

UNIT 1 | WRITTEN RESPONSE

Acton Cemetery is a small burial ground in North Acton, and as described by the Ealing Council website, is used for “burials, nature conservation, schools’ educational visits, and recreation.” When I first visited the cemetery, the thought of the site as a recreational one seemed strange and discomfoting; however, this became clearer when I noticed the leisurely walkers, a woman eating a sandwich, another walking her dog.

In my initial visits, I approached the site with an objective, observatory gaze, or as Perect (1997) instructs: “You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly.” I made notes on everything I saw, from the number of benches to inscriptions on tombstones. The cemetery, in many ways, can be connected to Perec’s *The Street*, notably through questions of ownership: the cemetery, in principle, belongs to no one. This is similar to Perec’s approach, with zones of the cemetery divided into pavements, burial grounds, a small garden in the corner, and so on. It is public yet personal, collective yet individual.

While Perec helped frame the cemetery as a space for observation, it also encouraged ways of seeing that move beyond looking: noticing, collecting, and interpreting what has been left behind - a shift that resonates with the act of gleaning.

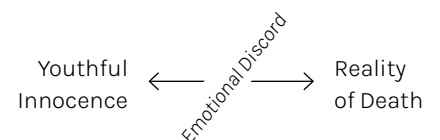
In *The Gleaners and I* (2000), Agnès Varda documents the act of gleaning and scavenging. With great warmth, Varda redefines our understanding of gleaning - not just as a necessity but as an act of preservation. In this context, the cemetery itself becomes a site of preservation. As Varda follows the gleaners, I found myself noticing artefacts: photographs, flowers, and tributes. These objects tell their own stories; they represent memory and preservation, dedicated to those who are no longer physically present.

Horne (2004) describes memorial portraits as creating a dissonance or a contradiction, as they are often portraits that were never intended to represent people in death but rather signify life.

[People seen] → Mostly in the first section
 sitting on benches / walking - IHT IHT IHT III
 By grave (sides) - 1 (Maybe) → Unlikely → On no

GRAVE MARKERS (Identities)

Couples (Husband + Wife) : IHT IHT IHT IIII
 UNKNOWN / cannot tell : IHT IHT IHT IIII
 Women : IIII → Markers faded or difficult
 Men : IHT
 Family (?) : IHT III



Of their importance, he writes: *“Inscriptions on headstones define boundaries of life... Portraits bestow a human face upon those borders in time. Portraits articulate the dialect of imagery and symbol. Neither time nor death extinguishes its humanity. Memorial portraits perpetuate life. That is their intent, their nature and their value.”*

In her review of the film, Pham (2021) rightly declares that gleaning is *“an act of love... It’s picking up what has escaped notice.”* Gleaning in a cemetery, as odd as it sounds, allowed me to contribute to this love, to preserve whatever fragmented stories of the deceased I could notice. Here, collecting and cataloguing photographs or artefacts was both an act of gleaning in itself and a process of storytelling. Perhaps in this acknowledgment of lives lived - much like Horne or Varda hope to do - we ensure they are not forgotten.



REFERENCES

Council, E. (2019). Acton Cemetery | Ealing Council. Available at: https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201036/deaths/1570/acton_cemetery [Accessed 12 Oct. 2025].

Horne, R.W. and Montanarelli, L. (2004). *Forgotten Faces: a Window into Our Immigrant past*. Personal Genesis Publishing.

Pham, L. (2021). *The Gleaners and I and I*. The Criterion Collection. Available at: <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/7602-the-gleaners-and-i-and-i> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2025].

The Gleaners and I. (2000). France: Ciné Tamaris.

Perec, Georges, (1997) *Species of spaces and other pieces*, London: Penguin Books Ltd