Faculti Summary

The speaker reflects on their journey of exploring the intersection of the internet and death, beginning in graduate school after the loss of a mentor, Richard Harvey Brown. They were inspired to analyze how social media serves as a space for mourning and remembrance when individuals die or go missing. Initially anxious about the lack of existing literature, the speaker ultimately wrote their dissertation on disaster news coverage and later returned to the topic for their second book, focusing on the concept of "digital death."

The exploration notes that much of the academic work on digital death has centered on how the living interact with the deceased's digital footprints, but less attention has been given to the agency of the dying and the dead themselves. The speaker delves into various digital expressions surrounding death, including blogs by the terminally ill and digital suicide notes, and investigates emerging technologies aimed at post-mortem messaging and mind uploading.

They describe the evolving understanding of legacy in the digital age, where anyone can strive for remembrance, extending beyond the traditionally powerful or heroic figures. The speaker discusses the challenges of achieving genuine digital immortality, emphasizing that while technology allows for innovative expressions of legacy, these records are often impermanent, as websites and data can disappear.

The speaker also raises concerns about digital legacy being commodified or overly individualistic, urging people to consider their contributions to the world beyond personal legacies. They advocate for thinking about mortality in communal terms and addressing real-world problems to ensure that any digital afterlife reflects positive contributions to society. Ultimately, the discussion highlights the complexities of integrating technology with our understanding of death and remembrance, challenging individuals to thoughtfully engage with their digital legacies and broader impacts on the world.