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This paper is concerned with the social, spiritual and expressive ways of dealing with the pain of grief over loss of objects, of relationships, of persons, of the self. Dominant twentieth century medical and clinical models have assumed that grief will be "resolved" when survivors reach the point where they can emotionally detach themselves from the dead person. Freudian psychoanalysis sees mourning as a process necessary for survival. It enables the bereaved to grieve by "letting go" of and "breaking the attachment" to the lost person or object. By contrast, melancholia involves the refusal to let go, sometimes leading to pathological outcomes. The melancholic figure, in popular perception, is often identified as a romantic symbol of the connection between insanity and creative genius. This paper argues that there is an interim space between detachment and pathological immersion. Contrary to detachment being necessary for creative remodelling of the experience of death through art-making, our psychological preservation actually requires continuity, not detachment, and the construction of biographical narratives of all kinds is a fundamental mechanism for restoring a sense of meaning and place for the dead and lost in the ongoing trajectory of self-narrative.

I. The Melancholic

Early nineteenth-century interest in the connection of insanity and creativity owes much to the cultural influence of romanticism. For the romantic poet, insanity or displacement (caused by loss of self or grief) was seen as a source of creative vision. Strangeness, eccentricity as well as pathological insanity seemed to enable purer emotional states and retreat into the self. Bowler (1997: 25) notes the mythical connection between, for example, Vincent van Gogh's brilliance as a painter and the "exemplary tragedy" of his life, and romanticism's de-historicisation of the relationship between alienation and creativity, constructing isolation as an essential condition and marginality as motif, of the "authentic" artist. In this context, Chris McAuliffe notes, with reference to the legend of Brett Whiteley, that the artworks themselves "trumpet the fusion of self, style, and spectacle" (1996: 324).

Torment, morbidity, and melancholia are terms that we presently associate with the "mad artist." For ordinary people, tragedy, alienation and death do not appear to have a creative means of expression. Although, in pre-secular times, life and death were a continuum, today, the place of death and grief in the life cycle assumes that life and death can be clearly separated from each other. This paper, as previously mentioned, is interested in exploring ways in which death and grief might be given social, spiritual, and expressive representation that will creatively reconnect life and death for the griever.

II. Premodernist "Death as Part of Life"

In late modernist western culture, mortality is entertainment. Experience of death is vicarious. We play video-games such as "Doom" and splatter the enemy; we watch "weepies," disaster blockbusters, serial killers, pathologists and coroners scraping evidence from skeletalised remains in film and television, but are repelled by personal experience or actuality. There is a paradox here: we can tolerate, even enjoy, the stylised surfaces of mortality, but not the lived experience. In pre-modern culture (largely epitomised by mediaeval European attitudes), life and death were integrated, part of a continuum—with the living ever aware of the frailty of life and, for example, ritually able to intercede on behalf of the welfare of the dead. This might be done by burial in proximity to the relics of saints in the interior of churches, prayers to saints, and acceptance of the corruption of the body as distinct from the soul.

Representations of the inevitability of death, corruption and judgement appear on gravestones and memorials. The grotesque materiality of the body was accepted as lived experience. However, following rejection of the concept of purgatory during the Reformation, there developed a belief that the living could no longer intercede on behalf of their dead. The early Renaissance began to marginalise grotesque representations, and the "ideal" body was one in which corruption was absent. Progressively, the corpse was concealed by the "successive masks" of the shroud, the coffin, and finally the "theatrical monument" (Aries, 1981: 607).

The emerging scientific age shifted the everyday experiences of mortality from the family and the home to the professions and the hospice. The midwife no longer performed her other traditional role of undertaker, laying out the deceased at home in preparation for prayers and burial. Aries suggests that increasingly modernist communities have abdicated ownership and control of death which seems to have been "domesticated once and for all by the advance of technology" and that "a heavy silence has fallen over the subject of death. When this silence is broken it is mentioned with feigned indifference" (1981: 612). Much contemporary experience of mortality
is thus mere simulacra (according to Baudrillard (1983)), and this hyper-reality frames individual and collective responses to especially sudden death and grief.

III. The Self in Late Modernity: The Impossibility of Detachment

The term ontological security refers to the sense of order and continuity individuals (and cultures) attempt to maintain in relation to the events and experiences of everyday life (as represented, perhaps ironically, by John Bracks’ seemingly detached and alienated figures in “Collins Street, 5 p.m”). According to sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991), fateful moments disturb and disorder our assumptions about the world, and our place in it. Ontological security, then, depends on people being able to find meaning in their lives. Meaningfulness, however, is always shadowed by the threat of disorder or chaos. Contemporary society tries to keep the dread of disorder at bay by distancing that which could potentially threaten the social order and continuity of human existence. Death, according to Giddens (1991), is the ultimate anarchy, the "great extrinsic factor of human existence," the "fateful moment" (of dis-order) which is ultimately resistant to human containment and control.

Paradoxically, although popular culture, especially television, can cocoon us from the actuality of death by constructing simulacra, at times they can also unexpectedly undermine our ontological security by confronting us with the actuality of sudden death. Barbara Creed (1995) also reminds us of the tension here: while horror film's obsession with the materiality of the body seems to be linked to an obsession with the nature of the self, imagery of the destruction of the body becomes potentially subversive, with the fictional corpse becoming the site for breaking taboos and societal constraints (seen in such works of Gunter von Hagens as "Reclining Nude"). Julia Kristeva's (1982) emphasis on abjection as, unlike Catholicism, made no concessions to the brevity of psychologically to release the "inhuman" (in the sense of the body) the deceased is paradoxical. However, the difficulty of such a clinical model based on the "sequestration of death from life," argues Howarth (2000), is that it ignores the fact that the death of a significant person requires the bereaved to exercise control over mortality, has been fundamental to its separation from life." The formalisation of this separation includes among other things the legal requirements of death certification, medical practice, public health rules about "hygienic" treatment of corpses, but most importantly, psychological theories of "healthy grieving," which require the bereaved psychologically to release the "inhuman" (in the sense of the body) the deceased is paradoxical. However, the difficulty of such a clinical model based on the "sequestration of death from life," argues Howarth (2000), is that it ignores the fact that the death of a significant person results in a loss of self, a self that is inextricably bound up with the deceased. The fundamental crisis of bereavement, according to this view, is a crisis not of loss of the other, but of loss of self. If the deceased is ‘let go’ completely, then part of the self is also jettisoned. For example, an expectant mother's identity includes not only the period of gestation, but also the anticipation of a lifetime of parenthood. How can the loss of the neonate or infant (and its temporal, spatial, biographical connection to the self) be discarded? Howarth suggests that, to regain ontological security, the individual must construct a-biographical narrative which restores not only a sense of meaning, but a continuity—a new biography that includes the place for the dead person and the events that led to the present, in the ongoing trajectory of the individual's own changing self-narrative.

As Allan Kellehear (2002) noted in his radio contribution to "The Spirit of Things," the idea that grief over loss is like the flu, that you will get over it, is nonsense. The grieving are changed. Their future narrative can only reflect and somehow incorporate that experience. "Getting on with it" means in many cases not only a denial of the centrality of the experience to one's identity, but also a denial of opportunities for sharing of the story of loss. It is furthermore a denial of permission for the individual to experience and acknowledge his or her liminal state (the state of bereavement, characterised by loss, pain, grief and mourning—neither what was nor what will become).

V. Loss, Grief & Liminality

Liminality (as developed by Victor Turner (1977)) may be seen as the site for the beginnings of the creation of future self-identity narratives. During this period, the suspension of ordinary life in, for example, the Irish wake and the Jewish minyan are important processes which can ritually contribute to continuity and new biography. Conversations are had, stories are shared, images are unearthed, memoirs are written, memorials are created, and participants are reminded, through many creative and discursive means, of their connections to the deceased, the importance of relationships, and the place of past (present and future) relationships, and indeed our own mortality in the overall scheme of things. In the period of crisis immediately following the death of the Princess of Wales, and the terrorist attacks of "9/11," large-scale community liminal states revealed the extent of disruption to the normal social fabric. In the "period of shock," what Turner (1977) terms "communitas" (a condition that binds us all) is temporarily suspended. The temporary loss of the fabric of social codes, for example, the usual prohibition of public displays of grief is suspended. These new spaces thus enabled the temporary possibility of, for instance, "homogenety and comradeship" which ironically characterises Bakhtin's (1968) carnival in different circumstances. Crowds filled the streets, creating public mourning spaces, placing flowers and cards in what came to be viewed as "sacred" places. Beyond this, for some, the concept of liminality has distinct limits in late modernity. In the case of the absence of a body (in the case of the "disappeared") or in the absence of a physical death (for the family of an Alzheimer's relative who is already socially dead), this period is indefinitely extended, which makes the possibility of it as a site for rewriting the future problematic.

VI. Grief, a Part of Life: The Persistence of Pain, a Changing Identity

Herbert Gorer (1955) notes that death has replaced sex as contemporary society's major taboo. He was concerned with what he referred to as the "pornography" of death and the presentation of death in unrealistic frameworks particularly as represented in popular culture. Instead of lived experiences, we have an adolescent voyeuristic preoccupation with the "stylised surfaces" in which we might be reduced to locating ourselves and finding meaningfulness. This is not to say, however, that the reduction of the importance of religious beliefs and
rituals in a predominantly secular society means an absence of spirituality. Kellehear (2000) notes that, of the three sources of transcendence—building blocks of spiritual meaning—religious needs are only one. Situational needs—making sense of the immediacy of the situation, through a sense of purpose, hope, connectedness, and social mutuality—as well as moral and biographical needs—which seek reconciliation, closure, forgiveness, and moral and social analysis—may be answered in the construction of expressive self-narratives of continuity.

Research by Kellehear and Ritchie (2003) and the "Death: Diversity and Difference" exhibition (curated by Ritchie in 2003/2004) revealed what some might see as surprisingly consistent beliefs in the purpose of life, continuity of the human spirit, and the need for connectedness through rituals of reconciliation, moral purpose, and recognition of irreversible change. At funerals, we celebrate the importance of lost lives by expressing connectedness through the performance of eulogies, anecdotes, and music. Through participation at the home, graveside or crematorium in the preparation or disposal and memorialisation of the dead, ritual ‘closure’ and reflection are enabled. Many construct shrines—in photo albums, on mantelpieces, on the roadside site—and the latter may be refurbished on the anniversaries of birthday or deathday for many years.

The writing of poetry, prose and the making of other fine arts enable others to situate painful experiences into their (auto)biographical contexts. Not all expressive narratives necessarily make ‘good’ art. However, they function as "a continuous examination of our perceptual awareness and a continuous expansion of our awareness of the world around us" (Robert Irwin, cited in Cynthia Freedland, 2001: 207). And while pain is not a necessary precursor of creative expression, creative expression is certainly a necessary and useful part of dealing with pain. Brian Massumi (1993) suggests that much of contemporary western identity is constructed from the outside. Such cultures imagine they exercise control over mortality to the point where the mood of late modernity becomes substantially meaningless and fearful. Perhaps it is time to re-learn ways of creatively expressing grief rather than detaching from the experience. The social and spiritual need to be foregrounded aesthetically and narratively to displace inadequate simulacra of the human condition.

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