

# Affective Landscapes in Literature, Art and Everyday Life

Memory, Place and the Senses

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ASHGATE

2015

### Chapter 3

## Placing Affect: Remembering Strangers at Roadside Crash Shrines

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The effective memorial is one which must first convince strangers that a loss has indeed occurred, and that it is their loss. (Rico Franeses, 'Monuments and Melancholia' (2001))

There is a roadside car crash shrine I often drive by near my home in Austin, Texas. The shrine commemorates the loss of four siblings who died in a car accident on February 28, 2010: Paul Gonzalez, age 9; Noel Gonzalez, age 8; Angelina Gonzalez, age 6; and Aaliyah Ann Gonzalez, age 5. Although I see the shrine often in the midst of my everyday journeys, I only stop to photograph it when I notice a significant change to the site. Because the shrine has changed a lot since I first saw it, and because my relationship with the site continues to deepen with each visit to it, I have come to see the shrine as a kind of index of my research on crash shrines in general.

I first photographed the site in April 2010, less than two months after the crash. Then, the site featured four wooden crosses set in concrete (Figure 3.1). The two crosses for the boys were painted blue and the two crosses for the girls were painted pink; each cross also carried a styrofoam cross with matching silk flowers. Each cross also featured a different coloured stuffed rabbit at the top of the cross. Each boy's cross also included a toy race car, while each girl's cross featured a small stuffed baby doll. At the time, I was trying to figure out how shrines manifest personal identity in the form of the material culture present at the shrine, and I was particularly drawn to the fact that each child was given a separate gender-coded cross with equally gendered toys attached to them.

By the second time I photographed the site, a year later, the site had undergone a major revision (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). The flower crosses had been moved to the back of each wooden cross, each cross now carried a bronze placard carrying the names, birthdates and death dates of each child, and the whole site now featured a black plastic border that was filled with white gravel. More important, the rabbits were all gone, replaced for the boys with full-scale footballs and replaced for the girls with new, much larger life-size baby dolls that leaned against each girl's cross as if sitting in a chair. I found myself intrigued by the change from smaller-than-human scale to human-scale objects. At the time, I had just completed an article analyzing the way that road trauma shrines territorialize memory by transferring



Fig. 3.1

Robert M. Bednar, Gonzalez Shrine, US-290 East at TX-21 North, Paige, Texas, USA, April 2010. Photograph courtesy of the author.



the life lost in an automobile crash to the life lived by the shrine itself placed on the roadside (Bednar, 2011b). This process of transference re-replaces the interrupted life with a new life that is allowed to take its course as the lost person's life was expected to before it was cut short by the crash. One of the things I analyzed in that previous essay was the way that shrines acting as proxies actually *age* on the roadside, extending the life of the lost person into a future that had been interrupted and negated by the crash. After watching this particular shrine change dramatically over the course of a year, I projected a near future time when I would return to photograph the shrine to show how the dolls had aged in the weather, as I had documented at other sites throughout the American Southwest.

The year went on, and I watched the shrine as I drove by it many more times. There it sat, doing what I was now learning to expect it to do: standing there in the sun and rain living its life, faithfully standing in for the lost children, keeping them alive socially even as the children were no longer embodied themselves. The site turned into a reference point, a landmark on the way through my everyday life as both a driver and a researcher.

And then, in December 2012, I noticed another dramatic development. Actually, it barely registered as I drove by at my regular full speed, but once my mind caught up with my eyes, I instinctually jammed on the brakes and swung my car around to park in what was now a familiar pullout spot. Approaching the site, I confirmed what I had only partially apprehended moments before as I drove by the site: there were now different dolls at the site (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).

When I saw these new dolls up close, I froze. The dolls were clearly no longer supposed to be babies. They had the jaunty, coordinated outfits and stylish haircuts of much older girls. Where the baby dolls looked at me with big, expressionless baby eyes, hailing me as a grown-up, drawing me in to them as a care-taker, these new 'big girl' dolls looked out with confident smiles on their faces, ready to take on the world. And yet, the girls they stood in for, Angelina and Aaliyah, the girls who used to be looking forward to a future filled with matching outfits and confident though fragile expressions, were gone. Their lives, once filled with ordinary rhythms and punctuated by everyday affects, were gone. There it was in sharp relief: if the shrine was a stand-in for the lost children, whose lives were interrupted, the shrine itself was not only enduring a longer life in place of the lost children, but also *growing up* as it did!

Staged this way, both the family's loss and the family's work to negotiate it instantly became not only visible to me, but palpable. A moment later, still shocked by the poignancy of what I was seeing, an intense wave of sadness engulfed me, and the sadness stayed with me the whole time I photographed the site. A melancholy settled into my body that remains with me today. Melancholy certainly followed me home that day, as I opened my computer to compare my new photographs to the previous photographs I had taken of the site. It only got deeper from there as I connected the dots from the first iteration of the shrine to the latest one. Only then did I realize that I had totally missed the fact that the first set of life-size dolls had themselves replaced smaller dolls: the ones attached to the top of the cross in my photographs from April 2010. This dramatic replacement of one set of dolls for





Fig. 3.2

Robert M. Bednar, Gonzalez Shrine, US-290 East at TX-21 North, Paige, Texas, USA, February 2011. Photograph courtesy of the author.





Fig 3.3

Robert M. Bednar, Aaliyah Baby Doll, Gonzalez Shrine, US-290 East at TX-21 North, Paige, Texas, USA, February 2011. Photograph courtesy of the author.

another 'older' set of dolls had happened once before without me recognizing its significance. Faced with this stark demonstration of how loss can be given form and anchored to the ground, but also how easy it is to miss it, I felt connected to the site more than ever before.

If my photographs and words have conveyed a sense of the scene to you, maybe you are now feeling something similar as you read this. There's something poignant about any roadside car crash shrine, where the tragedy commemorated becomes apparent in a different way than it does when you read an obituary, see a gravesite or visit a mausoleum. There's some palpable force of undeniability to the form of a shrine itself: right here, on this spot, someone was killed in an automotive accident, and right here, someone is working through their traumatic grief by building and maintaining a shrine at the same spot. And when the shrine literally stages an ongoing life for the ones lost at the exact location where that trauma occurred, a shrine can become the location of the experience of vicarious trauma for the strangers like us who witness them. Seeing those dolls there was shockingly poignant because it gave form to a loss that might otherwise go unnoticed – either because it was not known to me, or because it hadn't been given a material form.

But it was more than that.

There was something else – something I felt and knew but couldn't quite put my finger on, much less put into words. That 'something else' is the subject of this chapter.

To make sense of the 'something else', we have to ask difficult questions: How can a few store-bought plastic dolls make me feel something this deeply? Even standing there in front of the shrine, I already knew that it was not just the dolls that moved me, but the larger shrine, situated in a radically particular place, so I should state my question differently already: how can a roadside crash shrine move me? The answer may at first seem obvious, but as a scholar of everyday visual and material culture, my job is to interrogate the obvious. It is the *obviousness* of the obvious that gives it its force, so we must work to reflexively extract ourselves from the dynamic long enough to analyze it while still being inside it.

It seemed so natural when it happened, that intense feeling of melancholy, that recognition of poignancy. But what is the nature of this particular kind of affect? How is it that, when I am encountering a shrine commemorating the lost life of strangers – people I have never met and never will meet – I feel strong things in my body that I attribute to the shrine instead of only to my own imagination? Where are these effects and affects 'located' – both physically and culturally? From there the questions get only bigger. How can inanimate objects embedded in the landscape generate affect, especially when they do not *belong* to me, and when they are being used to commemorate people I will never know? Where is affect located? Where does it come from? Where does it go? Can it be contained in objects and landscapes? Or is it always something located in between subjects and objects, something in the process of becoming – something that is not even really a thing, but an intersubjective encounter-effect? And what happens to affect once it 'happens'? What does affect *do*, and what do we *do with* it?





Fig. 3.4 Robert M. Bednar, Angelina Girl Doll, Gonzalez Shrine, US-290 East at TX-21 North, Paige, Texas, USA, December 2012. Photograph courtesy of the author.





Fig. 3.5 Robert M. Bednar, Aaliyah Girl Doll, Gonzalez Shrine, US-290 East at TX-21 North, Paige, Texas, USA, December 2012. Photograph courtesy of the author.



These questions will both implicitly and explicitly haunt this chapter, just as they haunt this larger collection of work on 'affective landscapes'. These questions try to account for that 'something else' that remains in affective landscapes, places where affect is territorialized but never quite contained, either spatially or culturally. I am most concerned here with engaging the key concepts of affect, place and ordinary trauma to analyze the emplacement and effervescence of traumatic memory in roadside crash shrines. As Avril Maddrell and James D. Sidaway argue, 'experiences of death, dying and mourning are mediated through the intersections of the body, culture, society and state, and often make a deep impression on *sense of self*, private and public identity, as well as *sense of place* in the built and natural environment' (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010, p. 2, emphasis in the original). As I explore these intersections, my focus is on two main things: first, the way that affect is *placed* at road trauma shrines, and second, the way that emplacement interpellates strangers within what Lauren Berlant calls the 'intimate public sphere' (Berlant, 1997, p. 4) to create a particular kind of public structured in and through what Gillian Rose refers to the 'collective experience of "feeling"' (Rose, 2010, p. 7) in relation to what Rico Franes calls 'stranger-memorials' (Franses, 2001, p. 97). Along the way, I will show how the ongoing production of spaces of mourning in public landscapes demands that we ask complex questions about the nature of both individual and collective trauma, affect and memory as they are performed in and through public landscapes.

Melancholy is always structured as an excess of affect. I turn toward affect because it helps me think through what Lawrence Grossberg identifies as 'a gap between what can be rendered meaningful or knowable and what is nevertheless livable' (Grossberg, 2010, p. 318) or sensible: what I am calling that elusive 'something else'. Melancholy remains. It is a feeling that persists, but the things that persist also are left over. They become a remainder. I am melancholy about remains. That melancholy remains. It is persistent, it stays with me, and it continues to be a thing left over after an encounter with someone else's remains. My thinking about landscape is similarly focused on processes, gaps and materialities. In *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell argues that understanding landscape means thinking of landscape as 'a dynamic medium' – not 'not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed' (Mitchell, 1994, p. 1). In short, analyzing landscape as a medium asks 'not just what landscape "is" or "means" but what it does, how it works as a cultural practice' (pp. 1–2). And as a cultural practice, roadside shrines are also thoroughly embedded in what John Urry (2004) calls the 'system of automobility', or what Foucault would call the discursive *apparatus* of automobility: a cultural logic of organizing bodies, objects and processes towards some explicit and implicit cultural value, which produces subjects, objects and practices, and organizes power/knowledge relations among them all.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive exploration of this dimension of road trauma shrines, see Bednar, 2011a.





Fig. 3.6 Robert M. Bednar, Aaliyah Girl Doll close-up, Gonzalez Shrine, US-290 East at TX-21 North, Paige, Texas, USA, December 2012. Photograph courtesy of the author.

## Road Trauma Shrines

Before I can proceed, I need to back up a bit to contextualize roadside car crash shrines, or what I call road trauma shrines. Prevalent for many years in Latin America and the southwestern USA, they are now seen throughout the USA and around the world. Other scholars working on roadside shrines in a number of different disciplines have focused mostly on the producers and direct users of crash shrines (Anaya, Chavez and Arellano, 1995; Clark, 2008; Clark and Franzmann, 2006; Collins and Opie, 2009; Collins and Rhine, 2003; Everett, 2002; Klaasens, Groote and Huigen, 2009; Petersson, 2009; Reid and Reid, 2001). What is not established in the literature on roadside shrines, however, is an understanding of the processes by which shrines work for both intimates *and* strangers. My larger project has been to address this gap by analyzing the visual, material and spatial dimensions of roadside shrines that draw together strangers and intimates into a kind of a collective that has the potential to know road trauma as a *cultural* trauma. Put simply, crash shrines inscribe affect into the everyday landscapes of automobility, challenging drivers to remember that the everyday, ordinary traumas of automobility continue to haunt the automotive landscape. For even if we do not know the intimate narrative details, road trauma shrines demand that we remember that people die on the highways doing the exact thing we are doing when we see them: driving, going about the business of living everyday lives, believing in reaching a projected destination.

Road trauma shrines are part of a wider worldwide phenomenon that has become more and more widespread in the last three decades: something that folklorist Jack Santino (2006) calls 'spontaneous shrines'.<sup>2</sup> With roots reaching deeply and widely through many different cultural traditions, these shrines aim to negotiate 'unanticipated violent deaths of people who do not fit into categories of those we expect to die, who may be engaging in routine activities in which there is a reasonable expectation of safety' (Haney, Leimer and Lowery, 1997, p. 161). As Santino (2006, p. 5, 10) argues, because spontaneous shrines occur in public spaces, they are both commemorative and performative (meant to 'make something happen' – to materially transform the space of the event, the significance of event and anyone who interacts with the site). The contemporary landscape is embedded with these affective objects and spaces built by ordinary people to memorialize ordinary lives. They are part of a larger trend in contemporary society towards both the growing presence of vernacular (as opposed to institutional) memorial practices in the everyday built environment as well as the spatial and temporal separation of memorial practices from the material disposal of bodies, what Leonie Kellaher and Ken Worpole (2010, p. 169) call 'cenotaphisation'. Vernacular cenotaphs like roadside shrines, memory benches and memorial trees planted in the everyday landscape work to performatively remember the dead by 'anchoring memory to place' in the spaces where they lived, which constitutes not only an

<sup>2</sup> For a more recent collection that places more emphasis on the political dimensions of the practice, see Margry and Sánchez-Carretero, 2011.



assertion of ongoing memory but an implicit 'form of resistance to the rapidity of change and standardization in the public realm' (p. 175).<sup>3</sup>

Road trauma shrines are a cultural technology that produces affect and keeps absent people present in the everyday landscape. They materially assert the presence of missing persons, and such a performance is always territorialized – rooted in landscape, located in a *somewhere*. Once placed, crash shrines mark a place where trauma disrupted the flow of everyday life. This trauma is simultaneously private and public. Like large-scale, collective traumas, such as 9/11 or 7/7, car crashes are located in social space. But unlike them, they are dispersed, privately-born traumas that are felt deeply by individuals but rarely the whole community, much less the nation. That is why I call them 'ordinary traumas': they are ordinary both because they occur to ordinary people as part of the mobilities of everyday life, but also because they are rarely recuperated into some larger collective that can make them seem extra-ordinary. The statistics slowly pile up, making a significant number in the aggregate – nearly 40,000 road deaths in the USA every year, for instance – but individual road deaths create only localized intimate publics. As Ben Highmore writes, 'the everyday is the accumulation of "small things" that constitute a more expansive but hard to register "big thing"' (Highmore, 2010, p. 1).

As the Gonzalez shrine makes clear, even the most ordinary object is capable of simultaneously containing and being a portal into a world. As Kathleen Stewart argues, 'Something huge and impersonal runs through things, but it's also mysteriously intimate and close at hand' (Stewart, 2007, p. 87). While they live their lives on the side of the road, trauma shrines generate what Stewart calls 'the actual residue of people "making something of things"' (Stewart, 2010, p. 343). Every one of these things is entangled within a web made of both matter and imagination – of the real-and-imagined. As Highmore argues, 'the sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect are central to our contact with the world' (Highmore, 2010, p. 119). Studying these entanglements can reveal 'the way in which bodies, emotions, world trade and aesthetics, for instance, interweave at the most everyday level' (Highmore, 2009, p. 2). Thus to analyze shrines as affective landscapes demands tuning simultaneously to the frequency of the particular and the general at the same time, to see a landscape in its concrete form but also as a location for the movement between the concrete and the intangible.

### Remembering Strangers

Road trauma shrines emplace memory and create a space for intimates to mourn the victim, certainly, but they also create the potential for what Stewart calls 'ordinary affects', which create the possibility of 'being included in world' – in a "we" that is not yet there but maybe could be' (Stewart, 2007, p. 116). Following

<sup>3</sup> This is one of the main implicit political claims of spontaneous shrines. See Margry and Sánchez-Carretero, 2011.



Stewart, we might say that shrines create a place where a 'glitch' (p. 19) in the deceptively smooth operations of culture happens, where a 'little world comes into view' (p. 57) and a "'we" snaps into blurry focus', where those in the 'we' are met with 'a sense of shock or relief at being "in" something with others' (p. 27). Like other agents of 'ordinary affects', a road trauma shrine demands 'that some kind of intimate public of onlookers recognize something in a space of shared impact. If only for a minute' (p. 39). There, they create what Stewart would call a 'bloom space': a space of potentiality, a kind of 'promissory note' of something that might be happening, together (Stewart, 2010, p. 341). Strangers encounter road trauma shrines in everyday landscapes without knowing the people memorialized, without being 'inside' the micro-public that maintains a social presence for the victim by performatively commemorating a specific life lost, but being contained inside a different public: a motoring public made aware of road trauma as a cultural trauma, drawn together by an implicit assertion of affiliation – an assertion that *their* trauma is *our* trauma.

But what exactly does it mean to be addressed as if a stranger's trauma is *our* trauma? One way to explore this question is to think of road trauma shrines as a form of what Rico Franses calls 'stranger-memorials' (Franses, 2001, p. 97). A stranger-memorial is a particular collective memorial form that commemorates absent people for visitors who do not have personal memories of the people being memorialized. The stranger-memorial attempts to bridge this gap by staging a relationship between the stranger and the memorialized dead, but it never quite accomplishes the memory work it is designed to do. The reason it doesn't is directly relevant to the questions I am exploring here in relation to road trauma shrines, so I want to look more closely at Franses's argument before I bring us back to the question of how roadside shrines place – and don't place – memory and affect in shared landscapes.

Franses develops his idea of the stranger-memorial in his 2001 article titled 'Monuments and Melancholia', where he concentrates on two case studies of contemporary collective memorial forms: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Both of these memorials emerged contemporaneously to the losses they mark; that is, unlike older memorials to long-lost people, where all visitors are necessarily strangers to the loss the site commemorates, the Wall and the Quilt were created to mediate the trauma of loss experienced by people who have a direct stake in ensuring the public commemoration of otherwise private loss. Therefore, like road trauma shrines, these memory forms have two main constituencies – those who know the dead and mourn them with and through these memorials, and the wider public who is asked to witness that known loss and make it their own as part of some larger collective.

As Franses says, though, there is a problem: while the first group already knows who and what is lost, strangers, who have only the memorial, are left outside looking in. This fact is particularly stark at the Veterans Memorial, which has an evocative physical form, but uses only names to evoke the lost people it commemorates. Strangers are capable of reckoning with the aggregate loss –

especially in this particular memorial, which recuperates the individual losses into a larger national loss – but not the specific, unique losses. The AIDS Quilt is a collection of individual quilt panels that unfold according to their own design; most contain a large number of different applied objects and representations in addition to the name of the person memorialized. Here, Franes argues, the ‘underpinning logic seems to be that the more objects included in each panel, the greater the reference to the dead, and the stronger the evocation will be’ (Franes, 2001, p. 100).

At first glance, then, it might appear that by showing and evoking more of the person lost, the Quilt resolves the problem of the stranger-memorial, which is that one cannot remember – or forget, for that matter – what one has never known. But Franes argues that this is merely the ‘lure’ of this more elaborate kind of stranger-memorial (Franes, 2001, p. 104). Indeed, Franes writes, ‘The difficulty it faces is how to induce affect upon strangers for a loss that ... never happened to them; for the effective memorial is one which must first convince strangers that a loss has indeed occurred, and that it is their loss’. However, ‘rather than overcoming the sensation of non-acquaintanceship, ... the quilt accentuates it’ (p. 98).

To elaborate on this important insight, Frances turns more specifically to Freud’s ([1917] 1989) ‘Mourning and Melancholia’. There, Freud famously theorized that the function of mourning was to free the bereaved from attachments to the lost object of their grief. Failing to do so would lead to ‘melancholia’ – a pathological attachment to the object of grief and loss, with its consequent diminishment of the bereaved person’s ego. Freud theorized that melancholia establishes an ‘*identification* of the ego with the abandoned object’, where ‘the shadow of the object [falls] upon the ego’. In mourning, the bereaved may eventually become free to attach to a new object, but in melancholia, the abandoned object gains a ‘special agency’ over the ego, and ‘object-loss [is] transformed into an ego-loss’ (Freud, 1989, p. 586). As Freud argues, this ‘substitution of identification for object-love’ has two important consequences: not only does it diminish the self-value of the bereaved, but it also over-values the object that is lost but cannot return (p. 587). The result is a desire for re-unification with the lost object that is as strong as it is impossible to achieve. Freud writes that melancholia ‘behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies ... from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished’ (p. 589).

Franes argues that the main affect produced in encounters with stranger-memorials is melancholia, where ‘one is possessed by the structure of a loss, but the place that ought to be occupied by the lost object is vacant’. The problem is that in the stranger-memorial, ‘everything happens in reverse. One is introduced to someone only after he or she dies. One grieves for someone one never knew. One mourns an object one never possessed’ (Franes, 2001, p. 100). Where acquaintances of the lost dead have the potential to heal through mourning, ‘such mourning is impossible for strangers’. Put simply: ‘One cannot mourn (in the technical, psychoanalytic sense) persons to whom one has been introduced only after they have died. ... He or she is always-already a stranger’ (p. 101). Franes



argues that witnessing the prolific communication of intimate details in the AIDS Quilt actually *extends* the power of melancholia: in Freudian terms, apprehending the affect of each memory object in the Quilt panels 'requires a larger slice of the ego to match it, producing greater melancholia' (p. 102). As Franses puts it, 'The stranger-memorial, we might say, operates in the mode of deceit. It tricks one into believing that one has suffered a loss, and then provokes melancholia as the reaction to the event' (p. 101).

Which brings us back to road trauma shrines. As Michael Warner argues, 'a public is a relation between strangers' (Warner, 2002, p. 72). Like other stranger-memorials, road trauma shrines interpellate us to remind us that we are part of a public. Because shrines do so in the everyday landscapes of automobility, however, they further define that collective as the motoring public, a collective which, especially in the USA, is dedicated to living with and through cars. What is 'placed' in a shrine then is not precisely a specific communicable *memory of someone*, but the *material evidence that someone else is mourning someone in front of us*. That lost object, that *someone who someone else remembers*, is forever suspended elsewhere, beyond the stranger's ability to know. What remains, as Stewart says of other worldings, is the possibility of feeling that 'We're in it together, whatever it is' (Stewart, 2010, p. 344). It's a small opening for collective affect, but an opening nonetheless.

When you drive by a shrine and notice it, you are brought into its web of transference, where you can experience collective affect. Of course, saying that affect is collective does not mean that it is uniform. This is where I think Franses overstates his argument. Where Franses emphasizes melancholia as the main response to stranger-memorials, I would argue that melancholia is instead the best-case scenario response – the closest we might come to feeling anything that such memorials presume us to feel. Most of us won't even feel that. As I have argued elsewhere (Bednar, 2013, p. 343), shrines are places where affect collects and is experienced, but shrines elicit a wide variety of affective responses.<sup>4</sup> Many people see them as effective memorials, tributes or warnings, but others find them kitschy and sentimental, and many find them morbid and 'creepy'. Others may see their utility, but are embarrassed or offended by them because they consider them 'out of place' in the public right-of-way. What all of these responses share is a kind of emotional intensity that is even more rooted in affect than the words used to express the perspective. This intensity is another sign of that elusive 'something else' so characteristic of affective relationships to landscape. To say that shrines place affect is to say that they are the location of affective responses, not any one *particular* affective response.

Even the public response most aligned with the way shrine-builders present them – as poignant memorials to lost loved ones – is not as simple as it may first

<sup>4</sup> A good place to see the range of public opinions about roadside shrines is in the *New York Times* blog *Room for Debate*, in which an entry titled 'Should Roadside Memorials Be Banned?' on July 12, 2009, generated 370 comments in less than 24 hours before being closed down. See 'Should', 2009.



appear. If, like Franes, we analyze the responses to stranger-memorials that focus on sadness, poignancy or melancholy, we see that they produce a melancholy not based on *knowing*, but on *not-knowing* the loss the shrines represent. As Franes would argue, the result would be not only melancholia, but *shared* melancholia. What the public of a stranger-memorial shares is not collective *memory*, but collective *affect* – a collective sense that ‘something else’ is there. We may recognize that a loss has occurred, a loss that is as impossible to know as it is real to perceive, but it is a loss that can never actually be mourned. This leaves the stranger at most holding onto their own melancholia toward a generalized sense of loss, with no resolution possible except a recognition that their own condition of grieving a loss not their own is at least *shared* by the other strangers who encounter the stranger-memorial as well. Crucially, *this* is the affect shared by even the most sympathetic witnesses of the stranger-memorial: the shared experience of witnessing its frustrated attempt to communicate the memories it performs, and the shared condition of being a stranger in relation to someone else’s loss when someone else is asking you to see the loss as your own.

In the end, in encountering a road trauma shrine, the gap between those who *know* the loss and those who *know of* the loss remains unbridgeable: the stranger can feel something, and the stranger can feel implicated, but they can never in any meaningful sense of the word *remember* what they have never known. While shrines may produce affect and assert affiliation for passers-by, the losses they commemorate are even less ‘collected’ and identified than the memorials Franes analyzes, rendering their effects that much more diffused. Both as a scholar and as an empathic person, I may desire a bridge to understanding the losses commemorated and performed by road trauma shrines, but where I may seek a bridge I always find a gap. That gap is not an empty void, however; it is a space that creates an intersubjective space of feeling. I know that shrines are affective for intimates, but I don’t presume to know what intimates feel. I am actually working with a different register of affect – the affect that strangers can feel when encountering another’s intimate affects, and doing so alongside other strangers, which creates its own kind of affect: the feeling of being ‘in’ something with others, even if they are not feeling the same thing. As John Wylie argues, landscapes can be full and empty at the same time; they can entail ‘a simultaneous *opening-into* and *distancing-from*’ (Wylie, 2009, p. 285). But instead of identifying this problem and leaving it at that, my work has been all about *staying there in the gap long enough to feel something*. When I do, I realize that this dialectic of opening and closing is exactly where the affect in encounters with stranger-memorials is located: in the gap between what we feel and what we know we don’t know, which creates an intersubjective space for recognition – for recognition of a shared sense of other people’s ordinary trauma that has something to do with us. While that shared sense is vague and easy to disavow – and certainly not the same as the deep feeling circulating through the shrines for intimates – it is *something*.

This dynamic has become most clear to me over time in my many encounters with the site where we opened in this chapter, where I have watched the ‘replaced’ girls grow up. Yes, the shrine seems sad to me by itself, but there’s something

else, another kind of sadness as well. For me, the sadness is connected to the range of affective responses I mentioned earlier. The dolls, especially in close-up, are kitschy, creepy and poignant all at the same time. I can tell they are trying to do something, but I don't think they are working – at least not the way they are 'supposed to'. With much reflection since, on the road and at home, I think that what breaks my heart in my witnessing encounters with this and other shrines is my recognition of the persistent gap between them and me even as I seek connection. It is tied up with the recognition that what I share is shared less with the people who make and directly use these shrines than with the thousands of people who drive by them, those who cannot feel *the* loss, but feel something nonetheless, *while continuing to drive*. And it is tied up with my recognition of the melancholia permeating my work and my body as I work – where I live in the aperture, working my way through this collective trauma in pictures and words, feeling affect, knowing and holding grief and loss, but not having any way of resolving it other than to keep on driving into the future.

I have come to know that the melancholia induced by witnessing the embedded memory of road trauma in the landscape is a powerful force. I am still looking to find a way that it could be mobilized – not to settle the questions I have raised here, but to continue to unsettle them – to demand that we as individuals and as members of collectives pay attention to the landscapes of automotive trauma long enough and intentionally enough to begin the slow and confusing work of figuring out what it means to live in and through the cars that take us where we want to go, but also where we don't. The thousands of trauma shrines on the roadside are there to remind us that we have a lot of work to do.

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