

## **The Murder of Pim Fortuyn and Collective Emotions. Hype, Hysteria and Holiness in The Netherlands?**

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**ABSTRACT** The meteoric rise in the popularity of Pim Fortuyn and his political movement and its abrupt end, caused by his assassination on May 6 2002, was followed by an outburst of collective emotion. These phenomena involve two waves of hype in which the media played a major role. Massive media attention for Fortuyn as a politician who was gifted with great charisma and was said to 'speak the language of the people', made politically-inactive social groups conscious of the potential role he could fulfill in solving the social problems with which they were confronted. His sudden death was consequently a great loss for his followers. The outpouring of public emotion that followed resulted in the creation of several spontaneous shrines, where thousands left messages, and which were visited by many thousands more. For a large part of Dutch society, the intense media coverage of this new phenomenon made these shrines pre-eminent constructed foci for dealing with and processing Fortuyn's murder. At the same time they functioned as 'democratic' tools in articulating criticism towards politics, and proved the hype to be an effective and meaningful one.

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On May 6 2002, at 6:06 p.m., as he left a radio interview as part of his election campaign, the politician Pim Fortuyn was slain in the parking lot of the national Mediapark in Hilversum. He was killed by five shots from a Firestar pistol wielded by Volkert van der Graaf, a 32-year-old environmentalist and animal rights activist from Harderwijk.<sup>1</sup> It was the first political murder in The Netherlands since it became a kingdom and sent an unprecedented shock wave sweeping through Dutch society.<sup>2</sup> It was not only the political nature of the murder that shocked society - an anomaly within the non-violent and pacifist traditions of Dutch culture - but also the sudden silencing of a powerful, new political voice and movement that was challenging the otherwise staid Dutch political

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<sup>1</sup> On July 18, 2003, the Appellate Court in Amsterdam confirmed Van der Graaf's conviction and reaffirmed his sentence to 18 years imprisonment. Regarding the environmentalist and animal activist world in which the perpetrator moved: Siebelt 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The Netherlands has been a kingdom since 1813. In the Republic of The Netherlands which preceded this, there were indeed political murders, the most famous being those of Prince William of Orange (William the Silent) at Delft on July 10, 1584, and of Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt and his brother Cornelis in The Hague, on August 20, 1672.

establishment and holding up the image of a new society. Fortuyn represented a political voice in which a substantial, but regularly ignored, part of the lower and middle classes of the nation heard their views and feelings reflected.

In this article, on the basis of a first selection from the thousands of letters, cards and website postings that people left at spontaneous material and virtual memorial sites, I wish to begin the process of understanding the meteoric but short-lived success of this new political movement and the massive and collective mourning and outpouring of condolences that followed the killing of Fortuyn. This process can be interpreted as two different waves of hypes. But was this all ‘hype’ - and according to some even ‘hysteria’ (Pels 2003: 263, 299; Van Schoonhoven & Wytzes 2003: 26) - connected with both the political movement and the personal involvement of the Fortuynists and other Netherlanders, and therefore, a less relevant or functional phenomenon? Wim Kok, then Prime Minister, had already at that time stated that he believed the Fortuyn phenomenon prior to May 6 was hype, orchestrated and perpetuated primarily by the media.<sup>3</sup> Both before and after May 6 2001, many commentators were asking how long Fortuyn and his LPF would be able to retain their popularity and wide support after the elections.<sup>4</sup> Until how long after the murder would the collective emotions last and to what extent would they influence the popularity of the movement? Prime minister Kok used the word ‘hype’ in a pejorative way to downgrade the importance of the movement itself and of the sincere motivations of Fortuyn’s supporters. It is still an open question whether that does justice to the significance of the phenomenon. Kok underestimated the importance of the movement for society. Despite the fact that the media played an essential role in facilitating and stimulating the awareness of discomfort among Fortuyns (potential) supporters and subsequently mobilizing them. This also accounts for the outburst of emotions after his death. It is on this outburst, the second wave of hype, that I will concentrate in this article.

Against that background, I will also examine to what degree and in what way this wave was seized upon, not only to express harsh criticism and protest against the system, but also to ‘canonize’ Fortuyn as a hero, saint or messiah after his death.

### **A political sea change**

In fact, until shortly before his death, apart from political, governmental and academic circles, the 54-year-old, unmarried homosexual Pim Fortuyn (February 19 1948 - May 6 2002)<sup>5</sup> was not widely known among his countrymen.<sup>6</sup> He studied sociology, took his doctorate, became a lecturer at the University of Groningen, and later was appointed to a privately-funded chair at Rotterdam’s Erasmus University. In this latter function he was however, more occupied with political questions than with scientific research. When, in 1992, he also became a columnist with the widely-read Dutch, weekly, news magazine

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<sup>3</sup> Wim Kok articulated this opinion in interviews on Dutch television.

<sup>4</sup> This had already been being asked in commentaries on the phenomenon at the time; see Van der Kaaij 2002: 382-384; with regard to preliminary observations regarding his ‘sanctity’ see: Margry 2002: 13.

<sup>5</sup> On Fortuyn, see: Wytzes 2002; Santegoeds 2002; *Het fenomeen Fortuyn* 2002; Van Roosmalen 2002; Brands 2002; Pels 2003; Smalhout 2003); cf. also the ego document: Fortuyn 1998); republished in revised form after his death, with the revised title Fortuyn 2002b. On his homosexuality see: Joustra 2004.

<sup>6</sup> The breakthrough to a wider audience took place only in 2001; regarding his reputation before that period, see: Fortuyn 2002b: 363-365.

*Elsevier*, he began to air his own views of Dutch politics and society. He unfolded his idiosyncratic perspective on The Netherlands, the world and their social, economic and cultural problems in many columns, and ultimately in twelve books. As early as 1994 he proposed the rebuilding of The Netherlands by a non-political cabinet of experts, of which he himself would be 'prime minister'. What he initially presented as a metaphor – a position as prime minister - began to attract serious attention, and Fortuyn began 'to reckon with the possibility that perhaps some day it might yet happen'(Fortuyn 2002b: 359).

But it was only in the middle of 2001 that he resolved to do something about the nation's problems himself and really became politically active. His time had come, and as he himself phrased it, 'a leader fits with his times, like a leopard waiting for his prey'.<sup>7</sup> Shortly thereafter he was asked to become the leader of a new national, political movement, 'Leefbaar Nederland' (Liveable Netherlands). After he was elected to that post on November 24, the party's membership immediately and dramatically increased. His increasing opposition to the dominant political culture and the incapacity or refusal of politicians to acknowledge the extent and depth of the country's problems acted as a catalyst for his success. But because of his controversial appearances and statements and his confrontational manner of debating, he was shown the door by his party on February 9 2002. In the politically-correct Netherlands, his labelling of Islam as a 'backward culture' was the last straw.<sup>8</sup> With only a month to go before the closing date for the registering of parties for the parliamentary elections set for May 15, on February 11 he founded a new party named after himself: the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Pim Fortuyn list), or LPF for short.<sup>9</sup>

From that moment he intensified his across-the-board attack on the established political order: The government of the time was the 'purple' coalition, named after the red and blue party colours of the Labour and Liberal coalition members respectively. This coalition had governed for eight years, in two cabinets. He broke with the rigid sociability of Dutch management and politics, which sought to maintain the negotiated 'polder model' of consensus politics, minimizing conflict. Although in previous decades, Dutch society could pride itself in being a prosperous, modern, welfare state, where thanks to this political model there was little social unrest, the consultative structures in political and ministerial back rooms had, according to Fortuyn, also led to the loss of any critical perspective in administration and society. A self-sustaining bureaucracy existed at all levels. Time and time again Fortuyn arraigned the problems this supposedly caused, or the problems that it could not solve. His central themes were asylum seekers ('The Netherlands is full'), foreign-born residents and their inadequate adaptation to Dutch life, criminality and lack of safety on the streets, bureaucracy and political correctness, an inadequate health care system, poor infrastructure and protracted traffic jams. Fortuyn declared that he wanted to be of service to the citizens in solving these, an intention expressed in his slogan: 'At your service'. He proclaimed:

'With the Pim Fortuyn List, I am doing my best, not only to channel the dissatisfaction and irritation of the people of this country and guide it toward an alternative to the present

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<sup>7</sup> In one of his newspaper interviews during his campaign.

<sup>8</sup> Interview by Frank Poorthuis & Hans Wensink with Fortuyn in *de Volkskrant* of February 9, 2002: ('De islam is achterlijk, ik zeg het maar, het is gewoon een achterlijke cultuur'); cf. Fortuyn 2001, reprint, with a different title (!), of Fortuyn 1997.

<sup>9</sup> For this party, see: [www.lijstpimfortuyn.nl/partij/partij.html](http://www.lijstpimfortuyn.nl/partij/partij.html)

political culture, but in this book, I have sketched how we can address the failures of the collective sector and public administration. We are thus not an ‘anti’ movement, but a movement for change, and also indicate how that change will look and how we will realise it.’ (Fortuyn 2002a: 185).<sup>10</sup>

Not only did his attacks on their idealised model of social harmony receive no hearing from the political establishment, more germanely, the established politicians attempted to exclude him from the discussion with charges of extremism, a mechanism or process which had previously proven successful in marginalizing political opponents.<sup>11</sup>

Two months before the elections, on March 14 2002, Fortuyn published, as his electoral platform, his book *De puinhopen van Paars* (The purple ruins) in which he portrayed the two preceding cabinets of socialists and liberals as total failures (Fortuyn 2002a:185). Although, in the face of the fast-approaching election, it might have seemed that his campaign was doomed to failure, it soon became apparent that he had set unprecedented forces in motion. His message was indeed taken seriously, especially by large groups which had become alienated from conventional politics. These included those who were confronted daily with the problems that he was highlighting, and also young people who felt no attraction to the ‘old’ politics or regarded themselves as anti-establishment. His support came from diverse social groups, with native-born Dutch from the lower social classes strongly represented. But in addition he also enjoyed support from some middle-income groups and acquired a specific following among the *nouveau riches* from the 1990s computer and communications boom. This latter group were able to provide Fortuyn with financial, organisational and public relations support.<sup>12</sup> However, the greater that support became, the more strongly the counter forces from the political and intellectual establishment showed their hand. Politicians and media commentators labelled him as populist and his proposals demagogic or too simplistic.<sup>13</sup> They tried to undermine his popularity by stereotyping and stigmatising him as ‘extreme right’, and he was regularly identified with European party leaders like Jörg Haider, Jean-Marie Le Pen and Philip De Winter.<sup>14</sup> This was all extensively reported by the media, and as a consequence the press started to cover Fortuyn and his campaign even more intensively. Despite what his own supporters considered ‘demonization’, and thanks to his cultivating his status as a political underdog, his popularity only increased. Fortuyn was able to strategically use this demonization, the so-called ‘underdog effect’, his role as a victim, and his openness about his shortcomings and peculiarities. With this strategy of ‘self-stigmatisation’ (Lipp 1977: 59-77) and vulnerability he was able to garner extra support and trust from both the media and potential followers.

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<sup>10</sup> The slogan is derived from the last three words of Fortuyn 2002a: 186. All quotations from Pim Fortuyn and from the documents of the Fortuyn shrines have been translated from Dutch by the author.

<sup>11</sup> J.G.H. Janmaat’s Centre Democratic movement had in 1982-1986 been dealt with in that way; as a result of a tacit agreement among the other parties, its parliamentary representation was totally ignored and excluded.

<sup>12</sup> No sociological research has been done regarding the social and cultural backgrounds of his followers, therefore it is not possible to be more accurate or to present a specific analysis on this subject.

<sup>13</sup> The criticism was that his speeches consisted purely of opinions, standpoints and conclusions, without any argumentation or substantiation.

<sup>14</sup> Several also made comparisons with Mussolini and Hitler. See further with regard to populism: Pels 2003: 214-246.

The definitive turning point in the campaign, where this self-stigmatisation was employed at every turn, were two debates between the leaders of the national parties. The first was on the public television network (Nova) on March 6 2002 in which he emerged as the new leader of the country, and showed up the other party leaders as sour old fogies who, both verbally and in their body language, made plain the repugnance they felt at having to sit at one table with him. In a flash it became clear to most of the viewers that two different political worlds existed. The second debate on April 27 2002, on the commercial, television network RTL4 (Soundmix Show) provided a setting in which he felt more at home than the other party leaders, and moreover, where a large percentage of his potential followers could be found. Scenes from the first debate, were rerun repeatedly on TV and endlessly discussed, thereby leaving an even stronger impact on the election campaign. Whereas in the preceding years politics appeared to have become a non-issue with falling voter turnout and many who no longer followed politics, these developments stimulated all the national and local media, forcing them to devote an exceptional amount of attention to Fortuyn. Simultaneously for his following, this flood of attention functioned to legitimise their leader as a politician of considerable stature. Through Fortuyn and the media attention, a substantial part of the Dutch electorate who were previously disenchanted with the political process became caught up in politics again. This even applied to the youth who were not yet of voting age. Participation in elections, which had been falling for years, increased. By the time of his assassination, polls indicated that his party would take between 20 and 38 of the 150 seats in parliament. That would have been an unprecedented political upheaval. He was even being spoken of as a potential prime minister. Despite his death, on May 15 over 17% of the voters still voted for his party giving it 26 seats, and the LPF in one leap became the second largest party in the country, and a partner in the new government.<sup>15</sup>

### **Spontaneous memorial shrines**

The assassination of Pim Fortuyn came at a moment when his popularity and influence had probably almost reached their peak. Various commentators saw the murder and its effects in a broad sense as a cultural shock through which The Netherlands suddenly lost its 'innocence' as an honest and peace-loving nation, as it was perceived and articulated by many.<sup>16</sup> The immediate responses to the murder display similarities with the collective mourning, rage, grief, protest and rituality following the murder of Prime Minister Olaf Palme in Sweden in 1986 and the death of Princess Diana in Great Britain in 1997 (Scharfe 1989: 142-153; Kear & Steinberg 1999; Walter 1999). These phenomena are connected with changing attitudes in Western society regarding death and funerals, involving greater expressiveness in public mourning and stronger emotionality surrounding famous people or after disasters. They also have to be considered in relation to the sharp increase in public expressions of mourning on more private occasions, such as the explosion of temporary memorial sites where those involved can express their sorrow and their grief, but that at the same time also make it known to the world, so that

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<sup>15</sup> In the vote on May 15, 2002, the LPF received 1,614,801 votes (17% of the total), of which 1,358,942 were for Fortuyn by name as party leader. Regarding this political and socio/cultural upheaval, see: Chorus & De Galan 2002; Nicolassen 2002; Dekkers 2002; Van Holsteyn & Irwin 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Both the Dutch press, and the German press, which also devoted considerable space to the murder, mentioned this theme regularly.

others then can also share their grief (cf. Beunders 2002: 103-145). These include roadside, pavement or wall monuments in cases of premature death as a result of traffic accidents or senseless violence (Everett 2002; Post, Grimes 2003; Walter 1999: 273-275),

Almost immediately after Fortuyn's death was confirmed, there arose a great need to express the collective shock and emotion. These expressions occurred in virtual form on the internet, and people gathered spontaneously outdoors the same evening at one of several locations which were connected with his person or the assassination, which the public appropriated as makeshift memorial sites and gradually transformed them into shrines.<sup>17</sup> The six major shrines were<sup>18</sup>:

1 before Fortuyn's home in Rotterdam,

2 before the Rotterdam City Hall,

3 the parking lot of the Mediapark in Hilversum (the scene of the crime),

4 the monument to William of Orange, opposite the entrance to the Parliament in The Hague,

5 the National War Monument in Amsterdam, and

6 the Homo Monument in Amsterdam.

Regarding the collective emotions, it is not easy to exaggerate the influence that the location of the murder and the time at which it took place had on the intensity of the experience of Fortuyn's death, the way people processed the news, and in particular the creation of the shrines. Because the fatal shots were fired in the car park of the national broadcasting centre, they could be reported on radio and TV almost instantaneously from the studio windows. The timing and place of the murder, just after six o'clock in the evening, at the national television broadcast centre, and the quick reporting, meant that a large segment of the Dutch population followed the long sequence of events 'live' almost from their beginning. People not watching television at the moment were phoned by friends or family and told to tune in. That fateful Monday evening became one of the most nerve-wracking and fascinating examples of reality-TV by the fact that the suspect was picked up within seven minutes after the shooting, the quite unusual quick police report issued, not to mention the riots and arson attempts which broke out in the vicinity of the government centre. The desperation of the government and politicians and the rumours and speculations also contributed to the tension.

A large percentage of Dutch adults only turned off the TV in the early hours of the morning. In the following days, from most of the television and newspaper commentators, and many of those interviewed, it appeared that there was a general consensus that The Netherlands would never be the same again.<sup>19</sup> The events marked a

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<sup>17</sup> 'Shrine' here has the meaning of a temporary, public location, delineated in space, with a numinous character, which at least in part functions to give that place spiritual or religious significance, in connection with the person honoured or venerated there. In this I concur with what Jack Santino (1992) concluded regarding the religious dimensions of such sites. These shrines are 'spontaneous' because without regard to regulations or restrictions, soon after the death or disaster many individuals, without any specific prior consultation or agreement, already have assembled there, and they are temporary in nature.

<sup>18</sup> The temporary spaces in Dutch town and city halls which were provided for the signing of condolence registers thus do not fall within the definition of spontaneous shrines.

<sup>19</sup> The precise viewer totals are not easy to determine because all the public and commercial broadcasters devoted attention to the events, and viewers were spread over the networks. Figures are known only for the

fault line in history; this loss of ‘national innocence’ is an important aspect in explaining the outbreak of collective emotionality in the days that followed.

In the week after May 6 the six shrines became the pre-eminent temporary foci for a great part of Dutch society as it dealt with and processed the murder of Fortuyn, with people spontaneously gathering to express their feelings. During the first phase, Fortuyn’s following came together with all others who wished to express their abhorrence of what had happened. Because there had never before in The Netherlands been such a massive, spontaneous and public display of mourning for an ‘ordinary’ citizen, these places received constant media attention, and thus through the television screen they appeared in every living room as virtual sites of remembrance, to fulfil a memorial or mourning function there. As a result of the media attention, new visitors were in turn mobilised to go to the shrines. A large number of them did not come purely as spectators, or stand in silence, but themselves actively participated in the development and construction of the shrine. They did this not only by leaving flowers or personal objects, but also by leaving a huge number of notes, messages and statements.

The first four locations were transformed the very same evening into spontaneous shrines, the latter two the following day. Here people came together physically or virtually to express their feelings. This resulted in spontaneous assemblages and piles of objects, messages and statements which were laid against the fences and stairs and on the pavements at the locations involved, or sometimes affixed to fences, trees or one another with sticky tape or staples. Because of their nature these temporary memorials and mourning sites had an ambiguous character. They immediately obtained a sort of sacrosanct status, an unmistakably numinous character, as places of honour, respect and deep engagement.. There was also a certain awe and distance. Anyone who accidentally trod on a stem or note on the edge of the sea of flowers and messages, was immediately subject to angry looks or reprimands by bystanders as a result of this profanity. The central function of the shrines was not only to provide a place for leaving a message or object, but just as much to afford the chance to visit these places - in effect, to make a ‘pilgrimage’<sup>20</sup> - in order to read and experience what others had left behind. It is chiefly with regard to this latter function that contact with the sacrosanct realm was often unavoidable.

A potential conflict arose on Dam Square in Amsterdam, where two days earlier, on May 4, the national Remembrance Day ceremonies had taken place at the national war memorial there. After May 6 a part of this location was also appropriated by those who wished to commemorate Fortuyn, who placed their flowers and messages in the vicinity of the other wreaths and memorial bouquets. A police crush barrier was eventually placed to separate the two different memorials. However, many of those involved in the May 4 and 5 commemorations continued to object to what they saw as Fortuyn’s followers defiling the war monument and its setting for commemorating war dead, the resistance and victims of the Nazis. An anonymous, leftist, action group who maintained a website as their public podium sought to polarise the question by organising a demonstration against the placing of flowers

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public broadcaster Nederland 2: during the evening in question it had an average of between 20 and 23% of households.

<sup>20</sup> The use of the word pilgrimage (when not used in a metaphorical sense) isn’t really appropriate for these temporary shrines; cf. the critical notes on the phenomenon of pilgrimage and its sacred places in Margry & Post 1998.

for a ‘fascist’ at a monument of anti-fascist character.<sup>21</sup> The mayor of Amsterdam did not share this view, and ultimately almost nobody supported this effort. Moreover, ‘extreme-right’ was a term that almost nobody wanted (or dared) to apply to Fortuyn any longer.

The public no longer gathers at these sites, but spread across The Netherlands there have been a number of collective rituals in the form of silent processions in memory of Fortuyn.<sup>22</sup> With regard to the sites themselves, thanks to an unusually dry break in the weather, these spontaneous memorials remained intact until several days after Fortuyn’s funeral on May 10.<sup>23</sup> A week or so later, by the time the rain moved in again, the municipal sanitation departments cleared the locations. While the sea of flowers and wreaths were destroyed, all the written texts and other objects were collected and preserved.<sup>24</sup> After Fortuyn’s burial and the clearance of the shrines, the function of the various spontaneous monuments was, in a more formal manner, assumed by his temporary grave (and shrine) in the cemetery at Driehuis-Westerveld.<sup>25</sup> This is a process which has been witnessed on many occasions: spontaneous shrines provide space for the first emotions, but disappear again when a real grave exists.

### **The material culture**

The material culture that was left at the spontaneous shrines has been to a large degree preserved.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, it consisted of objects of both a temporary and more permanent nature, and on the other of written statements in diverse forms. Using the latter, and also drawing on the messages and statements placed on various websites, it is possible to analyse the ideas expressed therein. To a certain extent, this affords both insight into what was being thought and felt among Fortuyn’s following and other mourners, and what his person and his movement meant for them.

The material preserved is not, however, without its methodological problems. The

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<sup>21</sup> [www.indymedia.nl/nl/2002/05/3771.shtml](http://www.indymedia.nl/nl/2002/05/3771.shtml); the burgomaster permitted laying flowers and other memorials for Fortuyn, because according to him the monument is in fact a general symbol of freedom and tolerance; cf. ‘Protest om ‘misbruik’ Nationaal Monument’, in: *Het Parool*, May 8, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Such silent processions are a rather specific Dutch form of protest and/or mourning ritual; cf. Post & Grimes e.a. 2003.

<sup>23</sup> The ephemeral character of the material deposited at a shrine once again emphasises its temporary nature. When the materials begin to deteriorate, a process often initiated or hastened by rain and wind, the shrine quickly loses its emotional and numinous significance.

<sup>24</sup> As Fortuyn had let it be known that ultimately wanted to be buried in Italy and his grave there took a period to complete, the burial in Driehuis was only temporary. On July 19 his body was disinterred. On July 21, 2002, in compliance with his will, Fortuyn was reburied at the cemetery in the Italian village of Provesano.

<sup>25</sup> As Fortuyn had let it be known that ultimately wanted to be buried in Italy and his grave there took a period to complete, the burial in Driehuis was only temporary. On July 19 his body was disinterred. On July 21, 2002, in compliance with his will, Fortuyn was reburied at the cemetery in the Italian village of Provesano.

<sup>26</sup> Most of the material from locations 1, 2, 4 and 5 (it is not yet clear what happened to the material from locations 2 and 6) is preserved in the Pim Fortuyn Archive at the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam. In addition the Schielandshuis museum in Rotterdam holds objects and some written material. The letters and cards which were left at his grave in the cemetery at Driehuis have been collected and placed under the stone of the now empty monument there; this material will also be added to the Fortuyn Archive at the Meertens Institute. The great quantity of stuffed plush animals and other objects were also given to the family but because of strict sanitary regulations they have not been preserved.



items offer little or nothing in information about their context. Only a part are exactly dated, or can be placed with regard to the town or city the author came from, or even the shrine they came from, and are thus difficult to link with a social or political background.<sup>27</sup> Moreover they are often so terse that the intended meaning is difficult to determine. Nevertheless they are ethnographic source material *par excellence*. They are literally the precipitate of the *vox populi* that echoed around The Netherlands in the tumultuous year 2002. For no other single crucial event or episode in Dutch history is there such an extensive and spontaneously formed collection of ego documents. Despite their limitations, depending on their nature, the documents provide an interesting starting point for various forms of research, such as this contribution. We will attempt to answer the question of how these shrines were used as a final possibility to let the voice of the people - or better, the voices of individuals - be heard, and evaluate the content of their messages.

Texts and objects were deposited at the six shrines listed above, particularly during the first week after the murder (and at several places for somewhat longer). The material can be categorised as follows:

1 floral tributes with, or without, short message cards (except for roses, few other specific types of flowers);

2 textual documents: letters, notes, pamphlets, placards, cards, books<sup>28</sup>;

3 visual documents: posters, photographs, drawings (by both adults and children), paintings and frames with pictures and messages;

4 Material objects:

a Objects or symbols related to Fortuyn and his lifestyle: ties, cigars, bottles of wine, dog figurines<sup>29</sup>,

b Emotional objects: hearts, artificial flowers,

c Stuffed plush animals, among them many teddy bears and dogs<sup>30</sup>,

d Novena and votive candles; paraffin tea warmers,

e Cloth: flags, T-shirts, (soccer) scarves, caps.

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<sup>27</sup> The material given to the family was not kept separated by its source; the material from Driehuis-Westerveld has been kept apart. With regard to dating, almost all the separate category of website postings have exact dates.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to that left at the spontaneous shrines, there are two other types of written material that were created during that period: 1. *Municipal condolence registers and letters of condolence*. About 1500 of these registers were sent to the Fortuyn family, of which several dozen are in the Pim Fortuyn Archive at the Meertens Institute. 2. *Web registers*. Within three hours of Fortuyn's death the first condolence page, based on the format of the paper registers, was opened as an internet site/cyber-shrine. There are two start pages with webpage surveys and links: <http://pim-fortuyn.startkabel.nl/> and [www.pim-fortuyn.pagina.nl](http://www.pim-fortuyn.pagina.nl). Because of their more private and/or anonymous character, these webpages also served much more than the paper registers as forums for criticism of the government. As a rule, the texts are more critical, more explicit, and more extensive.

<sup>29</sup> The statuettes of dogs generally referred to Fortuyn's own King Charles spaniels, Carla and Kenneth; after his death they enjoyed a 'cult' of their own and had a website devoted to them: [www.ckff.nl/](http://www.ckff.nl/). There was considerable concern about the future of these dogs; they are now being cared for by Pim's butler Herman.

<sup>30</sup> Teddy bears are generally popular as cuddly toys, and especially so among Dutch homosexuals. See also the preceding note.

## **The messages and their content**

The contents of the letters, cards, messages, and also the web postings can be provisionally divided into four categories:

1. expressions of sorrow, condolence, grief and dismay,
2. expressions of affection and love,
3. attributions of metaphysical qualities of holiness, sanctity and messianic leadership to the person of Fortuyn, and the effect of these in the writer's personal life and in society,
4. expressions of protest, criticism, anger or threats of retaliation; protest messages directed at and against political and social evils, and specifically the 'hate campaign' against Fortuyn in politics and the media.

Greater attention is given to categories 3 and 4, which can plausibly shed clearer light on questions concerning the 'hyped' character of the movement.<sup>31</sup> The emotional expressions mentioned in the first three categories and their mutual relations, gave way to the fourth: the more-or-less politically-inspired idiom of anger and protest.

It is peculiar to the nature of this material that, with regard to the assessment of the content of a message, it is difficult to determine precisely who the writer is. A large proportion are anonymous; only a small number give a full name and address. The majority are provided with only one or more first names. The socio-political background from which they come is likewise hard to decide, because, as a rule, it cannot be determined if the writer is a member of the LPF, a sympathiser, or somebody else. Only in the case of a small number of the messages is there an explicit reference to the LPF party, party membership, or the writer's identification as a 'Fortuynist'.<sup>32</sup> Pim Fortuyn is quoted in many of the messages, but generally it is not clear whether this has been done in the writer's capacity as a person or as a politician.

Although the messages must be considered as condolences to the next of kin, the vast majority consist of personal messages addressed directly and solely to the deceased, and only rarely to his family or friends. Most of the letters and cards begin with a personal/intimate greeting that regularly reads 'Dearest Pim', 'Dear Pim', and also often just 'Pim' or 'Pimmetje' for short.

It is also true for the vast majority of the material messages, that they were left open (and openly), without physical envelope or emotional reticence. They are not intended as private messages, but for everyone to read. Only a very small number of letters had a private character, in the sense that they were placed in a sealed envelope. In terms of content, there is also relatively little distinction from the cards accompanying the floral bouquets. Although in terms of their size and design, the latter afford fewer possibilities for longer texts, most of the writers felt the necessity to place a message of grief or protest on these cards too.

From the various types of messages preserved it also appears that visitors often felt the need to write something or leave a message only when they arrived at the site. This is suggested by the diverse arrangement of torn-out pocket agenda pages, tickets, polling notices, scraps of wrapping paper from floral bouquets, and even the backs of letters already placed on the sites, on which messages were spontaneously scratched.

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<sup>31</sup> A quantitatively larger investigation of the protest and sainthood aspects is planned as a follow-up to this pilot, and therefore few precise figures can be given here yet, to the extent that that will be possible at all.

<sup>32</sup> 'Fortuynist' is a unofficial term regularly used in the media for a follower (whether formally or not) of Fortuyn and his party.

### *Sorrow, grief and dismay*

The majority of the letters contain expressions of mourning, condolence, personal grief and dismay, in the sense that the writers identified Fortuyn as a special sort of friend who was no longer present and was lost to society. The traditional mourning card with a black border and formulaic text like 'with sincere sympathy' is hardly to be found. As far as could be determined, such messages, when found, generally came from older people or from foreigners. They were often small, discreet cards or sealed envelopes with a text accompanied by a signature in them, or another expression of sympathy.

As would be obvious, many messages showed grief and dismay as a consequence of Fortuyn's murder. This grief commonly appeared to be fed by the fact that a person with whom a close relation was felt - 'one of us', a friend or loved one - was no longer present. It was sorrow about the fact that such a special person was no longer in society, that not just the family but every follower, and ultimately society itself had been affected. On this point there can be no parallel to be drawn with the collective grief after the death of Diana, which can be seen as an expression of the collective guilt of the English (Walter 1999). In Fortuyn's case the guilt was very emphatically laid at the feet of a specific set of politicians and parties.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the sorrow expressed in the messages is personal. Furthermore, the messages implicitly make clear that such grief in the writer's own life and their regrets for society - 'uncomprehended' by so many - could be given a place through a material expression at the public shrine. How greatly that was connected with personal emotions can be seen in the strong and passionate indications of affection and love for this man. Nevertheless, at the same time the grief also appears to fulfil a collective function for those who had not been heard in politics, yet who felt affected by the murder.

### *Affection and Love*

A large proportion of the letters were also characterised by a high degree of affection and professions of love, primarily from women. As we have noted above, it is striking how immediately and intimately Fortuyn was addressed by the majority of the writers. In most of the letters and cards he is addressed as a good friend, as an actual family member, a close friend, a loved one, or even a lover. That is particularly expressed in the greeting in almost all of the messages, which establishes an intimate connection: 'Dearest Pim' and 'Dear Pim' are the most frequent forms of address. As a symbol the heart is often used, both in objects and in drawings and drawn on the letters, or in formulations such as this from an anonymous writer, 'you will live in all our hearts'. Brian and Melanie write, as did many others, 'Dearest Pim, we will never forget you! In our heart forever.' A young woman writes a letter peppered with heart symbols: 'Dearest Pim, I sometimes cry for you yet. I ♥ you. I miss you very, very much, I hope that you are happy there.... Leonie'. Another anonymous writer left this letter:

'Dearest Pim, You were like a buffer for me. For us. Nothing could happen to me so long as you were for me. I could take refuge behind your back. You were like a beacon too, that gives light in the darkness.'<sup>33</sup>

It is clear from the letters that the explicit expression of feelings of affection is almost purely something on the part of women. One might have expected that

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<sup>33</sup> All the items quoted in this paper, unless otherwise sourced, come from unnumbered documents in the Pim Fortuyn Archive at the Meertens Institute.

homosexuals would also have formulated similar messages, but few if any of these are to be found, at least so far as research could determine.<sup>34</sup> Only a few men venture such intimate phrasing. One or two did that carefully, like 'Lambert': 'Hey, you were the world's greatest guy.... you touched my heart'. 'Nel', a woman, on the other hand, was more explicit: 'Pim, I miss you; I love you; rest in peace. Is there then no place for love and beauty in the world....?'

For many writers death seemed to be only a temporary interruption, and they make direct references to a meeting again in the future, in the hereafter or in heaven. Looking forward to such a collective meeting, one woman writes:

'You were a powerful man, you looked just as honest, kind and strong as your words and deeds. You had character. Irreplaceable: you live on for me, others are nothing compared to you, compared to you they mean nothing. You were the most beautiful man. I love you, I'll never forget you. Now you are at rest, Pim, away from all this misery. Rest quietly and peacefully. 'Til we meet again, Marge.'

In general, more affection and love is articulated in the letters that express sorrow (and religious dimensions) than in the messages that are chiefly expressions of protest and criticism of politics and society.

### *Sanctity*

The third category involves the attribution of qualities of sanctity, holiness and messianic leadership to Fortuyn, and the effects of those qualities personally or on society.

Fortuyn came from a Roman-Catholic family, subsequently became a Marxist and socialist, later refocusing again to an increasing degree on Liberal political values and Taoist and Christian religious ones.<sup>35</sup> His own appropriation of a religiously-coloured leadership can be traced back to at least 1995, when he published a 'religious-sociological treatise' on how Dutch society had lost its direction. Even then, Fortuyn had already appointed himself to a mission (or 'calling') and considered himself an instrument in the hands of God, who had a plan for him and for the world. Moreover, he conceived himself as the political leader at the head of society like 'a shepherd leading his sheep', thereby providing himself (and consequently his supporters) with a legitimisation for a public role with messianic characteristics.<sup>36</sup> He felt a personal affinity with Christ, and also compared himself with Moses, who would bring his people to the promised land. He cited the relevant Deuteronomy 32: 44-52 and added the personal phrase: 'I am ready. Are you? On our way to the promised land!' (Fortuyn 2002c: 238). He emphasised that no one would be able to dissuade him from this 'assigned' task, and

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<sup>34</sup> Letters which were left at the Homo Monument in Amsterdam were apparently not collected, or at least not sent to the family.

<sup>35</sup> Although in his autobiography (Fortuyn 2002b) strongly disassociated himself from the Roman Catholic Church, he also never entirely renounced it: Fortuyn 2002c: 167, 'I still call myself Roman Catholic'; more extensively on 'religion and churches', Fortuyn 2002c: 83-86, where he dismisses the Roman Catholic Church as an institution with regard to the shaping of personal (religious) conscience. Fortuyn's personal Catholicism however played hardly any role in the messages left at the various material and virtual shrines, in contrast to the Christian heritage which he defended, constantly setting it up in political discussions as the opposite to Islamic belief, which was a threat to the West. According to Fortuyn layers of Christian values (Bible, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) formed the basis for Dutch and European society.

<sup>36</sup> Fortuyn 2002c: 18. Fortuyn sees himself presented with the task of becoming 'father' for an orphaned society, working this out further at the end of his book, Fortuyn 2002c: 237-238.

was not afraid of possibly ending as a martyr.

Although occasionally before his death Fortuyn had had the qualities of a prophet or hero attributed to him, this increased sharply after his death. There was a great need to characterise and account for his significance. In interviews or in media commentaries he regularly appeared as an intercessor, prophet, hero, saint or messiah. The terms were often applied metaphorically. Because of this, it is therefore reasonable to ask whether the qualities of sanctity ascribed to him actually indicate that he was asking for or receiving trust or support, religious in nature. In other words, was Pim Fortuyn part of a process of sacral attribution or sacral meanings in which he could or did function as a mediator, intercessor or sacred personage for his followers? And if so, what are we to understand by sacredness in this connection? The specific notions of sanctity (imitation of Christ) and sainthood, as these have developed in the Roman Catholic Church through the normative processes of beatification and canonisation, do not apply here. Modern research expands the theoretical perspective and offers assistance in determining these functions. It should be clear that in place of a dualistic model, the fluid boundary between the sacred and profane must be the point of departure. Researchers such as Luckmann, Sexson and others have indeed already pointed to the 'hidden' or 'invisible' forms of religion that fulfil functions related to the human need for comfort, support, perspective and meaning.<sup>37</sup> They appear to have an inherent dynamism, and through human conduct or through the way people have of dealing with it - the process of appropriation by individuals or groups - anything can be assigned religious significance. From an ethnological perspective sanctity can be described as an informal or spontaneous social-cultural process in which people ascribe qualities to something or someone that serves the well-being of themselves or their fellow men. That connects with a development whereby personal forms of holiness and personal forms of attribution of sanctity and religious experience have grown to play an increasingly important role. Sexson proposes that religiousness can arise simply from someone's experience of consecration, through which the person or the experience becomes 'whole' or 'holy' (Sexson 1992: 9).

Within the wider process of individualisation in Western society there exists a need for varying forms of religious experience. The characteristics attributed to Fortuyn must therefore be seen in the light of religious changes through which personal sanctity of a more immanent and less transcendent nature has become central, and in which people feel a need for personal mediators and intercessors. The human capacity for religious conception also comes to the fore in ostensibly profane areas of life and can be expressed in apparently unimportant or commonplace things (Sexson 1992).

At many different levels, people are choosing new role models for themselves (Frijhoff 1998; Schmitt 1983: 251-297). Even the Roman Catholic Church, as a matter of strategy, is beginning to accommodate the wishes that are prevalent among its lay members and is more strongly emphasising personal sanctity and those saints which are closer to the people. In the Dutch context this has resulted in the need to exchange old-fashioned saints for saints, idols or role models from modern society. The national Catholic broadcasting network, the KRO, has appointed itself as a moderniser of faith, and profiles itself as a rediscoverer of religious values. In this, the network has emerged

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<sup>37</sup> Luckmann 1967; Sexson 1992. Confusingly Cliteur 2002 uses this term with a different meaning in his response to the consequences of Fortuyn's death, when he argues for a secular or humanistic 'religion' of norms and values as an element of social cohesion which could regulate the peaceful intercourse between people with different backgrounds.

as a Second Vatican Council, wanting to clean out the pantheon of saints and give it a new face. In 2002, it called upon Dutch society to provide the names of new saints and heroes - defined as 'anyone who has dedicated themselves to mankind and society' - to fill the 365 open places in the new saints' calendar. Indeed, Pim Fortuyn's name was among them. It is interesting to note that the e-mails to be found about the living Pim Fortuyn on the KRO site regarding electoral candidates were primarily negative, and focussed chiefly on his less saintly traits. After his murder the reactions became entirely positive, and the negative postings from before his death were removed by the KRO's webmaster - almost as a first step in beatification.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, while still alive Fortuyn had come to acquire a certain non-confessional form of sanctity, both in his own eyes and in those of others. As we have said, Fortuyn saw himself as a mediator and shepherd for a Dutch nation which had lost its way, and in light of that created an image of himself as the Father of the Nation, a spiritual guide and confidant to whom people could turn, in line with former secular leaders of the nation like William the Silent and Willem Drees.<sup>39</sup> He wanted to be a:

'Father who lays down and maintains the Law. A Father as philosopher.... A leader of stature is a father and mother at the same time. He dictates the Law and keeps watch over the unity of the flock. The capable leader is the biblical good shepherd. He lays down the norms and he builds bridges. He is strict and he is merciful. He is unapproachable and he is understanding. He points the way and he shares his doubts about the correctness of that way with his troops. He paints for us an image of the future....'(Fortuyn 2002c: 236-237).

With such notions, written down and spoken, he created a template that could be applied to different images of himself: as a prime minister, a relative, father or as a leader with more-or-less saintly or messianic qualities. It seems that these images were not yet fully evaluated or internalised by his supporters before his death.

After his death, when all the emotions in Dutch society broke loose, religious notions were expressed in the messages of remembrance. Many votives indicate that the writer believed Fortuyn's unique or 'divine' powers were already present during his lifetime. The anonymous P.A. from Ede suggests a certain divine immanence in Fortuyn: 'God is everywhere. Thus he is in everyone and certainly in you! You knew how to radiate that'. A woman who had doubts about the Christian God saw an alternative in Fortuyn: 'Why should I still believe in God? Would God still believe in mankind? I believed in you! Love, Bianca'. Along those same lines, others viewed him as a *deus ex machina*: 'Why didn't God act, as you did for us, Pim? Lots of love, José, Philip, Melvia, Melanie'.

Others saw or experienced his holiness only after his death. The medium, Lidia from Haarlem beheld the confirmation of that in the ascension of the chosen one: 'I have seen how you were taken up by white angels with very beautiful wings'. Fortuyn was associated with angels in a number of messages, and their holy qualities are referred to in several of them. A woman named Linda wrote, 'It had to be this way, but we mourn... I know for certain that all will be for the best, your task here on earth is completed, work

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<sup>38</sup> The actual webpage - <http://www.kro.nl/helden/held.php?heldid=11&held=fortuyn.%20pim> - gives only the mails for the new election of 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, as a child Pim Fortuyn was nicknamed 'William the Silent' (Pim is short for William) after a temporary period of uncommunicativeness; see Fortuyn 2002b: 102, cf. 62.

on the good in the Hereafter'. Another woman, Danielle, left this wish behind: 'Rest in peace and I hope that you will govern "above"'. In these examples a position as a sort of Supreme Court Judge 'above' is given to Fortuyn.

The themes of light and hope also appear, representing both Christian and universal religious values and metaphors. 'J.R.' wrote:

'Certain of what you believed,  
Brought the truth to the light,  
Inspiration and hope for many.'

For others Fortuyn's existential significance was however just a temporal fact: 'Dearest Pim, you were a point of light in society.... Now that light has been extinguished. Sandra, Cynthia and Alain'. The strongest religious attributes involve a sort of redemptive role, in which Fortuyn had a place as a prophet or messiah. One woman wrote:

'Dearest Pim,  
For me and many others you were a great heart;  
We stood at your side from the very start;  
Outspoken, you told no lies;  
Sent by God, you were our prize;  
You could see that by the look in your eyes.  
Monika.'

For her Fortuyn stood, like God, for goodness. Therefore maybe (or clearly?) she saw him as sent by God. An anonymous writer from Rotterdam left the following more-or-less corresponding lines:

'Serene Highness, you were  
A murmuring stream in your might and magnitude  
You were the source and the way!  
A creative fellow man with a message  
Called: A Messiah'.

This person expresses clearly the differences between humans and the new messiah who radiates from the sky, in all his might and beauty, and who appears to be 'source' and the 'way' for them.

Terms such as messiah, prophet and saint already appeared in the first journalistic commentaries and interpretations, and on the internet (Dros 2002; Bosman 2002; Heijne 2002; De Jong 2002; Van Houten 2002; Borgman 2002: 233-243). While this was a powerful stimulus to shaping thinking about Fortuyn, it was not always clear whether these were metaphors or not. Moreover, because such terms gain their meaning from a Christian context, it was not always clear what precisely was intended. Before his death these were indeed merely metaphors, but afterwards the semantic field changed under the influence of the mentioned letters and the statements of interviewed Fortuynists containing such qualifications.

But can Fortuyn actually be considered as a saint - or even a temporary saint? The fact of the matter is, that after examining a number of religions, there is no common denominator to be found for saints. One frequently-occurring common quality is the religious acknowledgement of someone's spiritual perfection (Frijhoff 1998: 31). It is questionable if Fortuyn fulfilled that criterion. Nauta points to the paradox that with an idol of the people, as a 'narcissistic charismatic' there is typically a 'great lack of

empathy... for the lot of their fellow men', and that with 'such idols it is never enough to be who they are. They overrate themselves and belittle others'(Nauta 2002). Because of their personal shortcomings they would fail as ideals for humanity. Nauta's suspicion that Fortuyn's death at the high point of his popularity saved him from a precipitous fall is plausible.

In many religions, sanctity is also seen or recognised in those who have been granted special gifts, and this seems to apply well in the case of Fortuyn. What were these gifts in his case? There is no evidence for the gift of healing.<sup>40</sup> But one of the most frequently-named and discussed qualities is his charisma. For this reason we should look more closely at this term, in view of the various senses in which the word is employed. In most cases what is being referred to is the charisma defined by Max Weber, which is connected with natural leadership. It has been convincingly described how Fortuyn was an example of this (Ellemers 2002). Almost all media commentaries explained his success with recourse to it. Since none of the sitting politicians in The Hague possessed similar charisma, and satisfaction with them was receding among the population, Fortuyn, as Weber formulated it, acquired the collateral for successful charismatic leadership.

From the statements cited above, it becomes clear that a different sort of charisma was also attributed to Fortuyn. These texts refer implicitly or explicitly to his supernatural gifts or divinely bestowed powers (*charismata*); gifts through which Fortuyn had a religious dimension added to his person, or appeared as a mediator between heaven and earth. Various followers sensed his authenticity, or believed they felt this, and wanted to lay their future in his hands. According to them, these graces were granted to a person with a mission, who was rather regularly termed a 'messiah'. Fortuyn thus seemed to fulfil existential functions and - as various messages reveal - had been attributed the power to give meaning to life.

Fortuyn's sudden death forced a change in the preceding massive appropriation of his person and his ideas. On the one hand, his death made it easier for a wider group to participate in the appropriation of the positive aspects of his person, also because, following his assassination and during the mourning, the rougher edges of his personality were quickly forgotten. On the other hand, for his political followers and fans, his death formed a caesura with respect to the concrete 'availability' of his person as leader and as spokesman. It made them more aware of the trust and hope that they cherished in him personally, consciously or not, and they suddenly realised that all that investment was gone in a single blow, or as one Wendy, quite consciously, reported on the web, 'in my unconscious you were a bit of hope for me in this ridiculous world'.

### *Protest*

The fourth category are expressions of protest, criticism, rage or calls for revenge, protest messages about and against social wrongs, and specifically against the 'hate campaign' purportedly conducted against Fortuyn by other politicians.

A proportionally greater number of these protest messages were left at the memorial sites. These were primarily in the form of letters of protest or social critique that were either addressed to Fortuyn himself or were left as open, unaddressed

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<sup>40</sup> Healing or miracle working is as far as I know not yet attributed to Fortuyn. I don't want to equal that with references in letters and posting of people who in vague descriptions 'feel' themselves 'better' due to his activities in the public.



manifestos. The background for this is that in the months before the election, Fortuyn had profiled himself as an outspoken protest politician and taboo-breaker, in opposition to the codes of the established political system. The shift from consensus politics to a politics of confrontation that he initiated polarised and sharpened the election process. The loss of his voice thus loosed the angry, indignant voices of his supporters. The Fortuynists suggested there was a lack of understanding: 'Why do you understand the people and the people understand you, while the media and the established politicians understand nothing at all?' This process had already begun on the evening of the assassination itself, when Fortuyn's supporters assembled on the square ('Plein'), opposite the Dutch parliament, and later, in the form of a people's tribunal aggressively demanding the heads of the politicians they saw as responsible for the murder; on the one hand as representatives of the 'wrong policies' that they had carried out in The Netherlands in preceding governments, and on the other for their 'hate campaign' and 'demonization' of Fortuyn as a right-wing extremist and racist. This purported 'demonization' recurs repeatedly as a theme in the protest messages: 'Who are the real murderers????' The 'leftist' press also was the target of open criticism: 'The media bastards created the atmosphere that cost Pim his life'. This statement is also a direct reference to the role of the media in the whole process.

Because words failed them, or because, in the first days after the attack, it was not easy to formulate a critique from the right perspective, or identify the actual perpetrators, some of the simple messages fell back on more general texts, such as 'Wake up, Netherlands!' or the question 'Why?' Sometimes the event also stood symbolically for something greater: 'Democracy has been murdered'.

However, by far the most frequent reproach concerns the loss of Fortuyn as the spokesman for the feelings and ideas of his supporters, and as their representative in society and politics. Many report that through him they had become interested and involved in politics and administration for the first time, or for the first time again in many years, and that he was the first to give them hope for solving the major social problems with which they were confronted daily. Many said that he had 'shaken The Netherlands awake', but that his voice had been silenced. Others wrote 'We have all been silenced', or 'Pim, now that we have lost you we are without a voice'. More generally, one finds the cry 'No freedom of speech!'<sup>41</sup> The most frequent formulation, in all sorts of variants, was 'You said what we thought'.

This text is therefore one of the keys to explaining the collective emotion that overtook a great deal of the Dutch population, and that was brought into the public domain by hundreds of thousands of shocked and mourning people, only some of whom were Fortuynists. It points also to the transposing of the personal responsibilities of his supporters onto Fortuyn - 'you said what we thought' - and to his functioning as an extension of them. This suggests that his death touched them in an especially fundamental and deeply-personal way. For those who felt themselves unheard and unrepresented, who had identified with Fortuyn because of their social position, their voting history or their marginal involvement in society, it seems that losing their voice, shepherd and leader in one fell swoop felt like the 'amputation of a part of their being', as one of the anonymous authors wrote. The rage that this sparked was intended by the

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<sup>41</sup> Another anonymous author wrote, 'Let us therefore proclaim May 6 a national day • for guarding freedom of speech • for democracy • against violence'

Fortuynists to be loudly and clearly heard, and can to a great extent be seen separately from their grief. Therefore, it should be understood, that such letters were often written to Fortuyn without words of address, or were addressed more generally to the people or to the motherland itself. In this way the spontaneous shrines functioned as a public whipping post, where the people pilloried politics and the administration.

The protest messages are thus to be sharply distinguished from the other messages. Through their specific form and visual layout they were the most emphatically present; in their direct use of language, or the use of terms of abuse in expressing their message, they were also the most explicit. Some individuals hung up multiple copies of their critique in order to draw additional attention to them, and not have them become lost in the masses of flowers and other letters. The mere protest messages, about a third of the total, were, to a large extent, made on or processed with computers. This resulted in their having a large type and clearly-designed layout, probably not so much with the goal of distinguishing them from a personal letter, but to ensure that their public statement was readable at a distance. Moreover, they were often sealed in plastic so that the weather conditions would have less effect on the message, and ensure their preservation.

### **Conclusion: hype?**

How should we interpret the phenomena surrounding Pim Fortuyn's meteoric rise in popularity, his sudden death, and the collective and public expressions that followed it?

In only a few months, Fortuyn was able to mobilise a relatively-large group of Dutch men and women who in the preceding years had taken practically no role in public political debates and had entirely lost interest in political and administrative electoral matters. To a great extent these were precisely the people who were most-often confronted with the problems of contemporary society, problems which were not being addressed because of the viscosity of administrators and the bureaucracy. Despite the in essence unamenable nature of his character and the conduct of his life, the combination of his charismatic personality and self-stigmatisation helped Fortuyn to bind people to him. With his clearly-formulated message, he was able to interest them in his simple and purposive solutions for the problems in their lives, solutions which were similar to the thoughts which they themselves cherished. Proceeding from his personal ambitions, he more-or-less unintentionally touched on the terrain of religion and meaning in life, and was projected and appropriated as a secular 'prophet of redemption' for the problems of post-modern society. Fortuyn was the man who was to offer perspective and certainty when the established order could not, or would not do so. The almost euphoric feeling among his followers, which quickly brought them together as a popular movement behind the leader they had discovered, must be seen as the first wave of hype.

Through his assassination they suddenly lost their leader. In their form and function, the public and collective emotion and the massive wave of condolence also showed characteristics of hype. They make up part of the second wave of hype. Its central function was not only a form of public mourning, but an instrument of Fortuyn's supporters to prevent the disappearance of their critique of politics and government and to maintain public attention on the issues they had raised. With the loss of their mouthpiece they wanted to be seen and heard. In this sense the spontaneous shrines and the media coverage of them facilitated a public and collective performance or expression of the self. The grieving fell back on available symbols, rituals and religion, latent but

recognisable, which functioned as catalysts and vehicles to express the feelings of mourning, grief and rage, and to exorcise anxiety, fear and doubt.

On the one hand, the harsh, protest nature of the spontaneous shrines involved a sharp condemnation of the demonization campaign and *a fortiori* the death of their leader, and was at the same time a general critique of the sitting political establishment and the failure of its policies. By responding in this way, the Fortuynists could follow in the footsteps of their leader, show what he meant to them, and, in a certain sense, temporarily take over his function. Their trust in his mission had to continue, and so he was also projected as a secular redeemer who could offer hope, in order to perpetuate his critique and continue the political renewal - all the more necessary because the LPF was going to participate in the election a few days after. His personal charisma was important for explaining this attribution process. Fortuyn's indisputable talent for being seen and accepted as a convincing leader and putting into words the problems of a 'silent minority' of Dutch society, sometimes led, during the first weeks after his death, to his being attributed qualities of sanctity and holiness which could provide spiritual support and hope. Nevertheless, he did not last as a saintly role-model.

Through the extensive media coverage, the content of the messages gained a much broader influence. Fortuyn's death caused emotions of grief and affection because his person was attached to political and social issues. The interaction between these emotions, the issues and the media helped to realize the hype. The metaphoric and concrete attributions of sanctity and messianism reinforced his image, and therefore also the hype itself. It was a relevant hype that should not be interpreted in a pejorative way as prime-minister Kok once did. Certainly, in the beginning it was not superficial or a matter of false sentimentality or hysteria, since the expressions of mourning, grief, intimacy, protest, hope and desire were characterised precisely by spontaneity, immediacy and candour.<sup>42</sup> It was a reaction to a crisis situation of a both personal and national nature, in which his followers lost their leader and the nation felt it had been robbed of its innocence. The emotions and their expression were as spontaneous and unaffected as the creation of the memorial sites themselves. But at the same time the shrines also proved to be effective 'democratic' tools in articulating criticism. Their power seems to be even more greater because we can now, two years later, ascertain that many political ideas of Pim Fortuyn are appropriated by present-day politicians and parties. It signifies that the hype around Pim Fortuyn's death was significant and meaningful for Dutch society.

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<sup>42</sup> But it is also true that the media was not without influence during the week after Fortuyn's death. The many interviews with visitors to the shrines, the constant images of the shrines themselves, the showing or reading of texts, etc., offered an example for others and could thereby have been a stimulus for similar conduct.