

Digital Séance

FABRICATED ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DEAD

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In a nutshell

- The (re)presentation of death in photography
- Post-mortal society, practices of mourning and theory of Continues Bonds
- Affordances of computational photography and interaction with images
- Case studies of Digital immortality and the afterlife
 - Listen to my voice
 - New Dimensions in Testimony
 - Meeting You
- Discussion - new meanings for practices of remembering the dead

Main Argument

The rise of computational technologies has changed the interrelations between death and photography.

Unlike commemorative practices via traditional photography, which are confined to a frozen moment and a stable representation, the rise of computational photography invites ongoing interactions between the living and the dead, or more precisely, an interaction between a viewer and a medium.

Such interactions defy the finality of death and entertain new comprehension of time and temporality.

The (re)presentation of death in photography



Portrait photograph of mother with dead child. Courtesy of the Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY (2006). (From *Sensational Design*, MIT Press (2004), p. 91).



<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-36244984>

Postmortal society and mourning

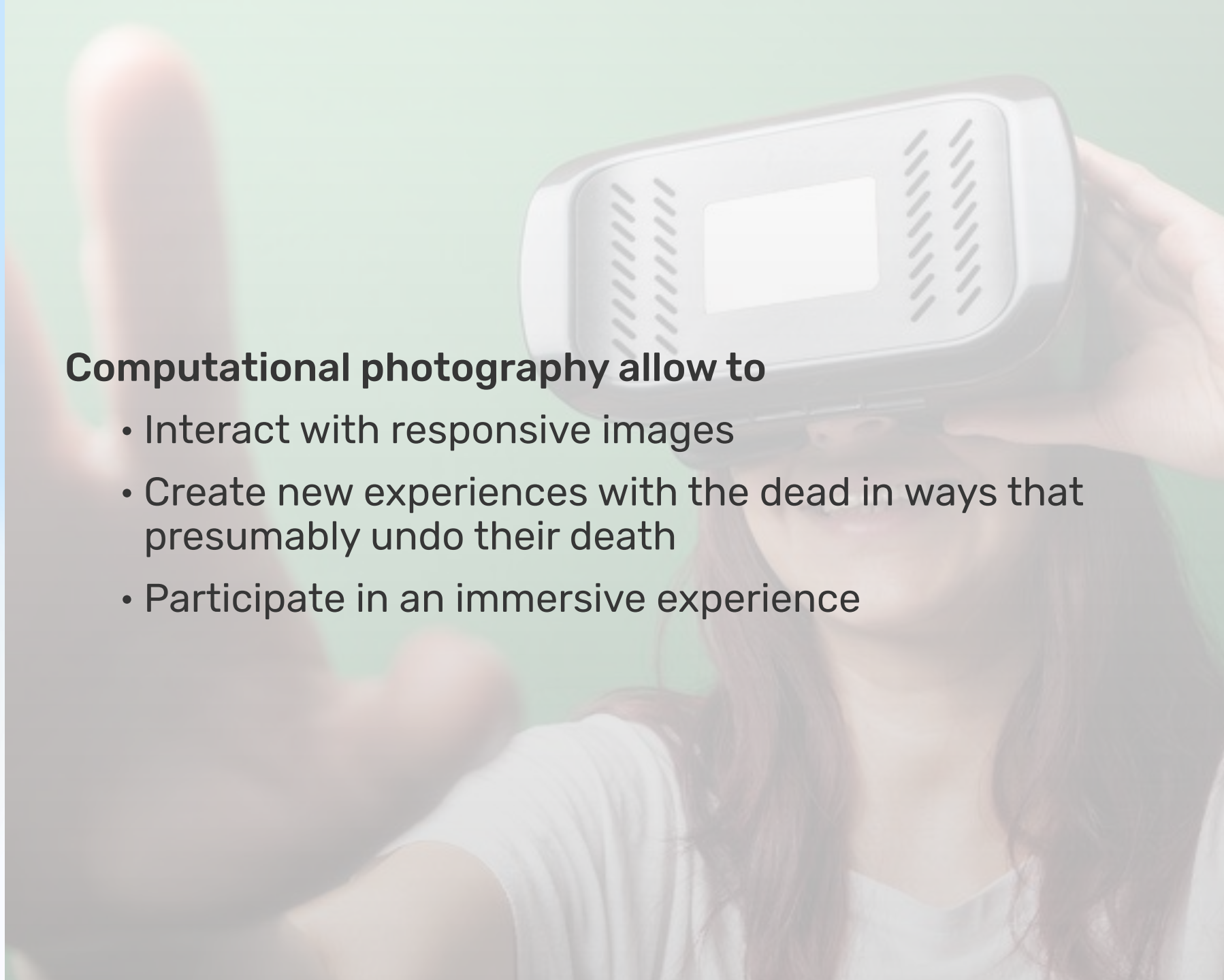
Continuing bonds

- "While death is, indeed, the end of life, it is not necessarily the end of the relationships between the living and the dead" (Refslund-Christensen & Sandvik, 2015)
- "There is something after mortality, something that succeeds death and that death is therefore no longer the last sentence" (Jacobsen, 2017, p. 9)

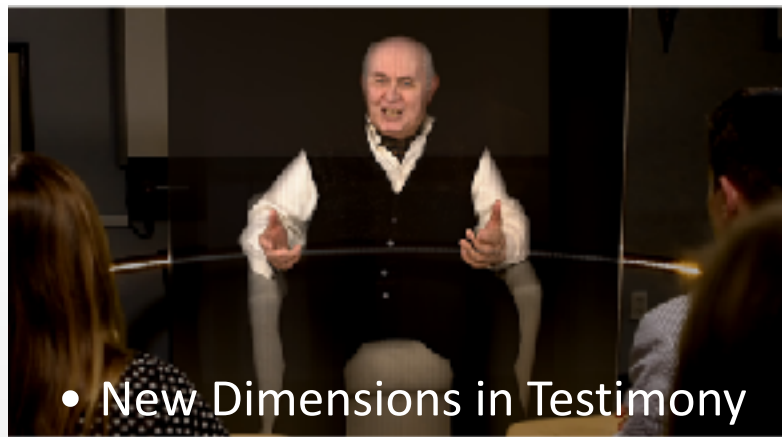
**The computational turn and the
rise of interactive photography**

Computational photography allow to

- Interact with responsive images
- Create new experiences with the dead in ways that presumably undo their death
- Participate in an immersive experience



The case studies



- New Dimensions in Testimony



- Listen to My Voice



- Meeting You

- Temporality
- Interactivity
- Commemoration vs. mourning





New Dimensions in Testimony

Temporality

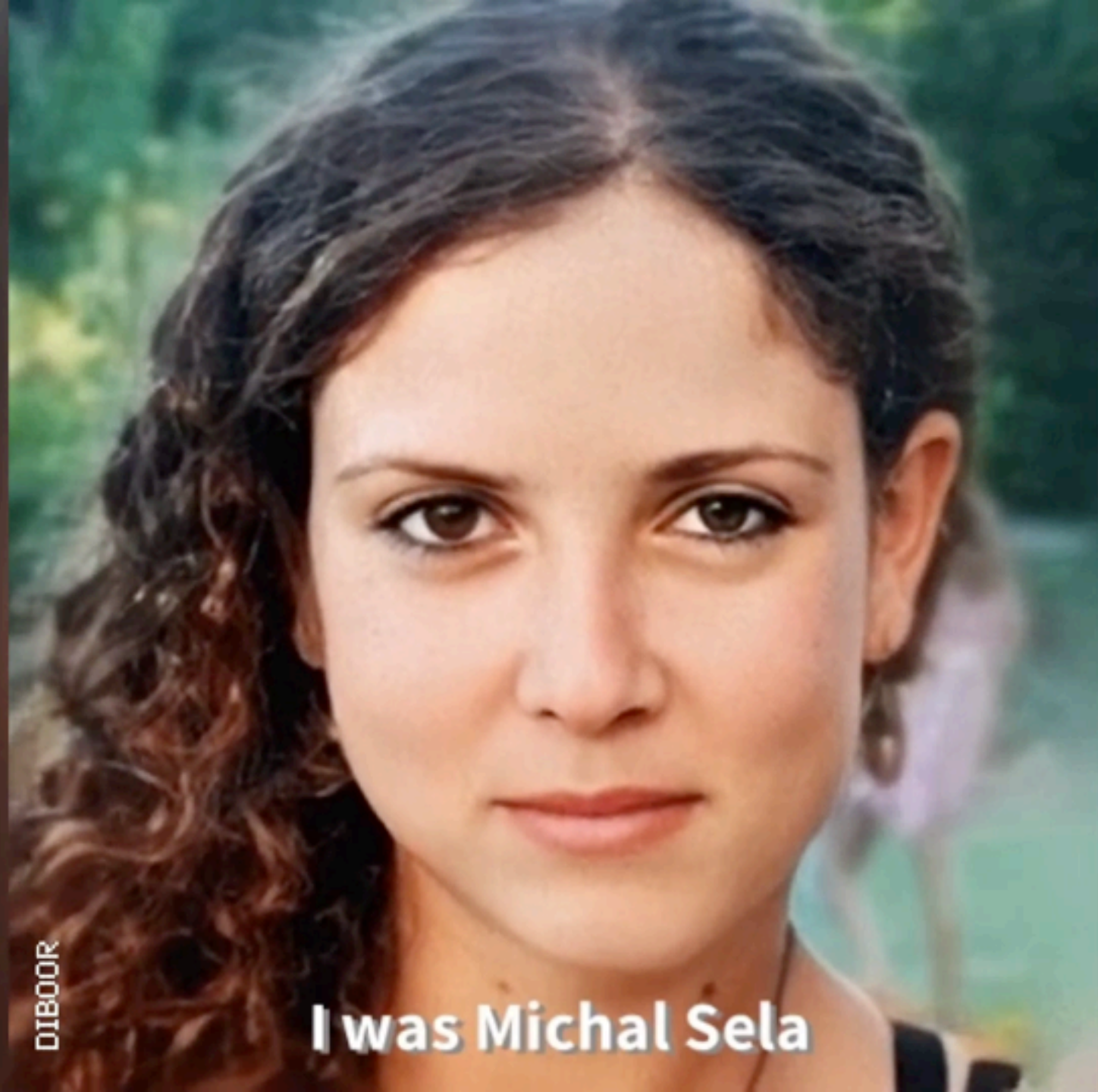
- Recounting the past in the present for future interaction

Interactivity

- Responsive
- Finite database yet infinite unique interactions
- Non-linear narrative

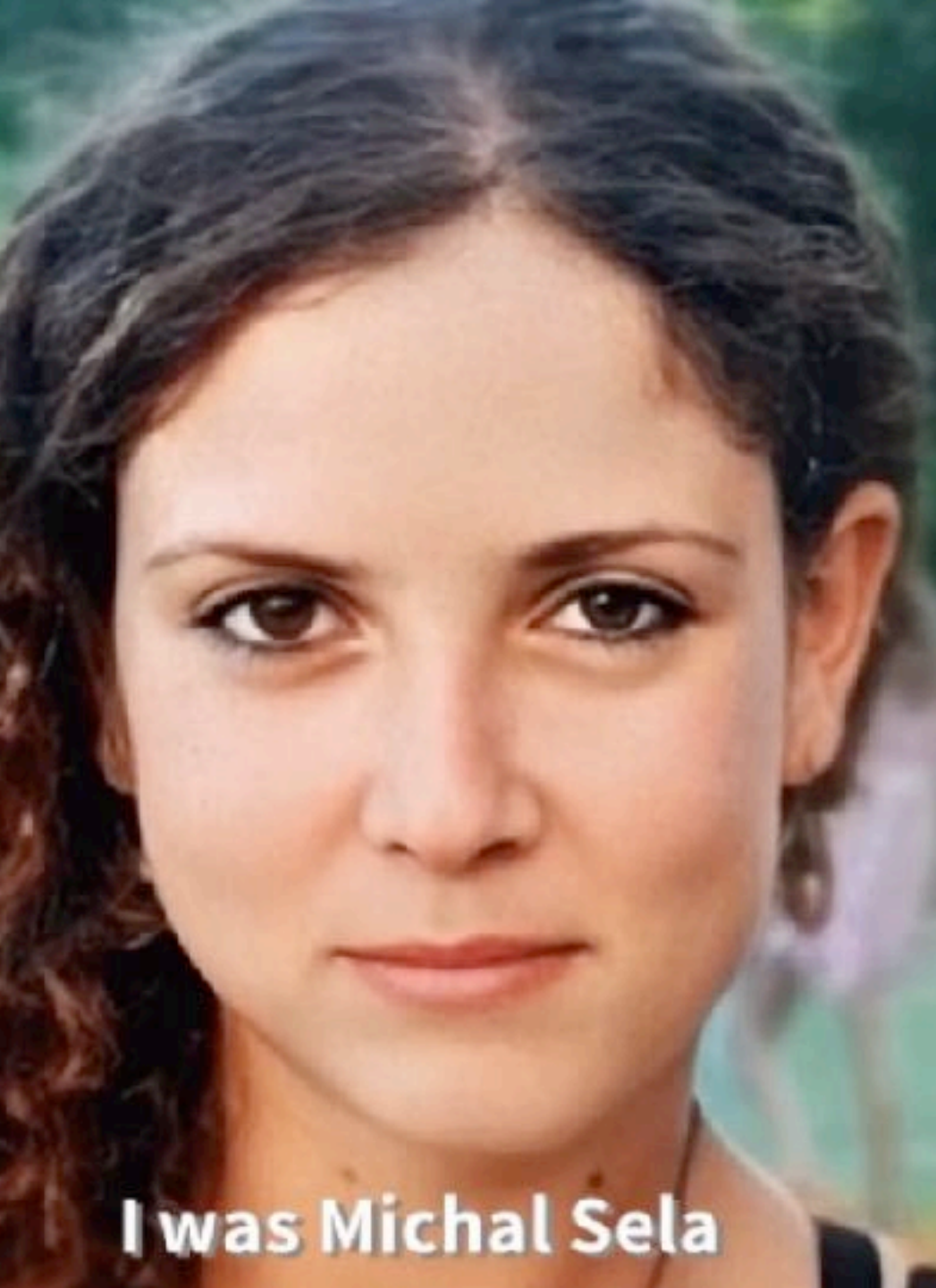
Mourning vs. commemoration

- Witnessing as emblematic indexicality
- Dis-estranging a non-familiar other



DIBOOR

I was Michal Sela



Listen to my voice

Temporality

- Temporal dissonance
- Death in first person
- About to die?

Interactivity

- Linear timeline of the media
- Call for action outside of the frame
- Punctum

Mourning vs. commemoration

- Part of the legacy of the family
- Making the private mourning, public
- Manipulated witnessing

I was Michal Sela

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and white pants, is wearing a blue VR headset. She is holding a black VR controller and pointing it towards a young girl. The girl has black hair and is wearing a purple dress with a pink bag strap. She is also wearing a VR headset with a red light on the side. They are standing in a virtual environment that looks like a forest at sunset or sunrise, with a large pile of logs on the left and trees in the background. The sky is a mix of purple, pink, and blue.

I missed you a lot.



“Meeting you” (Na-Yeon)

Temporality

- Real time of the mother
- The child’s death
- Discomfort

Interactivity

- Virtual reality and total immersion
- Open-ended scenarios within a confined setting
- Pre-scripted narrative
- lack of control

Mourning vs. commemoration

- Last encounter → closure (?)
- Estranged familiar family member

Discussion

Re-thinking the link between photography and immortality

- The interaction of new photography enables transcending death. (Mention temporality)
- The visual realism of the “living dead” created a new representation of death through photography
- Synthetic Indexicality
- Re-live past events and experience non-realistic events

Discussion

New affordances of visual media

- Interactions with the dead through new technologies
- With VR, we “break” the traditional photographic frame, enabling an immersive experience.
- New affordances dissolve the boundaries between the living and the dead, realizing continuous bonds.
- Non-linear narratives – database-driven experiences. Enables the “user” (not the viewer) to play an active plot role.

Thank you

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