

“Upstairs Now with Billy and Don”: Spontaneous Memorials in the Footballing Community

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines communication and interaction around football shrines, arguing that these build into a ritual process which installs the deceased as an ancestor and provides consolation for the survivors. The historical roots of shrine-building are discussed, and the role of the media in disseminating the practice considered.

KEY WORDS

Shrine; mourning; memorial; football; ancestor.

Introduction

In this paper I examine the growing body of literature on football shrines before relating key theories to a specific memorial display; one created at Leeds United’s stadium when former Leeds player Gary Speed committed suicide.

I argue that this memorial offered a postmodern, post-Christian generation the opportunity to respond to Speed’s death by reaffirming communal ideals and installing him as an ancestor (someone kept socially, if not physically, alive (Mulkay 1993, 33), and who remains a source of hope and inspiration). I further suggest that the diverse communications focused on the shrine built into a ritual process which changed the status of the deceased and offered comfort to the survivors.

I made two visits to the Gary Speed memorial in November 2011; once to mingle with those coming to pay their respects, once to take photographs of the tributes left.

A Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was used to interpret the data gathered at the memorial. Grounded Theory maintains that social actions are creative responses to basic human needs (e.g. for safety, shelter, meaning), and that their meaning and purpose can be explored by comparing different responses to the same problem and similar behaviours in different contexts (Glaser 1992).



Tributes to Gary Speed around the Billy Bremner statue at Elland Road, November 2011. ©Ian J Simpson 2011.

The nature of football shrines

Informal memorials have become a familiar reaction to sudden death across Europe and America. These displays are often termed ‘spontaneous shrines’ (Grider 2006); ‘spontaneous’ to indicate that they come into being through the acts of individuals not the coordination of any official body, ‘shrines’ to indicate that they appear to have sacred and ritual elements (Santino 2006, 52). Typically a shrine will include flowers, photographs, written tributes, items that represent the tastes and lifestyle of the dead person, toys, and ritual objects such as religious icons or candles. These items offer a semiotic vocabulary of mourning. Flowers are used to denote the beauty and transience of human life (Camporeisi 1994, 34), toys can represent lost hope, lost innocence (Doss 2008, 15), religious symbols and candles indicate ritual space (Collins and Opie 2010).

There are two important differences between the shrines built by the football community and those created for other deaths. The first is the nature of the items used to mark ritual space. While football memorials occasionally include specifically Christian items (the Hillsborough memorial included a plaster Madonna (Sheppard and Worlock 1989)) candles are rare and it is more frequent to see items associated with either non-religious social rituals (Christmas tree decorations, greetings cards) or the rituals of the team itself (programmes, trophies, group photographs). The second difference is the use of shirts and scarves in the memorial display: the incorporation of clothing into the shrine emphasises the group identity of the bereaved community in a way rarely found elsewhere. The spreading sea of team colours, and the positioning of shrines at footballing landmarks, means that such memorials often promote the team as much as they mourn the dead.

The display of team colours might be interpreted as a way of ensuring that the community survives disaster by celebrating kinship (Foster and Woodthorpe 2012) and reaffirming shared beliefs and values (Durkheim 1915, Sztompka 2000). It could also be read as a demonstration of fans' topophilic attachment to the revered space of the home stadium. The notion of topophilia (literally, the love of place) has been used by geographer John Bale (1988, 1994) to describe the way in which identification with the home team is fundamental to the sports fans' sense of who they are and where they come from. According to Bale (1994), football focuses nostalgia, myth and topophilia to create a totem of working-class masculinity which is welded to both national cultural representations, such as Roy of the Rovers (Brennan 2003, 300), and to local loyalties. Brennan (2003), in analysing the 1989 memorial to fans killed at Hillsborough, suggested that the extravagant display of team colours represented resistance to perceived attacks on this mythologized communal identity by journalists or rivals: the notion of resistance seems useful, the identification of detractors unnecessary: there can be no greater threat to communal identity than the death of group members.

The written tributes left at memorials appear to be the product of an exercise in communal meaning-making rather than the statements of individuals. Spontaneous shrines are not static displays but community events, where people gather to see what other people have written, often leaving their own items in response. Early offerings may be rearranged by later visitors as they determine which symbols or statements should serve as focal points for the display (Grider 2006). The accumulation of symbolic and written messages shapes interaction between visitors as they read the tributes, console each other and find themselves part of an 'expressive crowd' (Blumer 1946) which creates 'a circular reaction of inter-stimulation' (Cox 1980, 131) and an unusual level of rapport. The rapport is a curious one in which the normal barriers of age, class and social role are effaced and where unexpected leaders emerge to direct communal activity (Walter 1991, 601).

It is possible to interpret the gathering of mourners around a football memorial in terms of the anthropological ideas of liminality (Gennep 1960) and *communitas* (Turner 1969). Liminality describes a transitional state in which a person or group moves from one state of being to another (a person dies, fans become mourners); the norms pertaining to the original state are swept away, but, before the new arrangements are accepted, there is a period of normlessness where social rules are suspended or inverted. *Communitas* is the sudden sense of 'comradeship and egalitarianism' (Turner 1969, 360) that develops between people sharing a liminal state: it is a moment, 'in and out of time and in and out of secular structure which reveals..... a generalised social bond' (Turner 1969, 360). Thus we have football fans, finding themselves moved to the role of mourner and experiencing kinship with strangers.

In creating a focal point for mourning, the spontaneous shrine is instrumental in producing liminal space and the experience of *communitas*, and it is within this unique context that the distinctive voices of commemoration emerge. As commemoration begins there are many voices and the statements made by individuals may not harmonise (Doss 2008), yet what begins in dissonance may nonetheless produce a clear overriding message as the memorial display develops. Santino (2006) identifies three distinctive voices: the performative, the political and the ritual. These voices aim to change external reality by making assertions within sacred space. The performative voice has the power to change the status of individuals by activating the familiar linguistic tropes of ritual (Austin 1962, Santino 2006) thus the deceased is transformed into an ancestor through the recitation of his virtues and the affirmation that, though dead, he remains connected with the community, a watchful and inspiring presence. The political voice reframes the situation to reveal the people or the forces (allegedly) responsible and to demand change: it protests to an absent other, accusing them of causing, or allowing, the death (Magry and Sanchez-Carretero 2007). The ritual voice seeks to draw meaning and consolation from tragedy. This voice emerges as mourners collectively create a narrative that makes sense of the events and may be amplified by the media as they seek to report on tragedy in an authoritative and reassuring manner (Riegert and Olsson 2007).

That voices emanating from an apparently secular community speak confidently of the afterlife is perplexing. This has been explained in a variety of ways. Such language may, be simply conventional; the language made familiar by condolence cards and gravestones uncritically reproduced. Davie (1993) suggests that it reflects Christian afterlife beliefs, arguing that while church membership is declining, faith remains widespread. Others have identified “New Age” religions in memorial behaviour; religions that fuse folk beliefs, elements of Christianity and sentimental celebration of human love (Monger and Chandler 1998, Woodhead 1999). An alternative explanation sees the religion language of footballing shrines as a strategy used by mourners to ensure that those who have died are saved from obscurity and insignificance. Bauman (2007, 33-39) argued that most communities select one of three strategies to prevent the meaning of an individual’s life being erased by his death; denial of death, the promise of an afterlife, or the assurance of a permanent place in communal memory. Spontaneous shrines appear to use all three strategies simultaneously.

Football supporters ensure their dead are both remembered and experienced as continually present by including them in imagined communities. Members of fan communities may never meet, but, having recognised each other as living parallel lives and sharing loyalties (Anderson 1983), they experience empathy and kinship. This can provide reassurance and mitigate existential fears, especially when the community is perceived as being powerful and revered (Bauman 1992, 198). Being dead is no barrier to membership of an imagined community (Seale 1998); indeed including the dead in such communities offers several benefits to the living. The dead are not lost because they are remembered; the living need not fear being forgotten themselves; most significantly, the living gain a foothold in the eternal by imagining obligations to the dead as well as to people yet unborn.

Football clubs foster a sense of imagined community, which includes the past and the future, the living and the dead, in ways that are both insistent and direct. A statue at Sunderland’s football ground is inscribed:

“All generations come together at the Stadium of Light. A love of "The Lads" has bonded together supporters for more than 125 years and will for many more years in the future ... Supporters who have passed away have their support carried on by

today's fans, just as the supporters of today will have their support continued through families and friends" (cited in Penn 2005, 5)

Through sporting rivalries and commercial endeavours football clubs become saturated with symbolic content and come to stand for the idealised places and the proud, loyal communities we crave. Furthermore, the use of sport by educators and politicians, to teach "moral" lessons about self-discipline and team-work and to integrate diverse communities (Karp and Yoels 1990), has made it possible for people to find in commercialised sport the shared ideals and sense of communal belonging that organised religion once provided. Football fandom offers to a predominantly young male audience, the access to ritual and transcendence that a different (older, female) constituency still finds in church attendance (Davie 1993). Football provides charismatic leadership, weekly attendance at a communal rite, pilgrimages to away games, anthems and sacred spaces (Coles 1975, Walter 1991). Indeed, since the Taylor Report insisted on safer stadiums with a fully seated audience, many football fans have the opportunity to make their weekly devotions in a "Cathedral of Sport" characterised by inspiring architecture and monuments to footballing ancestors and benefactors (Penn 2005).

It is the coming together of this quest for transcendence with the formation of imagined communities around football teams, and the use of place as a totem of social identity, that gives football memorials their distinctive character. Footballing communities use memorial activities to demonstrate their identity, their kinship (Foster and Woodthorpe 2012) and their ability to sustain the bonds of loyalty beyond the grave.

The rise of football shrines in Britain

The emergence of spontaneous shrines in Britain is usually explained in one of two ways. The positive depiction traces its roots in folk art (Santino 2003, 2004, 2006) and suggests that its [re]emergence is an appropriate response to bereavement in a postmodern society (Brennan 2003, Walter 2007). The critical response sees shrines as a tasteless display of 'conspicuous compassion' or 'mourning sickness' (West 2004) resulting from 'media manipulation.... media generated "feeling fascism" or ... the ascendancy of the "grief police"' (Lawson 1997). The negative reaction seems founded on an assumption that these expressive memorial practices are unseemly and "unBritish" and that only some kind of brainwashing would lead to their adoption.

Britain abandoned elaborate public mourning rituals around the time of World War I, perhaps because to have publicly mourned so many deaths would have destroyed the country's morale (Gorer 1965). From the 1920s onward Britain became known as a society that preferred to say little about death and keep all emotion safely behind the proverbial stiff upper lip (Walter 1991: 608). When, in 1989, Liverpool responded to the death of 96 football fans at Hillsborough with a carnivalesque display of public grief including televised masses, a football field covered with offerings and a chain of football scarves across the city, scholars agreed that this could never happen anywhere else in Britain (Davie 1993). Liverpool was claimed to be a unique case: more religious than most British cities, more devoted to football, possessing a culture shaped by Celtic immigration and culturally isolated from mainstream Britain. These factors were held to have inoculated the city against the erosion of mourning ritual affecting other parts of the country (Walter 1991).

This analysis was proved wrong when the death of Princess Diana in August 1997 ‘prompted public demonstrations of grief on an almost unprecedented scale’ (Kear and Steinberg 1999, 92) including the deposition of an estimated 10 tons of flowers in the capital (Rowbottom 1999). The idea that Liverpool was unique was then replaced by the theory that Britain was gripped by a media driven mourning frenzy.

Certainly the media publicised mourning events: they also facilitated vicarious participation, arguably permitting Blumer’s ‘expressive crowd’ to function in a virtual dimension. The increased popularity of shrine-building and the homogeneity of the product are hard to explain without recourse to the media, and it has been credibly argued that in a society where death is rarely encountered, audiences look to media sources to tell them how to behave in times of bereavement (Walter 1995). Nonetheless, the political tone of many memorials makes it unlikely that they are mere media artefact. Both the Hillsborough memorial activities and those associated with Princess Diana attacked the press, accusing them of misrepresentation and exploitation (Monger and Chandler 1998, Hughson and Spaaj 2011).

Santino (2006: 54f) suggests that the role of the media in shaping commemorative acts was one of standardisation rather than advocacy: just as the emerging print media helped standardise Independence Day celebrations across America (Anderson 1983), television coverage of memorial activities normalised shrine building (Santino 2004, Santino 2006) and helped create a consistent vocabulary of symbolic content and normative rules for displaying offerings (Grider 2006, Doss 2008). Media encouragement of shrine-building is probably inadvertent, resulting from the predisposition of journalists covering disasters to prioritise reassurance and meaning making over information delivery (Riegert and Olsson 2007): this leads to a focus on shrine-building in the wake of tragedy as this is seen as a source of both reassurance and hope.

If memorial making is not purely media artefact, then other explanations must be sought. Offerings have been made to the dead, or left at sacred places, over many centuries and in many cultures. Some commentators have suggested that shrine building has been “imported” to Britain, if not by a global media then through international travel or migration, and that its roots lie in the shrines of other religions or the roadside crosses that mark death sites in both America and Catholic Europe. Britain, however, has many indigenous traditions, which foreshadow contemporary shrine making.

Santino (2004) suggests a connection with “clootie” or “rag wells”. These are holy places, usually associated with healing, where visitors leave a piece of cloth tied to a tree. This cloth has several meanings; it is an offering and a ritual object, surrendered in order to effect a change in the donor’s life (Walhouse 1880), it is evidence of the donor’s presence (and faith) to be noted by later visitors (Santino 2004), and it is a way of making concrete an imaginary link between the donor and the site (especially when the item left is a piece of their clothing (Rix 1907)). Clootie wells are still in use across Britain and they provide a rather remarkable parallel to footballing memorials – clothing on trees prefiguring scarves and shirts on fences and statues.

Clothing was also hung in medieval churches in memory of the dead; here it was the “achievements” of noblemen (their armour, helmet and surcoat), which were donated to the church for perpetual display as a memorial to the deceased (Cunnington and Lucas 1972, 129f). The use of heraldry in churches appears to share some symbolic logic with footballing memorials, both use emblematic items of clothing to draw the deceased into memory while highlighting their exemplary characteristics, their fitness to be remembered as an ancestor

and their continued affiliation with a particular geographic place (as Lord of the Manor or star of the local team.)

Links might also be seen with the tradition of using empty clothes to evoke, protest and commemorate absence. At funerals for army personnel and police, the cap or the helmet they will never wear again is placed, with their parade gloves, on top of the coffin. Using items of uniform to commemorate both a dead person's integration with a living community and their absence from it is something that contemporary Britons instinctively understand.

An alternative analysis sees the sea of flowers at temporary memorials as an attempt to provide for local victims the splendour previously only available to the royal dead. Within Veblen's (1912) model of conspicuous consumption, what the rich do first, the working class will copy later – here as a vigorous assertion of the importance of their own dead within a social structure that disempowered them in life. Many of the features of the contemporary football memorial appeared first in traditional royal funerals, where the route of the funeral procession was marked with hangings, ribbons and wreaths, and a huge volume of floral tributes was displayed.

While these antecedents do not constitute an evolutionary line of descent from medieval healing well or royal funeral to football memorial they do suggest that shrine-making may represent a form of bricolage (Jameson 1991, Magry 2011), drawing on a variety of readily available traditions and symbols, from Britain and beyond, all of which carry pre-existent cultural associations but which also have the potential to acquire new meanings through social and ritual practice. It is of course likely that newspaper and television coverage has played a role in combining and refining these elements so that shrine builders today are responding to a cultural script for the mourning of newsworthy figures that the media has helped to create.

Several writers have drawn attention to unintended or secondary effects of spontaneous memorials, which may, nonetheless, have contributed to their popularity. Brennan (2003, 275), drawing on Johnson (1999) argues that in joining socially sanctioned mourning events people are able to mourn their own (personal and cultural) losses as well as this particular shared bereavement. Doss (2008, 39f) meanwhile, points out that memorials offer to those not directly bereaved the opportunity of “kinaesthetic” involvement in communal meaning making, and meaning-making, as John Fiske (1989, 171) notes, is inherently pleasurable

The discussion above has indicated that football memorials articulate group identity and express both the football community's topophilia, and their search for transcendence. Memorials may also function as ritual sites which transform the relationships between the living and the dead by reconfiguring imagined communities and installing the dead as ancestors. They are also sites where political narratives are rehearsed alongside the eschatological. Memorials may permit the mourning of other losses and provide pleasure in the celebration of shared meanings and communal bonds. The following section reviews a single instance of shrine building in order to clarify or contest some of these suggestions.

The Gary Speed Memorial

Former Leeds United player Gary Speed killed himself in November 2011. As soon as the news broke Leeds fans started to leave flowers, cards, scarves and shirts with messages

outside the Elland Road stadium. The site became a ‘place of pilgrimage’ (Walter 1991, Davie 1993) as people travelled to pay tribute and view the offerings. The Speed memorial thus embraced three types of communication: artefacts with symbolic significance, written messages and interpersonal interactions around the display of tributes.

While this memorial was in many ways a ‘typical’ football shrine, if compared to those previously built at Elland Road for Chris Loftus and Kevin Speight, (United fans stabbed to death prior to a match against Galatasaray in April 2000) or to the Hillsborough memorials, it can be seen to lack their “call for justice”, its tone being shocked and sad, rather than shocked and angry.

Group identity, tophophilia and the celebration of communal bonds

The presence of shirts and scarves and wreaths in the Leeds United colours makes the suggestion that group identity is being celebrated here, hard to resist. Some of the written tributes also reinforced group identity by employing language that only insiders would understand. Only a Leeds fan would immediately recognise that in United’s official tribute ‘*Speed was always 11 out of 10*’ that adding the team logo to the end of his name evoked his nickname “Speedo” and 11 referred to his shirt number. Likewise, only a local would know that the terms ‘*the Valleys*’ and ‘*the Gelderd End*’ used in a poem by a fan, referred to seating positions within the stadium.

Other written tributes indicated the dead footballer’s function as a totem of communal identity:

‘Gary Speed – the reason we pulled on our Leeds shirts every week to come to Elland Road’,

‘We all love Leeds, we all love Leeds, we also love our Gary Speed’,

‘Leeds legend, football legend’,

“Leeds” here represents two distinct objects of affection; it is a real place with a unique history about which reminiscences can be shared, but it is also an imagined community (Anderson 1983) based upon shared hopes and memories of football glory. This imagined community is, thanks to a global media, accessible to fans all over the world. Speed’s death drew responses from both local and distant fans – and the two groups mourned in subtly different ways. Local fans shared their memories of childhood trips to Elland Road and their knowledge of local landmarks, they claimed Speed as ‘*ours, here in Yorkshire*’ and expressed their fandom as a given, as their heritage. For fans like the ‘Kent Whites’ following Leeds is a choice (‘*you were a big part of me becoming a Leeds fan*’), nonetheless, having made this choice they keenly maintain the ‘insider/outsider binary that so defines football culture’ (Foster and Woodthorpe 2012: 18). They do this through demonstrating their knowledge of sporting history (‘*312 appearances, 57 goals*’), and through argot such as the phrase ‘M.O.T.’, which frequently replaces ‘R.I.P.’: Leeds fans immediately spot this allusion to the team anthem, “Marching On Together” but to outsiders it is an acronym without meaning.

As Bauman (1992) indicates, for a community to be an effective defence against fears of isolation and death, that community must be strong, well-defined and timeless. In this context

the affirmation of the fan community's strength, references to its history and the demarcation of its boundaries all make perfect sense.

Coping with death: ancestor creation and the reordering of the imagined community

That football shrines offer communities the opportunity to rehearse strategies for coping with death can be amply evidenced by the Speed memorial. Bauman's (1992) strategies for maintaining life's meaning in the face of death are simultaneously deployed: Speed's death was denied by the photographs of him in his prime and by message that addressed him directly, he was promised an afterlife 'in the sky' and there were numerous assurances that he would never be forgotten.

The application of Santino's (2006) three voice model suggests that the primary function of the Speed memorial was ritual rather than political. The political voice was weak, evident only when Speed's suicide (historically a 'bad' death which excluded the deceased from the memorial process and even from churchyard burial (Harte 2011)) was reframed as the untimely demise of a hero-victim: he was '*a true gentleman*', '*gone too soon*'. The reason for Speed's suicide was never established, the coroner returning a narrative verdict (Carter 2012); as there was no-one who could clearly be blamed, the political voice contented itself with hoping that Speed '*found peace*', thus transferring the blame from Speed himself towards the known fault-lines of the football establishment.

Santino's performative and ritual voices are much clearer. The performative voice transformed Speed from celebrity to legend, from footballer to ancestor, by affirming the descriptions '*true legend*', '*Leeds legend*', '*our hero*'. The ritual voice provided a narrative that made sense of the events. Speed's story was retold until it became a smoother and more satisfying account: he may have died young, but this was balanced by all he achieved. He may be gone from the world, but he is not lost to his fans, for they can remember him '*with a smile*'. Placed in chronological order the messages addressed directly to Speed built into a hero-myth: '*You were the true legend when I was a young boy*'; '*You made us proud till it hurt*'; '*Now lad, it's time to part*'; '*Gone but never forgotten....your memory will live on*'; '*Keep on playing in the sky*'. Such narratives completed the conversion of flawed individual into an ancestor who can be remembered with uncomplicated affection and referred to as a moral exemplar (Miller and Parrot 2009, 506).

An alternative model of ancestor creation suggests that individuals become ancestors through two processes: the first mythologizes the deceased (Miller 2010, 150f), the second transforms the relationship between him and the bereaved community (Walter 1999). Speed was mythologized through heroic narratives, through the sheer accumulation of conventional tributes such as '*never forgotten*' or '*gone too soon*' and through "obituary statements" which drew attention to his revered characteristics: '*inspirational captain*', '*great player*', '*true gentleman*', '*genuinely nice guy*', '*honest man*', '*kind*'. That the messages aimed to transform man to myth using familiar linguistic tropes is particularly clear when the parallels between messages to Speed and the inscription on Bremner's statue are noted; the phrase '*inspirational captain*' was also applied to Bremner who was credited with '*771 appearances, 115 goals*'.

Speed's relationship with the living was re-negotiated through those messages which, while anchoring him firmly to the imagined community created around Leeds United also changed his status within it. These messages affirmed past relationships, by inserting him into the personal memories and life stories of individual fans, and offered a conceptual framework for these relationships to continue into the future.



Messages to Gary Speed at Elland Road, November 2011. ©Ian J Simpson 2011.

'My first crush, I'll love you forever. Keep playing in the sky.'

'We will remember our great memories of you with a smile. Goodnight Gary. Sleep tight. You always still shine brightly over us.'

'Upstairs now with Billy and Don'

Messages which address the deceased directly have been explained as ongoing conversations with the dead (Doss 2008, 15) perhaps facilitated by the sacred space offered by the shrine

(Santino, 2004) perhaps representing a temporary escape into a fantasy world in which the death has not (yet) happened (Brennan 2003, 283). All these explanations suggest that communion between the living and the dead is short term; I disagree. I believe that the conversations opened with Speed around his memorial laid the foundations of a relationship which was expected to continue indefinitely. I would further argue that expressions such as *'shining over us'* and *'upstairs now with Billy and Don'* (which unites Speed with the star and the manager of Leeds United's 1970s team) do not imply theological immortality, but a new role within the imagined community; Speed is no longer a leader and celebrity but has moved to join the legends and the ancestors.

The use of the phrase "MOT" as an alternative to "RIP" attests to fans' investment in an imagined community which embraces past and future: in fact the football anthem from which this acronym is drawn presents a rather remarkable statement that the community which bonds around Leeds United is an enduring, and perhaps immortal, community.

*'We've been through it all together,
And we've had our ups and downs
We're gonna stay with you forever,
At least until the world stops going round'*
(Reed and Mason 1972)

Conclusions

The arguments made in this paper can be summarised in the following way. A football memorial begins with a myriad of voices; individual fans speak to the dead, to each other and to themselves as they strive to create a narrative within which the death makes sense. Communal voices arise from the ritual process enacted at the memorial. The performative voice transforms the deceased into an ancestor, the political voice assigns blame while the ritual voice seeks meaning, reassurance and a reason to go on.

The creation of spontaneous shrines is becoming more popular and widespread because, having been pieced together from a variety of pre-existent cultural resources the practice has been found to be helpful and healing. The role of the media has been to standardise practice and to make people aware of the potential benefits of memorialisation. It does this because media executives and journalists see their role in crisis reporting as one of meaning-making and reassurance (Riegert and Olsson 2007); that is to say, when covering a communal bereavement, the media become an additional ritual voice.

People find many benefits in building and visiting spontaneous shrines. Shrines offer socially sanctioned space to grieve this and other losses within a community that normally demands emotional reticence (Brennan 2003). Mourners may experience comfort, transcendence, even ecstasy in sharing an existential event with others (Walter 2007, 8). Perhaps most importantly shrines offer an opportunity to reaffirm communal identity.

Football memorials offer an opportunity to enact kinship rites to people who may find little sense of belonging in their own streets and communities. This thirst to belong also binds

people to the imagined communities forged around the identity of the football club and this gives access to a distinctive “solution” to the problem of human mortality. By drawing together fans and players past, present and future into a community which is itself presented as immortal, football enthusiasts are offered the opportunity to claim their own immortality by affirming that of others. The memorialising process can bring significant benefits to a community, and deploying communally bonding mourning rituals in the face of a remote or minor tragedy may result in a net gain for local morale. As Doss (2006) notes, media coverage of memorials, and photographs taken by those who attend, foreground not the tragedy of death but the triumph of continuing social bonds and the satisfactions offered by memorial activity.

Before Britain became coy about death the Victorians mourned those they knew well (through familial or geographic proximity) expressively and through an extensive material culture of mourning. Today people mourn those they know well (through imagined communities or media coverage) expressively and via a visual culture shot through with recycled and reinterpreted symbols. Just as the Victorians held their dead close; in romantic memory, deathbed photographs, and mementoes; so too postmodern citizens refuse to break their bonds with the dead, memorialising them and transforming them into a fondly remembered ancestral presence (Klass, Silverman et al. 1996). It could be argued that modernism, with its insistence on separation from the dead (expressed in notions of “working through grief” (Freud 1917, Worden 1983) and also in extramural cemeteries) was the anomaly here. The growing popularity of shrine building might even be seen as one element of a growing rebellion against the privatisation of grief and the sequestration of the dead (Walter 1991) and as a protestation of the right of individuals and communities to find their own meanings in life and death rather than accepting those offered by politicians, historians and clerics.

Intriguingly, the Billy Bremner statue has recently started to attract tributes to the local dead, which also use words and images that claim a place for the deceased in an imagined, immortal, intergenerational community. A message on one football shirt tied to the Bremner statue sends love from ‘*our Leeds United family*’ and promises to re-enact a family tradition at each match ‘*until the world stops going round*’. Cards attached to flowers read ‘*a true Leeds United fan, M.O.T*’; ‘*in loving memory of Christine.....marching on together*’. Further examination of this emerging practice may shed valuable light on commemorative practice in the football community.

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