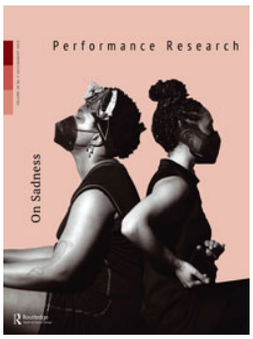

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In Remembrance

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In Remembrance

EMILY O'HARA

In Remembrance is a participatory artwork by Emily O'Hara that operates in the space of the domestic everyday; it positions the home and its associated everyday actions as a potential site for mourning's arrival. A lighting taper, beeswax candle*, and brass candle holder are gifted to 100 subscribers, with an invitation to join unknown others in a collective mourning rite through which expressions of presence, absence, and ritual are explored, aiming to complicate notions of emptiness often associated with death by those who live on.

You are invited to light a candle sent *especially* to you for a loved one, knowing that 100 others have subscribed and received the same. Collectively, we will light these candles in an extended temporal duration performance, repeated annually in unknown spaces, at unknown times. By participating, you join a collective and relational performance of mourning, with candles burning in ephemeral action. The ubiquitous, resonant gesture of lighting a candle reminds us that we are simply the latest in an unbroken chain of humanity. We are thus brought into radical proximity with an unknown community of others. The gesture becomes a collective remembrance through affirmative mourning rite.

** A replacement candle is sent annually for the lifetime of the artwork.*

Subscription Information

To receive one of 100 *In Remembrance* packages, please email your name, postal address, the full name and date of a significant bereavement (dd/mm/yyyy) to inremembrance2024@gmail.com

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> The death with which we are confronted is the death of others, and in particular those who are close to us. Mourning can therefore be defined as the human capacity of having a relation to those who are no longer present in the world. Seen in this light, mourning can be considered as the fundamental mode of being human. (Dastur, 2015: 1)

The domestic everyday is a phenomenon that withdraws and returns through repetition and disappearance. We 'cannot testify to the *every*; week | day | hour | moment… which constitutes our daily lives, as this everyday movement is not disclosable *except* as repetition and disappearance' (O'Hara, 2018: 33). Rather, we experience this opaque continuation within the spaces in which we dwell. Rita Felski, in *The Invention of Everyday Life,* draws together much of the contemporary discourse on the everyday, weaving between Michel de Certeau, Maurice Blanchot, and Henri Lefebvre, amongst others. Ultimately, Felski suggests that we are all anchored in the mundane (Felski, 2000: 79) and defines everyday life through a feminist lens, using three key terms: 'time, space and modality'. Felski states,

> The temporality of the everyday, I suggest, is that of repetition, the spatial ordering of the everyday is in the home, and the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit. (Felski, 2000: 81)

Like Felski, I believe that our homes are spatially programmed for certain activities: eating, sleeping, bathing, washing, gathering, etc. While there is much variability worldwide regarding the particulars of these spatial configurations, they routinely exist as part of everyday life. This commonality produces a sense of collective spatial habitation made by and inextricably linked with our everyday experiences. Within these spaces of collective inhabitation, we repeat actions over and over again. However, this repetition does not equate to *identical* actions. Instead, the minute differences *in* each repetition of a simple act collectively create complexity that influences our perception of everyday life. This understanding corresponds with Felski's elucidation of the myriad ways we measure time, particularly the diurnal rhythms that underpin everyday life (Felski, 2000: 81). Those rhythms emerge through objects and acts of repetition that become enmeshed with more extended measures of time.

If the everyday is characterized by the push and pull of withdrawal and return, I posit that repetition and disappearance are also mourning's resonant temporality. This crossover of the everyday domestic and the invisible presence of the other is beautifully articulated through various entries in Roland Barthes posthumously published *Mourning Diary*, a collection of fragments written in the three years between his mother's death in 1977 and his own in 1980, (Barthes, 2012). His entries shift between philosophical reflection, diaristic unburdening, and recollections of his mother.

Throughout the text, Barthes refers to:

the metallic racket of garbage bins (18)
[shifting furniture etc.] (19)
her pink Uniprix nightgown (47)
the word 'voilà' on the lips of a girl at the bakery (50)
the butter dish (100)
lieder broadcast on the radio (111)
a lamp with a pleated shade (144)
her photographs (159)
an enormous bouquet of lilies and yellow gladiolas (183)
an album (207)
the radio (208)
flowers on a table (210)
the cooking, the cleaning, the clothes (211)
the newspaper (215)
my keys (224)
some fruit bought in the market (224)
the photo (244)
my desk (244)
in the train (256)

These descriptions, images and objects are not spatially bound by the outer limit of the home they shared; instead, they indicate that our 'domestic everyday' has a porous boundary that traverses multiple sites, locations and contexts. This extracted list of Barthes' fragments articulates one of the ways in which our dead live with us; they return through the 'mundane' details of everyday life as described by Felski.

The death of (an)other is an entirely everyday occurrence, one experienced by every one of us during our lifetime, and yet each death is also totally singular in its particularities of person, place, circumstance, relation. Death itself can never be repeated, yet death is a repetitive force in everyday life. It is a rupture, and interruption of the flow of the everyday, both for the one who has died and for those who live on. Traced etymologically, inter draws from the Latin *in* 'into' and *terra* 'earth' and naturally follows a line of thought toward the interring of bodies into the ground. In relation to the domestic everyday, the word *inter* further expresses the notion that time is *interred* in space in the same way of mortality *inter* earth. (O'Hara, 2018: 89). Here, I aim to express the way in which everyday spaces locate us temporally, physically and poetically. Space and time are not separate but enmeshed.

In her piece *Mourning as the Origin of Humanity*, philosopher Françoise Dastur positions humans as being unique among mammals for the funerary rites that accompany the deaths of our own. She states,

> A funeral rite is first a way of notifying to the others the death of a person. But at the same time it is the institution of a new mode of relationship with the one who has passed away and continues to exist in some indeterminate kind of the 'beyond'…We know now, thanks to the work of anthropologists, that even in archaic societies humans refuse to consider death as a

> complete disappearance and continue to live in a world in which the dead are invisibly present. (Dastur, 2015: 6)

I disagree with Dastur's suggestion that funerary rites are unique to humans; *National Geographic* and other sources share many examples of animals that seemingly practice funerary rites, potentially feel grief and experience states of mourning, from chimpanzees to elephants, pigs to dolphins. This aside, it is the central thrust of the essay that speaks to me, whereby mourning is defined through its relational capacity between those still living and those who are no longer. Dastur positions mourning as a fundamental mode of being human, and I agree.

When I consider Dastur's notion of invisible presence in relation to the establishment of a new mode of relationship, I am returned to Barthes writing—and my own experiences of mourning—where it is the expanded 'space' of our everyday domestic—complete with the objects, acts and associated spatial programs—that becomes the personal and intimate site of mourning. Here, our others return to us, sometimes sporadically and without warning and at other times as a result of ritual remembrance. Our sadnesses seep into the everyday no matter where we are, but it is at home where we are offered a space in which we might think of mourning—and its expression through ritual remembrance—to be an act of affirmation rather than one of withdrawal.

Against the backdrop of Aristotle and Heidegger, Dastur goes on to make the argument that what distinguishes the human 'is its relation to the nothingness which is death' (Dastur, 2015: 2) and goes onto a discussion of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which the demigod king of the city of Uruk becomes aware of his own mortality through the death of his man-animal friend Enkidu. The cataclysmic effect of this awareness, Dastur suggests, indicates that it is in our social connection to others (and thus the inevitable associated loss) that we find our fundamental sense of humanity.

Here, Dastur, Barthes, and my own experiences of mourning collide in the social-domestic of everyday life. Soon after my father died in 2012, I travelled to locations of my ancestral lineage in England, Wales, Ireland, and Rome. Despite my non-religious upbringing, I found myself entering church after church. In each, rows of small tapers sat in various locations, some lit, some waiting. Those with burning flames held the echo of an*other* who had pressed taper to wick, lit for the memory of some*one*. I felt a call to light a candle every time. This was my first experience of a collective mourning gesture. After the unexpected death of my mother in 2016, I found myself adrift in a world without either of those who brought me into it. Carrying the memory of those lit candles with me, a ritual began to emerge.

With repeated annual events, mourning's return is expected. Each year—whether measured by solar or lunar means—alongside common social occasions (e.g., Easter, Matariki, Christmas), the number of *personally* significant dates (births, weddings, deaths) rapidly accumulates, for we remember not just our own, but those of others beyond too. Mourning anticipates its arrival in those moments; the calendar marks it so. But it is in the mundane moments, the days not marked with these significances, that I light a candle when a sharp sense of loss unexpectedly returns.

Lighting a candle to remember someone is not new; it is a practice steeped in history across many cultures and countries. It exists inside and outside of religious practices. One could argue that the gesture is universal with respect to death and memory, and the lighting of a candle invites in *other* collective experiences, birthdays, shared meals, power cuts, concerts and gatherings.

The significance of this social echo should not be overlooked when considering lighting a candle as a life-affirming act. In the way of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the echo gives rise to our sense of connection and humanity. In some ways, it is all too obvious that this sense of life—death is easily held within the oft-repeated gesture of lighting a candle. It offers a way of being-with-others in the 'beyond' that Dastur mentions above. As a performative act, it affirms our survival, invisible presence, and living with the dead. Sadness is not eliminated, but through connection, repetition and as part of a collective gesture, grief may be somewhat transformed.

In her final remarks, Dastur states that 'in all kinds of cultures it is necessary to make room for the dead because there is human life only where there is the possibility of sharing a common memory' (Dastur, 2015: 11). In this sense, death itself can be seen as the common memory, a marker of the existence of all those who live on (and those yet to come), and, perhaps, one of the only common memories across cultural differences.

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In Remembrance (burn time)
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