

Crying the Wrong Tears: Floral Tributes and Aesthetic Judgement

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I am for the art of hearts, funeral hearts or sweetheart hearts, full of nougat... I am for the art of slightly rotten funeral flowers...

(Claes Oldenburg)¹

Material practices concerning death and bereavement are changing. As Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey argue, what used to be ‘confined within cemetery walls’ – the laying of wreaths and flowers – can be seen increasingly to ‘spill out into public space.’² Occasioned usually by ‘“bad” deaths’, floral tributes and shrines form an ever more established element in the popular repertoire of emotional expressiveness around traumatic loss.³ Jack Santino suggests that the spontaneous shrine constitutes something of a global phenomenon: as images of disaster sites are beamed around the world so too are the practices of vernacular commemoration. Events mediated by global communications technologies such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the death of Princess Diana, the events of September 11th are seen then as responsible in part for the spread of the localised action of placing flowers at the scene of road traffic accidents, murders, drownings and other violent deaths.⁴

Seen as a particular ‘genre of mourning ritual’, shrines and tributes have received focused academic attention, particularly in the wake of what in Britain was termed the ‘floral revolution’ occasioned by the death of Diana.⁵ Folklorists, anthropologists and museum professionals have attended to the motivations of those laying the flowers and offer useful ways of understanding the emotional and sometimes political work of spontaneous shrines. Placed insistently in public space, roadside and hedgerow shrines, together with subway graffiti and shop doorway memorials, form emotionally charged landmarks that breach the mundane landscapes of the everyday with the materials of the everyday. As such they can be framed as vernacular creative commemorative acts – personal expressions of pain and loss articulated through the placing of standard and idiosyncratic objects – that nevertheless attempt to communicate political messages. This dual articulation of pain and protest leads Santino to frame spontaneous shrines as ‘performative commemoratives’: that is as charged acts of remembrance that hope to affect some sort of social change. This road is dangerous, the shrines say, the Royal Family is distanced and cold, this border is viciously policed.⁶

To a certain class of passer-by, however, floral tributes are portents, constituting a nuisance and more, evidence of a generalised cultural malaise. The physical spaces in which these acts of remembrance and mourning take place become, thereby, contested and embattled. The emotional

¹ Claes Oldenburg, ‘Exhibition statement for “Environments, Situations, Spaces”’, *Store Days* (New York: Something Else press, 1967). Reproduced in *Claes Oldenburg*, Barbara Rose (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), pp. 190-1 (p. 190).

² Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 99.

³ M. Bradbury, ‘Representations of “good” and “bad” death’, in *Death, Dying and Bereavement*, ed. by D. Dickenson and M. Johnson (London: Sage, 1993). Cited in Hallam and Hockey, *ibid*.

⁴ Jack Santino, ‘Introduction’ in *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death*, ed. by Jack Santino (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.1-3 (p.1).

⁵ Santino, *ibid*; Francis Wheen, ‘Francis Wheen’s top 10 modern delusions’ <http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0,,1140156_00.html>.

⁶ See Harriet F. Senie, ‘Mourning in Protest: Spontaneous Memorials and the Sacrilization of Public Space’, pp. 41-56; Maida Owens, ‘Louisiana Roadside memorials: Negotiating an Emerging Tradition’, pp. 119-145; Regina Marchi, ‘El Dia de los Muertos in the USA: Cultural Ritual as Political Communication’, pp. 261-283; Matthew J. Taylor and Michael K. Steinberg, ‘Forty Years of Conflict: State, Church, and Spontaneous Representation of massacres and murder in Guatemala’, pp. 305-331. All in Santino (ed). See also Beatrix Campbell, *Diana, Princess of Wales: How Sexual Politics Shook the Monarchy* (London: Women’s Press, 1998).

contestation of space, thus, marks out an emotional geography, the contours of which give clues as to the “socio-spatial mediation and articulation of traumatic loss and ‘bad’ death.”⁷ While much of the fieldwork that has been conducted around tributes makes reference to the ‘controversial’ nature of shrines (generally in terms of their location) there has been no serious attempt to deal with the anatomy of the contestation explicitly. In addition to battles fought over the placement of shrines (attesting to divisions between public and private and private and commercial property for instance), a good deal of energy is expended as to their aesthetics. Seen as tasteless and overblown, shrines and tributes are read to constitute signs of the kitschification of culture and as evidence of emotional degeneracy.

In turning attention to the passer-by – and in the first place, to the passer-by who flinches at the sight of a bunch of flowers pushed into a hedge – the question of community is raised in its broadest sense. If folklorists and anthropologists have helped explicate the specific messages encoded in shrines – illuminating the particular personal meanings embedded in the use of particular materials – this article attempts to deal with the universal significance: someone died here, badly, violently, needlessly.⁸ In general, shrines and tributes are encountered in passing, often flashing in and out of view as a small shock as we go about our mundane business. The passer-by thus lacks the detailed purview of either the mourner or the academic and with this an acknowledged means for cultivating sympathy. For Santino, this lack of knowledge is immaterial; the decisively *public* location of shrines and tributes – in that they ‘place deceased individuals back into the fabric of society, into the middle of areas of commerce and travel, into everyday life as it is being lived’ – renders them, simultaneously, as invitations to community:

The shrines insert and insistent on the presence of absent people. They display death in the heart of social life. They are not graves awaiting occasional visitors and sanctioned decoration. Instead of family visiting a grave, the ‘grave’ comes to the family – that is, the public. All of us. We are all family, mutually connected and interdependent.⁹

A chance encounter with the scene of a stranger’s death, in this expansive view, offers us an opportunity to recognise our common humanity and to confront certain truths: that none of us will escape death or the loss of someone we love and less self-centredly, that as we go about our daily routines, someone somewhere is missing someone, someone somewhere is in pain.

Given theoretical support, Santino’s magnanimity transmutes into an ethical consideration of human relatedness. On the one hand, Jean Luc Nancy’s work on myth affords a fundamental understanding of community based in notions of interruption and discontinuity; on the other, Teresa Brennan’s detailed exploration of emotion allows for a mapping of egoistic constellations of meaning and the contraction of human connection into self-absorption.¹⁰ Taken together, Nancy and Brennan offer a portrait of shrines and tributes as calls to our best selves: as invitations to fellowship and hence as opportunities to enter into vital states of communication and being-with, whilst, simultaneously exposing the will to power congealed in the idea of the pure aesthetic (dictating what is decent, appropriate or seemly in the case of funerary or commemorative aesthetics) and the prejudice and self-interest bound up in so-called rational judgements.

Santino characterises the spontaneous shrine as pertaining to: ‘the tendency to commemorate a deceased individual in front of an undifferentiated public that can then become

⁷ Liz Bondi, Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith, ‘Introduction: Geography’s “Emotional Turn”’, *Emotional Geographies*, ed. by Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi and Mick Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 1-16 (p. 3).

⁸ See Margaret R. Yocom, ‘“We’ll Watch Out for Liza and the Kids”: Spontaneous Memorials and Personal Response at the Pentagon, 2001’, pp. 57-97; Hege Westgaard, ‘“Like a Trace”: The Spontaneous Shrine as a Cultural Expression of Grief’, pp. 147-175; Jonathan Lohman, ‘A Memorial Wall in Philadelphia’, pp. 177-214; Sylvia Grider, ‘Twelve Aggie Angels: Content Analysis of the Spontaneous Shrines Following the 1999 Bonfire Collapse at Texas &M University’, 215-232. All in Santino (ed).

⁹ Jack Santino, ‘Performative Commemoratives: Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death’ in Santino (ed), pp. 5-15 (p. 13).

¹⁰ Jean Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004).

participatory if it so chooses.¹¹ What to Santino is a choice is to others an intrusion, however; floral tributes are loud, inappropriate and above all impertinent. They impose themselves upon us, staging an enforced encounter that taints the landscape. British TV presenter and broadcaster Muriel Gray's point of view is by no means untypical:

Since the days, eight years ago, when crowds of social misfits dumped rotting heaps of cellophane-wrapped flowers outside Kensington Palace when a woman they had never met died in a car accident, the repulsive habit of leaving makeshift memorials wherever one pleases has grown to epidemic proportions. There's barely a street corner in any town or city that doesn't sport a withered pile of cheap bouquets to mark some horrible accident or violent crime, and even worse, the wild places of Britain are becoming littered with a collection of cairns and plaques that are considerably more permanent than the petrol-station-bought chrysanthemums and grimy teddy bears crucified on metal crash barriers.¹²

Guardian photojournalist Martin Godwin supplies images pertinent to Gray's words in a recent exhibition of photographs. Although the photographer himself refrains from commenting directly on the exhibition, its catalogue steers the viewer resolutely toward the idea of the spontaneous shrine as the site of as a performance of fake feeling. Peter Suchin's framing of Godwin's images resonates with Gray's viewpoint: 'There is something a little pompous', he writes, 'about this gesture, signifying, as it does the desire to be seen to mourn, rather than simply expressing one's grief in a private less emphatically visible way'.¹³

The laying of flowers as an act of public mourning, for Suchin, is remarkable for its self-importance, its imitation of stateliness, and its excessive visibility. Such responses, at the very least, attest to the fact that no automatic consensus, no easy community can be assumed here; in Susan Sontag's words: 'No 'we' should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain'.¹⁴ For all those who feel implicated or touched by the encounter there are others who refuse what they see as its manipulations, its sentimentality, its vanity.

Impertinence manifested itself on a grand scale in August 1997. When Diana died and a vast sea of flowers appeared to flow from the Princess's home in Kensington Gardens, across London and out to the provinces, many were confident that what was being witnessed was a mass-mediated spectacle of false emotion or 'sentimental hysteria'.¹⁵ Guardian and other broadsheet readers, in particular, were outraged at the thought of being folded into the media narrative of universal mourning and sought to distinguish themselves from the mass. Diana may have been, as Tony Blair declared, the People's Princess but not 'for those who felt differently'.¹⁶ 'It was grief with the pain removed, grief-lite' complained one reader while another complained of the 'feelings fascism' that dominated the popular response.¹⁷ The so-called 'Diana event' betrayed a 'culture of sentimentality' dividing those who fell victim to false feeling and those who endeavoured to separate from the sanctioned portrait of 'the nation united in grief'.¹⁸ For those who stood back and resisted the tide, the shrines were a symptom, a portent, expressive of little but group psychopathology. Francis

¹¹ Santino, p. 6

¹² Muriel Gray, 'In Memory of Solipism', *Guardian*, 15 September 2005, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1570253,00.html>> [accessed 5 March 2007].

¹³ Peter Suchin, *The Legacies of the Engaged Image: the Redemptive Beauty of Life after Death* (Nottingham: Future Factory at Nottingham Trent University, 2007), p. 12

¹⁴ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 6.

¹⁵ Anne Rowbottom, 'A Bridge of Flowers', *The Mourning for Diana*, ed. by Tony Walter (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 157-172; Bethan Jones, 'Books of Condolence', Walter (ed.), pp. 203-14; Wheen, <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0,,1140156,00.html>> [accessed 5 March 2007].

¹⁶ I. Jack, 'Those Who Felt Differently', *Granta*, 60 (1997), pp. 9-35 (p. 17). Cited in Tony Walter, 'The Questions People Asked', Walter (ed.), pp. 19-47 (p. 34).

¹⁷ Jack, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Anthony O' Hear, 'Diana, queen of hearts (sentimentality personified and canonised)', *Faking It: the Sentimentalisation of Modern Society*, ed. by Digby Anderson and Peter Mullen (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 183-190 (p. 184).

When, for instance, takes psychotherapist Susie Orbach to task for her optimistic reading of Diana week: ‘The assumption’ he argues, ‘is that emotional populism represents a new kind of collective politics. In fact, it is nothing more than narcissism in disguise’.¹⁹ Those who cried during Princess Diana’s funeral therefore cried the wrong tears. They thought they were crying for her when they were really crying for themselves or, worse, they were performing crying.

Self-conscious, self-serving crying is the true mark of kitsch sentimentality at least as Milan Kundera characterises it in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running on the grass!

The second tear says: how nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass!

It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.²⁰

The copy of a genuine emotion, the imitation tear reproduces the hollow, vain structure of the kitsch object. It is not surprising then that kitsch becomes something of a codeword for the aesthetic and affective crime of vernacular commemoration. Author Philip Roth, for instance, attacking what he saw as the ‘orgy of national narcissism’ that ensued in the wake of the collapse of the Twin Towers takes particular exception to what he sees as the kitschy bad taste of the disaster’s memorialisation. At pains to establish his separation from the popular response while simultaneously casting a literary eye on things, Roth tells interviewers how he went ahead with his planned swim on the morning of the event but decided to stay in the city a while longer nevertheless (he just ‘happened’ to be there on the actual day):

For me New York had become interesting again because it was a town in crisis, particularly in the weeks that followed when everyone was expecting another attack. It was a strange time and the first time for years that New York interested me.²¹

Cool-headed detachment and the novelist’s stance is set against mass hysteria and what he terms ‘the kitschification of 3,000 people’s deaths’.²² Epidemic over-excitement threatens to meld with pop culture plastic furnishing a generalised scene of debasement; kitsch at the site of the disaster is its own disaster and an aesthetic affront to those of finer sensibility.

Congeaed, then, in the notion of kitschification is a fear of inappropriate emotion combined with one over mass culture. Sentimentality as fake emotion turns out to be too much and not enough feeling at the same time, while mass manufactured objects constitute inappropriate vehicles for grief. The sight of uncontained emotion receiving unrestrained material expression is contrasted with tempered reflection and sober, minimal demonstration – crying ‘the right number of tears’ to borrow James Elkins phrase.²³ In a backhanded defence of Diana shrine builders one commentator takes care to point out the quietness of the crowds deploying casual orientalisms in the process:

Nor were the people who did these things noticeably hysterical or deranged. They were, in fact, quiet, orderly and in demeanour dignified. Some of us may have felt we were in a foreign country that week, but we weren’t in Iran or Israel. The crowds were British in their restraint. They weren’t wailing or tearing their clothes. And their emotion, it has to be said, was genuine, misdirected maybe as in the case of the man who said Diana’s death meant

¹⁹ When, <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/0,,1140156,00.html>>.

²⁰ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 72.

²¹ Sam Leith, ‘Philip Roth attacks ‘orgy of narcissism’ post Sept 11’, *Telegraph*, 5 October 2002, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/main.jhtml?xml=/education/2002/10/14/teglindh205.xml>> [accessed 20 January 2004]

²² Roth, in Leith, *ibid.*

²³ James Elkins, *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 123.

more to him than that of his parents, and, in that sense, irrational but it was not insincere or superficial.²⁴

If descriptions of Diana week abounded in metaphors of flooding and spillage (a sea of flowers, etc) they were also preoccupied with the prevalence of certain materials. The flowers were the least of it. From radio discussions on cellophane to debates over the appearance of shrines in Harrods and in provincial shopping malls anxieties about mass consumer culture surfaced alongside those about feelings.²⁵ A disgust of the mass-produced (and consumed) is more than evident in Gray's words, where the 'cheap', the 'cellophane-wrapped', the 'petrol-station-bought' quality of the materials used to build shrines forms a good portion of their offensiveness.

As Jeannie Banks Thomas asserts, though, something happens to mass culture materials as they become part of a shrine's edifice. 'Shlock and kitsch', the key feature in Fredric Jameson's topography of late capitalism, may constitute the prime building material of the modern shrine but the use of plastic objects and Hallmark greetings cards in such a context necessitates a certain complication in the way such things are then viewed.²⁶ Hallam and Hockey, similarly note how 'plastic and cellophane used as materials of memory, indicate the extensive reach of contemporary artefactual domains mobilised in response to death.'²⁷ Igor Kopytoff would refine this by referring to the complex 'biography' of the object, which drops in and out of the commodity state as it makes its way through various stages of use. His notion of the terminal commodity, in particular, offers a useful way of thinking about the role of a particular context in circumscribing object use: once placed on a grave for instance, an object can no longer straightforwardly make its way back into the mainstream of useable or saleable goods.²⁸ In a similar vein, Paul Willis rejects the idea of 'the autonomous artefact [im]printing its own intrinsic values' on us as 'ludicrous', arguing that 'contexts change texts'.²⁹ Viewing consumption, following Michel de Certeau, as a creative practice (as 'secondary production') and not as 'the dying fall of the usual triplet: production, reproduction, reception' Willis explores the extent to which what he terms a grounded aesthetics constitutes an element of the consumption process.³⁰ Grounded aesthetics pay no heed to the codes of the gallery or museum and describes the symbolic creativity – the self-making and modes of aesthetic, social and material practice – that surrounds what we *make* of what we buy.

The transubstantiation of objects intensifies in the event of death. Joan Didion knows intimately the fragile latency of the everyday that occurs with bereavement:

The voice on my answering machine is still John's. The fact that it was his in the first place was arbitrary, having to do with who was around on the day the answering machine last needed programming, but if I needed to retape it now I would do so with a sense of betrayal. One day when I was talking on the telephone in his office I mindlessly turned the pages of the dictionary he always left open on the table by the desk. When I realized what I had done I was stricken: what word had he looked up? What had he been thinking? By turning the page had I lost the message?³¹

²⁴ O' Hear, p. 183.

²⁵ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/libby_purves/article2348099.ece>[accessed 5 March 2007]

²⁶ Jeannie Banks Thomas, 'Communicative Commemoration and Graveside Shrines: Princess Diana, Jim Morrison, My "Bro" Max, and Boogs the Cat', Santino (ed.), pp. 17-40 (p. 37).

²⁷ Hallam and Hockey, p. 210.

²⁸ Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process' in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 64-94 (p. 66)

²⁹ Paul Willis, et al. *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), p. 19-20.

³⁰ Willis, p. 20.

³¹ Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), pp. 152-3.

Didion's year of magical thinking following her husband's sudden death floods the object world. Anyone who has been here knows how things tremble with potentials: an unfinished cup of tea, creases in clothes, a list of lottery numbers, become subject to an incalculable alchemy. Steven Connor terms this capacity for objects to take on symbolic vitality 'rough magic': 'All magical objects surpass themselves' he writes, 'They have a life of their own: a life we give them, and give back to ourselves through them, thereby giving rise anew to ourselves'.³²

The vessels into which we pour feeling may be ready-made (all consecrated funerary objects – flowers, hymns, poems, prayers – are effectively ready-mades) but the idea that their origin (as mass produced or plastic, a code word for mass) diminishes what we feel, dividing the poor in spirit from those possessed of fine feeling, whose sensibilities match – exquisitely – their aesthetic, misses the phenomenal point. Objects relating to the dead are rich *and* poor, often at the same time. Who, outside the bereaved, can see the significance of favourite things? Who doesn't know that the bouquets that they lay and the poems they read at someone's graveside are poverty stricken and inadequate containers for what is being experienced? That there are no words is a commonplace in expressions of condolence: *I'm so sorry, I don't know what to say, if there's anything you need...* Words fail, expressions fail, but we say them anyway; we make do with what surrounds us as a way of negotiating our grief, as wretched as we know it might be. Those who mourn become temporarily alchemists. Things placed at the side of a road or at a grave are bewitched, transmuted from the complexion of the everyday and unremarkable to something blessed.

Those who know grief are also patient with the unruliness of emotion. Elkins puts it succinctly:

Wherever ethical ideas are processed in the brain it must be pretty far from the mysterious center that regulates crying. (You can't cry when you should, and you cry when you wish you wouldn't.) Besides, who doesn't cry over sentimental things?³³

Those who judge the appropriateness of the appearance of others' tears are perhaps never caught by surprise by their own feelings. Given the fundamental rewiring of sensibility demanded by capitalist modernity – the story of the twentieth century features a central plot organised around the compartmentalisation of emotion as a means of containing its potential to interfere with business – it is to be expected that tears might show up in the 'wrong' place.³⁴ If, having disciplined feeling to behave at work, we, as Walter Benjamin has it, learn again to cry at the cinema, small wonder we cry for dead princesses and puppies with bandaged paws and not for our fathers.³⁵

Further, shrine haters are less self-contained than they might imagine. The floral tribute constituted as spillage and as the habit of the emotionally damaged in turn spills facts about those intent upon establishing emotional distance as a basis for clear transcendent viewpoints. Despite appeals to clear-headedness and common sense, the aesthetic verdict delivered toward shrines and attendants can be seen itself as the site of emotional expressivity: irritation and anger usually accompany judgements of sentimentalisation. Gray is furious; likewise, Roth and When: this is anger, though, cooled to the temperature of contempt before being sublimated neatly into cold detachment. In focusing upon the material, physical process by which affect transmits itself as energy between persons and groups, Teresa Brennan questions the epistemic authority of what appears to be affectless assessment or judgement: 'one can think oneself detached from the passions and still be gripped by them, insofar as one calculates coldly'.³⁶ Cold detachment, far from founding clear-headedness, injects an icy blast into critical judgement, resulting in viewpoints that

³² Steven Connor, 'Rough Magic', <<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/magic/>>.

³³ Elkins, p.126.

³⁴ Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Simmel on Culture*, ed. by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 174-185; Alan Liu, *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street', in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996), p. 476.

³⁶ Brennan, pp. 19 & 130.

project, in the psychoanalytic sense, egoic and self-absorbed verdicts. Roth's affectation of disinterested interest operates as a form of bad contemplation, one that emits a toxic haze in its wake. 'How coldly can we look and still claim that we are looking?' asks Elkins,³⁷ to which we might answer: when our business is grandiose we cannot see at all, we fight our own shadows; the 'positional dynamics of humiliation and grandeur' that mark a narcissistic investment in superiority establish a deadly contest based in fear, anxiety and paranoia.³⁸ As Sontag puts it: 'Citizens of modernity, consumers of violence as spectacle, adepts of proximity without risk, are schooled to be cynical about the possibility of sincerity. Some people will do anything to keep themselves from being moved. How much easier from one's chair, far from danger, to claim the position of superiority.'³⁹

Considered energetically, the kinds of judgements offered by those who survey a landscape littered with the 'unseemly' and the inappropriate constitute a kind of dumping: Gray's response to what she sees as the dumping of rotting bouquets can be seen, then, as an instance of what Brennan terms 'projection' and an attempt at 'projective identification':

A projection is what I disown in myself and see in you; a projective identification is what I succeed in having you experience in yourself, although it comes from me in the first place. . . . This is a version of dumping, in that I have evacuated my unpleasant feeling and deposited it in you.⁴⁰

The narcissism *identified in* the landscape is, rather, *projected onto it*, a shadow cast by the self-contained subject under threat, its agency interfered with by the presence of others with other ideas. The fiction of self-possession importantly extends to the subject's surroundings. The self-contained subject is presumptive in assuming ownership of all it surveys, issuing aesthetic edicts in the process. The ego is an unsophisticated gatherer of fabrics for self-making: 'is this me?' it asks, abjecting not-me objects with squeamish intensity. The ego is self-serving and goes about its business with conceited diligence, casting out that which does not fit its purposes, its narratives, its self-portrait. Drawing on psychoanalyst Adam Phillip's work, David Bate details the parallel composition of self and landscape in the context of the evolution of the 'picturesque':

. . . when landscape is invoked by discourses of nationalist fervour, male sexual or class anxiety (expressed as a fear of social disorder) . . . as something to be protected. . . the idea of composure (a narcissistic unity to the exclusion of others) becomes a real problem; it elicits, invites, a violent process of cleansing the 'contaminating' elements, that is the unwelcome debris of people's 'rubbish', from the otherwise pure scene. It is precisely in the idea which says that someone or something 'does not fit the picture', that the composure of an 'us' is constituted at the same time as an 'ideal' picture is construed by the exclusion of a 'them' of 'that'.⁴¹

The not-matching, not-me environment in Gray's imaginary is abject in the extreme: rotting, withered, grimy and repulsive; and its reflection deadening. The ego cannot 'attend' or receive anything that does not serve its own ends and so greets the not-me blindly and violently.

Being coldly detached is being much too preoccupied with one's own position, and it narrows one's focus. It forecloses the feeling intelligence at work in 'evenly suspended attention' in which one is open to new ideas about the other.⁴²

37 Elkins, p.126

38 Brennan, p. 108

39 Sontag, pp. 99-100.

40 Brennan, p. 29-30.

41 David Bate, 'Notes on Beauty and Landscape', in Catherine Fehily, Kate Newton, Liz Wells, *Shifting Horizons: Women's Landscape Photography Now* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), pp. 34-8 (p. 37).

42 Brennan, pp 128, 131.

Tributes and shrines, viewed through narcissistic preoccupations become so much rubbish: ‘that’ which interrupts and spoils the view.

The profound inability to attend to the other, the refusal to be touched by a stranger’s death can be seen as the refusal of kinship in its deepest sense: ‘humankind as a community of mortals’.⁴³ Brennan would again detect the ego’s work here: if ‘the common direction of the ego presents itself to us as “me” and “my interests” (p.), then:

When I judge the other, I simultaneously direct toward her that stream of negative affect that cuts off my feeling of kinship from her as a fellow living, suffering, joyful creature. . . . I make her into an object by directing these affects toward her, because that act marks her with affects that I reject in myself . . . I assume that she does not feel as I do.⁴⁴

The stream of contempt that accompanies the aesthetic judgement of shrines and their builders can be seen, then, to fund a virulent form of loneliness. Following Elias’ definition of the lonely (as delineating those people who generate ‘no affective meaning’ for others), the potential for broad kinship withers with the retraction of feeling from the landscape beyond the immediate interests of self. Pre-occupied with their own enjoyment and the self-serving need for a landscape to reflect back an illusory identity the self-contained subject stumbles across a memorial to someone who also enjoyed himself here once and spits. The particular self-contained subject that is Muriel Gray can scarcely contain herself:

John McEgo, 1952-2005, may well have been ‘a much missed man who dearly loved this mountain’, but when others who also love it stand atop its summit and wish to think their own thoughts, frankly they don’t give a toss.⁴⁵

Gray’s contempt for others is remarkable not only for its vehemence but also for its attempt to bind a community of sovereign self-contained individuals, absorbed in their own sublime experience, united in disdain.

For Jean Luc Nancy, such a summoning summons with it dangers: inclusive community, identified as that which gathers *centripetally*, is governed by a will to power and a will to exclude. Community interrupted, on the other hand, emphasises being as ‘being in common’, our irreducible state as ‘singular beings that [that] compear’, i.e. come into being through the condition of being-with:

Interruption turns community toward the outside instead of gathering it in toward a center – or its center is the geographical focus of an indefinitely multiple exposition. Singular beings compear: their compearance constitutes their being, puts them in communication with one another. But the interruption of community is the very law of compearance. The singular being appears to other singular beings; it is communicated to them in the singular. It is a contact, it is a contagion: a touching, the transmission of a trembling at the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us fellows, or the communication of the passion to be fellows, to be in common.⁴⁶

With self-serving bonds undone, we compear in a state that is the very opposite of composure, detachment, and containment; Brennan would highlight the emphasis on touch and the transmission of passionate communication here; compearance is, in this sense, an energetic, above all *material*

⁴³ Norbert Elias, *The Loneliness of the Dying* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 3.

⁴⁴ Brennan, p. 119.

⁴⁵ Gray, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1570253,00.html>>.

⁴⁶ Nancy, pp. 60-1.

condition of being-with. More, the privileged scene where community is interrupted is that of another's death. Drawing on the work of Maurice Blanchot, Nancy continues:

... "The basis of communication," writes Blanchot, is not necessarily speech, nor even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but exposure to death, and no longer my death, but someone else's, whose living and closest presence is already an eternal and unbearable absence."⁴⁷

As communicative acts – to reiterate, their placing in *public* space determines them irreducibly as such – floral tributes and spontaneous shrines speak of pain and loss and address us in our compearance and deep humanity. The *interruption* to our everyday complacencies and absorptions inaugurated by the sudden appearance of flowers and bears tied to railings – however withered and sodden – appeals to our best selves, offering us opportunities to recognise our being in commonness, inviting us even if fleetingly to propel our energies outwards. The capacity to share another's pain, far from being reducible to the crying of a second tear or the performance of fake emotion, is then the fundamental basis for fellowship, compassion and community in all its contagious, unravelling singularity. On the other hand, the contemptuous orientation toward shrines, shrine builders and attendants issues an invitation that, if it were a painting, would resemble Andy Warhol's 1963 painting *White Burning Car*: a disaster scene noteworthy for the chilling indifference of the passer-by nonchalantly strolling past, in self-contained disregard for what is given to be seen. It is generally accepted that Warhol issued this painting as a contradictory meditation upon the emptying of affect from the mass mediated disaster image and our capacity to become numb to scenes of atrocity. In Hal Foster's words:

... the Warhol repetitions not only reproduce traumatic effects; they also produce them. Somehow in these repetitions, then, several contradictory things occur at the same time: a warding away of traumatic significance and an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect and a producing of it.⁴⁸

The model being put forward by shrine haters effectively refuses this contradiction, advocating instead the sovereign self-containment of the passer-by. The steadfast refusal of community laid out here is devastating and represents for Nancy the absolute 'privation of being' and a bleak recommendation for existence.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Nancy, p. 61.

⁴⁸ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 131.

⁴⁹ Nancy, p. 57.

