriage a mother is leaning sideways to argue quietly with her late-teenage son. I hear the word 'immature' in her whisperings. 'Mum, I'm not discussing this on a train … It's the same every time.' She mentions money; he seeks assurance from his free newspaper, from the

---

[153] Although not mentioned in her statement, it is necessary to take note of the fact that Berger is a Catholic scholar and therefore certain ritual liturgical elements may pose greater challenges than the equivalent ritual liturgical expression in the reformed churches and specifically the DRC.

[154] Digital immigrants refer to the generations that came before the widespread use and ease of access to the internet. This would generally include those from the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers and many from Generation X.

sportsmen in his lap. Facing a wall of adolescent sullenness, she settles back in her seat. Presently, she begins to smile and leans in again. 'To change the subject completely … this is just silly,' she takes a piece of paper out of her bag and unravels it like a shopping list, holding it up in front of her son's face and reading him excerpts from it. I guess that he isn't the type to laugh at his mother's silly aside simply to smooth things over. His winter hat has red stitching in the shape of a tiny Che Guevara and he wears the adolescent's dog collar of puffy black headphones. The mother keeps reading aloud and chuckling, and he stares at the strip of paper as though watching from afar a mildly revolting but ultimately tedious spectacle. The mother's smile subsides. 'Not interested, never mind,' she says quietly, pressing her scarf against her breast, at which, perhaps, more gracious children once suckled. 'Paper,' she sighs, and begins to flick pointedly through the Metro, her eyes moving quickly over sections of each page beneath arched, overacting eyebrows. He stares desolately at his own copy. I can hear the white noise inside both of their heads as they continue this pretence at reading. Despite her bluff, the mother soon abandons the headlines and brings out her smartphone. She starts tapping at it thoughtfully while the son remains very still and holds his downward stare, waiting. It's not long before unselfconscious quivers of concentration appear at the edges of her mouth. Now and then her eyebrows tremor from true absorption and focus, and a new sense of peace washes over the scene. The son tugs his jeans at the knee and adjusts his weight; he begins to turn the pages of his newspaper naturally. I wonder where this sudden ease has come from, and then I realise that it is because the mother has gone.

While only a story, the content illustrates the current reality between the corporeal and the virtual and, while not an example of ritual liturgical expression it is not unlike what was observed at the field sites during the research done.

Based on the results of the empirical research and supported in the work of Berger (2017), spatial proximity is understood as a boundary of cyberspace. It is necessary to re-emphasise that boundaries or limits are not viewed as negative constructs in this thesis. They are viewed as crucial indicators of the nature of the spaces they help define. Berger (2017: 37-38) is of the opinion that conventional liturgical perspectives place too strong an emphasis on the gathered assembly, and this emphasis tends to discredit what is currently happening in other spaces such as cyberspace. She holds that what she refers to as 'simultaneity without spatial proximity' is the exact concept that challenges the over-emphasis on spatial proximity in current liturgical discourse. From a

theological perspective she makes reference to the work of Aune and Ratzinger and their ideas on the implications of spatial proximity as identifier. They are of the opinion that a strict adherence to spatial proximity as the only grounds for liturgical expression over-emphasises human action as the primary dynamic of Christian worship. The effect then is the weakening of God's initiative in the liturgical encounter.

It is evident from the research done and based on the interactions at the field sites that a lack of spatial proximity did not undermine the depth of the liturgical encounters. However, the concept of simultaneity as Berger (2017) uses it is problematic when applied to the context of this thesis. In most of the examples [155] appearing Berger's work (2017: 23,33,34,35,76) a formal approach is taken to the formation of liturgical expression in cyberspace. In other words, Berger approaches cyber ritual and liturgical expression in cyberspace from the perspective of organised liturgical events in many of the examples used.

In the context of this thesis simultaneity cannot be claimed for any of the observations made during the field research. During the period of observation there were no instances where the researcher could confidently identify simultaneous interaction with a post. There were many cases where one could *assume* simultaneity, such as with the launch of the fifth field site (on the death of Chester Bennington) as hundreds of thousands of posts were made daily. Assumptions, though, are not sufficient grounds to claim simultaneity.

It is evident from the preceding discussion that the lack of spatial proximity (which relates closely with the lack of a physical body) is one of the defining

---

[155] Descriptions of the examples include:
Page 23: Hypothetical case of a patient with dementia participating in a televised mass;
Page 33: Various examples of chatrooms and other devotional practices;
Page 34: Church of Fools service;
Page 35: St. Bonifatius, an internet church and the Divine Office prayer app;
Page 76: YouTube baptism.

features of space in cyberspace as observed in this research. In keeping with the theme of boundedness, the absence of spatial proximity is part of the boundedness of space in cyberspace, and therefore reveals something of its essence that can be used to understand the phenomenon. To conclude this section, a note from Berger (2017: 40):

> Ultimately it is God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who "makes" the Church – and thus also is the primary, constitutive dynamic in liturgy. This is not theological news of course, but ecclesiological basics. Yet these foundational convictions serve surprisingly well in the digital age if we but allow them to enter into conversation with contemporary realities.

4.3.1.4 Public space

Sumiala (2013: 60) makes the critical statement that it is not only important to understand how social community in and via the media is imagined, but also to understand the space where these communities are created. The space in question is cyberspace and its facet as a public space is the area of boundedness discussed in this section.

Sumiala (2013) primarily works on media and ritual, and although this work forms part of the *Media, Religion and Culture* series edited by Hoover, Mitchell and Morgan, she doesn't devote much attention to the religious elements. Her emphasis on imaginative communities and symbolic thresholds, however does resonate with the second space (imaginative space) as discussed earlier from the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014). With this in mind, the boundedness of public space is discussed.

The nature of the space is introduced (in very general terms) as the "material-symbolic thresholds that connect different scales of spatialities" (Sumiala 2013: 60). From this introduction, the relation between the corporeal and the virtual becomes evident, and without using the same terminology, she affirms the idea of interference as discussed earlier from the work of Post and van der Beek (2016). She says that symbolic or virtual expression usually takes place at

public sites. This thesis made an explicit choice to view and use Facebook as public space,[156] and consequently the field research was done in public spaces, i.e. in ritual liturgical spaces that were not private. In the corporeal dimension what happens between the walls of your home belongs to the private domain. The same could be said for any gathering that is not open to the public such as cremation service for only close family members, or a private funeral at a place that the deceased held dear. Once these experiences are taken into cyberspace, it becomes more difficult to define them as purely private in nature. The notion of the blurring of private and public space is also echoed in the work of Lovheim (2013: 52) and Post and van der Beek (2016: 83).

Sumiala (2013: 61) refers to the emergence of the 'media audience' as the phenomenon that comes into existence when the relation between the narrator and the receiver becomes mediated by technology. Although she doesn't mention it explicitly, the idea of a media audience or a receiver is inherently passive. In other words, media audiences as used in the work of Sumiala (2013) implies passive receivers of information, [157] where the 'media audiences' observed in this research were participating either with the narrator or the narrative. With this distinction in mind, the point is still that the narrator and audience/participant relation create a public space. Public space is still a vague indicator of boundedness and therefore some attributes of public space as observed in the field research are discussed briefly.

Public space as observed during the field research for this thesis, grants the public access to emotional and personal expressions that would otherwise not be accessible.

This idea from the work of Post and van der Beek (2016: 83-84) is at the heart of ritual liturgical interaction in cyberspace in the context of this research. Private and intimate narratives are brought into cyberspace and so become

---

[156] See Chapter 2 section 2.1.2.7.5
[157] This line of thought is shared in the work of Consoli (2014: 119-137), where the work of Habermas is discussed as the influence of mass media leading to a "public sphere of receptivity" (Consoli 2014: 119).

public as hundreds and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people gain access to these narratives. In a certain sense cyberspace as public space forces participants to relinquish absolute control over their narratives, as their narrative is formed and interacted with by the community. There are many examples of this from the field research but one will suffice to illustrate the point. In this example (Image 4.1) a participant chooses to share his/her own narrative of depression and mental health struggles and post it to the #ripchester website, where thousands of other participants can view and interact with the post. By doing this, the participant's own narrative becomes part of the ritualised narrative at the field site, and therefore encodes the storied body of the participant through the channelling of his/her own emotions and the interactions from the public.
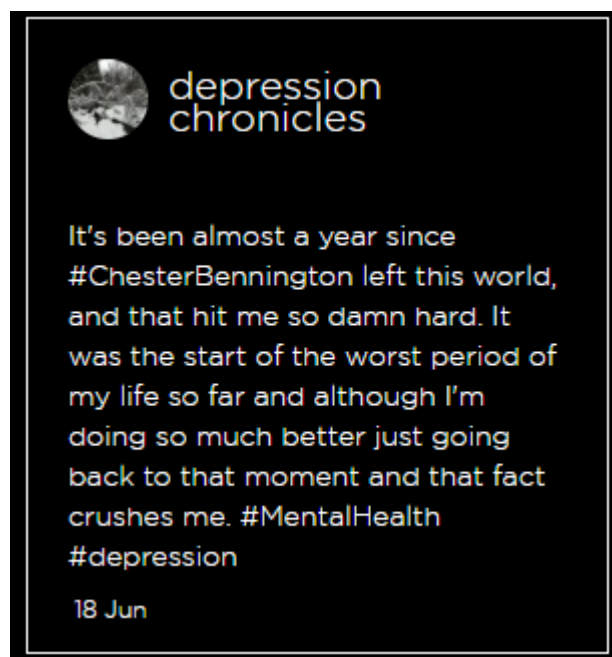
Image 4.1

Public space as observed during the field research for this thesis, provides a point of convergence for persons experiencing a phase of liminality, to connect with others and form liminal communities.

Liminality is a core concept in this thesis and also a core concept in understanding the public aspect of space in cyberspace. From the work of

Turner (2008[1969]) we know that liminality is a fundamental part of rites of passage and the death of person close to the participant (for whatever reason) initiates the process of liminality. In corporeal spaces the possibility is greater to keep one's own liminal journey a private matter, but when these narratives are taken into cyberspace through our embodied codes, they are visible to the public. This is an important aspect of space as it relates to cyberspace as this space is liminal in its very nature. Therefore, participants who are currently experiencing liminality find these spaces easy to integrate with by virtue of their very nature. As these spaces are public and easily accessible for the most part, individuals gravitate toward them and liminal communities are formed.

As observed during the field research, these liminal communities change over time as participants complete their journeys of liminality or migrate to other liminal communities. The nature of the space also enables new participants to enter the liminal community, participants who were not necessarily part of the initial group of people that formed the community. An example of this can be seen at the fourth field site. At this stage the posts at the field site have dramatically declined in number since the death of the profile owner. During the initial posts at the field site the parents of the deceased did not post much and participated in the ritual liturgical narratives through Likes or comments or simply (one can only assume) by browsing what was being remembered about their son. As the form of the liminal community changed and members participated in or left the community, the parents started to bring their personal narratives into the public space and this only serves to emphasise the fact that space in cyberspace as studied in this thesis has liminality at its centre.

To our dearest Son, May you know how loved you were, and how much you still are loved! We know your Christmas up in Heaven will be the most wonderful of Christmases! Until we meet again in the Heavens please know our hearts yearn for you. God bless you dear one.
Dad and MomII

Like   Comment
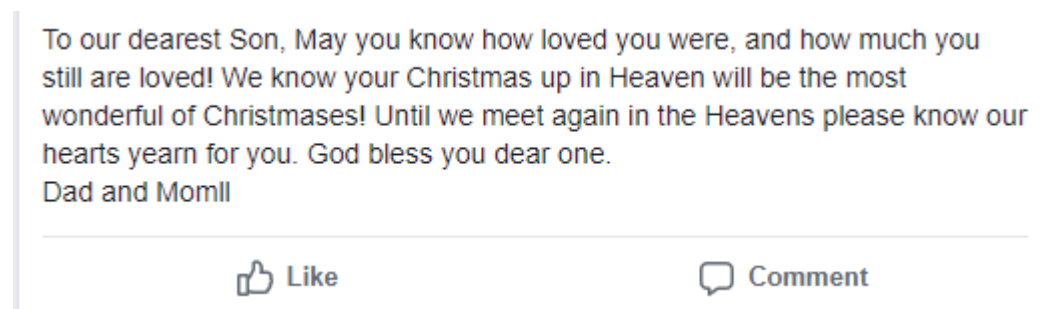
Image 4.2

Public space as observed during the field research for this thesis is an authentic space of human expression and its effects are not confined just to the virtual.

This aspect was discussed earlier from the work of Post and van der Beek (2016) and their categories of physical, virtual and interference. During this discussion[158] the focus was on the way in which the corporeal and the virtual dimensions relate to each other, although it was mentioned that expression in cyberspace is indeed authentic. The expressions observed in this research were authentic narrative reconstructions of experiences participants had in the corporeal dimension. The debate on the authenticity of expression and interaction in cyberspace is not a new one, but it would seem as if the position of the virtual has received much needed attention from modern scholarly commentators. Berger (2017: 16) is straight forward in her understanding of the underlying distinction between virtual and real and states: "digital worlds are un-real while offline worlds are real. The distinction, however, is both inadequate and outdated." Berger is not alone in recognising the importance of the virtual in the modern human being's life; the works of others such as Radde-Antweiler (2016), Scott (2015), Campbell and Grieve (2014), Geraci (2014), Haverinen (2014), Heidbrink, Miczek and Radde-Antweiler (2011), Grieve (2010), to name but a few, are also rooted in the understanding that cyberspace is a real and authentic space of human expression.

The public aspect of cyberspace does therefore not dilute the ritual liturgical expression to a mere performance in front of an audience, but potentially carries the same weight as a liturgical ritual in the corporeal dimension. Santino (2004: 356) discusses three senses of the term "public":
- done before an audience;
- performed in institutionalised contexts for people unfamiliar with the tradition;

---

158 See Chapter Four, 4.2.1.

- set out before a spectatorship whose make-up is fluid and unpredictable.

The nature of public space observed in the field research challenges these ideas put forward in the work of Santino. It would seem (apart from the third option depending on one's interpretation thereof) that the public space does not necessarily engage the audience actively. The research done in this thesis indicates that the public nature of cyberspace actively engages the audience to become participants in the performance/narrative/expression observed. This does not imply that every person in the virtual audience should or does participate, but it is evident that they do have the choice to do should they want to.

Therefore, it can be concluded that human expression in the public nature of cyberspace is first and foremost real and authentic, and secondly, invites the public to participate and share in the space. Two examples from the field research are given below to illustrate both options discussed above. In the first example (Image 4.3) we find an authentic and real human expression, one where the participant expresses how much she misses the deceased. This post had no community interactions, in other words no Likes, shares or comments, but was viewed by 114 people who had the choice to participate but did not. The second example (Image 4.4) illustrates the second option. Again, we find authentic human expression, but in this case various "audience members", from the public nature of the post, made the choice to participate. Both are authentic human expressions, both invited the audience to participate and both had real implications, whether they had active participants or not.

missing you so much.

❤️

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

✔ Seen by 114

Image 4.3

February 17, 2016 · 🌐

As a father, I am naturally inclined to protect, but then the opponent death presented itself uninvited. It revealed how incompetent I am, it forced me to my knees in submission. My dear son was so small, vulnerable, scared, dependent and yet I could not do a single thing to stop death from taking his life one day before his 1st birthday. How will I ever forgive myself for not having the ability to protect him. To death I want to say this: Yes, you are a force to be reckoned with; you demand respect and will not be dictated to by mortals. But know this, you have underestimated the bond I have with my son and the love I have for him that is and remains unconditional. With all due respect, you will not have the final say...

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

👍 29

View 1 more comment

Indeed.
Like · Reply · 2y

Amen!!!!
Like · Reply · 2y

Amen   Death is overcome
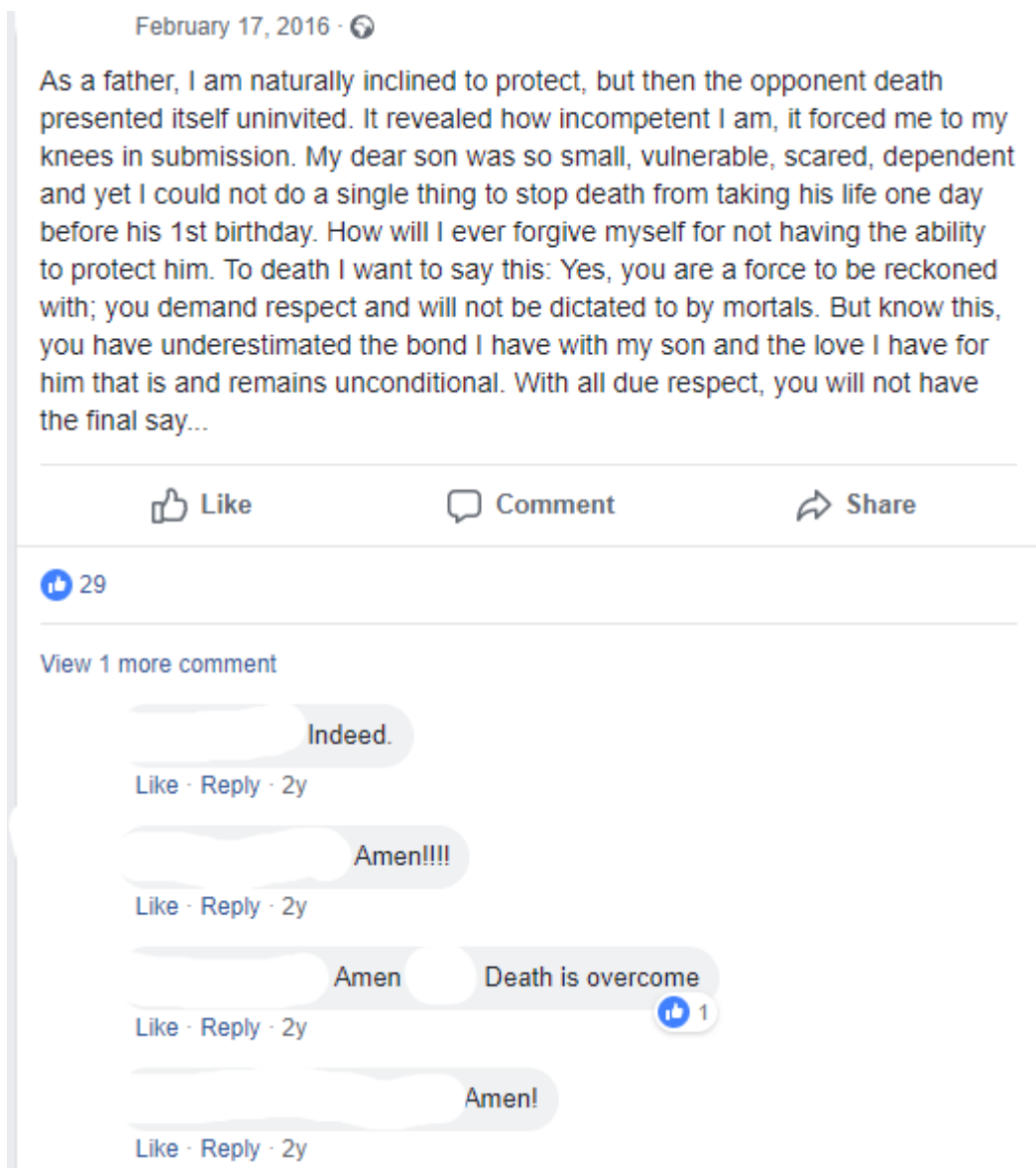👍 1
Like · Reply · 2y

Amen!
Like · Reply · 2y

Image 4.4

Public space as observed during the field research done for this thesis, was in many cases framed as sacred space.

Before the discussion on the sacred nature of space in cyberspace, the way in which the concept of sacred is understood needs to be clarified. The concept of sacred as understood in this thesis is closely related to the way in which space is presented in the work of Post and van der Beek (2016: 101-103). The concept of setting apart plays a prominent role in this way of understanding the sacred, and this "setting apart" is reflected in four sub-domains (Post & van der Beek 2016: 101). These sub-domains include the personally sacred and civil sacred sub-domains that reflect the natural dimension, and the religious sacred and spiritually sacred domains that reflect the dimension of the supernatural. As Post and van der Beek (2016: 101) note, this matrix (based on the work of Mathew Evans) allows the sacred to be understood in an open and broad fashion.

To further explore the concept of space as sacred space the statement by Post and van der Beek (2016: 102) is helpful: "The place is maintained and made sacred by a moral community". The sacred nature of space as studied in this thesis is reflected in this statement. Space as observed at the field sites had no inherent character apart from being fluid. The spaces at the field sites were constructed by the community and it was the community that maintained the sacred nature of the space once it was established. The second field site is a good example of the constructive power of the community. The last post that the deceased made was a metaphorical and humorous post regarding a romantic pursuit, and therefore the nature of the space was light-hearted and quirky. As soon as news of the death of the profile owner reached his family and friends and they started posting to his page, the nature of the space changed dramatically. Shortly after the first posts were made, the nature of space started to change into a space of commemoration and remembrance, but also of sorrow and mourning. One could argue that (broadly speaking) this is already a sacred space at this point based on the matrix discussed earlier.

Post and van der Beek (2016: 103) reference the work of Lefebvre[159] in saying that practices have nothing intrinsically sacred; they are transformed in a ritual process to become sacred practices. The same can be said of space; space is transformed into sacred space based on the human interactions related to the space. Sacred space is space that is set apart by a community based on their practices.

As the private expressions of the participants entered the public space of cyberspace, these expressions in many cases transformed the space into a sacred space. The space does not lose its public nature in this process, but an underlying set of rules and bounds is implied for those who wish to participate. For the most part this statement held true, especially on the pages of the deceased where participants engaged in activities of mourning and remembering. The interactions of the participants gave form to the space, and therefore the nature of the participation reflected the form of the space.

This was especially evident in the cases where posts were made in ignorance of the ritual nature of the space. Examples would include birthday wishes to the deceased that are oblivious to the fact that the recipient is indeed deceased; advertisements and invitations to events, to name but a few. When these posts were made, they stood out from the rest of the space as they did not fit. With the third field site the nature of the space was even more fluid in its transformations. As this site belonged to a living person, the nature of the space could not adhere only to the form of a sacred and ritual space. The owner of the page still made posts about work, life and hobbies and therefore the space transformed with each of these iterations. Narrative played a crucial

[159] Lefebvre, H., 1992[1974], *The Production of Space*, translated by D. Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, Malden.

role in the process of transformation and demarcation, but this aspect is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Post and van der Beek (2016: 104-114)[160] discuss the issue of "sacred zones" in cyberspace;[161] they identify (2016: 109) four zones that can be found in cyberspace:

- Religious sites;
- Communities;
- Art and culture;
- Leisure culture.

They note that a certain aspect of "setting apart" (Post & van der Beek 2016: 109) can be identified in the very design of these zones. Specific mention is made to the "portal" or "entry page"[162] as a distinguishing point of the zone. This observation by Post and van der Beek (2016: 109) is certainly accurate for some iterations of space in cyberspace, but is not as accurate when it comes to social media. On the one hand, websites[163] such as gratefulness.org, thecenterforhealingarts.com, 247candle.com, thesundaymass.org, catholictv.org and heartofthenation.org are examples of the nature of the space being "set apart" by the landing page. Social media, on the other hand, do not set themselves apart in any way except as a platform for social interaction. Sacred space as part of the public boundedness of cyberspace can be regarded like a piece of clay. In some cases, the clay is already sculpted into something and that something defines its character (such as a cyber cemetery in the form of a website). In other cases, such as with social media and the cases studied in this thesis, the clay

---

[160] Post and van der Beek (2016: 108) note that their thinking on sacred zones in cyberspace is preliminary and intuitive in nature.

[161] Post and van der Beek (2016: 109) divide what is described in this thesis as cyberspace into four parts: cyberspace, games, internet sites and social media.

[162] This is also called a "landing page" and generally refers to the first page (or screen) that one sees when visiting a website or opening an application.

[163] https://gratefulness.org/light-a-candle/ (accessed June 2018)

http://thecenterforhealingarts.com/light-a-candle/ (accessed June 2018)

https://www.247candle.com/christianity (accessed June 2018)

https://thesundaymass.org/ (accessed June 2018)

http://www.catholictv.org/masses/catholictv-mass (accessed June 2018)

https://www.heartofthenation.org/online-mass/sunday-mass (accessed June 2018)

is sculpted by the community and therefore the community defines the nature of the space.

This distinction contributes towards exploring the space of cyberspace, but essentially the point still is that the public boundedness of cyberspace allows for the expression of the space as sacred space.

To conclude the discussion on the public boundedness of cyberspace as is evident from the data of this research, it can be said that *cyberspace is an authentic place of convergence for individuals experiencing liminality, where communities are formed in the public sharing of their experiences that shapes the space to serve the participants' needs.*

4.3.1.4 Authenticity

The third aspect of the boundedness of ritual liturgical space in cyberspace is the limit of authenticity. In the previous section (4.3.1.3) it was stated that cyberspace as public space is an authentic space of human expression. In this section the potential for authentic ritual liturgical interaction is discussed.

Helland (2013: 29) briefly refers back to the rise of the internet and the technology associated with it in saying that online ritual activity at that time was limited to text-based interactions. This does not only hold true for ritual activity, but online activity in general was restricted to text-based interaction at the time. Helland notes that early online ritual activity was adapted by religiously enthusiastic people, so the rituals could be performed online. The result of this was dismissal from the academics of time as being more a "game" than a real form of religious engagement.[164]

As Helland (2013: 29) notes, O'Leary was one of the first scholars to view cyberspace as an authentic space of expression and was open to the

---

[164] While not a religious context, the researcher took part in some of the first online gaming communities. The community in question was Ultima Online, an online roleplaying game set in

evolution of new spaces for ritual liturgical expression. O'Leary (1996: 793) states that:

> As ancient religious formulae are translated into contemporary idioms, their meaning will be profoundly altered along with the mode of their reception. The old symbols will find new functional equivalences in the idioms of technological culture, and some of these will be unrecognisable to today's audiences. We must anticipate that the propositional content and presentational form of religion in the electronic communities of the future will differ greatly from its contemporary incarnations as the teaching of Jesus differ from the dialectical theology of the medieval Scholastics or as the eucharistic ceremonies of the earliest Christians differ from the Latin High Mass. With the perspective afforded by an Ongian view of communication and culture, we can be sensitive to true novelty while at the same time retaining awareness of the continuity of tradition, of the manifold ways in which it adapts, mutates, and survives to prosper in a new communicative environment.

Drawing upon O'Leary's insight, a theme of reproduction is identified. The reproduction of rituals in cyberspace is not a new phenomenon and can frequently be observed on the internet. They do, however, differ in the form in which they are presented online. Some are formalised and attempt to be accurate reproductions of offline ritual practice. Such an example is found in the work of Duteil-Ogata (2015), where the cyber cemetery *Cyberstone*[165] is discussed. Cyberstone is a cyber cemetery that is set apart as a ritual space via a landing page that prompts participants to enter a username and a password. Without these details the cyber cemetery is not accessible. Duteil-Ogata (2015: 20) reports that users may add certain elements to a gravesite in the cyber cemetery and these sites usually reflect practices that people reproduce from the corporeal dimension. These include the use of candles,

---

a fantasy world of heroes, monsters and other fantastical beasts. The researcher played this game between 1998-2002 and, as Helland (2016: 29) notes, interaction with other players was limited to text. Despite the fact that interaction was limited to text, the researcher met two other players and played together as a group for a few months. In the light of the authenticity argument, this "virtual" friendship should have had no effect in the "real" life back in the corporeal dimension. The opposite in fact occurred in that the researcher had occasional contact with the other two players for almost 15 years after they played together.
[165] http://www.cyber-stone.jp/HP/about.html (accessed April 2018)

music that the deceased liked, images and text that represent the deceased, and many other ritual practices that one would find in a funeral service.

However, this is not the only modality of reproduction to be found in cyberspace, and this thesis argues that such specifically set apart spaces are in the minority. In the context of the network society and with liminality in mind, spontaneous ritual expression is commonly found in cyberspace. If a broad view is taken of ritual expression in cyberspace, these expressions can be found in a wide variety of spaces. These spaces include but are not limited to digital games, social media and chat applications. Digital games and social media are two of the most popular spaces emerging as ritual spaces. The popular massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft has been the object of many studies of religion and ritual, and has time and again proven to be an authentic space of ritual expression and performance.[166] Flowing from the game itself a guild[167] was formed known as the Christian Expeditionary Force, a guild for Christian players who state about themselves:

> We're often asked, "Are you for real?" The answers is an emphatic, "YES!" We are a group of Christians who like to play video games together. As Christians, we want our time spent in a way that honors God. We don't want to have to worry about what we're going to see in chat or whether we'll be mocked if we ask for prayer. Discipleship is our calling.

Earlier it was established that cyberspace is an authentic space for human expression, but is it an authentic space for ritual liturgical expression and performance? This thesis argues that it is indeed a space that offers the possibility of authentic ritual liturgical interaction. The guild mentioned above includes a forum on their website[168] that offers players a platform to either give "praise reports", make prayer requests or participate in Bible study. They

---

[166] See Matthee (2015), Geraci (2014), Gregory (2014), Vallikatt (2014), Chen (2011).
[167] 'Guild' is the term used to describe a group of players playing the game together (in the case of World of Warcraft). The terms 'guild' and 'clan' are used interchangeably, although 'guild' is more often used in role-playing games, while 'clans' are used in strategy and shooter types of games.
[168] http://christianforce.net/mb/ (accessed June 2018)

recently migrated to a new website and the posts were erased in the process, but they do report a total of 13 459 posts made on the website with almost 500 members contributing.

This example of the possibility of authentic ritual liturgical experiences in cyberspace is from the dimension of gaming, but the same could be identified at the field sites studied in this thesis. This is not to say that *every* post made on Facebook is a ritual liturgical expression; what is meant is that space as understood in this thesis has the inherent possibility of facilitating authentic ritual liturgical expression and experience. Two examples are shared from the field research to illustrate the point. In the first example (Image 4.5) authentic ritual liturgical interaction and expression are observed (as is evident from the texts used and based on what could be observed at the site). The nature of the post set the space apart for the community to interact in a ritual liturgical manner. The same cannot be said of the second example (Image 4.6). Although the field site had a ritual liturgical nature based on the interaction at the site the previous couple of years, this post was not of ritual liturgical nature.

Image 4.5

September 13, 2016 ·

Tired of cleaning and constantly maintaining your car, truck, horsebox, portable toilets/ public toilets, and machinery? Had enough of dealing with dirt and grime? Are you ready to consider a mind blowing nanotechnology alternative. Something that is
Anti-wetting
Anti-corrosion
Anti-contamination
Anti-icing and
Self-cleaning

Here is a revolutionary solution that will repel most liquids and oils.
      uses proprietary nanotechnology to coat and object and create a barrier of air on its surface. This barrier repels water, refined oil, wet concrete, and other liquids unlike any other coating.

This product vasty improves adhesion and abrasion resistance allowing it to be used in applications where greater durability is required.

Image 4.6

This section can be concluded by saying that space in cyberspace is a space of possibility[169] and this possibility includes the possibility for authentic ritual liturgical expression, interaction and performance. This statement is supported- in- and- supports the work of Post and van der Beek (2016: 100), although from a perspective of sacred space, in confirming the reality of various levels of reproduction of authentic sacred spaces in cyberspace (and by extension the ritual liturgical expression that accompanies these spaces).

4.3.1.5 Virtual worlds

The fourth aspect of boundedness of space in cyberspace (virtual worlds) has the most explorative nature of all the aspects identified in this chapter and relates to spaces in cyberspace as virtual worlds. Up until this point the experiences, theories and philosophies of the corporeal dimension have been projected onto cyberspace in order to understand the nature of the space. This is an important process for any exploration and study of a new or emerging space, and has been done many times to explore various aspects of cyberspace as is evident from the work of Berger (2017), Bosman (2016),

---

[169] Possibility is in a certain sense also anticipation, to refer back to the work of Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014).

Nuenen and van der Beek (2016), Saucerman and Ramirez (2016), Scott (2016), Drover (2015), Matthee (2015), Obadia (2015), Geraci (2014), Spadaro (2012), to name but a few.

There are well-known theories and philosophies to aid in identifying parallels between the corporeal dimension and cyberspace. Once a parallel has been identified, it provides a basis for further theorising to help understand the space that is being explored. The study of cyber cemeteries is an example of this type of inquiry. The current knowledge of funeral practice and physical cemeteries is transported into cyberspace in order to explore a new space and how these elements may find form in this space. As certain elements start to find expression in cyberspace, this provides researchers with a basis to study the phenomenon. The expressions found in the spaces also evolve as they are explored and therefore the possibility of new expression in these spaces is constantly coming to the fore. This is evident in the evolution of the concept of the cyber cemetery. Initially cyber cemeteries were literally physical cemeteries [170] reproduced in cyberspace and therefore symbolic reconstructions of headstones, family tombs and even candles and flowers. According to the observations made in this thesis, cyber cemeteries have evolved to better represent the space of cyberspace in being more fluid, flexible and spontaneous. This is evident in spaces such as Facebook, where cyber cemeteries have lost a lot of the physical attributes such as headstones and coffins but kept the essentials of the space such as a space of mourning, remembrance and in some cases healing. This serves to illustrate the point of virtual worlds as understood in the work of Geraci (2014: 1)

> Virtual worlds, however, go well beyond what can be produced through webpages, and they are an important part of our religious landscape now. They make way for new religious opportunities: they allow us new ways of expressing old religious practices and beliefs, but they also offer new ways of circumventing those traditions.

In the quest to understand space in cyberspace researchers tend to limit themselves to corporeal concepts and the potential of these concepts to reveal

---

[170] http://www.ripcemetery.com/#functionsPage (accessed June 2018)

the fullness of cyberspace. This thesis argues that while there are many parallels between the two dimensions and the spaces they represent, both are fundamentally different from each other. Therefore, theories rooted in the corporeal dimension will not necessarily reveal the fullness of cyberspace. Cyberspace is a human creation, but its possibilities cannot yet be fully conceived even by its own creators, and just as the physical universe holds depths that are unexplored, so cyberspace as a virtual world reflects the same reality.

Therefore, one of the aspects of the boundedness of cyberspace is its character as a virtual world, and therefore this limits space in such a way that new theories must be developed which are based on what can be observed in cyberspace in order to study these spaces in their fullness.

This concludes the discussion on the boundedness of cyberspace as guided by the concepts of spatial proximity, public space, authenticity (ritual place) and virtual worlds. The concept of narrative space is now applied in the context of the boundedness of cyberspace.

4.3.2 Narrative construction

This section puts forward the argument that space in cyberspace as observed in this thesis is narratively constructed. Firstly, the potential of narratively constructed space is discussed, and secondly the concept itself is critically evaluated.

4.3.2.1 The potential for a narrative construction of space in cyberspace

As with the previous section on storied bodies, narrative did not only play a role in the construction of the self (the body) in cyberspace but also in the construction of the space where the self or identity of the participant is expressed. Referring to the boundedness of space in cyberspace, it was

established earlier that cyberspace is bound as a virtual world, governed by its own set of rules and potentials that have not yet been fully comprehended and explored. Therefore, the construction of space does not follow conventional methods evident in the fact that there are no physical boundaries that one can observe to delineate the space at hand. In the light of this fact, lenses such as narrative are used to explore the way in which space in cyberspace is created or revealed.

The first observation based on the theory discussed above and the data from the field research is that spaces in cyberspace are revealed as nodes rather than blocks. The concept of nodes has already been discussed earlier in this thesis and it comes to fore again here. The concept of nodes and blocks can be understood as explained below:

- Corporeal space is understood as being the block in this case; therefore a block refers to a specifically delineated space. A church building is a good example of a block as the notion is used in this section. The building itself is set apart on the basis of its physical boundaries (a block is used to explain the concept; it does not necessarily imply anything about shape or architecture) and these physical boundaries define a space. The block (space) of the church building may contain many other blocks (spaces) such as a coffee area, an altar, the pews and so forth. These blocks define certain spaces inside of the space of the church building itself. As is evident from the context of, for example, the Old Church in Amsterdam,[171] these blocks can also be shifted to set space apart for different things such as liturgical ritual, tourist attractions or art exhibitions.

- In the context of the corporeal dimension one can point to a space and say that "this is the coffee area", for instance. We can therefore observe the blocks and articulate the space they create. To use language borrowed from the world of 3D animation and modelling, the blocks we

---

[171] The researcher attended a Reformed church service in the Old Church in Amsterdam (April 2018). An art exhibition was set on hold to create space for a Sunday morning service and then the liturgical space was adapted to once again reflect the space of the art exhibition.

observe in the corporeal dimension consists of vertices,[172] edges[173] and faces,[174] and therefore we can observe them.

- Cyberspace, according to the findings in this research, is the node, which refers to a point in space. The difference between a block and a node is immediately evident, as a node (point in space or vertex) cannot be observed in the corporeal dimension, but in cyberspace it serves as the very foundation of our understanding the construction of space. Taking Facebook as an example, one can visualise the creation of one's profile as the first node defining the space. Every post, Like, comment or share adds nodes to the space. A practical example might be a person with an interest in vehicles; they will post about vehicles, Like vehicle-related pages and posts, share vehicle-related posts and comment on a variety of vehicle-related interactions. These nodes are connected and together they construct the Facebook page of the person in question as a space for vehicle enthusiasts. Because of the nature of the space these nodes can co-exist with other nodes, for instance if the person is celebrating their birthday, nodes are created which construct the page as a space of celebration.

Diagram 4.3 is a visual representation of the discussion above.

---

[172] A vertex is simply a mathematical point in space. One vertex alone cannot constitute an observable object (in the corporeal dimension). Vertices are multiple points in space; generally they form the anchors for the edges of an object. A 2D triangle consists of three vertices (one on each corner).

[173] An edge is a line between two vertices; therefore edges are required for vertices to be observable as part of an object. A 2D triangle consists of three edges connecting the three vertices to each other.

[174] A face is the space that is delineated by the vertices and edges that are connected. A 2D triangle consists of one face, the area in between the edges and corners.

Space in the corporeal dimension

Church Building

Coffee space

Concert ticket booth

Admin office

Liturgical space

Stage

Church Building

Space in cyberspace

Vehicles ○
Birthday/celebration ☆
Sacred/religious △
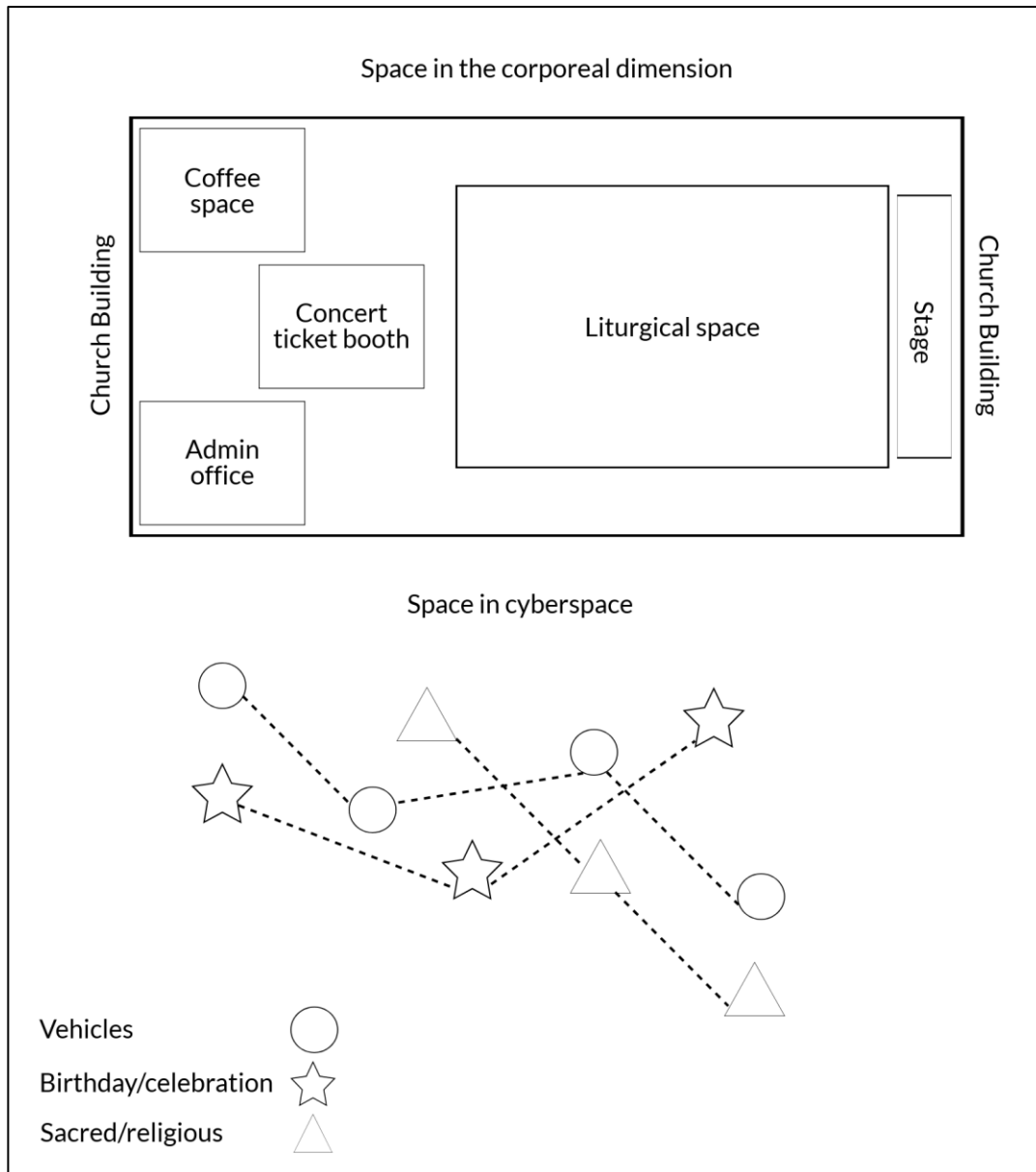
Diagram 4.3

Extending from this first aspect of the narrative construction of space and the distinction between "blocks" and "nodes", the second aspect relates to the nature of the network and the role nodes play in this.

In cyberspace space is created through the connectedness of nodes. These nodes are connected by means of the narratives that constitute them. Diagram 4.3 is useful to convey this concept in showing how nodes are connected and, in their connectedness, they assign boundaries. To use examples from the field research, the fourth field site, the case of a friends sudden passing, illustrates

the potential of the creation of space through narratives. Initially posts at the site all had mourning and remembering in their narratives and this shaped the ritual space. After the initial posts and before the physical funeral service, a participant posted a narrative explicitly celebrating the life of the deceased accompanied by a photo of the participant and the deceased at a party. This narrative was the first node in a more nuanced expression of mourning at the site. After the narrative had been posted and the participant called upon the other participants to share in the celebration of the life of the deceased, posts generally had the character of celebration and remembering good times with the deceased. A space of celebration was created by means of the nodes and the narratives that constitute them. The space kept evolving over time and, with birthdays or Christmas time, the narratives shaped the nature of the space; some birthdays were remembered by narratives of celebration and others by narratives of intense missing of the deceased and longing.

A second example of the creation of space through the narrative nodes in cyberspace is observed at the third field site, the case of a grieving father. At this field site the nature of the narratives differed from the others as the owner of the page was not deceased. The narrative nodes of the father created the space for participants to connect their narratives to his mourning. In many cases the father would explicitly mention how he misses his son and accompany this with a story from the time they had together. Based on the space created by his narrative, the comments would be filled with stories of participants who had also lost children and they would either convey their own narratives of mourning or narratives of hope and support. In other cases, the father would post narratives remembering and celebrating the life of his son. In one such case the father chose to dedicate a certain day of each month to his son, and this was met with hundreds of other narratives celebrating and remembering with him. At this field site the evolution of space was observed most clearly. The initial space created was one of intense, existential mourning. As time passed, the nature of the space evolved from intense mourning, and reflecting other narratives of mourning, into a space of acceptance and was reflected in

narratives that supported the acceptance, and eventually into a space of healing and victory that was again reflected in narratives of support and joy.

These examples are two of many narratives that were observed at the field sites. Given the potential of narratives to create space, they also dictate the nature of that space. Not all narratives create space for ritual liturgical interaction; some even explicitly exclude these kinds of narratives from the space.

In the light of the discussion on space in cyberspace it is evident that in the case of this thesis, studying ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace through examining the nature of cyber cemeteries, the narratives posted at the field sites ascribed form, function and authenticity to the space. The space was delineated and set apart by means of the narratives; these narratives are represented as nodes and the connections between the nodes serve as the boundaries of the space. In this way the space is conducive to the formation of liminal communities, the expression of grief and mourning, and authentic ritual liturgical expression and interaction.

4.4 A short critique on the concept of narrative

This section evaluates critically the concept of narrative as it is used in this thesis. Much has been said above on the validity and relevance of narrative as offering a lens to observe and understand ritual liturgical interaction in cyberspace. As this study is of an explorative nature, the concept of narrative succeeds as a guiding concept but there are some difficulties associated with it. These critiques are discussed below.

4.4.1 Virtual worlds – infinite possibilities

The most evident weakness of a narrative approach as taken in this thesis is that it doesn't account for a wide variety of contexts. As discussed earlier,

cyberspace is bound as a virtual world and therefore one concept cannot hope to explore the complexities of an entirely new context. The way in which narrative is used in this thesis applies to the undefined spaces in cyberspace and how these spaces find expression in the context of social media and cyber cemeteries. Narrative, while still important, does not figure as prominently in the approach of Berger (2017), for example, when the spaces studied are already set apart as ritual liturgical spaces with the intention of digitally performing a liturgy. This thesis still holds that narrative in the form of storied bodies and narrative space can be used to approach any space in cyberspace, but it will lose its explanatory power more quickly in certain contexts. Academics such as Pehal and Cieslarova (2012: 71), for example, contest the concept of narrative as being able to elicit the dynamics of ritual (2.2.2.3.1) as they state that "The fact is, once people stop attending a certain ritual, once they stop investing their corporeality, the ritual diminishes and dies. Even though this still does not convincingly prove that the dynamics of ritualization are mediated by the corporeality of the ritualists, it clearly shows that the body forms an integral part of ritual action."

4.4.2 Subjectivity of narrative

A narrative is by its very nature a subjective construct. Our own personal narratives are an interpretation of what we believe to be true (or what we wish to convey in the case of a lie) that we express, in the case of this thesis, in cyberspace through a post on a variety of platforms. Our already interpreted narratives are then interpreted by our audience, integrated with their interpreted narratives and, should they choose to do so, the expression of their narratives. There is no denying that narratives are interpreted as is evident from the third field site. The same narrative of the father who lost his son is interpreted by some participants as a process of healing, a sharing of pain, an authentic glimpse into his mourning journey and by other participants as an admission that he is neglecting his other children because of his grief, or not seeking professional help to guide the mourning process.

Narratives are fickle, constructed to reflect an interpreted or wished for reality. Despite their fickle nature, narratives are what we have available in abundance to study ritual liturgical interaction in cyberspace. Whether these narratives reflect truth, lie or perceived truth, they are the vessels that make ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace a possibility for empirical study. Ryan (2013: 31) says:

> the practice of ritual and the creation of imaginary worlds through storytelling are both universal human activities and essential factors in what Roy Rappaport calls "the making of humanity." Both rituals and narrative make us human by building community: ritual coordinates activity into a collaborative event, while narrative requires joint attention to the words of the storyteller. Another aspect of ritual and narrative that explains their cultural importance is captured by a formula often used by psychologists and cognitive narratologists: "Narrative is a way to make sense of the world"

4.4.3 Routine nature of rituals

Nünning and Nünning (2013: 67) mentions that the performance of routine actions is uninteresting from a narrative point of view. These routine actions are generally only of value to narratives when they are new, somehow broken or relate in some way to another issue within the narrative. This may be problematic in a ritual liturgical space, where repetition is central to the nature if ritual.

The repetition of narrative was especially evident at the "case of a grieving father" field site, where the father routinely posted narratives that were very similar in mourning his son. In this case the repetitive nature of the narratives did not seem to be a problem and the participants at the field site kept integrating their own narratives with those of the father. With sites where the owner of the page is deceased, doing so may be problematic. In agreement with the idea of Nünning and Nünning discussed above, narrative does not generally have the character of repetition; therefore it was observed at the field sites that for every instance of repeated narrative, there were one or two elaborate narratives. One can only speculate on the reason for this, but from

213

the observations made in this thesis it would seem that these elaborate narratives were in many cases used to establish the participant as more important than the other participants – "more important" in this case meaning closer to the deceased or hurt more intensely by the loss of the deceased.

While the theory on different levels of narrative is only speculation it is fair criticism to the concept of narrative and ritual in cyberspace.

4.4.4 Conclusion

Based on the field research done for this thesis and supported by the theoretical literature, it can be concluded that ritual and narrative are indeed fruitful partners in exploring ritual liturgical expression and interaction in cyberspace. Based on the ritualisation at the field sites in the form of narratives (including narratives expressed in photos, emojis and other tools offered on the various platforms), it was established that the interplay between ritual and narrative reveals much on especially:

1. The understanding of the body in cyberspace; and
2. Understanding the creation of space in cyberspace.

These are crucial areas of inquiry for ritual liturgical interaction and areas of contention in the network and post-mortal society. Therefore, these areas are also crucial in the context of practical theology and specifically the field of liturgy.

With this in mind, the thesis is concluded in the next section with a summary of the research done up to this point. This is followed by critical reflection on what the findings imply for current and traditional Reformed thanatological praxis and by some suggestions for future research.

5. Conclusion

This final chapter represents the conclusion of the research done. This study followed a systematic route from Chapter One to Chapter Five in exploring liturgical, and by extension ritual liturgical, expression in cyberspace. This was done from the perspective of cyber cemeteries and rooted in the Reformed thanatological tradition.

5.1 Brief overview

The overview below illustrates the way in which the respective chapters and led to this conclusion:

Chapter One

Chapter One served as an introduction to the study, discussing issues that include:

- Why cyberspace is important to liturgical studies;
- The context of this thesis;
- The research question;
- An overview of the contents of this thesis.

Therefore, Chapter One laid the foundation for the rest of the thesis. Methodologically speaking, Chapter One mainly performed the descriptive-empirical task of determining the current ritual liturgical context in cyberspace, while also reflecting on the reality within the DRC, including their literature on the topic as indicator.

Chapter Two

The second chapter continued the descriptive-empirical task by reflecting on the current ritual liturgical context based on the literature from a variety of fields. This study enables the normative and interpretive tasks to be integrated, first to

reflect on why the current ritual liturgical context in cyberspace is reflected in the way that was observed, and secondly to identify what ought to be going on, especially from a ritual liturgical perspective. This chapter also explored the approach of the thesis in its understanding of practical theology and liturgy, and exploring some of the core concepts relevant to this thesis. Following the discussion on practical theology and liturgy, the general theoretical character is explored by the thesis. It is established that the theoretical character of this thesis is focused on a ritual liturgical study in the context of cyberspace, using cyber cemeteries as focal point. The end of Chapter Two set the scene for a discussion on the findings of the field research.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three is the empirical chapter and is focused on presenting and interpreting the findings of the field research. The research was presented systematically, discussing each field site in two phases. The two phases of the discussions served to convey the prominent ritual liturgical interactions at each site and then condense these codes into core concepts. The core concepts were interpreted, and, on the basis of the research data, the concept of narrative was identified as the most prominent concept. The chapter is concluded with a discussion on the concept of narrative and how it was woven into the expressions observed at the field sites.

Chapter Four

In Chapter Four the concept of narrative is further explored to theorise on both body and space in cyberspace as they pertain to the context of ritual liturgical interaction. Chapter Four is primarily a quest to engage the pragmatic task of developing ways of responding to what has previously been established in this thesis. The pragmatic task as interpreted in this thesis does not conclude with a physical model that aims to address current ritual liturgical praxis. To address the pragmatic task, theory is developed which can be used to understand the

current context of ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace. This in turn supports critical reflection on the current thanatological praxis of the DRC.

<u>**Chapter Five**</u>

Reflection on the pragmatic task continues in this final chapter which concludes the research. An overview of the research is provided and the implications of the theory developed in Chapter Four are applied to the context of the DRC and ritual liturgical expression.

5.2 Cyber cemeteries as a challenge to traditional Reformed thanatological liturgical praxis

During the course of this research, the reality of cyber cemeteries has challenged various constructs, theories and beliefs that relate to the sphere of liturgical studies and more specifically the sphere of ritual liturgical studies. Specific emphasis was placed on the understanding of embodiment in cyberspace and the nature of space in cyberspace. These two crucial areas were chosen based upon the data gathered during field research. In addition to exploring the above-mentioned areas of embodiment and space in cyberspace, the research data also pointed toward a narrative understanding of these concepts to make them applicable to the praxis of traditional Reformed thanatological liturgical praxis.

The challenge posed to traditional funeral liturgies as they are to be found in the literature of the DRC can be traced back to one of the first points made in this thesis. Cahalan and Mikoski (2014: 5) mention that practical theology should be open-ended, flexible and porous. This attitude toward doing practical theology is important, especially when the context of liturgical expression is experiencing a dramatic shift. This shift toward cyberspace is simply following the worldwide trend in the 21st century, but it would seem that the boundaries of the thanatological liturgical praxis of the DRC do not allow space for (or does

not know how to allow) this natural movement observed in the cultural shifts of humanity.

The understanding of constructs such as space and embodiment is proving to be detrimental to the evolution of liturgy in the DRC. This does not imply that the current attitude and literature of the DRC actively prohibits such an evolution or migration, but rather that the way in which practical theology is done needs a re-evaluation in the light of the way in which liturgy is understood. Cyberspace and specifically cyber cemeteries themselves are good examples of how fluid boundaries are in the network culture. Participants have the ability to create, construct and reproduce space almost instantly. This is evident from the iterations of cyber cemeteries such as observed on Facebook and the memorial website to Chester Bennington. Liturgical spaces of mourning were constructed in cyberspace and in a relatively short amount of time they evolved from physical reproductions of cemeteries online, to dedicated places of mourning online (not necessarily a reproduction of a cemetery), to spontaneously constructed spaces on Facebook, Instagram etc., to virtual memorials in digital games and most recently liturgical expressions that disappear after 24 hours in the form of a "story" on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

Therefore, the thinking around liturgy and ritual liturgical expression needs to be rooted in paradigms that are open-ended, flexible and porous, otherwise the context of cyberspace will be particularly difficult to traverse. As discussed earlier, there were two concepts that emerged from the research data: embodiment and space. These concepts are indicators of areas in which traditional Reformed liturgy is challenged by the context of cyberspace.

5.2.1 The challenge of embodiment

The first pattern that emerged from the data was that of embodiment. The question was whether cyberspace and ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace prompted any changes to human beings themselves, or not. This was not

tested[175] in terms of interviews and other ethnographic methods, but the theory developed based on the observations made at the field sites would suggest that experiences in cyberspace do indeed have authentic consequences for the people involved. An example from the work of Bell, Bailey and Kennedy (2015: 382) is provided to illustrate the human experience. In this example one of the respondents in their study said the following based on their participation at a Facebook cyber cemetery:

> … something will have happened … and they'll say, 'oh thanks a bunch mate, I bet you're responsible for that!' …. nobody's held back really … because Michael was very truthful. I think a lot of people found that refreshing … and for me that was very much a healing process.

Based on the process developed and discussed in 4.2.2, the importance of experiences in cyberspace as encoding our physical bodies (much like they are culturally encoded) cannot be ignored. Granted the DRC does not have any official cyber rituals or liturgies[176] (excluding services being streamed online), this does not mean that members of the congregations of the DRC do not participate in ritual liturgical activities elsewhere. It is likely that members of the congregations are participants in many cyber rituals without necessarily being aware that this is the case.

This raises the question: how does the traditional Reformed thanatological liturgical repertoire account for participants who have already experienced much that the traditional liturgies offer? As discussed in 4.2.2., the process is akin to a hermeneutic spiral and many of the participants have likely become part of online liminal communities and started to weave their own narratives of grief. What then is the place of the traditional thanatological liturgy in the DRC? This thesis does not argue that the traditional liturgy has lost its place or

---

[175] Although this was not tested in this thesis, Jacobsen (2017), Malone (2016), Bell, Bailey and Kennedy (2015), Coombs (2014), Frost (2014), Haverinen (2014), Carmack and Degroot (2013), Kern, Forman and Gil-Equi (2013), Hourizi, Moncur and Pitsillides (2012), Davies (2010), Krysinska and Andriessen (2010), Calow (2007), Haverinen (2004), Sofka (1997) have conducted research on the experiences of people with regard to cyber cemeteries.
[176] It is necessary to note that the ritual liturgical landscape of the DRC is slowly evolving and the forthcoming liturgical guide *Daar is meer 2* will address many of these emerging contexts such as cyber ritual.

become irrelevant; the reality is simply that the thanatological context has changed to such a degree that traditional approaches do not respond to the struggles of 21st-century citizens.

To conclude, the concept of storied bodies as part of the context of cyber ritual and liturgical expression with regards to death challenges the traditional liturgical concepts of the DRC with regard to funerals, death and mourning in such a way that warrants a re-evaluation of the current position of traditional thanatological liturgical praxis as performed in the DRC.

5.2.2 The challenge of space in cyberspace

The second pattern that emerged from the data was that of space as it pertains to cyberspace. It was found that space was narratively constructed in cyberspace; therefore participants had the ability to construct space based on the narratives they shared. This ability to construct space was observed throughout the research done at the field sites and participants created a wide variety of mourning spaces through their narratives.

It was found that just as corporeal space is bound by certain limits, space in cyberspace is also bound and it is in the boundedness of the space that its nature comes to the fore. Space in cyberspace has the potential to be both a creative space and a transcendental space where authentic experiences are to be had. Therefore, it is possible that space in cyberspace can be sacred and facilitate ritual liturgical expression. Furthermore, it was found that spaces in cyberspace, while having many similarities with corporeal space, are also virtual worlds.

The challenge then to the traditional thanatological liturgical praxis of the DRC is in knowing that members of the various congregations are four-dimensional human beings. This means that they are participants in both corporeal and virtual spaces, and therefore they are formed by and in both of these spaces. The literature of the DRC and the liturgical guidelines, indicates that not much

is made of other spaces than the traditional liturgical spaces. In a post-mortal society these "other" spaces feature prominently in the lived lives of the members of the congregations.

Most modern businesses employ the services of a social media manager or a digital marketing agent with the specific aim of engaging the space of cyberspace. What would the equivalent be in the DRC? Is it necessary to actively engage with the space of cyberspace? These are questions that the reality and authenticity of the space pose to the DRC. The praxis of traditional Reformed liturgy regarding death is also fundamentally challenged as the corporeal church space is not the only space where rituals of mourning are performed. As is evident from the research done for this thesis, cyberspace is a popular space for ritual liturgical expression regarding death and people participate in this space for years after the death of the person being remembered/mourned.

In conclusion, it can be said that the reality of cyber cemeteries and what they reveal about space poses the fundamental question of what 21st-century liturgy is like? The position adopted in this thesis is that with a better understanding of space and how space is constructed in cyberspace, the thanatological liturgical praxis of the DRC can be stimulated to evolve into a praxis that includes the variety of contexts that the 21st century offers.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

This research left many areas unexplored, as they would either have made the study to cumbersome, or they would have blurred the focus of the thesis. Nonetheless, these areas are important areas for study and as such they are worth mentioning for future research:

1. Martin Heidegger's theory of building, dwelling and thinking may hold much value in developing an understanding of the way in which human beings construct space of expression in cyberspace. In this thesis a

narrative approach was taken based on the research data, but Heidegger's theory might prove to allow an even better and more thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

2. Paul Ricœur's mimetic theory may prove valuable in understanding the way in which ritual is reproduced in cyberspace. It was observed during the research process that many of the ritual-liturgical expressions and narratives were rooted in what participants saw and knew from the corporeal dimension. Ricœur's mimetic theory might therefore be able to provide a better understanding of the process of reproduction.

3. Virtual reality and augmented reality are for the most part unexplored areas of ritual liturgical expression. Virtual and augmented reality can be used to recreate a liturgical ritual and the experiences of participants can be recorded as they take part in these simulations. The data gathered from such a process have the potential to advance an understanding of the concept of virtual worlds.

4. Grimes has done much in mapping the dynamics of ritual for the corporeal context. The field is ripe for a similar work in mapping the dynamics of ritual as they pertain to cyberspace.

5. The reality of artificial intelligence and the dawn of chatbots (such as Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa) pose unique challenges to the 21st-century ritual liturgical landscape. Is it possible that artificial intelligence can craft unique and personalised liturgies, especially when it comes to funeral liturgy?

These are but a few suggestions for further research as these themes became apparent in this research.

5.4 Conclusion

In concluding this thesis, it can be said that cyberspace and ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace are indeed areas of immense complexity. Within these complexities lies the opportunity for a new and evolved ritual repertoire, forged in the context of the late 20th century and continued in the 21st-century.

Cyberspace is an important area of inquiry for practical theology and will only increase in importance as the century progresses. With the network society at its centre, people have never been as connected as now. Communities are formed across vast distances with people from a wide variety of cultures and backgrounds.

Through the examination of cyber cemeteries, it is evident that cyberspace is also a space where liminal communities are formed and thrive. The very nature of the space is amenable to the concept of liminality. It is also evident that notions around the understanding of specifically embodiment and space are fundamentally challenged by the reality of cyberspace. The way in which these concepts are challenged raises critical questions about the thanatological liturgical praxis of the DRC.

It is the position of this thesis that Reformed liturgy as illuminated by the literature of the DRC, cannot remain unchanged in the face of the challenges issued by the context of cyberspace. Liturgy will need to embody the value of flexibility and be porous enough to ensure that there is enough space for the multitude of ritual liturgical expressions made possible by the reality of cyberspace.

The aim of this study was to inquire into the ways in which cyber cemeteries and other thanatechnology influences ritual liturgical expression. Within the framework developed by Osmer (2008) and by doing ethnographic research, it was found that Facebook (primarily) and other memorial sites offered much in terms of understanding ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace. It was found that ritual liturgical expression in cyberspace was strongly influenced by the narratives of the individuals in encoding and decoding their bodies as they moved between the dimensions of cyberspace and corporeal space. It was also found that narratives were responsible for the construction of ritual liturgical space, and that the narratives that constituted the space in cyberspace could create a context where the sacred could be experienced.

Cyberspace will remain a valuable area of inquiry into the nature of ritual liturgical expression for the foreseeable future. Not many things in life are certain, but for the time being death is a certainty. Therefore liminal communities of mourners will use cyberspace and its iterations to express their narratives of grief.

6. Bibliography

Abdil-Fadil, M., 2016, 'Conflict and Affect Among Conservative Christians on Facebook', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11, 1-28.

Alcof, L.M., 2005, 'Latino Oppression', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 36(4), 536-545.

Arfman, W.R., 2014, *Ritual dynamics in late modernity: the case of the emerging field of collective commemoration,* Sidestone Press, Leiden.

Austin, J.L., 1975, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edn., Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Bailey, K.D., 1994*, Sociology and the New Systems Theory. Toward a Theoretical Synthesis*, State University of New York Press, Albany.

Bainbridge, W.S., 2017, 'The Virtual Conquest of Death', in M.H. Jacobsen (ed.), *Postmortal Society: Towards A Sociology Of Immortality*, pp. 197-216, Routledge, New York.

Ballantyne, N., Lowe, S. & Beddoe, L., 2017, 'To Post or Not to Post? Perceptions of the Use of a Closed Facebook Group as a Networked Public Space', *Journal of Technology in Human Services* 35(1), 20-37.

Barnard, M., 1998, 'Liturgiewetenschap als discipline', in P, Oskamp & N, Schuman (eds.), *De weg van die liturgie: Tradities, achtergronden, praktijk,* pp. 90-100, Meinema, Zoetermeer.

Barnard, M. & Post, P., 2001, *Ritueel Bestek. Antropologische Kernwoorden van de Liturgie*, Meinema, Zoetermeer.

Barnard, M., 2006, *Liturgie voorbij de liturgische beweging. Over evangelical worship, thomasvieringen, kerkdiensten in migrantenkerken en ritualiteit op het internet*, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer.

Barnard, M., 2010, 'Flows of Worship in the Network Society: Liminality as Heuristic Concept in Practical Theology Beyond Action Theory', *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 44(1), 67-84.

Barnard, M., Cilliers, J.H. & Wepener, C.J., 2014, *Worship in the Network Culture: Liturgical Ritual Studies. Fields and Methods, Concepts and Metaphors,* Liturgia Condenda Vol 28, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Basset, D.J., 2015, 'Who Wants To Live Forever? Living, Dying and Grieving in Our Digital Society', *Social Sciences* 4(4), 1127-1139.
Bell, B., 1997, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Bell, J., Bailey, L. & Kennedy, D., 2015, 'We Do It To Keep Him Alive: Bereaved Individuals' Experiences of Online Suicide Memorials and Continuing Bonds', *Mortality* 20(4), 375-389.

Berg, B.L., 2004, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences,* Pearson, Boston.

Berger, T. (ed.), 2012, *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyberspace*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville.

Berger, T., 2018, *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds*, Routledge, New York. [Kindle version].

Blair, E., 2015, 'A Reflexive Exploration of Two Qualitative Data Coding Techniques', *Journal of Methods and Measurements in the Social Sciences* 6(1), 14-29.

Brennan, M., 2014, *The A-Z of Death and Dying: Social, Medical and Cultural Aspects*, Greenwood, California/Colorado/England.

Bryant, R., 2001, 'What Kind of Space is Cyberspace?', *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 5, 138-155.

Bryant, C.D. & Peck, D.L. (eds), 2009, *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience Volume 1,* SAGE, London.

Boden, M.A., 2016, *AI: Its nature and future*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Böntert, S., 2012, 'Liturgical Migrations into Cyberspace: Theological Reflections', in Teresa Berger (ed), *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper room to Cyberspace,* Liturgical Press, Minnesota.

Bosman, F.G., 2015, 'Review: Cybertheology – Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 99, 125-127.

Bosman, F.G., 2016, 'The Word Has Become Game: Researching Religion in Digital Games', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11, 1-28.

Burkell, J., Fortier, A., Yeung, L., Wong, C. & Simpson, J.L., 2014, 'Facebook: Public Space, or Private Space?', *Information, Communication & Society* 17(8), 974-985.

Cahalan, K.A. & Mikoski, G.S. (eds.), 2014, *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland.

Calow, J., 2007, 'Memoria, Memory, and Commemoration', *Mortality* 12(2), 103-108.

Calvey, D., 2018, 'Chapter 31: Covert: The Fear and Fascination of a Methodological Pariah', in R. Iphofen & M. Tolich (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook*

of Qualitative Research Ethics, SAGE, Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington/Melbourne.

Campbell, H., 2005a, 'Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies', *The information Society: An International Journal* 21(4), 309-315.

Campbell, H., 2005b, 'Spiritualising the Internet. Uncovering Discourses and Narratives of Religious Internet Usage', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1, 72-87.

Campbell, H., 2011, *When Religion Meets New Media*, Routledge, London.

Campbell, H. (ed.), 2012a, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, Routledge, London.

Campbell, H., 2012b, 'Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society'*, Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80(1), 64-93.

Campbell, H. & Lövheim, M., 2013, 'Introduction', *Information, Communication & Society* 14(8), 1083-1096.

Campbell, H. & Grieve, G. (eds.), 2014, *Playing with Religion in Digital Games*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Campbell, E. & Lassiter, L.E., 2014, *Doing Ethnography Today: Theories, Methods, Exercises,* Wiley-Blackwell.

Campbell, H. & Garner, S., 2016, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture,* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.

Cann, C.K., 2014, *Virtual Afterlifes: Grieving the Dead in the Twenty-First Century*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington.

228

Cañuelas, L., 2012, *Virtual Funerals: Mourning Rites in the Cyber Era (Poster),* Undergraduate Research, University of Puerto Rico, accessed 6 April 2016 from
https://www.academia.edu/8628969/Virtual_Funerals_Mourning_Rites_in_the_Cyber_Era_Poster_

Carmack, H.J. & DeGroot, J.C., 2014, 'Exploiting Loss?: Ethical Considerations, Boundaries, and Opportunities for the Study of Death and Grief Online', *OMEGA* 68(4), 315-335.

Casey, A.C., 2006, 'Virtual Ritual, Real Faith: The Revirtualization of Religious Ritual in Cyberspace', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 2(1), 73-90.

Castells, M., 2010, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd edn., Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex.

Cavouti, C. & Smith, A.M., 2014, 'Thanatechnology: Implications for Research, Education, and Practice', *Death Studies* 38(7), 482-484.

Christensen, D.R. & Sandvik, K., 2014, 'Death Ends a Life, Not a Relationship: Objects as Media on Children's Graves.', in Dorthe, R. Christensen & Kjetil Sandvik (eds), *Mediating and Remediating Death: Studies in Death, Materiality and the Origin of Time, Volume 2,* Ashgate, Surrey.

Chryssides, G.D. & Geaves, R., 2014, *The Study of Religion: An Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods second edition,* Bloomsbury, London.

Cilliers, J.H., 2007, *Binne die Kring-Dans van die Kuns: Die Betekenis van Estetika vir die Gereformeerde Liturgie*, African SUN Media, Stellenbosch.

Cilliers, J.H., 2008, 'In die omtrek van die Gees: 'n Besinning oor die ruimtelikheid van liturgie.', *Praktiese Teologie in Suid Afrika* 23(2), 1-21.

Cilliers, J.H., 2010, 'The Liminality of Liturgy', *Scriptura* 104, 343-351.

Cilliers, J.H., 2014, 'A Royal Waste of Time? Perspectives on Liturgy as Space Against Waste', *Scriptura* 113(1), 1-11.

Clasen, F., Bartlett, A., Carstens, C. & Schoeman, F. (eds), 2010, *Handleiding vir die Erediens,* Bybelmedia, Wellington.

Conde-Frazier, E., 2006, 'Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice', *Religious Education* 101(3), 321-329.

Conde-Frazier, E., 2012, 'Participatory Action Research', in Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, pp. 234-244, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Consoli, D., 2014, 'The Network as Global Public Sphere', in G. Chiurazzi, D. Sisto & S. Tinning (eds.), *Philosophical Paths in the Public Sphere*, pp. 119-137, Lit Verlag, Berlin.

Coombs, S., 2014, 'Death Wears a T-shirt – Listening to Young People Talk About Death', *Mortality* 19(3), 284-302.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2008, *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, 3rd edn., Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Cox, G.R, Bendiksen, R & Stevenson, R.G., 2003, *Making Sense of Death: Spiritual, Pastoral and Personal Aspects of Death, Dying and Bereavement,* Baywood Publishing Company.

Creswell, J.W., 2014, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches, 4th Edition,* SAGE, Los Angeles.

Cuneo, T., 2016, *Ritualized Faith: Essays on the Philosophy of Liturgy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Cyberstone., n.d., *Homepage*, available at http://www.cyber-stone.jp/HP/about.html accessed June 2018.

Dambudzo, J., 2012, *The State of Cemeteries in South African Cities,* a report of the South African Local Government Association (pdf), accessed 28 April 2016, from http://salga.org.za/app/webroot/assets/files/Research_Results/State%20of%20Cemeteries%20Report%20-%20March%202013.pdf.

Danbolt, L.J. & Stifoss-Hanssen, H., 2017, 'Ritual and Recovery: Traditions in Disaster Ritualizing', *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 56(4), 352-360.

Davies, C., 2010, 'Technological Taxidermy: Recognisable Faces in Celebrity Deaths', *Mortality* 15(2), 138-153.

Dawson, L.L. & Cowan, D.E. (eds.), 2004, *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, Routledge, London.

Davidson, D (ed.), 2016, *The Tattoo Project: Commemorative Tattoos, Visual Culture, and the Digital Archive*, Canadian Scholars, Toronto.

Dickson-Swift, V., James, E.L., Klippen, S. & Liamputtong, P., 2008, 'Risk to Researchers in Qualitative Research on Sensitive Topics: Issues and Strategies', *Qualitative Health Research* 18(1), 133-144.

Dilnot, C., 2009, 'The decisive text: on beginning to read Heidegger's "Building, Dwelling and Thinking."', pdf. accessed 13 April 2016 from http://www.iau.usp.br/revista_risco/Risco9-pdf/03_ref2_risco9.pdf.

Dobscha, S. (ed.), 2015, *Death in a consumer culture*, Routledge Interpretive Marketing Research, Routledge, London.

Driver, T.F., 1992, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform our Lives and our Communities,* Harper, San Francisco.
Drover, L., 2015, 'The Ahmadiyya in Germany: An Online-Platform as a Multi-Functional Tool', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 9, 45-62.

Dücker, B., 2007, *Rituale. Formen – Funktionen – Geschichte. Eine Ein-führung in die Ritualwissenschaft*, Metzler, Stuttgart.

Durkheim, E., 2001[1915], The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, translated by C. Cosman, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Duteil-Ogata, F., 2015, 'New Funeral Practices in Japan: From the Computer-Tomb to the Online Tomb.', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 8, 11-28.

Du Preez, A., *2009, Gendered Bodies and New Technologies: Rethinking Embodiment in a Cyber-era*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Eubanks, C. & Gauthier, D., 2011, 'The politics of the homeless spirit: Heidegger and Levinas on dwelling and hospitality', *History of Political Thought* 32(1), 125-146.

Eynon, R., Schroeder, R. & Fry, J., 2009, 'New Techniques in Online Research: Challenges for Research Ethics', *21st Century Society* 4(2), 187-199.

Fagerberg, D.W., 2016, 'Liturgical Theology', in A. Reid (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Liturgy*, Bloomsbury, London/Oxford/New York/ New Delhi/Sydney.

Faimau, G. & Behrens, C., 2016, 'Facebook Religion and the Technologization of the Religious Discourse – A Case Study of a Botswana-based Prophetic Church', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11, 66-93.

Fairfield, P., 2015, *Death: A Philosophical Inquiry*, Routledge, New York.
Forman, A., Kern, R. & Gil-Egui, G., 2012, 'Death and Mourning as Sources of Community Participation in Online Social Networks: R.I.P. Pages in Facebook', *First Monday* 17(9).

Frost, M., 2014, 'The Grief Grapevine: Facebook Memorial Pages and Adolescent Bereavement', *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 24(2), 256-265.

Fukushima, M., 2015, 'Corpus Mysticum Digitale (Mystical Body Digital)?: On the Concept of Two Bodies in the Era of Digital Technology', *Mortality* 20(4), 303-318.

Gabel, T.G., 2016, 'Cheating death via social self immortalization: the potential of consumption-laden online memorialization to extend and link selves beyond (physical) death.' in S, Dobscha (ed), *Death in a Consumer Culture,* Routledge Interpretive Marketing Research, Routledge, London.

Gearing, R.E., 2004, 'Bracketing in Research: A Typology', *Qualitative Health Research* 14(10), 1429-1452.

Geldhof, J., 2015, 'Liturgy: From Desacralization to Sanctification in Secular Environments', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 31(1), 117-131.

Geraci, R.M., 2012, *Apocalyptic AI: Visions of Heaven in Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and Virtual Reality*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Geraci, R.M., 2014, *Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in World of Warcraft and Second Life*, Oxford University Press, New York. [Kindle Edition].

Giaxoglou, K., 2014, 'Entextualising Mouring on Facebook: Stories of Grief as Acts of Sharing', *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 21(1-2), 87-105.

Gibson, W., 1984, *Neuromancer,* Ace Books, New York.
Gibson, M., 2015, 'YouTube Bereavement Vlogging: Emotional Exchange Between Strangers', *Journal of Sociology* 52(4), 631-645.

Gibson, A. & Silberman, D.R., 2016, 'Preparing your Online Life for End-of-Life', poster presented at the Association for Death Education and Counselling's 38th Annual Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Gilbert, K.R. & Horsley, G.C., 2011, 'Technology and Grief Support in the Twenty-First Century: A Multimedia Platform.', in Robert, A. Neimeyer, Darcy Harris, Howard Winokuer & Gordon Thornton (eds), *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society: Bridging Research and Practice,* Routledge, New York.

Gildenhuys, T., 2006, *Identifiseer die Leuen*, Groep 7 Drukkers en Uitgewers.

Gildenhuys, T., 2008, *Maak Skoon Jou Huis*, Groep 7 Drukkers en Uitgewers.

Green, J.W., 2008, *Beyond the Good Death: The Anthropology of Modern Dying,* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

Grierson, E.M., 2004, 'From Cemeteries to Cyberspace: Identity and a Globally Technologised Age' accessed 22 April 2016 (pdf) from https://www.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/15813/elizabeth_grierson.pdf.

Grieve, G., 2010, 'Virtually Embodying the Field: Silent Online Meditation, Immersion, and the Cardean Ethnographic Method', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4(1), 35-62.

Grimes, R.L., 1990, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice. Essays on its Theory,* University of South Carolina Press, Columbia.

Grimes, R.L., 2000, *Deeply into the Bone. Re-Inventing Rites of Passage,* University of California Press, London.

Grimes, R.L., 2010, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies, 3rd Edition,* Waterloo, Canada.

Grimes, R.L., 2014, *The Craft of Ritual Studies,* Kindle edition., Oxford University Press, New York.

Goldschmidt, K., 2013, 'Thanatechnology: Eternal Digital Life After Death', *Journal of Pediatric Nursing* 28, 302-304.

Goodfellow, I., Bengio, Y. & Courville, A., 2016, *Deep Learning*, The MIT Press, Cambridge/Massachusetts/London.

Guest, G., Namey, E.E. & Mitchell, M.L., 2013, *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research*, SAGE, London.

Habermas, J., 1987, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Translated by T.A. McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston.

Haverinen, A., 2014a, 'In-Game and Out-of-Game Mourning: On the Complexity of Grief in Virtual Worlds', in Dorthe, R. Christensen & Kjetil Sandvik (eds), *Mediating and Remediating Death: Studies in Death, Materiality and the Origin of Time, Volume 2,* Ashgate, Surrey.

Haverinen, A., 2014b, 'Memoria Virtualis – Death and Mourning Rituals in Online Environments', PhD thesis, Department of History, Art and Culture Studies, University of Turku, Finland.

Haverinen, A., 2015, 'Facebook, Ritual and Community – Memorialising in Social Media', *Social Networks, Communication and the Internet* 42, 7-22.

Hedtke, L. & Winslade, J., 2017, *The Crafting of Grief: Constructing Aesthetic Response to Loss*, Routledge, New York.

Heessels, M., 2012, *Bringing home the dead. Ritualizing cremation in the Netherlands,* Nijmegen, s.n.

Heidbrink, S. & Miczek, N., 2010, 'Introduction to the Special Issues: Religions on the Internet – Aesthetics and the Dimensions of the Senses', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4(1), 1-11.

Heidbrink, S., Miczek, N. & Radde-Antweiler, K., 2011, 'Contested Rituals in Virtual Worlds', in R.L. Grimes, U. Hüsken, U. Simon & E. Venbrux (eds.), *Ritual, Media, and Conflict*, pp. 165-189, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Heidbrink, S., Knoll, T. & Wysocki, J., 2014, 'Theorizing Religion in Digital Games. Perspectives and Approaches', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 5, 5-51.

Heidbrink, S. & Knoll, T., 2016, 'Towards "a New Providence of Humanity"! – Introduction', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 10, 1-6.

Heidegger, M., 1971, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* translated by Albert Hofstadter, Harper and Row, New York.

Heidegger, M., 2002, *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond,* edited by J, Van Buren, State University of New York Press, Albany.

Heidegger, M., 2008, *Basic Writings,* HarperPerennial – ModernThought, HarperCollins Publisher, New York.

Heitink, G., 1999, *Practical Theology,* transl. R. Bruinsma, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.

Helland, C., 2005, 'Online Religion as Lived Religion. Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1(1), 1-16.

Helland, C., 2010, '(Virtually) Been There, (Virtually) Done That: Examining the Online Religious Practices of the Hindu Tradition: Introduction', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 4(1), 148-150.

Helland, C., 2013, 'Ritual', in H.A. Campbell (ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, pp.25-41, Routledge, New York.

Holt, J., 2007, *The Daily Show and Philosophy: Moments of Zen in the Art of Fake News*, Blackwell, Malden/Oxford/Victoria.

Hoondert, M., 2008, 'Funeral Rites and the Transformation of Religiosity: Exploring ritual and music in a complex context', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 24(1), 51-69.

Hoondert, M., 2012, 'Contemplatieve abdijen als musical spaces: vervreemdend en aantrekkelijk', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 28(1), 51-65.

Hoondert, M. & Arfman, W., 2013, 'Musicalizing All Souls' Day Rituals', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 29(1), 113-133.

Hoondert, M., 2016, 'Rituelen zijn "in", Liturgische en rituele studies 2013-2015', *Handelingen* 2016(1).

Hoondert, M. & Bruin-Mollenhorst, J., 2016, 'Music as a Lens to Study Death Rituals', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 32(1), 87-105.

Howard, P.N., 2002, 'Network Ethnography and the Hypermedia Organization: New Media, New Organisations, New Methods', *New Media & Society* 4(4), 550-574.

Hüsken, U. (ed.), 2007, *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritua*l, Brill, Leiden.

Huttunen, L., 2016, 'Remembering, Witnessing, Bringing Closure: Srebrenica Burial Ceremonies on YouTube', in Andrea Hajek, Christine Lohmeier & Christian Pentzold (eds), *Memory in a Mediated World: Remembrance and Reconstruction,* Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.

Jacobsen, M.H., 2017, *Postmortal Society: Towards A Sociology Of Immortality*, Routledge, New York.

Kasket, E., 2012, 'Continuing Bonds in the Age of Social Networking: Facebook as a Modern-day Medium', *Bereavement Care* 31(2), 62-69.

Kern, R., Forman, A.E. & Gil-Egui, G., 2013, 'R.I.P.: Remain In Perpetuity. Facebook Memorial Pages', *Telematics and Informatics* 30(1), 2-10.

Khaldarova, I. & Pantii, M., 2016, 'Fake News: The Battle Over the Ukrainian Conflict', *Journalism Practice* 10(7), 891-901.

Kjærsgaard, A. & Venbrux, E., 2016, 'Grave-Visiting Rituals, (Dis)continuing Bonds and Religiosity', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 32(1), 9-20.

Klomp, M. & Hoondert, M., 2012, '"De straten van Gouda zijn ons Jeruzalem!" Een populaire Passie op het marktplein', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 28(1), 207-223.

Kluver, R. & Chen, Y., 2008, 'The Church of Fools: Virtual Ritual and Material Faith', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 3(1), 116-143.

Kranemann B. & Post, P., 2009, *Modern Ritual Studies as a Challenge for Liturgical Studies*, Liturgia Condenda Vol 20, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Krysinska, K. & Andriessen, K., 2010, 'On-Line Support and Resources for People Bereaved through Suicide: What is Available?', *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour* 40(6), 640-650.

Kübler-Ross, E., 1969, *On Death & Dying*, The Macmillan Company, New York.

Kübler-Ross, E., 2014, *On Death & Dying: What the Dying have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy & their Own Families*, Scribner, New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/New Delhi.

Kucharski, A., 2016, 'Study Epidemiology of Fake News', *Nature* 540, 525.

Lange, P., 2007, 'Publicly Private and Privately Public: Social Networking on YouTube', *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 13(1), 361-380.

Lartey, E., 1999, "Practical Theology as a Theological Form", in J. Woodward, S. Pattison & J. Patton (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Lategan, B., 2009, 'New Testament hermeneutics (Part2): Mapping the hermeneutical process' in A. Du Toit (ed.), *Focussing on the message: New testament hermeneutics, exegesis and methods*, pp. 65-105, Protea, Pretoria.

Lefebvre, H., 1992[1974], *The Production of Space*, translated by D. Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, Malden.

Letsosa, R., 2010, 'Liturgical Aspects of Funeral Services in Reformed Churches of African Origin', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 31(1), 6 pages.

Lock, S. Last J.M. & Dunea G. (eds), 2001, *The Oxford Illustrated Companion to Medicine,* 242-245, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Long, T.G., 2009, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral,* Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky.

Lövheim, M., 2005, 'Young People and the Use of the Internet as Transitional Space', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1(1), 1-22.

Lövheim, M., 2013, 'Identity', in H.A. Campbell (ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, pp. 41-57, Routledge, London.

Lukken, G., 1993, *Ontwikkelingen in de liturgiewetenschap: balans en perspectief*, Heeswijk-Dinther, Abdij van Berne.

Lukken, G., 2004, *Rituals in Abundance: Critical Reflections on the Place, Form and Identity of Christian Ritual in our Culture,* Liturgia Condenda vol 17, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Lukken, G., 2006, 'Een Kritische Blik op het Hedendaagse Rituele Landschap met het Oog op het Christelijk Ritueel', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 22(1), 113-135.

MacWilliams, M., 2006, 'Techno-Ritualization: The Gohozon Controversy on the Internet', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 2(1), 91-122.

Mak, A., 2015, *UitvaartWijzer: gedachten, handreikingen en teksten bij dood en uitvaart,* Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer.

Mallon, B., 2008, *Dying, Death and Grief: Working with Adult Bereavement,* SAGE, Los Angeles.

Malone, P.A., 2016, *Counselling Adolescents Through Loss, Grief and Trauma*, Routledge, New York.

Mansfield, P.M., 2016, 'Extending the mourning, funeral and memorialization consumption practices to the human-pet relationship.', in Susan Dobscha (ed), *Death in a Consumer Culture,* Routledge Interpretive Marketing Research, Routledge, London.

Marchi, R., 2012, 'With Facebook, Blogs, and Fake News, Teens Reject Journalistic "Objectivity"', *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 36(3), 246-262.

Matthee, F.J.N., 2014, *Paul Ricoeur en Digitale Kommunikasie: 'n Hermeneutiese Beoordeling van Nooma,* MDiv dissertation, Dept. of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria.

Matthee, F.J.N., 2015, *An Auto-Ethnographic Exploration of World of Warcraft: Raiding as Liturgical Ritual,* MTh dissertation, Dept. of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria.

McClymond, K.T., 2009, 'When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual', *Numen* 56(4), 507-509.

Mi, Y., Katkov, M. & Tsodyks, M., 2017, 'Synaptic Correlates of Working Memory Capacity', *Neuron* 93(2), 323-330.

Miczek, N., 2008, 'Online Rituals in Virtual Worlds: Christian Online Services Between Dynamics and Stability', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 3(1), 144-173.

Miller-McLemore, B.J. (ed.), 2012, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Miller-McLemore, B.J., 2012, "Introduction: the Contributions of Practical theology", in Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, pp. 1-21, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Moreman, M. & Lewis, A.D. (eds.), 2014, *Digital Death: Mortality and Beyond in the Online Age,* Praeger, California.

Moschella, M.C., 2012, 'Ethnography', in Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, pp. 224-234, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Moyaert, M. & Geldhof, J. (eds.), 2015, Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue. Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations, Bloomsbury, London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney.

Musambira, G.W., Hastings, S.O. & Hoover, J.D., 2007, 'Bereavement, Gender, and Cyberspace: A Content Analysis of Parents' Memorials to Their Children', *OMEGA* 54(4), 263-279.

Myles, D. & Millerand, F., 2016, 'Mourning in a "Sociotechnically' Acceptable Manner: A Facebook Case Study', in Andrea Hajek, Christine Lohmeier & Christian Pentzold (eds), *Memory in a Mediated World: Remembrance and Reconstruction,* Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.

Neijenhuis, J., 2012, *Liturgik – Gottesdienstelemente im Kontext*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Bristol.

Nijland, S., 2015, *Om wie jij bent: teksten, gebeden en gedichten bij afscheid en rouw,* Adveniat, Baarn.

Nugteren, T., 2013, 'Sensing the 'Sacred'? Body, Senses and Intersensoriality in the Academic Study of Ritual', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 29(1), 49-67.

Nünning, V. & Rupp, J., 2013, 'Ritual and Narrative: An Introduction', in V. Nünning, J. Rupp & G. Ahn (eds.), *Ritual and Narrative: Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld.

Nünning, V. & Nünning, A., 2013, 'On the Narrativity of Rituals: Interfaces between Narratives and Rituals and Their Potential for Ritual Studies' in V. Nünning, J. Rupp & G. Ahn (eds.), *Ritual and Narrative: Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld.

Obadia, L., 2015, 'When Virtuality Shapes Social Reality – Fake Cults and the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 8, 115-128.

Ohlendorf, R., 2016, 'Playing with the Legend – Ostension and Extra-Textual Production in Minecraft', *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 10, 27-45.

O'Leary, S.D., 1996, 'Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64(4), 781-808.

Orsmond, E., Botha, J. & Bartlett, A., 2013, *Woord en Fees: Preekstudies en Liturgiese Voorstelle Gebaseer op die Kerkjaar*, Communitas, Matieland.

Osmer, R.R., 2008, *Practical Theology an Introduction,* WmB Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan. [Kindle edition].

Pattison, S., 1999, "A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection", in J. Woodward, S. Pattison & J. Patton (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Pehal, M. & Cieslarová, O., 2011, 'Corporeality as a Key to the Assessment of the Dynamics of Ritualization', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 27, 67-85.

Pennington, N., 2014, 'Grieving for a (Facebook) Friend: Understanding the Impact of Social Network Sites and the Remediation of the Grieving Process', in Dorthe, R. Christensen & Kjetil Sandvik (eds), *Mediating and Remediating Death: Studies in Death, Materiality and the Origin of Time, Volume 2,* Ashgate, Surrey.

Phillips, W., 2011, 'LOLing at Tragedy: Facebook Trolls, Memorial Pages and Resistance to Grief Online', *First Monday* 16(12), available at http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3168/3115 accessed January 2018.

Piasecki, S. & Malekpour, S., 2016, 'Morality and Religion as Factors in Age Rating Computer and Video Games – ESRA, the Iranian Games Age Rating System', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11, 164-229.

Pieterse, H.J.C., 2015, 'A New Approach to Studying Worship', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36(1), pp 1-2.

Pieterse, H.J.C., 2017, 'Scientific-theoretical research approach to practical theology in South Africa: A contemporary overview', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(4), 1-9.

Pitsillides, S., Katsikides, S. & Conreen, M., 2009, 'Digital Death', paper presented at the Virtuality and Society International Workshop, Athens, Greece. Available at https://issuu.com/stelios_giama/docs/iov09_proceedings accessed July 2016.

Pitsillides, S., Waller, M. & Fairfax, D., 2013, 'Digital Death: What Role Does Digital Information Play in the Way We Are (Re)membered?', in S. Warburton & S. Hatzipanagos (eds.), *Digital Identity and Social Media*, pp. 75-90, ISR, Hershey.

Post, P., 1995, 'Zeven notities over rituele verandering, traditie en (vergelijkende) liturgiewetenschap', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 11(1), 1-30.

Post, P., 2000, 'Interference and intuition. On the characteristic nature of research design in liturgical studies', *Questions Liturgiques* 81(1), 48-65.

Post, P., 2000, 'Rituelen in overvloed. Acht woorden bij een presentatie', *Eredienstvaardig* 16(1), 31-33.

Post, P., Grimes, R.L., Nugteren, A., Petterson, P. & Zondag H., 2003, *Disaster Ritual: Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire,* Liturgia Condenda 15, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Post, P., 2004, 'Panorama of Current Ritual-Liturgical Inculturation and Participation in the Netherlands: Sketch and Perspective', *Questions Liturgiques: Studies in Liturgy* 85(1&2), 30-67.

Post, P., 2006a, 'Na de Lange Jaren Zestig. Liturgiewetenschap en Ritual Studies: Opkomst, Typering en Actuele Uitwerking van Een Relatie', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 22(1), 89-113.

Post, P., 2006b, 'The "Tree for Life" Day: A New Ritual for Memorial and Reconciliation. Some Ritual-liturgical Observations on an Emerging Ritual to Commemorate Victims of Cancer in the Netherlands', *Studia Liturgica* 36, 94-108.

Post, P., 2009, 'Rituele en religiuze identiteiten in Europa. Casus: actuele rituele en religieuze dynamiek in Nederland' *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 25(1), 125-155.

Post, P., 2010, *Holy Ground: Re-inventing Ritual Space in Modern Western Culture*, Liturgia Condenda 24, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Post, P., Molendijk, A.L. & Kroesen, J.E.A. (eds.), 2011, *Sacred Places in Modern Western Culture*, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Post, P., 2013, 'Ritual Criticism: Een actuele verkenning van kritische reflectie ten aanzien van ritueel, met bijzondere aandacht voor e-ritueel en cyberpilgrimage', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 29(1), 172-199.

Post, P., 2014, 'Worship in a Network Culture. Explorations on Ritual and Liturgical Competence', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 30(1), 191-202.

Post, P., 2015a, 'Ritual Studies', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion,* Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York.

Post, P., 2015b, 'Cyberspace as Ritual Space', A. Gerhards & K. de Wildt. (eds.), *Der Sakrale Ort im Wandel*, 269-282, Studien des Bonner Zentrums für Religion und Gesellschaft vol. 12, Würzburg.

Post, P., 2016, 'Current Post-Disaster Ritual: An exploration of established, absent and emerging repertoires. National and International perspectives.' In Benedikt Kranemann & Brigitte Benz, *Trauerfeiern nach Grosskatastrophen: Theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugaenge,* Echter Verlag, Wuerzburg.

Post, P. & van der Beek, S., 2016, *Doing ritual criticism in a Network Society. Online and offline explorations into pilgrimage and sacred place*, Liturgia condenda 29, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Post, P. & Faro, L., 2017, 'Een Ritual Studies Onderzoekdesign. Ervaringen en Perspectieven', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 33(1), 20-39.

Radde-Antweiler, K., 2006, 'Rituals Online: Transferring and Designing Rituals', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 2(1), 54-72.

Radde-Antweiler, K., 2008a, 'Religion is Becoming Virtualised. Introduction to the Special Edition on Religion in Virtual Worlds', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 3(1), 1-6.

Radde-Antweiler, K., 2008b, 'Virtual Religion. An Approach to a Religious and Ritual Topography of Second Life', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 3(1), 174-211.

Radde-Antweiler, K., 2016, 'Digitale Religion? Medienforschung aus Religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive', in I. Nord & H. Zipernovszky (eds.), *Religionspädagogik in Mediasierten Welten*, pp. 146-159, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.

Radford, S.K. & Bloch, P.H., 2016, 'Ritual, mythology and consumption after a celebrity death', in Susan Dobscha (ed), *Death in a Consumer Culture,* Routledge Interpretive Marketing Research, Routledge, London.

Rappaport, R., 1999, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Roberts, P., 2004, 'The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery.' *Omega Journal of Death and Dying* 49 (1), 57-76.

Rose, M., 2012, 'Dwelling as Marking and Claiming.', *Environment and Planning, Society and Space* 30(5), 757-771.

Roslon, M., 2017, *Spielerische Rituale oder rituelle Spiele: Überlegungen zum Wandel zweier zentraler Begriffe der Sozialforschung*, Springer, Wiesbaden.

Ryan, M., 2013, 'Ritual Studies and Narratology: What Can They Do For Each Other', V. Nünning, J. Rupp & G. Ahn (eds.), *Ritual and Narrative: Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies*, pp. 27-51, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld.

Saldana, J., 2009, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, SAGE, London.

Sample, T., 1998, *The Spectacle of Worship in the Wired World: Electronic Culture and the Gathered People of God*, Abingdon, Nashville.

Santino, J., 2004, 'Performance Commemoratives, the Personal, and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore', *Journal of American Folklore* 117(466), 363-372.

Saucerman, J. & Ramirez, D., 2016, 'Praise Helix! Christian Narrative in Twitch Plays: Pokemon', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 10, 74-95.

Sbardelotto, M., 2016, 'And the Word Became Network – An Analysis of the Circulation of the "Catholic" in Online Communicational Networks', *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11, 229-254.

Scott, L., 2015, *The Four-Dimensional Human: Ways of Being in the Digital World,* Kindle Edition, William Heinemann, London.

Scott, S.A.Q., 2016, 'Algorithmic Absolution – The Case of Catholic Confessional Apps', *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11, 254-275.

Seamon, D., 2000, 'Concretizing Heidegger's Notion of Dwelling: The Contributions of Thomas Thiis-Evensen and Christopher Alexander.' *Online – Academia, Phenomenology of Architecture,* accessed 6 April 2016 from https://www.academia.edu/Documents/in/Phenomenology_of_Architecture.

Searle, J.R., 1969, *Speech Acts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Senn, F.C., 2016, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

Senn, F.C., 2017, *Eucharistic Body*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

Sofka, C.J., 1997, 'Social Support "Internetworks", Caskets for Sale, and More: Thanatology and the Information Superhighway', *Death Studies* 21, 553-574.

Sofka, C.J. Cupit, I.N. & Gilbert K.R. (eds), 2012, *Dying, Death and Grief in an Online Universe: For Counselors and Educators,* Springer Publishing Company, New York. (Various Chapters)

Sofka, C.J., Gibson, A. & Silberman, D.R., 2017, 'Digital Immortality or Digital Death? Contemplating Digital End-Of-Life Planning', in M.H. Jacobsen (ed.), *Postmortal Society: Towards A Sociology Of Immortality*, pp. 173-197, Routledge, New York.

Spadaro, A., 2014, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*, translated by M. Way, Fordham University Press, New York.

Staal, F., 1975, 'The Meaninglessness of Ritual', *Numen* 26, 2-22.

Stengel, O., 2017, 'Der Mensch im Digitalzeitalter: Sapiens 2.0', in O. Stengel, A. van Looy. & A. Wallaschkowski (eds.), *Digitalzeitalter-Digitalgesellschaft: Das Ende des Industriezeitalters und der Beginn einer neuen Epoche*, pp 63-87, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden.

Stringer, M.D., 2015, 'The Future of Public Religious Ritual in an Urban Context', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 31(1), 45-59.

Stroebe, M., Schut, H. & Boerner, K., 2017, 'Cautioning Health-Care Professionals: Bereaved Persons are Misguided Through the Stages of Grief', *OMEGA* 74(4), 455-473.

Sumiala, J., 2013, *Media and Ritual: Death, Community and Everyday Life*, Routledge, New York.

Sweller, J., 1988, 'Cognitive Load During Problem Solving: Effects on Learning', *Cognitive Science* 12(2), 257-285.

Taher, M., 2006, *Cyber Worship in Multifaith Perspectives,* Scarecrow Press, Indiana.

Theron, P.M., 2015, 'Coding and Data Analysis During Qualitative Empirical Research in Practical Theology, *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 49(3), 1-9.

Tinning, S., 2014, 'Place, Public Space and the Limits Defining them: a Heideggerian Approach', in G. Chiurazzi, D. Sisto & S. Tinning (eds.), *Philosophical Paths in the Public Sphere*, pp. 99-119, Lit Verlag, Berlin.

Tucker, J., 2014, 'Liturgy, Liturgical Music and the Internet Apostolate', in A. Reid (ed.), *Sacred Liturgy: The Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*, pp. 337-355, Ignatius Press, San Francisco.

Turkle, S., 1995, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet,* Simon & Schuster paperbacks, New York/London/Toronto/Sydney.

Turkle, S. (ed), 2007, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With,* MIT press, Massachusetts/London.

Turkle, S. (ed), 2008, *Falling for Science: Objects in Mind,* MIT press, Massachusetts/London.

Turkle, S., 2011, *Alone Together: Why we expect more from Technology and less from Each Other,* Basic Books, New York.

Turkle, S., 2012, *Connected, but alone?,* Video, accessed 2 May 2016, from https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together?language=en.

Turner, V., 2008[1969], *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine Transaction, New Brunswick/London.

Vandermeer,J.H. & Goldberg, D.E., 2013, *Population Ecology: First Principles*, 2nd edn., Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

Valentine, C., 2008, *Bereavement Narratives: Continuing Bonds in the Twenty First Century*, Routledge, London.

Van der Merwe, J., 2001, *Gebedeboek met Liturgiese Voorstelle,* Lux Verbi, Wellington.

Van Gennep, A., 2010[1909], *The Rites of Passage,* Routledge, New York.

Van Looy, A., 2017, 'Der digitale Raum: Augmented und Virtual Reality', in O. Stengel, A. Van Looy. & A. Wallaschkowski (eds.), *Digitalzeitalter-Digitalgesellschaft: Das Ende des Industriezeitalters und der Beginn einer neuen Epoche*, pp 51-62, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden.

Van Nuenen, T. & van der Beek, S., 2016, 'Pilgrim or Tourist? – Modelling Two Types of Travel Bloggers', *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 11, 138-164.

Van Ommen, L., 2016, 'Ritual Repetition: Creating Safe Havens for Sufferers or Boring Experiences?', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 32(1), 125-141.

Van Tongeren, L., 2006, 'Een gemeenschappelijke oriëntatie. Over de Ritual Studies en ontwikkelingen binnen het liturgiehistorisch onderzoek', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 22(1), 135-151.

Van Tongeren, L. & Post. P., 2011, 'Voorbij de Liturgiewetenschap: Over het Profiel van Liturgische en Rituele Studies', *Netherlands Studies in Ritual and Liturgy* 12, 90.

Vittori, G., 2013, 'Dwelling in performing as thinking.', *Mimesis Journal* 2(2), 144-165.

Walter, T., Hourizi, R., Moncur, W. & Pitsillides, S., 2012, 'Does the Internet Change How We Die and Mourn? Overview and Analysis', *OMEGA* 64(4), 275-302.

Wepener, C.J., 2004a, *Van Vas tot Fees: 'n Ritueel-Liturgiese Ondersoek na Versoening Binne Suid-Afrikaanse Kultuurkontekste*, D.Th. Thesis, University of Stellenbosch.

Wepener, C.J., 2004b, 'From fast to feast. A ritual-liturgical exploration of reconciliation in South African cultural contexts', *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 20(1), 289-292.

Wepener, C.J., 2006a, 'Participation and power: Opportunities for method and theory in liturgical research from a changing (Dutch Reformed) South African liturgical landscape' *Jaarboek voor Liturgie Onderzoek* 22(1), 49-67.

Wepener, C.J., 2006b, 'The Object and Aim of Multi-Disciplinary Liturgical Research' *Scriptura* 93, 384-400.

Wepener, C.J., 2007, 'Participation and power: Opportunities for method and theory in liturgical research from a changing (Dutch Reformed) South African liturgical landscape', *NGTT* 48(3&4), 730-742.

Wepener, C.J., 2009, '*From fast to feast. A ritual-liturgical exploration of reconciliation in South African cultural contexts*' Liturgia condenda 19, Peeters Publishers, Leuven.

Wepener, C.J., 2011a, 'Nuwe tendense buite-om die erediens van die 21ste eeu. 'n Beskrywende liturgies-historiese en hedendaagse verkenning.', *NGTT* 52(1), 257-271.

Wepener, C.J., 2011b, *Soos 'n Blom na die Son draai,* Bybel-Media, Wellington.

Wepener, C.J., 2012, 'Liminality: Recent Avatars of this Notion in a South African Context', *Scriptura* 110, 293-307.

Wepener, C.J., 2014a, *Van voor die Wieg tot na die Graf: Rituele roetemerkers vir die drumpels van die lewe,* Bybelmedia, Wellington.

Wepener, C.J., 2014b, 'Liturgical inculturation or liberation? A qualitative exploration of major themes in liturgical reform in South Africa.', *HTS Theological Studies* 70(1), 8 pages.

Wepener, C.J., 2015, '"Bliksem"/Damn it! A ritual-liturgical appreciation of a deadly sin for an angry nation.', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36(3), 8 pages.

Wepener, C.J. & Van der Merwe, J. (eds), 2009, *Ontdekkings in die Erediens,* Lux Verbi, Wellington.

Wepener, C.J. & Barnard, M., 2010, 'Entering the Field: Initiating Liturgical Research in an African Independent Church (AIC)', *Acta Theologica* 30(2), 192-210.

Wepener, C.J. & Bothe-Smith, S., 2017, *Daar is Meer: 'n Bronboek vir Roetemerkers by Lewensoorgange. Die Laaste Oorgang, die Dood*, Bybel-Media, Wellington.

Wepener, C.J. & Greyling, A., n.d., *Daar is Meer 2*, Bybel-Media, Wellington. (Forthcoming).

Whewell, W.D.D., 1874, *History of the Inductive Sciences From the Earliest to the Present Time*, 3rd edn., D. Appleton and Company, New York.

Whitehead, T.L., 2005, 'Basic Classical Ethnographic Research Methods', *EICCARS,* Department of Anthropology, University of Maryland.

Williamson, P., 2016, 'Take the Time and Effort to Correct Misinformation', *Nature* 540, 171.

Wittgenstein, L., 1961, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F Pears & B.F. McGuinness, Routledge, London.

Wittgenstein, L., 1963, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell, Oxford.

Wojtkowiak, J., 2012, *"I'm dead therefore I am". The postself and notions of immortality in contemporary Dutch society,* Nijmegen, s.n.

Websites, blogs and other media consulted

247Candle., n.d., *Christianity*, available at https://www.247candle.com/christianity accessed June 2018.

Archer, J., 2018, *Instagram To Warn Users If They Spend Too Much Time on the App*, *Telegraph*, available at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2018/05/16/instagram-warn-users-spend-much-time-app/ accessed June 2018.

Blockgeeks., n.d., *What is Cryptocurrency: Everything You Need To Know [Ultimate Guide]*, available at https://blockgeeks.com/guides/what-is-cryptocurrency/ accessed June 2018.

Blue, V., 2018, *Facebook's Fake War on Fake News*, *Engadget*, available at https://www.engadget.com/2018/01/19/facebooks-fake-war-on-fake-news/ accessed 16 February 2018.

Cambridge Dictionary., n.d., *Emoticon*, available at https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/emoticon accessed 6 April 2018.

Catholictv., n.d., *Daily Mass*, available at http://www.catholictv.org/masses/catholictv-mass accessed JUne 2018.

Christianforce.net., n.d., Faith: Discussions Regarding Our Christian Faith, available at http://christianforce.net/mb/ accessed June 2018.

Constine, J., 2016, *How Facebook News Feed Works*, *TechCrunch*, available at https://techcrunch.com/2016/09/06/ultimate-guide-to-the-news-feed/ accessed on 4 January 2017.

Constine, J., 2018, *Instagram says you're all caught up in first time-well-spent feature*, *TechCrunch*, available at https://techcrunch.com/2018/05/21/scroll-responsibly/ accessed June 2018.

Esquire., 2018, *Instagram To Warn Users When They Spend Too Much Time on the App*, available at https://www.esquire.com/uk/latest-news/a20726826/instagram-warning-too-long-on-app/ accessed June 2018.

Gartner., n.d, *Gartner Hype Cycle*, available at http://www.gartner.com/technology/research/methodologies/hype-cycle.jsp accessed on 4 October 2016.

Ghosh, D. & Scott, B., 2018, *Disinformation is Becoming Unstoppable*, *Time*, available at http://time.com/5112847/facebook-fake-news-unstoppable/ accessed on 16 February 2018.

Gratefulness, n.d., *Light a Candle*, available at https://gratefulness.org/light-a-candle/ accessed June 2018.

Guardian., 2018, *The Cambridge Analytica Files*, available at https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/cambridge-analytica-files accessed April 2018.

Heart of the Nation., n.d., *Sunday Mass*, available at https://www.heartofthenation.org/online-mass/sunday-mass accessed June 2018.

Howe, N., 2015, *Why Millennials are Texting More and Talking Less*, *Forbes*, 15 July, available at https://www.forbes.com/sites/civicnation/2018/07/25/new-regional-advisors-help-ensure-its-on-us-is-a-campaign-for-everyone/#1036f715e2aa accessed on 17 September 2017.

Myspace., n.d., *State of Oblivion*, available at https://myspace.com/stateofoblivion accessed January 2018.

#RIPCHESTER, http://chester.linkinpark.com/

Owens, T., 2014, *Ghosts of Races Past: Son Finds Fathers Ghost in Game*, available at http://www.playthepast.org/?p=4886 accessed February 2017.

RIPCemetery., n.d., Like a Traditional Cemetery, but with Something More, available at http://www.ripcemetery.com/#functionsPage accessed June 2018.

Satara, A., 2018, *If You Don't Fully Understand the Cambridge Analytica Scandal, Read This Simplified Version*, available at https://www.inc.com/alyssa-satara/if-you-dont-fully-understand-cambridge-analytica-scandal-read-this-simplified-version.html accessed April 2018.

Schrage, M., 2013, *Time to Hang Up on Voice Mail*, *Harvard Business Review*, 30 September, available at https://hbr.org/2013/09/time-to-hang-up-on-voice-mail accessed on 17 September 2017.

Shontell, A., 2014, *People are Now Spending a Mind-Boggling 21 Minutes Per Day on Instagram*, *Business Insider*, available at https://www.businessinsider.com/people-spend-21-minutes-per-day-on-instagram-2014-10?IR=T accessed June 2018.

Smithsonian. n.d., *Human Characteristics: Social Life*, *Smithsonian,* available at http://humanorigins.si.edu/human-characteristics/social-life accessed 14 August 2017.

Snap Inc., n.d., *Let's Chat*, available at https://www.snap.com/en-US/news/page/9/ accessed January 2018.

Statista., 2017, *Number of available apps in the Apple App Store from 2008 to 2017 (in 1000's)*, *Statista*, available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/268251/number-of-apps-in-the-itunes-app-store-since-2008/ accessed on 20 September 2017.

Statista., 2017, *Number of monthly active Facebook Messenger users from April 2014 to September 2017 (in millions)*, *Statista*, available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/417295/facebook-messenger-monthly-active-users/ accessed on 20 September 2017.

StatCounter, n.d., *Desktop vs Mobile vs Tablet Market Share Africa*, available at http://gs.statcounter.com/platform-market-share/desktop-mobile-tablet/africa/#monthly-201603-201703-bar accessed November 2017.

Swan, A., 2018, *Does The Cambridge Analytica Scandal Mean Facebook Is Doomed*, available at https://www.forbes.com/sites/andyswan/2018/04/02/does-the-cambridge-analytica-scandal-mean-facebook-is-doomed/#3acc9ab04ef5 accessed April 2018.

The Center for Healing Arts, n.d., *Light a Candle*, available at http://thecenterforhealingarts.com/light-a-candle/ accessed June 2018.

The Sunday Mass, n.d., *Light a Candle*, available at https://thesundaymass.org/candles accessed June 2018.

Tiku, N., 2018, *Facebook's Latest Fix For Fake News: Ask Users What They Trust*, *Wired*, available at https://www.wired.com/story/facebooks-latest-fix-for-fake-news-ask-users-what-they-trust/ accessed on April 2018.

Ong, T., 2017, *Facebook Found a Better Way to Fight Fake News*, *The Verge*, available at https://www.theverge.com/2017/12/21/16804912/facebook-disputed-flags-misinformation-newsfeed-fake-news accessed on 16 February 2018.

Facebook documentation

https://www.facebook.com/help/203805466323736?helpref=uf_permalink accessed March 2018.

https://www.facebook.com/help/203805466323736?helpref=uf_permalink accessed March 2018.

https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards accessed March 2018.

https://www.facebook.com/help/1568013990080948 accessed March 2018.

7. **Table of figures**