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Celebrity Memorials

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CANDIDATE 1: Celebrity Memorials: Robin Williams and discussions of mental health

In *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death*, Jack Santino examines, among other things, the physical shrines and memorials that fans create to honor the memory of prominent celebrities and public figures. This year saw a surge in *online* memorials of a similar nature, particularly following the suicide of Robin Williams on August 11, 2014. While he left no note, his struggles with severe depression have been heavily publicized since his passing, and it is assumed this depression significantly contributed to his decision to take his own life. Immediately following his death, online tributes began appearing in the form of video, text, and image-based *assemblages*.

1. **Dynamic variation.** These online tributes demonstrate dynamic variation in their folk *assemblage* of images, text, and video not previously associated with death.
2. **Folkloric.** Here we see fans compiling and adapting top-down images in order to express grief over Williams' death and frustration over society's perception of mental illness.
3. **Grassroots.** Like spontaneous shrines, the memorials are a personal repurposing of existing media to express each person's unique grief.
4. **Persistent over time.** This dialogue on a taboo subject, facilitated by Williams' popularity, will likely continue online and re-occur at the deaths of other celebrities.
5. **Culturally significant.** While Williams' death is by no means the first to generate a fan response, these online tributes are noteworthy not only for their abundance, but for their facilitation of ongoing cultural and social commentary on the topics of mental health and suicide.

