Audiences of death – between real and virtual funeral wakes

Abstract:

This work will examine the availability and viewing of actual funeral wakes on the internet in Brazil, called the Virtual Wakes. We will study the anthropology of death through a brief rescue of the history of funeral wakes in Brazil until the invention of the Virtual Wakes, which consists in the real time broadcasting of one's funeral wake, which may be assisted by anyone, even those who never knew that one who is being veiled. For this analysis, we will make a brief online ethnography in a virtual community of a popular social networking site in Brazil, called Orkut, where users weave comments about the dead being veiled, while watching the Virtual Wake, revealing different views about death. We intend, with this work, to briefly reconstruct the history of Brazilian funerals from the nineteenth century, heavily influenced by European culture, and trace the path that led part of the Brazilian urban society to hire and view funerals over the internet after more than two hundred years of distance from death. Our work will be guided by studies of the French historian Philippe Aries, the Brazilian historian João José Reis and the Polish sociologist Zygmut Bauman.

Keywords: *virtual wakes, virtuality, funeral, dealing with death, grief processing*