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In *The Library of Babel*, Jorge Luis Borges imagines a universe wholly conflated with its sole building, a Library that shelters every mathematically possible permutation of signs, in the shape of symmetrical, 410-page books. The narrator, a sage inhabitant, speaks of the Library's infinity across space and time. Its hexagonal geometry gives the impression of a hierophany, "the work of chance or of malevolent demiurges" (113). Its literature, in crude form, is a blend of "rational line[s] (…) [and] leagues of senseless cacophony" (114). Callous can only begin to describe this cosmogony. Naturally, its society is always on the fringes of an occluded code, which pushes some to divination or dark Gnosticism, others to suicide, and a (self-)select class to tireless peregrinations in search of truth. The people have faith in the Library's machinations, whose quantum matter is at once this orthographic gibberish and the amassed knowledge of the world. The narrator grasps the futility of trying to escape from or elucidate this monadic space. Surrounded by innumerable deaths, he finds relief in its "disorder – which, repeated, becomes order: The Order. My solitude is cheered by that elegant hope" (118).

On any plane of interpretation, Borges' story problematizes the limits of our understanding, wherein the Library is a protean labyrinth, a treatise on the origins of the universe, a study on the material and immaterial, a laboratory trial. For its fatalism, it is also a graveyard. Still, it is not a mere thought experiment, but an ideational precursor to humankind's greatest creation in size. In the twenty-first century, the Internet became a colossus akin to Borges' vast architecture, hoarding, with the to and for of each electric pulse, informational silt from across the globe. Initially instruments of archival purpose, its virtual spaces are now the *loci* of sustained being and interaction. With time, the simulacrum has accrued more momentum, indeed more life than life itself. And though an enclosed system can logically store a finite amount of data, we are yet to reach the brim of, let alone overfill,

the Online. Italian philosopher Davide Sisto's nonfiction work *Online Afterlives* emerges at the conflux of currents of this interest. On the one hand, it immortalizes – the pun evident herein – the state of media and the Internet of recent years, when Facebook, the figurehead of connections and data malfeasance, has also become "the world's largest cemetery" (90). On the other hand, it theorizes the titular digital culture that pervades the now and its ramifications in empirical reality, effects on consciousness, mourning, and the human pose both ante- and postmortem. The study also touches on posthumanism and transhumanism, disciplines of high traction at present, but it stems from a deceivingly simple happenstance:

> When I turned on my smartphone on the morning of November 14, 2014, I got a notification from Facebook. It was reminding me to send a birthday message to my friend Alessandro. (…) All of this was unremarkable, except for the fact that Alessandro was dead. He had died the previous summer (1).

Almost everybody can attest to the visceral grief of loss, and some, as in Sisto's opening anecdote are forced back into it with periodic vigour by technology that is none the wiser. Others, strangely, revel in death's imagery, or immerse themselves in it so as to attain "digital survival after biological death" (31). Far from a modern invention, this bipartite rapport has been adjacent to civilization since its dawn. Here, one is reminded of van der Ast's still lifes, whose floral arrangements are simultaneously enticing, ornamental, and imminently wilted or rotten. Alive, therefore already dead. Sisto is quick to underline the hypocritical mechanism at work: "Death, so often kept at arm's length from our everyday lives, is foisted peremptorily upon us on social networks, chat threads, and the internet in general" (2). Despite our efforts to drive it out of sight and mind, we make nothing of our time among memorabilia of "digital ghosts" (47, 58, 67). And despite our frolicking around "virtual cemeteries" (16), we are no better equipped to face mortality than those who performed, millennia ago, the first funeral rites. This disconnect between aversion and passive acceptance sustains throughout the author's incursions into practices secular and spiritual, physical and digital, all gravitating to death in the twenty-first century.

The introductory chapter to *Online Afterlives* is coincidentally the most compelling one, approaching the topic such that one needn't be proficient in "thanatechnology" (16), indeed not at all tech-savvy, to follow the arguments. Sisto

maps some instances of our routine death-awareness. In language, rich idioms arise or are appropriated out of a wish to sidestep calling death by its name. Among many cultural favourites, Hamlet's "[to shuffle] off this mortal coil" (4) stands out, though other superstitious variants abound. In professions, the Swedish *döstädning*, responsible with "putting into order (...) one's (...) physical home in view of one's death" (10), grow in popularity off- and online. Sisto's depiction of this novelty, the "hybrid and unearthly, hyper- present and eternal" (7) digital home, comprised of one's social media, forgotten accounts, and a lifetime of shared content, explores how the process of inhabitance has bifurcated into tangible and intangible spaces, the latter of which can seldom reach an order, a posthumous minimalism, due to data's propensity to be stored indefinitely and accessed at will. In contrast, the real home does not partake in this permanent overtness. Being stripped of superfluous objects until only the tokens of a "unique and deep connection with [one's] loved ones" (11) remain makes the crossing of its threshold acquire ceremonial import. To Sisto, then, the very nature of the Online commodifies death and the remnants of the dead: "One has time to prepare, psychologically and emotionally, for seeing the objects left around the house (...) On Facebook's timeline, the situationis quite the opposite (...) Online material is always there at our fingertips" (97).

In this respect, two works of fiction come to mind. In Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas, a homebody haplessly tasked with the execution of her late lover's will, follows hints linking him, a real estate tycoon, to a postal fraud conspiracy spanning centuries; driven mad by her unresolved pursuit, Oedipa concludes that the dwelling space of the departed was but "a name; an incident [with] no boundaries" (137), and that his "legacy was America" (137). In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*, the titular Klara, an artificial being, occasions a discussion on human nature; whereas one character believes there is nothing of a human that cannot be transferred to data, the machine-girl realizes that the site of one's personhood will always be out of her reach, stored nowhere in the biological body, but in the invisible strings that tie a person to their loved ones. The insertions of Borges, Pynchon, and Ishiguro are not gratuitous, but they iterate two lessons that follow Sisto's lines of thought. One, that tracing someone's footsteps through the vast expanse of the (digital or physical) world is unavailing. Two, that neither items, nor symbols and lines of code left to posterity can restore their life. The human essence proves to always reside in a miasma, regarded most with ritual deference. If these

versions of a lineage are insufficient, then, perhaps one's memory can survive and ramify in perpetual evocation. The author's most prevalent syntagm is without a doubt "digital ghost" (47, 58, 67), yet his theoretical body relies on examples that are decidedly not digital. Sisto defines the departed as "an irrevocable absence – a presence that vanishes forever" (18), visibly inspired by the Derridean notion of *trace*, and declares that "*chi muore si rivede* (those who die are seen again)" (15), a nod to the French philosopher's revenant specters, which he describes as phenomenal "becoming-bod[ies]" (Derrida 5) cemented in a dialectic state between then and now. Sisto's hauntology is indelibly scarred by the event of passing, which, per Vladimir Jankélévitch,"marks the beginning of eternity because it has no tomorrow and allows no turning back" (28). Beyond this, he states that many cultures hold the belief that the process of immortalization, though unable to fetch spirits from non-being into being, can bring solace to the grieving community in awelcome act of self-delusion, wherein the corpse is separated from the memory of the departed, and death is, per Régis Debray, deconstructed or sublimated altogether. Quoting thanatologist Tony Walter, Sisto infers that this grim ubiquity is not a modern production. Rather, death has historically coexisted with civilizations in their "oracles and myths, within [their] dreams and various funeral rites, through historic monuments, sculptures, masks, and painted portraits" (20).

What ensues is a predominantly diachronic examination of the technological forms of immortalization, from photography to radio, television, and the Internet, paired with theories from figureheads of twentieth and twenty-first century criticism. While Roland Barthes theorizes that the recorded subject, hereby named *spectrum*, calls attention to their own implacable mortality without fail, Susan Sontag explains that a kind of dying emerges at the exact moment of the shot, to which Sisto adds that "the instant immortalized contains (…) the void that passing time places between the presence and the absence of someone who is no longer there" (22). Thus, representation of the living, in images, sounds, motion, or a combination of mediums, is entirely contaminated by the consciousness of the individual's mortality, be it the subject, agent, or witness at hand. The red thread of this failure to defy death and render one(self) immortal traverses the book's chief studies, yet, straying from the pretense of self-sufficient exegesis, the three emerge in a dialogic state that should not go unnoticed.

Whereas the main critical trajectories of the work have heretofore been carefully structured, his writing is henceforth rendered kaleidoscopic by the author's efforts to take cognizance of traditional media, social networks, digital entities, and virtual spaces, through the lens of myriad theories from anthropology, psychology, sociology, and literature. In this sense, his theoretical sources coalesce towards a digital cartography as vast as the Library that opens this text. The first chapter provides in-depth analyses of the television series *Black Mirror*, the acclaimed film *Her*, digital chatbots (Eter9), avatars (LifeNaut), and holograms of dead celebrities (DIO Returns), laying critical emphasis on the matter at large: that artificial intelligence can be projected to achieve digital immortality of the already-dead. Should the goal succeed, Sisto, drawing from Derrida, questions whether the mourning process can still efficiently "onthologize the corpse (…) [and] establish a period of transition, of suspension, of boundaries" (69). As these specters populate his investigations, he tallies the (dis)advantages of figuratively digging up the grave of another, but also the repercussions of retroactively designing a world without death.

On a sustained note, the second chapter dissects Facebook as the foremost digital graveyard, boasting a database of expired users whose "invasive ubiquity" (88), though unparalleled in scope, fails to prompt the same revulsion that its real-life counterparts do. In one of the book's rare displays of subjectivity, Sisto writes soberly about platforms that permit the spread of distressing content, like recordings of natural disasters and live broadcasts of murders and suicides, to strike a chord, indeed to wave a red flag, that violent death is becoming perverted, turned to pathological spectacle: "Death (…) has taken someone else and, seeing that with our own eyes as we view a live video on social media turns a feeling of anxiety into one of perversely intense pleasure" (110). He also unearths the platform's value as a site for communal grieving, as "the message board of the deceased is filled with poignant messages, musical dedications, shared memories" (113).

The final chapter illustrates how social media, personal communication apps, online cemeteries, and memory repositories expedite the practice of leaving an impression on the world before departing. The technology relies on a noble cause, but it is not devoid of ethical caveats.

A digital legacy implies the notion of consent, wherein one's actions, infallibly recorded and archived throughout their lifetime, must also be met with the option to erase them in full. Still, antemortem, the individual who pursues their data-death will get stuck in catch-22. Sisto warns that "as [the companies] are doing this work, they receive in exchange a precise digital map of that person's digital identity and thus all of their movements online" (152). Otherwise, the voluntary gesture to cache oneself in the Online requires not only great effort, but also the acceptance that the end result will be little more than a figurative band-aid for eventual grief or an object of interest for tech enthusiasts. All in all, the book's final chapter is charged with the rueful knowledge that, within a few generations, there will be nobody left to remember us, online or off, but strangers.

The labyrinthine *digiography* that Davide Sisto charts in *Online Afterlives* enforces by no means a moralizing thesis. At no point should the reader infer that they are obliquely pushed to swear off online activities, lest they indulge in risky discourse or waive their autonomy to malevolent bots. Neither does the author venture to paint humanity in broad, all-encompassing strokes, except by process of elimination. The book offers brief panoramas of what it means to bealive, die, and rise again in the digital age, with a fair warning. Our virtual rise can never be complete because "a human being is not a closed system, a system that is conditioned by the total autonomy of procedural reasoning, with its schematic models and principles based on a rigid causeand effect mechanism" (74). At best, what an online afterlife can bestow, if chosen with the awareness that suffering is still a part of it, is succour upon the mourning, and even then, an equivalent exchange is made: to prolong the paradox of death aversion and acceptance, to chance "backward-looking melancholy, [being] unable to spring forward into the future" (83), if only to gain peace in the present. With no judgment nor cheer, Davide Sisto beckons his readers to think wisely of their digital death.