

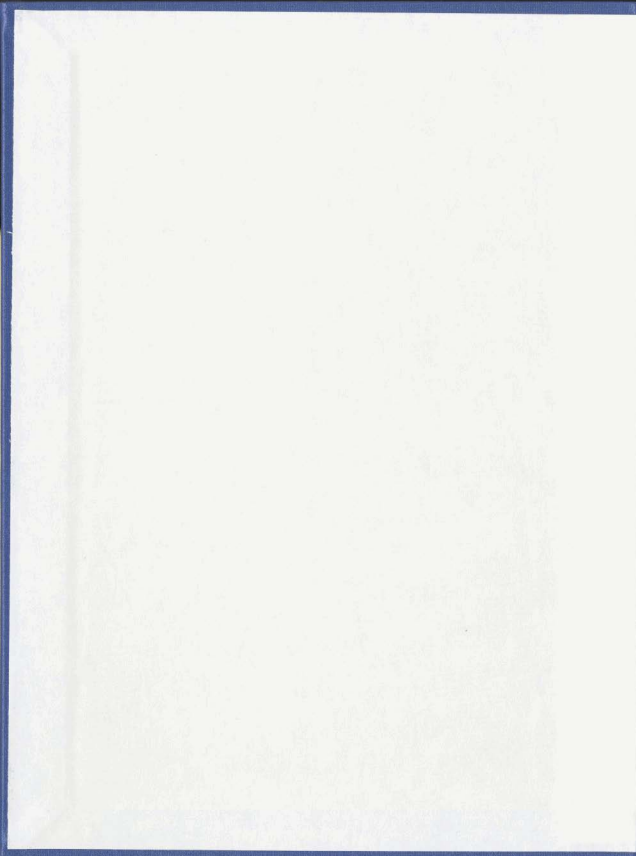
CROSSROADS:
ROADSIDE ACCIDENT MEMORIALS IN
AND AROUND AUSTIN, TEXAS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**CROSSROADS:
ROADSIDE ACCIDENT MEMORIALS IN AND AROUND AUSTIN, TEXAS**

**by
Holly Jeannine Everett**

**A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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**Department of Folklore
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Abstract

This thesis considers issues in belief and material culture studies in an examination of roadside cross memorials in and around the city of Austin, Texas. Thirty-five memorial sites, including both Mothers Against Drunk Driving crosses, which are erected through the Texas Department of Transportation, and others constructed by private citizens, are featured in descriptions and photographs.

The first two chapters provide the historical and current context for the appearance of vernacular memorials and discuss a number of memorials, both informal and formal, in North America and Europe, including roadside crosses in other areas of Texas. Chapter three details Austin's crosses, noting dominant patterns in construction and assembly and providing a thorough inventory of memorial offerings. Items placed at many of the crosses reflect an ongoing dialogue with the deceased (notes, inscriptions on bridge railings), and the continuation of missed celebrations (toys, homecoming mums, graduation tassels). The memorials thus become representative not only of the mystery of death, but of the deceased themselves.

In chapters four and five, Austin area residents consider their involvement with, and perceptions of, various memorial assemblages. Informant responses are analyzed in terms of vernacular, domestic religious expression, political activism and grief processes. A number of roadside memorial assemblages contain elements more often associated with seasonal home and yard adornment, a manner of decoration which allows bereaved individuals to incorporate the dead into the world of the living, and vice versa.

Whereas contemporary funeral custom and landscape emphasizes the difference between the deceased and those who mourn, roadside cross

memorials present a more universally active, and thus affective threshold. Individuals mourning the sudden death of a loved one must negotiate a complex field of emotion, often dealing not only with their own grief, but that of other relatives and friends of the deceased. Additionally, magico-religious beliefs may be called into question and/or reaffirmed, as are individual priorities and expectations. In an effort to incorporate an unexpected loss, a number of my informants maintain memorial assemblages as places of intimacy and community, sacred spaces in which death may be contemplated, and life celebrated.

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The work contained in these pages reflects the generosity, patience and memory of a number of people, not only in Texas, but also in Newfoundland. Foremost are my thanks to my interviewees, especially Vicki and Ronnie Biggs, Susan Crane, Margie Franklin, Shilah Lamay, Jennifer Solter, Thomas Vannatta, and James and Ruby Werchan. They shared with me extremely personal and painful experiences, thoughtfully answering my myriad questions. Each of them touched my heart, and that depth of emotion has informed every word of this thesis.

Additionally, Bill Warren and the hundred-odd young adults in his senior English classes provided me with the solid basis upon which I began my fieldwork in Austin. Recalling my own attitude while a member of one such class, I was doubly appreciative of the time and effort that went into completing my questionnaires and participating in follow-up interviews. Equally crucial were the interviews granted me by Tom Hurt at the Texas Department of Transportation and Travis County Traffic Engineer Raymond Reed. Photographer Doug Powell shared his many photographs of roadside crosses and grave markers throughout the American southwest, as well as his understanding of their relevance in the cultural context of the area. Many other friends and acquaintances assisted by offering their thoughts and opinions on Austin's growing number of memorials.

Members of my family, even though occasionally questioning my choice of subject matter, withstood innumerable hours in the car as I scoured Texas roadsides for markers. To my sister, Christie, I will always be grateful, not only for her unwavering support and friendship, but for her knowledge of Austin (that she

didn't even know she had) and keen eye. My parents' belief in me buoyed my spirits throughout the project.

Fellow graduate student Jane Gadsby provided me with photographs of roadside crosses from her own travels, and Clara Byrne and Andrea O'Brien provided photographs of, and insight on markers on Newfoundland's Irish Loop. John Bodner offered constructive criticism of my earliest ideas. He and Catherine DeCent were, and continue to be, of great support on this side of the border. Others, including Keith Coles, Julia Kelso, Mikel Koven, Tammy Lawlor, Lara Maynard, Deva McNeill, J. David Neal, Michael Robidoux, Niko Silvester, Tim Stalker and Wendy Welch suggested references, critiqued seminar presentations and empathized with frustrations attending the writing process.

Scholarly, moral and monetary support from the department of folklore sustained me as well. Dr. Paul Smith provided initial direction and references, as did Dr. Martin Lovelace and Dr. Diane Tye. My supervisor, Dr. Diane Goldstein, as well as offering guidance and well-timed proddings, was a source of inspiration and encouragement before I wrote a single word.

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Introduction

In the spring of 1996, several months before I began my master's programme in folklore at Memorial University, I became aware of an increasing number of roadside crosses in my hometown of Austin, Texas. I remembered seeing them as a teenager—grim warnings, I thought, as I sped to nearby lakes in my first car. I did not know then that the crosses had a long history in Mexico and the southwestern United States, nor that they had analogues in several other countries. I had no firsthand knowledge of the construction of those I drove past almost daily. Nonetheless, I found them fascinating and disturbing, even possessing a numinous quality.

I locate myself in the study as a participant-observer, in the sense that I lived in Austin, witnessing the appearance and disappearance of roadside crosses, for seventeen years. I talked about them with friends and relatives, speculating about their origins, as many of my informants have done. When I mentioned my interest in them to my mother, a school teacher, in early 1997, she described one near her home in Austin. The brother of one of the women killed at the site, Heather Lamay, was in my mother's third-grade class at the time. She felt sure that the boy's mother, Shilah, would be happy to speak with me.

Shilah, a former nurse and now stay-at-home mother in her mid-forties, was my first contact. She referred me to two other women who had lost children in automobile accidents. My brother-in-law, David, watched a friend construct a roadside cross for his brother. In other cases, I contacted individuals who had been quoted in newspaper articles. I hoped that since they had been willing to talk to a reporter, they would be equally willing to speak to me. As might be

expected, a number of interviewees expressed reluctance to open their homes and hearts to a stranger, but in most cases I was treated with a frank openness of spirit that I will never forget.

Thesis Overview

The following pages, and especially chapter two, will reveal that I am certainly not the first to consider the crosses from a folklorist's perspective. My analysis is unique, however, in its focus on a single urban area and consideration of both participant motivation and audience response in an effort to locate the memorial form in its cultural milieu. Contemporary scholarly literature on roadside accident markers generally focuses on a larger region, or state: Maida Owens' work in Louisiana; Alberto Barrera's contribution to Joe S. Graham's *Hecho en Tejas*; "Mexican-American Roadside Crosses in Starr County," Kathleen McRee and Sam Larcombe's research and exhibitions in New Mexico. Additionally, as Graham noted in 1991 in *Hispanic-American Material Culture: An Annotated Directory of Collections, Sites, Archives and Festivals in the US*, "there has been less interest on the part of scholars and artists in Texas," in comparison to work based in other areas of the Southwest, specifically New Mexico (2-3). Other work on such markers is oriented toward illustrating general issues in cultural geography (Henzel, 1991) or material culture studies (Griffith, 1992; West, 1988).

By organizing the explication of data and theoretical analyses in the manner described in the following pages, I will trace the communicative process of the markers themselves, as tangible evidence of extremely personal pain that inevitably affects an entire community. Specifically, as centerpieces of fragile,

mutating vernacular memorial assemblages (Santino, Yellow Ribbons 20-21), the crosses have only in the last few years been examined as more than incidental specks in the cultural landscape of certain groups. Drawing parallels to previous works as well as addressing questions left unanswered in the current literature, I hope to integrate somewhat disparate areas of inquiry in order to elucidate the practice of the roadside cross tradition in Austin, and its relationship to similar forms. A unique form of public, belief-centered material culture, roadside accident markers occupy a rare place not only in the realm of roadside attractions, but in the spatial understanding, or cognitive map of the individual, a uniqueness that renders them "outlaw" and almost untouchable markers of liminal space.

In interviewing Austin residents—high school students, grieving mothers, state employees, traffic professionals—I have concentrated on the polysemic nature of roadside accident markers. Although their reasons for erecting or noticing crosses differ, the interviews made one aspect of this type of memorialization clear. The white cross is a widely recognized symbol of tragedy and remembrance, and, I would assert, untimely death.

Primary research was conducted in Texas from April 23 through June 4, 1997, and from December 17 through January 11, 1998. The fieldwork process encompassed library and archival research, directed questionnaires, directive and non-directive tape-recorded interviews, visual documentation, and notes taken during and after casual conversation. Crosses throughout the Austin area, as well as the state, were photographed and indexed.

I will discuss the data gathered during fieldwork with respect to the history of roadside memorial crosses in Mexico and the southwestern United States, their role in North American memorial culture as signifiers of liminal space, sites

of a sudden move from life to death, unmarked by sacrament or civil ceremony (Griffith, Beliefs 100); and, finally, their social functions in bereavement processes as well as their dysfunctional nature as “outlaw” objects from several theoretical approaches. The analysis will incorporate modified functionalist, structuralist and feminist theoretical perspectives.

I have included over eighty photographs, not only to provide the reader with clear visual images of the crosses and the assemblages of which they are a part, but also with a sense of the memorials as they appear to thousands of Austin motorists each day. As noted in chapter three, many crosses sit at busy intersections or along heavily traversed roads and highways, competing for drivers' attention with official roadway signage, billboards, fast food restaurants, strip malls and megastores. Thus, chapters four and five deal specifically with the ways in which area residents read (and do not read) the memorials.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one, Private and Public Memory, begins with an examination of contemporary memorial culture, including both civilly sanctioned and maintained memorials such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and those erected for disease, disaster and crime victims; and those of a vernacular nature, such as roadside crosses. I discuss issues mediated in memorials attempting to address both private and public memory, as well as the memorials' use by individuals as sacred spaces and sites of pilgrimage. A number of public memorials in Austin, both formal and informal, serve as an introduction to the area's memorial landscape.

Chapter two, The Cross-Cultural Roadside Cross, traces the development of the roadside memorial cross tradition in the United States, from early Catholic

gravesites in the Americas to their current presence in almost every state, as well as in Canada and Mexico. Roadside crosses featured in popular culture include those described in novels; pictured on postcards; featured in newspaper and magazine articles on drunk driving or general motor vehicle safety; presented in websites and motion pictures. In this chapter, I also describe the current context of vernacular roadside memorials in Austin, including relevant municipal, county and state regulations.

Chapter three, *Austin's Roadside Memorials*, ethnographically details forty-four individual roadside crosses in the Austin area, drawing heavily on interviews, local newspaper articles and photographic documentation. Interestingly, whereas bearers of the memorial tradition are generally assumed to be Hispanic Catholics (Graham 478; Barrera 279), my research reveals that the tradition is now being perpetuated not only by members of other Christian denominations, but also by individuals subscribing to no particular faith at all, as evidenced by MADD's choice of the cross as one of their official symbols. One of the oldest dated crosses (1981) in Austin is in fact the first MADD cross erected in the Austin metropolitan area.

Chapter four, *Bereavement Made Manifest*, follows with an examination of private and public bereavement as expressed by roadside cross memorials, primarily developing themes encountered in interviews with those who have constructed and/or maintained them. Informants' memorialization practices at corresponding gravesites are also discussed. Finally, I explore the relation of the roadside cross to issues of vernacular religion and architecture, as well as analogous tradition in other areas of Texas, and Mexico.

Chapter five, Functions of the Cross, deals explicitly with the role of the roadside cross in informal communication. William Bascom's four functions are set against Austin area residents' perception of the lessons of vernacular memorials. In recognition of the limitations of the functionalist paradigm, I also examine the memorials' socio-economic and non-integrative, or subversive aspects. Of special note here is a discussion of MADD crosses in the area, and a local resident's attempts to legalize non-MADD memorials.

The concluding section draws together the ideas developed in previous chapters, such as the politics of memory and sacred space, vernacular religion and the domestication of public space. Additionally, I identify directions for future research, including further investigation into the place of the roadside cross in larger memorial complexes, and of Mexican-American and white, Euro-North American cultural intersections in the context of memorial tradition. Finally, I address the relevance of the thesis to my own experience and development as a folklorist.

Chapter One

Memorial Culture in the Twentieth Century

The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* defines "memorial" as "something designed to preserve the memory of a person, event, etc., as a monument or a holiday" (1987). This chapter serves as an introduction to vernacular memorial culture, and will explore the process of memorialization from the perspective of participants and non-participants. I will discuss a selection of memorials, shrines and places of pilgrimage as an aid in the contextualization of roadside cross memorials in the Austin area.

The word "memorial" may first bring to mind civilly-sanctioned structures, such as the Lincoln and Vietnam veterans memorials in Washington, D.C., and the ceremonies performed at these monuments. Other associations may include Memorial (United States) or Remembrance (Canada) Day observances honoring veterans. However, it should be noted that activities appropriate to spaces, whether geographical or calendrical, set aside for remembrance of certain persons or events are open to interpretation and innovation. Thus, a more ready connection in North American popular culture between Memorial Day and customary activities might well be retail sales, outdoor concerts and barbecues. While memorial ceremonies honoring veterans are still conducted in North America, it is perhaps equally viewed as a day of leisure (Santino, All Around 118-21).

Simultaneously, in the latter half of a century that has witnessed the unexpected deaths of numerous celebrities and political figures, ranging from the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., to the drug

overdose of actor River Phoenix to the more recent death of Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, the process and physical manifestation of memorialization has become more mutable. In addition to prescribed commemorative practices, such as the establishment of a governmentally maintained site, individuals with varying degrees of connection to the deceased are creating extemporaneous memorial assemblages. Discussing popular shrines in the United States, Richard West Sellars and Tony Walter observe that

the roadside where James Dean crashed, the memorial in Central Park across the street from where John Lennon was gunned down, the spot on the sidewalk where Swedish premier Olaf Palme was shot [in 1986], all are regularly adorned by flowers and offerings. (196)

A deluge of flowers, cards, notes, candles and other items were left at the site of Princess Diana's fatal crash on the Cours la Reine in Paris. The same kinds of remembrances, as well as "honey-colored Teddy bears" were left at the gates of Buckingham and Kensington palaces and outside Harrods department store in London, displays "that seemed less like funeral tributes than like the contents of some vast piñata filled with party favors, that someone had broken above London" (Gopnik 36). The incongruity of the effusive displays of grief with stereotypical British stoicism underscored many accounts of the country's mourning.

Analogous memorials arising from a public outpouring of grief for disease, disaster and crime victims include the various articles left just outside the front gate of Gianni Versace's home in South Beach, Florida; impromptu murder victim memorials in Philadelphia (DeWolf; Primiano); the stuffed animals, flowers and notes intertwined in the fence around the ruins of the bombed Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City; and the flowers and teddy bears sent to

Dunblane Primary School in Dunblane, Scotland. In fact, the Scottish primary school has been so overwhelmed with offerings that school officials have publicly requested that no more be sent ("Our Thanks"). In each of these instances, structures generally considered part of the public domain—sidewalks, schools and government buildings—are utilized for private and public mourning, as spaces in which to negotiate meaning.

Formal Memorialization

Completed and dedicated in 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. is one of the most widely recognized sites of such negotiation, far removed from the actual scene of devastation. Scholars including Kenneth Foote and John Bodnar have discussed the origins and eventual construction of the monument, especially noting the embodiment of the "memory debate" in conflicts concerning appropriate design (Bodnar 1-9). While many judged the black granite walls inscribed with the names of fifty-eight thousand men and women a horribly unsuitable tribute to the nation's war dead, others saw in its starkness a more truthful manifestation of the reality of the war and its consequences. A compromise between the two camps came in the form of a freestanding statue depicting three soldiers, later joined by additional statuary commemorating female veterans (6; Foote 291).

It continues to be a place for remembering and recasting individual and collective impressions. Lydia Fish has documented responses to the site by "pilgrims" that include veterans and relatives of the dead and missing, and their offerings: rosaries, photographs, letters, flowers, poems, pieces of uniforms and teddy bears (83-84). Emotional reactions to the monument can be so powerful that visitors, usually veterans, sometimes find it difficult to approach the wall and

instead hang back in a line of trees facing it. Park service volunteers and veterans carefully watch for these seemingly reluctant visitors, to offer their support and assistance in the emotional and possibly traumatic experience of confronting the monument (85-86).

A particularly telling incident occurred in the year following the wall's dedication. Perhaps related to protest against the Reagan administration's Central American policies, calls threatening bombing or defacing of the wall were made to Park officials. Veterans responded by turning out to guard the wall, as did Park and mounted police. A four-foot snow-fence was erected to protect the wall from the nearby demonstrators (86). Although no harm came to the memorial or anyone involved, the preparation for armed confrontation speaks to the tension elicited by the public representation of a problematic past. Indeed, Fish refers to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a "the strangest of all sacred places . . . the place where the Vietnam veterans have found the strength to fight their last and most difficult battle" (87). Although the site is thousands of miles from the jungles of Asia, its liminality, in terms of landscape, design and depiction renders it a powerful reflection of painful memories, faced in private and public by individuals across the country.

While the Vietnam Veterans Memorial commemorates the horror of those years from a significant distance, thus perhaps providing some degree of emotional safety to pilgrims, memorials marking physical sites of mass death dot the European landscape, the great majority resulting from genocidal actions of the Nazi regime (commemorative sites are also located in Israel and North America). Dachau and Auschwitz, the two monuments in Europe drawing the largest number of visitors per year, approximately 90,000 and 75,000

respectively (Young x), have been sites of conflict between different groups of survivors, townspeople, nations and faiths. Dachau, the first concentration camp opened by the Nazis, first held political prisoners, among them a number of German Christians, including clergymen. The first large group of Jewish prisoners arrived on the heels of *Kristallnacht*, November 9, 1938. They were followed, in ensuing years, by thousands of Soviet Army officers. After the camp was liberated in 1945, it was converted by the Americans into a military stockade, then later a German refugee center. During this time, the crematorium was preserved, with a "Garden of Remembrance" planted around it (60-62).

James Young has traced the evolution of memorial structures and interpretation at Dachau. The first exhibit, accompanied by graphic photos of Nazi violence, was met with complaints by local civic officials. They objected to the display as "not only offensive to good taste but also damaging to international relations," and it was closed in the early part of 1955 (63). The efforts of camp survivors to reopen the museum and create a permanent memorial space were met with opposition, again by local leaders and citizens, who wished to divert attention from the site. Nonetheless, the reorganized International Dachau Committee (first established as an underground camp prisoners' association during the war), with the support of the Americans still at the camp, soon opened a makeshift museum.

In the years to come, the site would become home to other memorial structures including a Catholic monument (1960), an international memorial (1965), a Jewish chapel (1967) and an international monument (1968). The Catholic monument consists of "a rounded cylinder of unhewn stone, forty-one feet high and forty-five feet in diameter . . . opens in front to create a large airy

vestibule for prayer," writes Young, and " . . . is empty except for a large cross, and a gigantic crown of thorns . . . perched on top" (64). The plans for the monument apparently met with little or no opposition from local residents, which may be attributed to the surrounding Catholic population and the large number of Catholic prisoners at the camp during the war. Among them was the man who would eventually spearhead monument construction, the auxiliary bishop of Munich. The dedication ceremony, attended by mostly Catholics numbering in the area of fifty thousand, included a recreation of Christ's passion. The establishment of a Carmelite convent behind the memorial in 1964 was received in a similarly cooperative manner (65).

Young asserts that the Catholic presence in the camp, during its operation by the Nazis and also after their defeat, accounts for the low level of friction between Jewish and Catholic survivors and visitors, a marked difference from the battle of symbolism and representation that has occurred at Auschwitz/ Birkenau. In December 1997, *The New York Times* reported that both Christian crosses and stars of David had been removed from the field of ashes behind the gas chambers at Birkenau, the main burial ground for both camps (Perlez). The conflict over the appropriateness of the symbols had been ongoing since 1983, when they were erected by Polish Boy Scouts in an attempt to coerce a compromise between the parties involved, including the Catholic Church in Poland, the Polish government and various Jewish groups (Dwork and Pelt 246; Perlez; Young 151). The beginning of the dispute is generally attributed to an address in 1971 by Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (who later became Pope John Paul II) honoring Maximilien Kolbe, a priest who died at Auschwitz in exchange for the life of a Jewish prisoner. In his speech, the cardinal effectively appropriated the

former camps for the Catholic church as sites of Christian martyrdom. Edith Stein, a Polish Jewish woman who had converted to Catholicism as Sister Benedicta of the Cross, was killed at Birkenau in 1942. During the Pope's return visit to the camps in 1979, he announced the initiation of the beatification process for the Carmelite nun (Dwork and Pelt 245).

In response to the Pope's pronouncements, in 1984 a group of Carmelite sisters founded a convent near Block 11, the site of Father Kolbe's martyrdom. After much protest by Jewish groups—especially after the mailing of a fund raising appeal by a Catholic charity citing a “desire to erase the outrages so often done to the Vicar of Christ” (Bartoszewski 7)—the sisters moved into another building some distance from the camp border in 1992. Although Dwork and Pelt assert that as a result of such compromises of memory, “inexact allusions, snatches of misinformation, and inappropriate metaphors . . . generate histories that corrode the history of the Judaeocide” (243), it is hoped that, following relocation of the convent and the removal of the crosses and stars from the ash field, further plans to preserve and mark the sites can go forward.

The best manner in which to confront such a dilemma is a challenge for any community dealing with a site-specific tragedy. The differing priorities of each group involved are possible points of contention. Whereas the problem of memory at Auschwitz/Birkenau centers on religious difference, the conflicts at Dachau continue as local officials struggle to incorporate respectful and instructive recognition of past wrongs into a positive civic image, especially in light of the tens of thousands of visitors arriving every year (Young 69). The way in which Dachau presents itself as a modern town in relation to its past, however, encompasses not only official literature, but also informal communication

between residents and visitors, and once visitors return home, between themselves and members of their own communities.

It is precisely this type of informal communication and activity, or folklore, centered on an infamous site that often prompts city planners to initiate a governmentally administered (if not fully funded), memorialization process. For example, in Memphis the commemoration of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, began with the owner of the motel at which King was shot. Walter Bailey turned the room that King had occupied at the Lorraine Motel into a shrine, "including a glass enclosure extending from the room to where King fell on the edge of the balcony, a small display of King memorabilia, and some plastic wreaths" (Foote 75). Eventually, through the joint efforts of Bailey, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memphis Memorial Foundation (incorporated in 1982 and later renamed the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation), private citizens and city business and government leaders (among others), the motel was completely renovated, save for King's room at the time of his death, and reopened as the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum in 1991 (76-77; Sellars and Walter 194).

In the twenty-three years that elapsed after the assassination, Bailey dealt with severe financial problems, as did the memorial project with fund raising and public opinion, encompassing positive and negative assessments of King's character, the wish to leave the painful event in the past, and concerns about the most appropriate use of land and funds. Nonetheless, city leaders recognized that tourists were seeking out the assassination site, and that there existed the opportunity to shape those visitors' experiences and memories of the event, which would in turn inform their general impression of the city (Foote 78).

In drawing upon the examples above, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the memorial complexes at Dachau and Auschwitz/Birkenau and the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum, I have looked at the avenues taken by various individuals and groups in coming to terms with the private and public memory of terrible episodes in recent history. The first two instances involve memorialization on a vast scale; the third, the commemoration of an individual regarded as an influential leader, and to many, a hero. Although the question in each case appears to have been *how* to memorialize, the question of *whether* to remember at all, in an institutional manner, was answered affirmatively at some point in the process. Additionally, in the case of King, a private business was transformed into a public institution.

Austin Memorials, Official and Otherwise

The designation of public and private space for memorialization is an especially delicate task in urban areas experiencing explosive growth. The city of Austin and its residents have in recent years grappled with a perceived need to expand and diversify the metropolitan area's economic base in response to the recent instability of major employers in the area, such as state and federal government institutions, and the desire to preserve the city's unique quality of life as a more manageable, yet sophisticated and liberal municipality (particularly in comparison to Houston and the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex). Cleaner, "greener" industries like computer hardware and software developers and manufacturers have been courted by the Chamber of Commerce in an effort to promote growth while protecting the environment, which includes not only ecological concerns, but social issues as well.

The appropriate use of communally utilized space is an ever-present issue in the lively debate surrounding public works projects such as parks, recreational

and convention facilities, and memorial structures. Austin residents and city officials recently dealt with the task of effectively representing public and private memory in its commemoration of late blues great Stevie Ray Vaughan. Vaughan, who moved to Austin from Dallas, died in a plane crash in August of 1990. News of his death stunned Austin fans, who quickly organized a candlelight vigil in the city's centrally located Zilker Park. Writing in 1991 for the *Austin American-Statesman*, Michael Point describes the memorialization process that followed the vigil as one accompanied by "spirited debate," finally ending with the family's decision to install a statue at Auditorium Shores, an outdoor venue at which Vaughan frequently performed (Foote 74). The city-owned park runs along Town Lake, a section of the Colorado River which flows through downtown Austin. Ceremonially unveiled in 1993, the bronze statue of Vaughan, standing at eight feet and surrounded by a "meditation garden," was made possible through private donations from individuals not only in Austin, but around the world, and the allocation of space was made by the city (Point 1993). Facing south, away from the river, Vaughan's likeness is often adorned with fresh-cut flowers left by fans.

Although the best way to memorialize the well-known and admired musician was deliberated for a little over a year and included discussion of renaming various city streets or parks for Vaughan, the need to commemorate his life in a public fashion was not at issue. Whether due to Vaughan's highly publicized sobriety, or the fact that construction of the memorial site was funded by private citizens, family, friends and fans faced no public opposition. The memorialization of a single individual, or small group, who are not public figures

or have not died in a manner that is perceived as heroic or unusually tragic frequently stirs greater debate.

Thus, a controversy attended the installation, in December 1997, of 1,500 small crosses by Park Hills Baptist Church members in the expansive front grounds of the church at the intersection of Farm to Market Road 2244 and the Mopac Expressway (Fig. 1.1-3). A placard placed in front of Park Hills's permanent sign proclaimed it the

FIELD OF CROSSES
IN MEMORY
OF THE 4,110 BABIES
WHO DIE FROM ABORTIONS
IN OUR COUNTRY EVERY DAY!

Symbolizing the fetuses aborted in America, according to church members, the display was planned to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the United States, *Roe vs. Wade*. The crosses, mentioned to me by several informants, garnered further media attention in mid-January when several crosses were uprooted and burned on the church grounds by vandals ("Anti-abortion crosses").



Fig. 1.1 Crosses at intersection of Mopac frontage road and Farm to Market Road 2244.



Fig. 1.2 View of crosses from southbound lanes of Mopac Expressway frontage road. Church buildings are to right of area shown.



Fig. 1.3 Crosses and church tower.

I have chosen these memorials to represent two points on the public/private memory continuum as manifest in the Austin area. Although for the

most part privately planned and built, both are intended for public consumption and thus placed in high traffic areas. Vaughan's family created a memorial that was accessible to anyone at any time. It stands outside the section of Auditorium Shores that is often enclosed by chain link fences for concerts, festivals or other events. The members of Park Hills Baptist Church wanted as many people as possible to see the anti-abortion display, and planted the crosses accordingly, at the corner of the church grounds bordered by two heavily traversed highways.¹ In accordance with its intended use, each memorial's location and structure invites a certain level of engagement from the general public.

Of the two, the "field of crosses" is the more obvious candidate for on-going debate and negotiation. It is also a unique memorial in that it is temporary and does not commemorate a specific event or individual.² Further, it utilizes Christian symbolism to make what is ultimately a political statement, a tradition in American public life that contradicts the legal separation of church and state. It is, however, in keeping with the concept of civil religion, first expounded by Jean Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, embracing

the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. All other religious opinions are outside the cognizance of the state and may be freely held by citizens. (Bellah 264-5)

Robert Bellah's work explores the idea of American civil religion in particular, from an examination of the Declaration of Independence to the rhetoric of the Johnson administration (1963-69), noting a common "set of beliefs, symbols, and

¹ I obtained permission to photograph the crosses from church office staff.

² For a similar memorial on the Internet, see "The Shrine in Memory of Children Who Have Died Unborn" at <http://www.innocent.com/Shrine.html>, a production of the Church of the Holy Innocents in New York City.

rituals;" (262-72) e.g., a belief in "the Almighty," the cross, and the observance of Memorial Day. Of relevance to the present discussion is his differentiation between denominationally defined faiths such as Catholicism, Protestantism and Judaism, and the "very activist and noncontemplative conception of the fundamental religious obligation" (264). Civil religion is not typified by the hushed seclusion of a cathedral or chapel, but is thoroughly grounded in the active debate of the public arena.

It is invoked, especially, in times of crisis and uncertainty, as during the war between the states, the assassination of President Kennedy, the Vietnam war and, on a more personal level, following the death of a family member or friend. Indeed, Peter S. Hawkins cites "the acts of piety that have grown up around both the VVM [Vietnam Veterans Memorial] and the [AIDS] quilt" as "the most vital examples of popular civil religion we have" (762). At public sites where the sacred and profane intermingle, people of varying cultural, and thus religious, backgrounds come together to mourn.

In theory, civil religion's all-encompassing public embrace excludes religious intolerance. Writes Bellah, "There was an implicit but quite clear division of function between the civil religion and Christianity. Under the doctrine of religious liberty, an exceptionally wide sphere of personal piety and voluntary social action was left to the churches" (264, 267). In many of the documents and speeches he analyzes, there is an emphasis on Christian symbolism without specific invocation of the Christian church, similar to the use of the cross without strict adherence to the beliefs in which its religious significance originated. Hence, it becomes representative of religious or spiritual belief in general, a symbol adoptable by people and groups of various faiths.

The civil religion of the United States blends political and religious social action in many spheres, as the dialogue between church and state comes full circle and doctrinal distinctions blur.³ For as noted by Antonio Gramsci with respect to a "unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct . . . why call this unity of faith 'religion' and not 'ideology,' or even frankly 'politics'?" (50). In religious or spiritual belief, the individual chooses between tenets that can be odds with each other, as in the act of pledging allegiance to any given political party or platform. Both represent a certain understanding of one's environment and prescribe behavior that is in accordance with that vision. The only difference might be in religious belief systems' more direct claims of absolute truth.⁴

While the Park Hills Baptist Church and the Stevie Ray Vaughan memorials represent different points on the commemoration continuum, they are similar in that they signify events occurring somewhere other than the memorial

³ The expression of civil religion is, of course, often problematic. Sue Samuelson describes a court case in which she was an expert witness for the defense. In December, 1979, the city of Denver, Colorado was sued by a group called Citizens Concerned for the Separation of Church and State, with the support of the American Civil Liberties Union. They charged that a nativity scene on the steps of the city hall was a "religious symbol which should not appear on government property" (139). The city won the case, and at the time of Samuelson's writing the citizens' group was appealing the decision.

⁴ Kugelmass cites Jonathan Woocher and Charles Silberman in the identification of American Jewish civil religion, one tenet of which is "the Holocaust as a subject of popular Jewish discourse" usually identified with the resurgence of Jewish nationalism resulting from the Six Day War (1967-77). The previous discussion of the conflict over religious symbolism at Auschwitz offers a glimpse of a contested intersection of Jewish and (predominately) Christian civil religion on the international stage. I will further explore the use of exclusive symbolism by political groups and the symbolism of the cross in general in chapters two and five.

site, as does the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. As noted in the case of Holocaust memorials and that dedicated to the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, honoring and shaping memory at the physical site of violence involves a different set of challenges. Foote categorizes the choices made in commemoration of site-specific events as sanctification, designation, rectification and obliteration (7).

Obliteration entails the complete eradication of any structure or physical feature related to a tragic incident. Examples include the former home of John Wayne Gacy near Chicago; the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky, at which a fire killed 165 people in 1977; and the Cocoanut Grove nightclub in Boston, site of devastating fire in 1942. In each instance, buildings were razed and the property remains unused, both indications of a community's shame or guilt (179-87).⁵ Closely related to obliteration is rectification, in which the site is returned to its original condition or totally redeveloped.⁶

Austin residents have witnessed the process at work in the rectification of numerous traffic accident sites which now bear little or no trace of destruction, and in the University of Texas's response to Charles Whitman's shooting spree from the tower of the Main Building in 1966. Damage on campus was cleaned and repaired. The observation deck from which Whitman fired was reopened

⁵ The recent demolition of Nicole Brown Simpson's former home in Brentwood, California provides another example of obliteration.

⁶ Obliteration, followed years later by rectification, has taken place at the former site of Mount Cashel Orphanage in St. John's, Newfoundland. Following the trials that led to the convictions of several Christian brothers on counts of sexual and physical assault in 1989, the orphanage was closed. The buildings were razed in 1992 (Bates). All that remained were several gateposts, painted grey and emblazoned with the Irish cross. In 1997, the land was purchased for the construction of a Sobey's grocery store. In June of 1998, small floral wreaths appeared atop the two main gateposts.

without ceremony, although it was closed again a few years later due to suicides (Foote 195, 357). The site of a robbery, arson and quadruple homicide at a northwest Austin yogurt shop serves as an example of designation. A bronze memorial marker was installed in memory of the four young female victims near the site. Prior to the placing of the marker, friends of the women left lighted candles, flowers and notes in front of the burned-out store (Phillips).

Sanctification, involving the creation of sacred space by physical manipulation of the landscape, whether it be the institution of a memorial plaque, garden or building, is usually inspired by disaster or heroic death. In the Austin area, however, as in other areas of the American southwest and across the United States, are an increasing number of sanctified spaces created in memory of individuals who were neither well-known nor martyrs.

The memorial for Ivan Garth Johnson, killed in 1989, combines an existing public structure, a painted mural, graffiti and offerings (Fig. 1.4-5). Spray-painted on an overpass support column are the words

R.I.P. IVAN
FAIR SAILING TALL BOY
IVAN GARTH JOHNSON
1971 - 1989
DON'T DRINK & DRIVE
YOU MIGHT KILL
SOMEONE'S KID

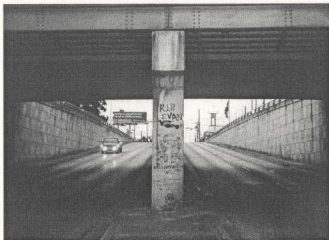


Fig. 1.4 Lamar Street bridge overpass, looking north.



Fig. 1.5 Close-up view of overpass memorial for Ivan Garth Johnson.

Designs accompanying the message include a black dove, strands of ivy and pattern of triangles at the base of the support. Placed at its foot are rocks decorated with shells, cigarettes and an empty terra-cotta flower pot. Long-time Austin resident Ryan Britton reported that

every year, they [they family] cut a piece of wood in the shape of a heart or a circle, and glue seashells in the shape of the number of how many years this boy . . . has been gone. I think the "7" and the "9" are still there.

The column upon which the artwork has remained untouched for almost a decade rises up from the Lamar bridge over the Colorado River, less than half a mile from the Stevie Ray Vaughan memorial. Rush-hour traffic comes to a standstill on the bridge twice every weekday, providing a captive audience for the memorial's affecting message. Other drunk driving memorials, including the white, wooden crosses erected through the Austin chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving will be detailed in following chapters, as will the formation of the Austin MADD chapter.

All memorials discussed above communicate to members of their audience in different ways. A supporter of anti-abortion legislation will, of course, react to the Park Hills Baptist Church display far differently than someone in favor of legalized abortion. A motorist viewing Ivan Garth Johnson's memorial for the first time will likely be more affected than a commuter who traverses the bridge twice each weekday. The fact that four informants recited the memorial legend to me word for word, however, attests to its continued power to impress.

Not all Austin memorials receive lasting attention, or pass into the vernacular knowledge of the area as has Johnson's. Visitors to the city will not

read about his memorial in any tourist literature or guidebook.⁷ In addition, neither the informal memorials described above nor institutionally maintained sites are guaranteed veneration as sacred spaces, as monuments of all kinds are routinely the objects of vandalism, if not outright desecration.⁸ Whether due to their origin, design or location, some sites become the focus of pilgrimage, as a shrine, while others fall into disrepair and obscurity.

A memorial on Guadalupe Street in Austin, while relatively new appears to have been abandoned, and was almost camouflaged in December 1997 by a thick layer of dead leaves (Fig. 1.6-7). The rounded tombstone-like metal marker has been completely overtaken by rust save for the rectangular plaque bearing the inscription

SKIA OURA
March 28, 1996 - November 4, 1996
"Taken by our negligence [sic]"

A crumbling funeral wreath flanks the north side of the marker on an equally rusted stand. As noted by Thomas Zimmerman with regard to roadside crosses in south central Kentucky, Oura's memorial has perhaps served its purpose for grieving family and friends (3). Attention and maintenance may have moved from the site of death to the home or cemetery.

⁷ Foote discusses this kind of informal, interstitial communication about death sites with particular regard to John Dillinger, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow (212).

⁸ For example, see Young's account of vandalism of a Holocaust memorial at San Francisco's Jewish Museum (317-19), and Foote's report of similar problems occurring at the Haymarket riot police monument in Chicago (138-41).



Fig. 1.6 Rusted metal marker for Skia Oura.



Fig. 1.7 View toward street from Oura memorial. Remnants of funeral wreath are visible in upper left corner.

Sacred Space and Pilgrimage

Foote states that the United States, from colonial days to the present, has been something of a landscape of disaster and loss, as well as diversity and beauty, thereby forcing the population, and governing bodies in particular, to develop alacritous and meaningful memorial responses (6, 289-91). In considering items left by visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Bodnar writes that:

a park service technician who helped catalog the items left behind told a reporter that the mementos left him 'a little misty.' He claimed that these objects were 'not like history' but had an 'immediacy' about them. What he might have added was that they were not really like the history that was usually commemorated in public. (8)

Ultimately, Bodnar asserts, " . . . pluralism will coexist with hegemony" (253), as civil institutions find it increasingly necessary to accommodate vernacular culture and memory in the formation of public commemorative activities and structures. The roadside cross tradition, not far removed from war memorial customs, similarly spotlights "ordinary" lives and memories, creating multivocal monuments in otherwise vapid public space.

In 1993, George Monger posited two primary reasons for the roadside shrine practice, memorialization and warning, describing the action of maintaining the site of fatality in such a manner as "private and individual 'pilgrimage'" (114). As a basic motive behind such assemblages, his assertion works well, as a number of my interviewees voiced the same opinion (see chapters four and five). Sellars and Walter go further, sensing an almost instinctual need to confront sites of sudden death in an effort to better understand death itself, citing the large crowds that gather for public executions and accidents "simply to observe how other people die" (196).

Confronting the unknown is a tenet of pilgrimage as conceptualized in the writings of Victor Turner (Center Out There 213-14). The primary distinction made by Victor Turner with respect to pilgrimage and other rituals is that pilgrimages require a journey (207-8). Such peregrinations are further distinguished by innovation and inclusion, and are thus, as stated by Karen Pechilis, "unbounded" (63). It is this quality of the pilgrimage that creates an environment in which meaning is created and recreated, "an area of multivocality" (Turner and Turner 145). Moreover, as Pechilis states,

Pilgrimage sites are not the realm of the familiar everyday; therefore the attempt is to make it familiar, to invest it with known meanings. Pilgrimage evokes an application of the known to the unknown in which the known is changed. (65)

The intersection of the familiar and the unfamiliar is commonly marked by, among other things, the action of taking items to or away from the site (66). Thus, the home and the pilgrimage site become invested with the symbols of each. Pilgrims to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial leave teddy bears and articles of clothing and take home a T-shirt or postcard, as friends of the accident victims described in this thesis leave a note or figurine and perhaps take away a flower (Biggs, see chapter four), resulting in a kind of domestication of the site.

Although a site may be familiarized by a variety of actions as a meeting place of different voices and messages, it is also a likely candidate for conflict. For Pechilis and others, the occurrence of discord is not a problematic one. Pilgrimage, as a liminoid phenomenon operating outside of rigid power structures (Turner and Turner 1-39), provides an open forum for negotiation that does not necessitate resolution (Bowman 55-56; Pechilis 65, 71-73). However, there must be some element of agreement at the core of the assemblage. In other words,

while the ritual may be ludic in nature, its diversion must be grounded in established symbolic systems (Pechilis 67; Hufford 198).⁹

Religious landscapes, while also reflecting diversity and negotiation, usually mirror religious hegemony. Terry Jordan and Lester Rowntree note the plethora of crucifixes, crosses, wayside shrines and Christian place names in Christian, especially Catholic, cultural regions such as Québec and certain parts of Germany. Predominantly Protestant areas, they write, are notable in their lack of religious iconography (219). The sacred landscape of the Austin area, which bears evidence of the heavy influence of both Catholicism and Protestantism, will be addressed more thoroughly in the following chapter. Its geographic location, in the state as a whole, is important to note here in that it straddles the demographic border between the predominantly Catholic counties to the south and those with heavy Protestant populations to the north (213; Ramos 489).

Yi-Fu Tuan emphasizes marginal location as emblematic of anti-structure with reference to Turner's conception of pilgrimage, but also acknowledges the varied character of sacred space, and of the sacred itself (91, 89). In contrast to the mundane landscape of the modern city, the sacred produces a tension that is awesome, horrible and yet almost magnetic:

Contemporary space, however colorful and varied, lacks polarized tension as between the numinous and the quotidian. Contemporary life, however pleasant and exciting, moves on one plane—the plane encompassed by rational and humanist vision. Ecstasy and dread, the heights and the depths, the awesome and the transcendent rarely intrude on our lives and on our landscapes except under the influence of chemical stimulus. Along certain lines our world has contracted. (99)

⁹ While the Turners, as well as Pechilis, focus on established, conventional religious pilgrimage, Marion Bowman discusses New Age pilgrims as well as Christian visitors to Glastonbury. David Hufford's writing here is concerned with pilgrims to St. Anne de Beaupre in Québec.

While Tuan's statement encompasses the sterility and tedium of the modern suburb and the often violent vibrancy of large cities, it neglects the sacred within the city—the roadside cross, the storefront shrine, the memorial mural.

Alan Morinis identifies pilgrimage sites as "divinely-infused ruptures in the continuous surface of the mundane, human social world" (281). Though his description is directed to pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition, it is equally applicable to the unexpected and perhaps disruptive nature of impromptu public memorials. In the cultivation of an active connection between site, marker and memory, they combat what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux de mémoire*, or "sites of memory". Substitutes for "real 'environments of memory,'" they include museum exhibits and festival presentations, and thus "deritualization" (qtd. Kugelmass, 180).

The trajectory of this chapter has thus far encompassed sites of personal, local, national and international importance. All locations are examples of sacred space, sites set apart from the quotidian and dedicated to commemoration. In reference to his conception of sanctification, Foote defines sacred spaces as places "that are publicly consecrated or widely venerated rather than those owned or maintained by a particular religious group," further stipulating that "there must be a ceremony that includes an explicit statement of the site's significance and an explanation of why the event should be remembered" (8). In the following chapters, I will document the recognition of roadside cross memorials as sacred space, whether temporary or permanent, without formal marking or ceremony. The statements of area residents attest to the extraordinary character of the sites, and their varied roles in the memory of people and events.

Reader, assessing conventional (e.g., Fatima, the Hajj, Lourdes) and unconventional (e.g., Graceland, Kent State, Dallas' infamous grassy knoll) pilgrimage, concludes that

... pilgrimage, in providing a means for uniting the living and the dead, offer the means for individual and social message to be relayed simultaneously without impairing, or bringing into conflict, their separate and multiple meanings. (21)

So, too, roadside memorial markers offer a meeting place for communication, remembrance and reflection, separate from the "everyday." As in Glastonbury (Bowman 55-56), roadside assemblages embrace many voices, including in many cases the quiet acquiescence of civil authority, for as Foote states, they are neither encouraged nor in many states "even permitted along most thoroughfares" (172). The multivocality and cooperation embodied in each memorial, and the vernacular support that facilitates their existence, contributes to their dynamism and popularity.

Conclusion

Margie Franklin described a cross erected by a friend of hers. A memorial to her son, Richard Anthony Gonzales, the cross stood on private property between a large medical centre and a residential area. After some months, centre personnel approached Margie's friend and offered to replace the cross with a horizontal granite marker (Fig. 1.8). While the marker is more permanent than the wooden cross it replaced, its message to passersby is less clear. As it is almost level with the grass surrounding it, motorists are unable to read the inscription (Fig. 1.9). They do take note of it, however, the ambiguity of the marker notwithstanding (Reed). The adaptation of public space, even for smaller,

more personal memorials is not without contention, as evident in the brief history of Gonzales's marker.



Fig. 1.8 Granite marker replacing original wooden cross for Richard Anthony Gonzales near accident site.



Fig. 1.9 Gonzales's marker, bordered by medical centre sidewalk and two-lane road.

James Young and Zvi Gitelman describe vernacular holocaust memorials constructed in the former Soviet Union, a number of which marked mass grave sites in Riga, Vilna and Minsk. Due to the prevailing ideological forces of the time, Jewish casualties were not commemorated separately from other Soviet

fatalities. Jewish families, then, took the task of memorializing the dead into their own hands.

Occasionally, these unofficial memorials would consist of cast sculpture and reconstructed tombstones. More often, they appeared as simple wooden tablets nailed to a tree with names inscribed on them, or as a pile of stones set in a clearing, or as a grassy burial mound. (Young 28)

When discovered by local authorities, however, the memorials were destroyed. Some were replaced with state sanctioned structures, but these were dedicated to the suffering and honor of the Soviet Union, rather than Jewish victims, a far cry from the "genuine folk creations, coming from the broken hearts of survivors rather than from the studios of regime-approved artists" (Gitelman 145). The memory of the folk memorials survive now through their documentation in family photographs (Young 27-28).

Similarly, the crosses and memorial assemblage constructed for Heather Lamay and Lisa Wendenburg, discussed in detail in chapter four, exist now only in the photographs and memories of participants, as does a memorial on Stassney Lane (see chapter three) in the photographs featured in this thesis. As with the public and private memorials detailed above, the survival of vernacular commemorative tradition, like that of the roadside cross, involves the complex interplay of politics, culture and belief. The way in which such currents have and continue to interact, especially in Texas, is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

The Cross-cultural Roadside Cross

In the *Austin American-Statesman* on December 31, 1996, a letter to columnist Jane S. Greig asked the following

Q Where can I get information on the white crosses placed on the highway where someone has died in an accident? I've been told that MADD [Mothers Against Drunk Driving] puts them up where someone has been killed by a drunken driver. I'd like to place a marker at an accident site, but drunken driving was not involved.

Greig's response notes that "the only white crosses (markers) legally on the right of way are placed by the Texas Department of Transportation in conjunction with MADD . . . Unauthorized markers periodically appear on the right of way but are removed." The crews assigned to the removal of the markers must be busy ones, fighting what appears to be a losing battle. Roadside accident markers, governmentally sanctioned and otherwise, are a familiar feature of many Texas roadways, and indeed of streets and highways across North America.

A thread on the Folklore discussion list folklore@tamum1.tamu.edu bore this out in a striking fashion. A short query, posted on January 22, 1997, asking list participants for information on accident markers—"Has anyone come across any articles or books about roadside memorials or accident markers"—soon elicited over fifty responses (Goldstein). Remarkably, while the request was specifically for textual references, many replied not with citations, but as follows

I am from Alabama, Greenville originally, and now live in Birmingham. The custom of crosses at the sites of accidents is quite common here. The custom varies from one plain white cross to decorated crosses with flowers or the victims [sic] name, even sometime pictures on the crosses, to a cluster of crosses in varying sizes (most often when there is more than one victim). (Russell)

Many of the responses described similar assemblages, as individuals recalled having seen crosses in fifteen US states—California, North and South Carolina, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Montana, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington and Wyoming, as well as the Canadian province of Newfoundland, Mexico, Panama, England, Germany, Greece and Ireland. Articles about the roadside cross tradition, or one cross in particular have appeared in newspapers from Austin to Sydney, Australia (Delvecchio).

Popular ideas about roadside memorials are reflected in accounts such as Russell's, newspaper and magazine articles which incorporate the memorials in pieces on drunk driving, motor vehicle safety or urban violence (Marshall; Harmon; McCauley), and postcards like that produced by the Center for Southern Folklore depicting a white wooden cross on highway 82 in Mississippi. Painted in red and black letters, the cross exhorts passing motorists to "GET RIGHT WITH GOD." Web sites devoted to roadside crosses include a journalism student's final project for a news and new media class at Northwestern University (Panlillio), and a site originating in Indiana which offers white crosses for sale ("Roadside Memorial Cross"). Still another site, which cautions interested individuals to check local laws concerning roadside memorials prior to making a purchase, offers two alternatives to homemade crosses, stating, "The thought is wonderful but after a very short time the site is

not." Florida-based Imago Multimedia memorials feature, in place of overt religious symbolism, a dove ("Memorial Markers").

Further evidence of the roadside cross's place in the public imagination exists in popular fiction. Monger quotes Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer*.

They passed dozens of white crosses along the route, each cross representing a highway fatality. So many Indians smashed themselves on the roads it was old news, but most accidents involved alcohol. (Power 53)

In John Nichols' *The Milagro Beanfield War*, set in small-town New Mexico, an anonymous Milagro resident protests the plans of a wealthy landowner by erecting crosses "in memory" of him and his planned development.

Like mushrooms in damp leaves, they sprouted every night by a dozen roadsides—downtown, up in the canyon, out on the north-south highway. Their inscriptions either advised the passerby to *Pray for the soul of Zopilote Devine*, or to *Pray for the dear departed soul of the Miracle Valley Recreation Area*. A few times, even, flowery bouquets had been laid at these contemptible monuments commemorating a death or deaths which had not yet occurred. It was impossible, of course, to ignore the crosses, . . . (304)

Devine, mortally frightened by the crosses, begins to spend many of his waking hours removing and burning the wooden protests. Finally, the scene of the tragic bus accident in Russell Banks' *The Sweet Hereafter* is marked, several days afterward, by crosses. Lawyer Mitchell Stevens, inspecting the site, observes that

There had appeared one morning fourteen tiny crosses out at the crash site, which turned out to be the work of schoolchildren, at the instigation of the school board. So much for separation of church and state. (Banks 138)

Banks' novel, set in upstate New York, is based on actual events in the Texas town of Alton, near the Texas-Mexican border,¹ including the appearance of the crosses. On the fifth anniversary of the accident in 1994, twenty-one crosses still hung on the chain-link fence around the perimeter of the infamous gravel pit where the bus came to rest after leaving the road (Lemieux). The examples above provide a cross-section of issues that often accompany roadside crosses, such as the separation of church and state, land ownership and reclamation, societal and governmental indifference toward death, and freedom of religious expression.

For instance, a state-sponsored program to memorialize traffic fatalities in Florida was abruptly halted when the department of transportation and a state representative began to receive complaints about the display of religious symbolism from the local chapter of the Anti-Defamation League. The state had approved the program as a move to curb the increasing construction of roadside crosses by private individuals. The state-constructed crosses (made of white plastic) already in place were removed and the department of transportation decided to consider other memorials designs ("DOT Won't Install"). Debate in Halifax, Nova Scotia, about MADD crosses has been ongoing since January of 1998, with highway officials concerned that they cause motorists undue distraction, and MADD members arguing for increased recognition of impaired driving deaths (Dedrick) I discuss MADD crosses in Texas in further detail later in this chapter, as well as in chapter five.

¹ Atom Egoyan's film version of the book, released in 1997, is set in the Canadian province of British Columbia. No crosses appear in the film.

Thus, the roadside marker landscape is constantly in flux as crosses are erected sometimes within hours of a fatal collision (Hurt), and others are removed or eventually abandoned. The narratives concerning such crosses are equally mutable, as individuals read about the anniversary of a tragic accident, encounter a cross for the first time upon taking a wrong turn or driving in an area of the city with which they are unfamiliar, or experience a loss themselves.

Austin area resident and high school teacher Thomas Vannatta, in response to an email questionnaire, wrote that in addition to those with which he is familiar in the Austin area, he has seen roadside crosses in Mexico, most of South America and Japan. Whereas he identifies crosses in Central and South America as a vernacular response to hazardous travel (especially in the case of public transportation), he understood those in Japan to be legally sanctioned and erected for the purpose of increasing driver awareness. Vannatta's efforts to have a similar program instituted in Texas, following a fatal accident near his home, are explored in chapter five.

Jim Woolf reports the beliefs connected to accident sites in Chile. Because an accident victim's spirit is troubled, it remains at the site rather than moving on to the next life. A cross erected at the site is tended not only by friends and family, but by all passersby, who pray to ease the spirit's suffering. Translator and language instructor Mario Escobar, now a resident of St. John's, Newfoundland, grew up in El Salvador in the 1960s. In his experience, the hazards of driving were incidental to the appearance of roadside crosses. The small village in which he lived, Tejutepeque, was devoid of motor vehicles save for small public buses, yet the immediate landscape was covered with small, white crosses. All sites were marked, regardless of the cause of death. If

someone dropped dead from a heart attack in a cornfield, Escobar stated, a cross was erected there.

As noted in the previous chapter, wayside calvaries and crosses line the roads of the Canadian province of Québec (Bird 96-97; Bouchard 27-45; Carpentier; Simard 7-21) and many European countries (Franck 26-31; Jordan and Rowntree 219). Monger notes a number of cross memorials assembled in England, dating from 1896 to the present. Those commemorating fatal automobile accidents include crosses cut in turf, painted on walls and one made entirely of artificial flowers. In addition, he describes two roadside graves one of a Lincolnshire woman who committed suicide, reported in 1908; and that of a "Joseph . . . the 'unknown Gypsy Boy,' near Newmarket, Suffolk. Monger, to whom the information was related by an area resident, writes

According to one version of the story, Joseph was tending some sheep when one went missing. Fearing that he would be accused of sheep stealing, he hung himself. . . . The grave is said to be tended by the gypsies, and there are often fresh flowers. In recent years, though, the flowers have been plastic, a plastic border has been put round the grave and a marble cemetery flower-holder has been put there, as have a couple of wooden crosses. Coins are often put on the grave by passing motorists or lorry drivers. (113)

Monger's preliminary conclusions about such memorials, as noted in the previous chapter, are functionalist in nature and focus on the cathartic aspect of ritualized displays of grief.

Ruth Richardson also details the custom as practiced in Britain, emphasizing the folklore surrounding death, and crossroads in particular. Beginning in the 1200s, crosses were cut into roadside turf in order to purge an accident or crime scene, albeit marking it more permanently than it might have been otherwise. Connecting the custom with that of the formal funeral

procession was the practice of pausing along the route to the burial ground for "refreshment, prayers or singing" (96). In Wales, prayers were said at every intersection, while in the Scottish Highlands, mourners added stones to cairns at each stop. Leaving a stone as a sign of remembrance has corollaries in Jewish tradition (Safanov 78), and in the piles of stones left at a number of the memorials detailed in chapter three. Widely known in southern England are the Eleanor Crosses, marking the resting places of Queen Eleanor's funeral procession on its journey, in 1200, to Westminster Abbey. Of the nine originally erected at each crossroads, only a few remain (Richardson 97; Benson 83-84).

Further, as illustrated by Monger, Richardson writes that suicides were commonly buried at crossroads, but that the reasons for this practice are unclear, other than the fact that suicides could not be buried in hallowed ground according to church doctrine (97). Similarly, Benson writes "custom in early times" required that anyone considered unworthy of burial in consecrated ground be buried at a crossroads outside of town, often at the foot of a wayside cross (143).

Neni Panourgia discusses roadside shrines in Greece in *Fragments of Death, Fables of Identity*. Whereas the markers noted above indicate a fatal accident, Greek *proskynetári* may also indicate an individual's escape from death in a collision, in which case they are constructed in part to thank divine forces that may have intervened. In addition, like their counterparts that mark a death site, they serve as warnings to motorists and reminders of humans' universal fate (172-73). Further, although *proskynetári* often incorporate the cross, they are more usually designed to resemble both churches and gravesites. Panourgia writes that

they are not large—usually measuring fifty by fifty centimeters—they are set up on pedestals, and instead of walls, they have pieces of glass, like windows. Inside are placed an icon of the particular saint, Christ or Panayia (according to whomever is thought to have intervened), sometimes a photograph of the deceased, a *kandêli* [candle], and a bottle of oil, some charcoal, incense, and matches. (174)

As a sign of the frequent and unavoidable intrusion of death into life, the shrines also communicate the desire to prevent accidental death.

Roadside crosses in the American southwest are perhaps the most well-documented in the United States, and are often connected with discussions of deathways in the Native or Mexican-American traditions of Arizona and New Mexico (Griffith Beliefs; Barrera; West). David Kozak and Camillus Lopez have written on the roadside memorialization practice of the Tohono O'odham Indians in southern Arizona (1991), as has James Griffith (Beliefs 84-85). As part of what Kozak and Lopez term the "O'odham cult of the dead" (1-2), the assemblages represent a combination of O'Odham and Catholic belief and date back to a 1958 automobile collision in which seven people were killed. Stating that the memorials are constructed only for those who die suddenly, and therefore badly, Kozak and Lopez note the exceedingly high number of traffic fatalities occurring on the reservation, as well as the high suicide rate (6-7). The memorials, as distinguished from other shrines and aboriginal trail markers on the reservation, feature a cross as the primary element while still exhibiting a high degree of individual creativity (9). Kozak and Lopez also describe secondary elements:

In addition to the cross, . . . there are several other objects of cultural importance. In order of frequency these are: votive candles; flowers; grotto structures; fences; *santos*, "saints' images;" and [United States] flags. (11)

Although they may be visited and attended to at any time, the authors note the importance of All Souls Day, November 2, in the maintenance of the memorials. During the week prior and a few days after, the sites are cleaned and redecorated, and prayers are offered for the deceased (12).

Griffith writes that until about 1960, the Arizona Highway Department erected similar markers at the sites of fatal accidents (an observation echoed by Austin resident Doug Powell in chapter five). He also reports the return of the "official" crosses on a particular US highway: "A standard green metal highway information sign explaining the markers is located at the beginning and the end of the stretch of highway where they have been placed" (*Beliefs* 103). Roadside memorials in Arizona do not always incorporate a cross, however, nor do they commemorate a traffic fatality. For instance, Griffith describes a six-foot-high *nicho* on interstate 19.

It is made of local stones and whitewashed. Although it is dedicated to Santa Teresa, several statues of other saints and members of the Holy Family share her space. It was erected in memory of Arthur Lee, a former owner of the Sopori Ranch, who fell off his horse in 1934 and was dragged to death. The shrine is traditionally cared for by some child at the ranch. The last time I visited it, the space in front of the tiny altar was crowded with candles and artificial flowers. (104)

Although its center point is a *nicho* rather than a cross, the memorial includes items commonly associated with roadside crosses: flowers, candles, stones and religious icons.

At a roadside cross flanking a dirt road, Griffith observed a pile of remnants from a car wreck, including a shattered windshield (104). Estevan Arrellano has documented similar crosses, or *descansos*, in New Mexico, themselves assembled from the wreckage. Tracing the custom's practice in New Mexico to traditional burials as does John O. West (see below), he also

notes crosses constructed of wood, iron, cement or stone. Arrellano's first memory of *descansos*, he writes, date from his childhood.

I remember my aunts asking, "Is your tío Julian's *descanso* still up?" My tío Julian had died at any early age bringing firewood from atop the mesa on a *carro de bestia*, a horse-drawn wagon. To this day, everytime I climb the mesa I go directly to his *descanso* and straighten it up with rocks. (42)

Arrellano has observed crosses in both rural and urban contexts, noting their appearance on Santa Fe street corners.

As noted in this and the preceding chapter, crosses commemorate deaths both in and outside of cemeteries, and mark sites of death not caused by automobile accidents. Griffith describes a shrine in a Tijuana, Baja California cemetery erected at the death and burial site of murdered Mexican soldier Juan Castillo Morales, more commonly called Juan Soldado.² Near Waco, Texas, at the former site of the Branch Davidian compound, wooden crosses commemorate those killed during the siege and fire of 1993.

Moreover, not all roadside crosses signify a death other than that of Jesus Christ. An engineer living in the town of Pampa, in the Texas Panhandle, erected a 190-foot cross next to Interstate 40 as an "advertisement for Jesus" in 1995. Steve Thomas is now helping others who plan to build giant crosses in Illinois and Florida (Babineck). Griffith describes the three white wooden crosses erected on a hilltop by a friend prior to moving to a new neighborhood.

They stayed up for about five years, until some neighborhood kids dismantled them and took the pieces down the hill. The purpose of

² Executed on February 17, 1938 for a crime he did not commit, Juan is now venerated for his ability to aid in the eradication of illness and for other miracles that have occurred in the area. The shrine incorporates his grave and execution site, marked by several crosses, and a chapel (Griffith, *El Tiradito* 75-80).

the crosses seems to have been protective: they appear to have been intended to make the area a better place in which to live. (Beliefs 142-43)

Griffith also notes that similar clusters, and even one or two crosses, fashioned of wood and sometimes painted, mark a number of hilltops in the Pimería Alta region of Arizona. A number of respondents to the folklore list-serv mentioned the "cross clusters," or the roadside calvaries constructed by West Virginia millionaire Bernard Coffindaffer, consisting of one large cross flanked on either side by two smaller ones (the colours of the three crosses vary by report). Coffindaffer began erecting the monuments, as instructed by a voice he heard while in the hospital, following his successful recovery from open-heart surgery. The clusters now reportedly line various roadways in eighteen states, including Texas (Tindall).

The Sign of the Cross

As largely unauthorized markers of liminal space (Graham 478), roadside crosses, especially on heavily-trafficked urban streets, are dynamic, polysemic communicators. I refer to Charles Peirce's trichotomy of signs to analyze the crosses, and their place in Austin's cultural landscape semiotically specifically his classification of a sign based on the relation between sign and referent. In this regard, roadside crosses fall into all three classes — icon (resemblance), index (contiguity) and symbol (arbitrary relation) (Fiske 49-57; Nöth 42-45). As an icon, the cross is "motivated" by the structure, according to Christian tradition, upon which Jesus Christ was crucified. The cross is related indexically to an accident which occurred in a given spot, perhaps the only indication that anything out of the ordinary ever took place there. Symbolically, the cross represents physical death followed by spiritual rebirth into an eternal

state of existence to all those even vaguely familiar with the tenets of Christianity. Thus, each marker affords the viewer a powerfully iconic moment, with spatial, temporal and magico-religious implications.

The cross as an indication of death is connected with the Biblical account of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection as told in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Vannatta writes that, prior to the infamous execution, "original crucifixions by the Romans had nothing to do with religion, but were dramatic reminders to travellers of Roman power," an assessment also shared by Benson (24). The cross carried extremely negative associations, then, not only for Christians, but for Jews and other groups alike who had suffered under Roman rule (Henry 23; Rees 69). As such, the cross was a symbol of brutal death, and thus rejected for use in worship by the early Christians until late in the fourth century, and then not bearing any representation of Christ.³ The crucifix, a cross with the figure of Christ upon it, entered into regular use in the eighth century (Firth 48). Hugh Henry attributes the beginning of the cross's acceptance as a religious symbol to the writings of Saint Paul to the Galatians (23-24). Paul rejected the world as he felt Christians were then rejected by Roman society: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6.14).

Elizabeth Rees connects the cross with the idea of the "cosmic world tree," representing the continuity of the life cycle (69-70). Other associations

³ Benson also cites observance of the commandment regarding graven images (Ex. 20.4), and the efforts of early Christians to conceal their faith from the Romans as obstacles to the adoption of the cross as a positive symbol (40).

with the tree, and thus immortality, result from the embrace of both good and evil by the crucifixion.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden is replaced by the trees on which the good and evil thieves are crucified. The crucifixion of Jesus represents the absorption of the other side of things into a complete whole: Jesus accepts both the good thief and the bad (98)

Gustaf Aulén also stresses the cross's symbolic duality while insisting on its singular conclusion. Indeed, the "gospel of the cross" preached by the apostles depended upon the death *and* resurrection of Jesus Christ (188). Further, in the actual and symbolic suffering of Christ, he is experientially connected to all of humankind (169; Tuan 98), and made the perfect instrument of reconciliation: "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven (Col. 1.20). In the horror of the crucifixion, Aulén sees a link to the harsh reality of human existence, including "human wickedness and hardness, . . . accidents, catastrophes," the suffering of Christ and thus of God (186, 167); however, it is equally important to recognize, in this tribulation, the victory represented by Christ's empty tomb.

The acceptance of both good and evil, and the final triumph of good through eternal life, is crucial to many of my informants understanding not only of the loss their loved ones, but of the message of the roadside crosses, and is documented in chapters four and five. Both Vicki Biggs and Susan Crane stressed that visiting their childrens' grave sites, while important to them, is tempered by the knowledge that their children are not there. Further, while both women are convinced of their children's presence at the respective accident sites (see chapter three), they also believe them to be in heaven. Aulén states

that religious expression, while reinforcing perceived links between humankind and Jesus Christ, by no means fixes him to a certain place or time. As the risen Christ, "the promise of his presence is every day to the end of time" (182). Thus, just as the physical and verbal symbolism related to Christ does not anchor him in the space-time continuum, neither are the women's children magico-religiously affixed to their death sites by means of the cross, a direct contrast to the related beliefs of Chileans as reported by Woolf at the beginning of this chapter.

Powerful symbolism aside, Terry Jordan writes that the cross is still viewed with some suspicion by Protestant groups in the southern United States, who regard it as more indicative of Catholicism than a pan-Christian emblem (50-51). The sentiment was echoed in my interview with Shilah Lamay, during which she discussed her ambivalence toward the cross erected in memory of her daughter Heather by schoolmates (see chapter four).

Cultural Interplay and Interpretation in Texas

The Austin landscape is rife with various tributes and markers. Foote documents the proliferation of memorial structures in the state in general, writing that

perhaps no state has been so lavish in celebrating its origins or so preoccupied with them. Legends, histories, and textbooks all stress the outnumbered Texans' heroic struggle against the tyranny of the Mexican dictatorship . . . nowhere is there a better example of how fact and myth mix to shape a landscape into a heroic representation of a historical tradition. (215)

A prime spot on the heroic landscape is, of course, the Alamo, now a popular shrine in downtown San Antonio. A more accurate picture of the struggle between Mexican authorities and white settlers, encompassing less than

admirable actions on both sides of the conflict, has been presented by scholars such as T.R. Fehrenbach (1968).

Particularly relevant to the present study is the fact that Texas was not officially part of the United States until the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. At that time, the boundary between Texas, as well as what is now known as the American Southwest, and Mexico was drawn at the Rio Grande River. The skirmishes and battles, including the legendary massacre at the Alamo, that led up to Mexico's massive land concession began in January of 1835. The seeds of the Texas Revolution were planted by Anglo settlers, increasingly chafed by what they viewed as unreasonable interference and restrictions imposed by the Mexican government, who formed a political group in favor of separating from Mexico (Ramos 49, 53; McComb 36-45).

Anglo colonists had begun settling in the area, somewhat illegally, around the turn of the century, following Spain's abandonment of military outposts on Texas' eastern border. The first group of settlers to receive formal authorization to settle, under the leadership of first Moses Austin, then his son Stephen F. Austin arrived near present-day central Texas in 1821. The switch from Spanish to Mexican rule that same year had done nothing to ease tensions. Indeed, Mexico's focus turned inward as the nascent government underwent tremendous change and turmoil for the better part of the next three decades (Fehrenbach 152-189).

One major point of contention between Mexican government and Anglo immigrants was freedom of religion, or rather lack thereof. New arrivals to Texas were expected to convert to Catholicism. Those who were already adherents of a Protestant denomination sometimes continued to worship in secret, although

even overt activities were often quietly tolerated by Mexican officials (Ramos 486). Historical accounts note that even given such administrative acquiescence, Protestant settlers rankled at the restriction (Foote 217).

The Austin area, as the northernmost point of a number of Spanish expeditions and a few failed missions, perhaps inherited less of the hispanic legacy that so pervades the western and southern regions of the state. The more successful settlements date from the period of Mexican rule. Present-day Bastrop, for example, southeast of Austin on highway 71, is the result of an 1832 Mexican land grant. However, Helen Simons and Cathryn Hoyt assert that the present Mexican-American population in the region is not the result of such early colonization, but of more recent immigration. Nevertheless, cultural ties to border areas remain strong (177-78). Often, immigrants in the Austin area are also helping to support relatives in Mexico.

Mexican culture is a part of everyday life for many individuals in central Texas, in street (e.g., Guadalupe, Nueces and Rio Grande streets) and place names (Mendez Junior High School and the recently opened Américo Paredes Elementary School). Further evidence comes in the form of: a regional dialect that incorporates countless Spanish words and expressions; Tex-Mex, the regional cuisine; Tejano music; holiday celebrations on Diez y Seis, Cinco de Mayo and the Day of the Dead; and customs, such as creating and maintaining roadside crosses.

Crosses, Custom and Civil Religion

Crosses, whatever their denominational origin, are indicative of sacred space and in that capacity they mark churches, religious schools, cemeteries and even whole cities, e.g., the hilltop cross on Montréal's Mont Royal. Mircea

Eliade, noting that Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores claimed new territory in the name of Jesus Christ by raising a cross, writes that people make space their own by recreating it, or consecrating it to a new purpose (32).

In the United States, the custom of memorializing traffic fatalities is linked to the influence of Catholicism in the Americas, especially along the Texas-Mexico border. Catholic priests and settlers brought with them death customs including that of burying fellow believers in hallowed ground, or *camposanto*. In the early days of Spanish colonization of the Americas, when travelers often found themselves far between established settlements, those dying en route had to be buried *in situ*. Crosses at the site of interment served not only to mark the spot, but to informally consecrate it (Barrera 278).⁵ Griffith notes J. Frank Dobie's observation, in *Tongues of the Monte*, of crosses erected at roadway death sites in Mexico. Rocks were left at the base of these crosses as passing travellers stopped to pray for the deceased (Griffith, *El Tiradito* 80).

Early references to the custom of marking significant sites, including graves, with a cross include those found in correspondence and journals dating from the time of Spanish exploration of the area, prior to settlement. The diary entries of Fernando del Bosque, on an journey across the Rio Grande toward present-day Eagle Pass and perhaps beyond in 1675, record the numerous instances in which a wooden cross was constructed and erected to claim land

⁵ A respondent to the folklore discussion list notes a two roadside graves on highway 190, between Death Valley and Lone Pine, dating back to the 1880s. Apparently, the graves are those of two young girls

who died of one of the many childhood diseases of the day . . . the site is maintained voluntarily by employees of the California Department of Transportation who have graded a parking lot. Like many children's graves, [they] are covered with small toys and pennies. (Gazis-Sax)

for the Spanish monarch (293-307), as do those of Juan Domínguez de Mendoza, on a 1684 expedition to western central Texas (321-333).

Alonso de León made five expeditions into Texas, the first in 1686 and the last in 1690. It was during the last foray that he recorded the following

As we went down toward the river [Rio Hondo] we found some large white rocks, on some of which we saw some crosses cut, and other figures artificially made with great skill, apparently a long time before. (Itinerary 392)

Arrellano writes that *descansos* were erected in Embudo, New Mexico at least as far back as the 1700s, during which time they were banned by the governor:

"There were so many that travelers who stopped to pray for the souls of the departed became easy targets for the Indians. . ." (42). Griffith cites a Franciscan historian's translation of the complaint of a Catholic bishop, circa 1783, about "the large number of crosses on a road where travelers were being killed by Apache Indians" (Woolf; Griffith, Beliefs 101-102).⁶

Jean Louis Berlandier describes a trip made in August of 1829 from Laredo to Matamoros, during which he and his fellow travellers encountered more than thirty crosses. Initially, they thought the crosses were indicative of recent death at the hands of bandits.

. . . later we learned that several crosses were very old and indicated places where the Comanches had massacred travellers or herdsmen. Lastly, we learned that rancheros sometimes bury their relatives in these places, or else put a cross at the spot where they rest with a corpse which they are taking for burial to the cemetery of a neighboring town. (429)

At the same time, other burials were similarly marked. In 1828, Berlandier and his party, passing through recent battlesites of Mexico's war of independence,

⁶ See McCarty, 1983.

saw soldiers' remains everywhere, as the dead were sometimes left as they fell. It is in this context that he notes the contrasting humanity of Colonel José Félix Trespalacios (on the Mexican side)

He gave burial to almost all the dead which were found. At the foot of an old oak, respected by the years, a grave was dug, and the remains of those adventurers who arrived to proclaim independence were buried. A cross carved in the trunk of that live oak indicated the site of the grave. Placed at the height of a man's head, renewed from time to time by the soldier of the presidio who carve it as deep as the wood, it seems to be freshly engraved. (284)

Not all accidental or military deaths were consecrated in such a manner, however. Berlandier documents their discovery of at least one corpse that they happened upon and apparently left to decompose (233).

Father Damián Massanet who accompanied Alonso de León (son of Ponce de León) on two sojourns into Texas,⁷ notes a similar occurrence, in which Indians lead him to a spot where the dead bodies of two Frenchmen lay (391). However, León's account of the same incident is quite different. He writes

we came to where they told us two Frenchmen had died, where they wished to make a settlement, and where we saw the graves. We placed a cross in a tree for them . . . (*Itinerary* 417)

The discrepancy between the two accounts underscores the difficulty of tracking the appearance and disappearance of roadside crosses. Arrellano, seeking out an 1846 Taos Rebellion battle site along the Old Apodaca Trail—he had read about it while researching his family's genealogy in an old journal—came upon rocks literally covered with crosses (42). Like many items of folklore, *descansos*

⁷ The second, made in 1690, saw the first Spanish settlement in the area, as De León assisted Massanet in the establishment of two missions (Bolton 348-49) .

have often been deemed superfluous to historical record, except when problematic as in the case of Griffith's Catholic bishop, Embudo's eighteenth-century governor or the present situation in south Texas (discussed later in this chapter).

In accordance with Berlandier's account, John O. West identifies the custom with the transport of the coffin from the church to the *camposanto* following a funeral. The places at which the pallbearers stopped to rest were *descansos*, as were the places of ritual pausing—to recite the rosary or a requiem prayer—inside the cemetery. Older cemeteries featured *descanso* shelters. Thus, the *descansos* represented a very real, as well as metaphorical, interruption of life's journey, as do roadside crosses today (236-39).

Many Mexican-Americans view the tradition as a Mexican one adopted by Anglos (Canales). Although in north and central America they are fashioned out of many different materials, including wood, metal, cement and sometimes pieces of the wrecked automobile(s), as detailed below and in the following chapter, that most commonly occurring in Texas is the white, wooden cross, usually accompanied by flowers, and perhaps other items such as photographs, notes and/or religious objects (rosaries, crucifixes, saints' pictures).

The Roadside Cross in Texas

In the state of Texas, policy decisions regarding roadside crosses are made at the discretion of each of the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDoT) twenty-five district enforcement agencies. The city of Austin and the surrounding area comprises the "Austin district." Some agencies choose to allow the erection and maintenance of certain types of markers, such as those

constructed by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD),⁸ while others adopt a strict no-marker stance, such as the Dallas district. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, MADD crosses are the only authorized roadside crosses in the Austin district.

The Austin MADD chapter, known as the Heart of Texas chapter, maintains records of crosses erected through the organization, and the Austin TxDOT enforcement agency keeps a file of MADD cross “permits” (Ohlendorf).⁹ To erect a cross through the Heart of Texas MADD Chapter, individuals must complete a form available through the chapter office that includes construction specifications and guidelines (appendix one). Following submission of the application, an organization representative files a similar form with the TxDOT (appendix two). The form stipulates that “if, in the opinion of the District Engineer or his authorized representative, the cross poses a threat to the safety of the traveling public within the highway right-of-way, the cross will be removed by the State.” Neither shall the cross “be located in such a manner as to be distracting to motorists.”

When I contacted the national MADD office by e-mail to inquire about the organization’s roadside cross program, I received the following reply from Assistant Director, Victim Advocacy and Research, Regina Sobieski.

⁸ California resident Candy Lightner founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) in 1980—a response to her frustrating experience with the justice system following the death of her thirteen-year-old daughter in a drunk driving incident. Originally composed of all female members, the organization now includes people of any age or gender.

⁹ Woolf states that MADD crosses are also approved for use in Louisiana, Ohio and Florida. He further notes a similar highway safety program in Montana, not restricted to drunk driving deaths, where roadside crosses are erected by the American Legion.

Thank you for your interest in the roadside memorials. Unfortunately, we don't have any information that discusses when they first came about. But approximate time frame is 10-12 years ago. The program is only done in areas that allow roadside memorials. Many places across the U.S. don't allow them because of the distraction to motorists and not wanting to cause another crash. [In] Other cases it's up to whomever owns the land next to the highway. It's typically privately owned and the owner must grant permission before a memorial can be erected. Others have [a] problem with the symbol of a cross. [They are] Christian in nature and can offend passer-by motorists so they won't be allowed. Another issue with the memorials is all too often they are vandalized adding additional pain to the loved ones.

So to answer your question no they are not in all states and technically MADD does not provide the crosses/wreaths unless they were donated to the MADD office. WE [emphasis in original] can't favor one group over another. So the program is left up to the individuals to partake in. (Sobieski)

Additionally, while MADD On-Line includes a large searchable "Idea Library" for members to use in planning public programs or other events, there is no mention of roadside crosses.

The lack of on-line information about the roadside cross program underscores the organization's desire to avoid accusations of religious discrimination or violation of the constitutional separation of church and state. Nevertheless, this governmentally sanctioned use of a religious symbol, however contested, by local branches of an international educational and political organization is a manifestation of American civil religion as outlined in the previous chapter. As a largely Christian population,¹⁰ Texas residents have erected roadside crosses in all regions of the state.

¹⁰ Roman Catholicism and Southern Baptist Protestantism claim the largest number of adherents in Texas, with 3.6 and 3.3 million, respectively. Adherents to Judaism are estimated at 107,980. However, these figures do not reflect the growth of Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Islam resulting in

While I have photographed crosses in central, east and west Texas, I have also interviewed individuals who have seen them in north and south Texas (Powell, Reed). South Texas's increasing proliferation of crosses, in fact, has become problematic for TxDOT officials. In the spring of 1997, Richard Kirby, an engineer in the Austin district office made a special presentation to a group of highway maintenance supervisors on the roadside cross "problem" in the Valley, specifically the Pharr district (encompassing Brooks, Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, Willacy and Zapata counties). The assemblages have become so numerous as to render routine roadway maintenance difficult. Additionally, TxDOT officials fear they are dangerously distracting to drivers (Hurt). Barrera, in fact, documented over forty-eight crosses in Starr County alone at the beginning of the present decade (292). The southern county, at the edge of the Texas-Mexican border, is home to approximately 49,000 people and is one of the fastest growing counties in the state (Ramos 268). In keeping with popular belief about roadside crosses in the state, the population of Starr county is primarily Hispanic (97.2%), and Roman Catholic (85.6%).

As Barrera found in his sample, however, it is important to note that not all Mexican-American Catholics practice the custom (279). As demonstrated in chapter three, the custom is quite widespread outside its community of origin. Counties with considerably smaller Hispanic and Catholic populations are also home to similarly styled roadside memorial assemblages, such as Blanco,

part from recent immigration to the state. Adherents, for the purposes of the study, are here defined as "all members, including regular participants who are not considered as communicant . . . (but) 'the baptized' (Ramos 486).

Gillespie and Kerr counties, to the west of the Austin area (Ramos 152, 195, 222, 488-89).

South central Texas is, in fact, home to a number of historic German settlements. Jordan, Bean and Holmes write that the cities of Galveston, San Antonio and Houston had considerable German populations by the end of the 1800s, between one-quarter and one-third of the total (85-86). The German, and predominantly Lutheran, heritage of these areas, especially historic German settlements such as Fredericksburg in Gillespie county, still marks the landscape (Ramos 488-89; Jordan 105-9), an example of which are the area's roadside crosses. I photographed seven in between Johnson City and Kerrville, travelling by United States highway 290 west and state highway 16.

Set back from the road against a barbed wire fence running alongside state highway 16 between Kerrville and Fredericksburg is a sheet metal cross, painted white, for Tori Eckhardt (Fig. 2.1). The cross stands about six feet high, and features a photo-ceramic portrait of Tori at its center.¹¹ A small black plaque with gold lettering, a few inches below the photo on the vertical, reads

IN MEMORY
OF
TORI
ECKHARDT
10-11-77 9-26-95

Further down the vertical is a large red bow and an arrangement of red poinsettias. Just south of the cross, a visitor has placed a large Christmas wreath supported by a wire stand (Fig. 2.2).

¹¹ John Maturri discusses the use of photographs on Italian-American gravemarkers, also noting that while the practice is not widespread in the United States, it is common in southern and eastern Europe, in Catholic and Jewish cemeteries (20-27).

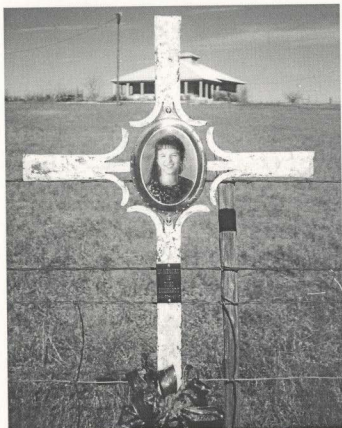


Fig. 2.1 Sheet metal cross for Tori Eckhardt on Highway 16.



Fig. 2.2 Tori Eckhardt's cross with Christmas wreath.

A similarly constructed cross, also fashioned of white sheet metal, stands several yards from US 290 at the rear of a highway rest stop (Fig. 2.3). Approximately a foot shorter than the cross described above, its intricate design includes an almost identical plaque as well as an attached plant holder. The plaque states

IN LOVING
MEMORY OF
OUR BELOVED
KRISTA
MAE
VOLLMAR

8-27-72 6-9-91

Flanking the cross on its eastern side, a two-foot limestone cross stands in front of three large stones. The cross's face is inscribed with countless "X"s, or Saint Andrew's crosses, the significance of which is unknown (Fig. 2.4).¹²



Fig. 2.3 Sheet metal cross for Krista Mae Vollmar on US 290.

¹² Liungman observes that St. Andrew's cross (so-called because according to legend, out of humility Andrew refused to be executed on a cross identical to that on which Jesus Christ was crucified) predates Christianity and adorns prehistoric cave walls in Europe. Additionally, it was a figure in both early Chinese ideography (representing the number five) and Egyptian hieroglyphics (divide, count, and break into parts) (139, 322). Further, crosses of this kind are routinely marked with pencil or red brick on two different structures believed to house the remains of New Orleans' alleged voodoo priestess Marie Laveau (Tallant 127, 129). Drawing the crosses is part of a ritual in which the visitor offers a wish or request.



Fig. 2.4 Limestone cross with inscribed "X"s.

Crosses also intermittently appear alongside US 290 heading east out of Austin, varying in size, construction and decoration (Fig. 2.5-6). Many are without identifying markings or inscriptions, whether by design or age. Farm to Market Road 1488 intersects 290 in the town of Hempstead. I photographed two memorials on the two-lane highway, including one consisting of a Calvary-like display of three crosses set back a few yards from the road (Fig. 2.7). The tallest of the white, wooden crosses is flanked on either side by the two others of almost equal height. While it may appear, from the number and arrangement of the crosses, that they are related to those masterminded by Coffindaffer

(described above), the large grapevine wreath to the east of the crosses, featuring pink silk roses, greenery and a card of condolence firmly links the assemblage to recent fatalities. Although unsure of the details, my father, an area resident, confirmed that a serious automobile accident in which at least three people were killed had recently occurred at the site (Everett).



Fig. 2.5 Plain wooden cross on US 290 east.



Fig. 2.6 Two wooden crosses on US 290 east, between Austin and Giddings.



Fig. 2.7 Three crosses alongside 1488.

Another roadside cross, unique to the sample area, stands roughly thirty miles east of the three crosses noted above on the same highway (Fig. 2.8). The memorial features an eighteen-inch cross atop a wooden picket fence, almost

identical to the *cerquitas* serving as grave site boundaries in many Mexican-American cemeteries in Texas and New Mexico (Jordan 70-71).¹³ The entire structure is painted white. The side of the *cerquita* parallel to the roadway has been decorated with a lasso and three or four bouquets of artificial flowers (Fig. 2.9). At the time I photographed the memorial, there was no evidence of anything inside the boundary of the fence.



Fig. 2.8 Cross and *cerquita* on 1488 near Interstate 45.

¹³ The fences sometimes bordering Tohono O'odham death memorials, as noted previously, are traditionally constructed from mesquite posts. The authors' informants stated that the fences served the dual purpose of keeping animals such as cows and horses off the site, and symbolizing the traditional Tohono O'odham house. Other materials include metal posts, four-by-fours, barbed wire, chicken wire mesh and chain link (Kozak and Lopez 12).

The population in the counties through which these sections of US 290 and FM 1488 run (with the exception of Travis county, discussed in-depth in the next chapter) is predominately white, Euro-North American, with African Americans comprising the next largest group in all but Montgomery county (Ramos 148, 189, 228, 243, 282-83). In Montgomery county, in which the above cross and *cerquita* stand, Hispanics comprise the second largest demographic group. Additionally, the area presents a mix of dominant religious groups, including Southern Baptist, Roman Catholic and Lutheran.

During the course of a half-hour drive from Conroe, the largest city in Montgomery County, to New Caney, I photographed ten crosses. In contrast to those documented on 290 and 1488, all but one of the ten bear at least a name, if nothing else. Three metal crosses, painted white with black lettering, were each attended by white, red and purple silk poinsettias driven into the ground at the base (Fig. 2.9). It is important to note that the crosses are not grouped together, which would seem to indicate that each spot is significant and likely an actual death site. The cross farthest from the road is the most explicit in this regard (Fig. 2.10), and reads

INRI
AQUI FALLECIO
ALBERTO FUGAROS
RECUEDOS [sic]
DE ESPOSA E HIJA Y FAM.
DECANSA EN PAZ
8-4-68 21-7-95

[Here died/Alberto Fugaros /remembrance from wife and daughter and family /rest in peace]. Nearer the road are the crosses for Antonio Hernandez Bolanos ("RECUERDO DE FAM Y AMIGOS, FALLECIO 21-7-95") and Lazaro

Hernandez Zamudio ("RECUERDO DE FAM Y AMIGOS, NACIO EL 2/4/76, FALLECIO EL 21/7/95") (Fig. 2.11-12). The crosses are among the more traditional memorials included in this thesis, in terms of their construction, spatial arrangement and Spanish epitaphs.



Fig. 2.9 Metal crosses, painted white, bordering drainage ditch.



Fig. 2.10 Cross farthest from road, for Alberto Fugaros.



Fig. 2.11 Cross nearer road for Antonio Hernandez Bolanos.



Fig. 2.12 Westernmost cross, in memory of Lazaro Hernandez Zamudio.

Further east, the memorial for Jerry Lee Adams combines a cross with a planter base (Fig. 2.13), a structural design similar to the cross near Austin erected in memory of Tara Biggs (see chapter three, Fig. 3.57-59).



Fig. 2.13 White wooden cross with planter base for Jerry Lee Adams.

Conclusion

Overall, the short sampling of crosses outside the main study area, together with those documented by Barrera and Powell, provides a useful cross-section of vernacular roadside memorials in the state and highlights the variety of construction and design that marks the custom. Like the counties upon which I focus in the following chapters, Travis and Hays, those described above

straddle cultural borders, namely Catholic-Protestant, and white Euro-North American-Mexican-American. Travis county remains unique with respect to its large Roman-Catholic population.

While the influence of Catholic, hispanic culture is certainly strong in the area, it is not a restrictive force, but one that permeates Austin residents' day-to-day existence. Consequently, a custom such as that of the roadside cross, with roots in Spanish tradition, may be practiced by a Southern Baptist female of British descent with little concern for its origin or similarity to other of her beliefs. Additionally, the tradition has variants in a number of cultures, as detailed above, and is a feature of popular culture as well.

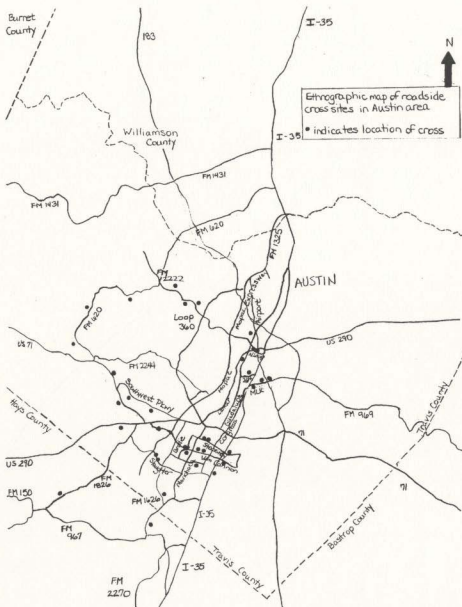
The symbolic strength of the cross derives from centuries of association with powerful images of suffering and hope. It continues to be informed by the controversy its presentation invariably evokes. In contrast to the plethora of historical markers and monuments in the Austin area, handcrafted and often meticulously maintained roadside memorials communicate more personally about events in the present, rather than the past. The Austin area's roadside crosses represent individual and community responses to the grief, anger, frustration and anxiety about vehicular carelessness and crime, and disjunctive urban space. The following chapter details and analyzes patterns of this roadside communication.

Chapter Three

Austin's Roadside Crosses

This chapter will detail the roadside crosses I photographed in the Austin area between April 30, 1997 and January 18, 1998, during three trips to the city. While the majority of the crosses are within city limits, I have included a number of others in Travis county, as well as two memorials located in neighboring Hays county (Fig. 3). As Austin's population and urban sprawl increases, more and more people find themselves commuting to jobs in the city, with as much as three hours a day spent in transit. Oftentimes their daily drive takes them past at least one roadside memorial (Hancock; Vannatta).

Information about individual crosses is based on various combinations of interviews, questionnaires, *Austin American-Statesman* articles and informal conversation. In some cases, I was unable to locate any identifying information for a memorial. In others, I found newspaper accounts of accidents that may have been related. In all instances, I did not wish to disturb any of the memorials. As a result, I moved items to better view plaques or other mementos only if certain it would not disrupt the integrity of the assemblage as I found it. For this chapter I have grouped the crosses into the following categories: memorials protesting drunk driving incidents; memorials associated with certain roadway features (intersections and dangerous curves); and those connected to accidents thought to be caused by excessive speed. Finally, I will briefly discuss a cross commemorating a stabbing death. A total of thirty-five memorial sites are discussed, some of which consist of two or more crosses.



Drunk Driving Incidents

As noted in the previous chapter, MADD markers, such as the crosses pictured here, are the only roadside memorials approved for the Austin district by the Texas Department of Transportation. Jennifer Solter founded one of the first MADD chapters in Texas, the Heart of Texas Chapter, in 1981 following the death of her daughter Sara Jayne Solter at the intersection of William Cannon Boulevard and Cannonleague Road. In the early-to-mid-1980s, all MADD crosses in Texas were built by a Houston resident who had lost a son to a drunk driving incident. Solter erected the white, approximately 1.5' X 2' cross in 1984, under the canopy of a poplar tree at the edge of a residential area.

The red plaque at the crosspiece reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF SARA JAYNE SOLTER
BORN 10/20/61 & KILLED AT
THIS LOCATION 8/14/81 BY A DRUNK DRIVER

As shown in the photographs (Fig. 3.1-2), there is usually one bunch of artificial flowers placed at the base of the cross in connection with Sara's birthday, Christmas and Easter. Jennifer stated that, "Those are the three times that we always change out the flowers for." The red tulips pictured here were left for Easter. Sometimes she finds items left anonymously, such as a rose with a red ribbon tied around it, or dried or artificial flowers.



Fig. 3.1 First MADD cross in Austin, erected in memory of Sara Jayne Solter.



Fig. 3.2 Solter's cross, facing eastbound lanes of William Cannon Blvd.

The front lawn of the nearby Dittmar Recreation Center, just over a mile to the southeast of Solter's memorial, is the site of a MADD cross erected for Theresa Lynn Ellsworth Moore, killed a week after her thirty-fourth birthday (Fig. 3.3). The incident occurred at the intersection of Dittmar and Forest Woods Roads, an area known by residents for poor visibility and speeding motorists.



Fig. 3.3 MADD cross for Theresa Lynn Ellsworth.

The cross, noted by questionnaire respondents, is in fact, difficult to see as it stands parallel to the road. Conforming to MADD standards as noted above, the cross is inscribed thus:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
THERESA LYNN ELLSWORTH MOORE
BORN JULY 14, 1960 & KILLED AT
THIS LOCATION JULY 21, 1994 BY
A DRUNK DRIVER

Moore was fatally injured when her vehicle was struck from behind as she exited the recreation center parking lot. Although no flowers or other decorative items were in evidence at the memorial when I photographed it in January of 1998, an electrical pole across the street was adorned with a tattered pinwheel and plastic flowers. Pink plastic roses were attached to the base of the pole (Fig. 3.4).



Fig. 3.4 Decorated electrical pole across the street from Ellsworth's cross.

Farm to Market Road 2222 is well-known throughout Austin as an extremely dangerous roadway. It is also a popular one, for it runs from northwest Austin to a number of city and county park areas bordering lakes with sandy beaches.¹ A weather-worn MADD cross sits high on a man-made ridge on the north side of the road just at the city limit (Fig. 3.5-6). Over a decade old, the fading plaque nailed to the flaking, white cross still bears the inscription:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
ROBERT CARTER MANLY
D.O.B. 1/10/66
KILLED ON THIS SPOT BY A DRUNK DRIVER
5/21/85

In May of 1997, two dried-out wildflowers had been secured to the top of the transverse beam with a smooth, round chalk rock.



Fig. 3.5 MADD cross erected in memory Robert Carter Manly, on Farm to Market Road 2222.

¹ In the mid-1980s the road was thick with small white crosses. It now appears that the majority of these have been removed as a result of on-going highway repair and improvement projects. The "Farm to Market" or "FM" designation in Texas indicates roadways that originated as roads connecting outlying farms and ranches to urban centers.

Two crosses not constructed through MADD, memorializing a drunk-driving incident bear the first names of both victims, Daniel London and Beth Early (Fig. 3.7). Daniel was driving Beth home from a date when their vehicle was struck head-on by a car driven by an impaired driver. The crosses are located on Brodie Lane, just north of FM 1626, and stand parallel to the road.

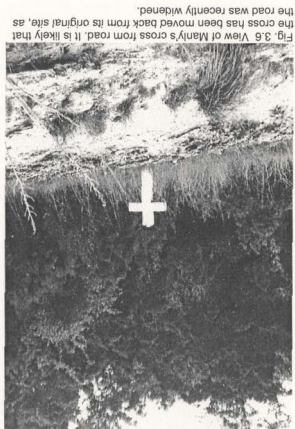


Fig. 3.6 View of Manly's cross from road. It is likely that the cross has been moved back from its original site, as the road was recently widened.



Fig. 3.7 Crosses for Beth Early and Daniel London on Brodie Lane.

Several groupings of silk flowers surround the base of each cross. The northernmost, a 2'X2', white, wooden cross stands over white and red poinsettias, red carnations and purple daisies (Fig. 3.8). A gold-tone angel, held fast with a band of red flowers, adorns the transverse, painted in 2", pine-green letters. The cross is also fronted by a plain wooden cross, about 18" high. A pink bow and two pink silk carnations backed by greenery form a diagonal across its face.



Fig. 3.8 Close-up of northernmost structure.

Daniel's mother, Ana Garcia, erected the wrought iron cross handmade in her home state of Jalisco, Mexico (Harmon). Anchored in concrete and painted white, Daniel and Beth's names, in capital letters fashioned of clay, are separated by a five-petal flower of the same material (Fig. 3.9). The planter attached to the cross holds three clay pots filled with a profusion of flowers, among them daisies, black-eyed Susans, morning glories and daffodils. Set back a couple of yards from the road, the crosses are obscured by the sharp curve of the road, and the high grass on either side of them as one approaches from the north or south.



Fig. 3.9 Close-up of wrought-iron cross and planter handmade in Jalisco, Mexico.

An unmarked cross on FM 620, a few miles northeast of Tara Bigg's memorial (see below), commemorates a drunk driving fatality which occurred sometime after May of 1995 (Biggs). Facing oncoming traffic, the white wooden cross with beveled ends shows signs of wear in the chipped paint and the almost colourless silk flowers deteriorating at its base (Fig. 3.10). A rusted nail and a bit of string are all that is left of something that was once attached near the top of

the south face of the 1.5'X2' memorial. A chunky, red wooden heart pendant hangs from the cross piece by a thin leather strip.

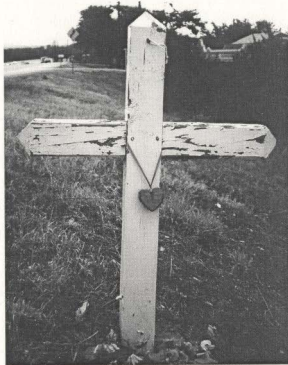


Fig. 3.10 Cross on FM 620 identified by Vicki Biggs as commemorative of drunk driving death.

Another memorial not visibly connected to MADD has been constructed on a median of West William Cannon Boulevard for former Houston resident and drunk driving victim Mark Travis Phillips (Fig. 3.11). The letters "M" and "P," about two feet in length, spelled out in rocks decorate the ground in front of an eighteen-inch cross, fashioned of thin metal and painted white, held in place by a small pile of stones. A broken terra-cotta planter, still holding two dried stems, sits above the second point of the "M."

Stand-alone memorials for which no additional information can be found pose a special ethnographic problem—the cause of the signified accident cannot be ascertained with certainty. However, as part of Texas' Hill Country, Austin and the surrounding area is rife with scenic, and treacherous roads that link urban congestion with glistening lakes and rolling hills. The views afforded a traveller are distracting enough in the best of conditions. A number of roadside crosses in

Conjecture and Certainty, Curves and Collisions

The driver, charged with intoxication manslaughter, had either fallen asleep or passed out at the wheel. Phillips, age twenty-two, was killed when the car in which he was a passenger skipped the curb of the median and slammed into a tree ("Man charged"). Now part of the memorial, the tree, whose trunk is still scarred, is ringed by stones. Inside the ring is debris from the wreck and a single, empty beer bottle.



Fig. 3.11 Memorial assemblage for Mark Travis Phillips, including small white cross.

the area informally mark blind or sudden curves, and often lie within several yards of an official highway warning sign.

State Highway 71 merges with United States Highway ("US") 290 as both intersect Interstate Highway ("IH") 35 in the middle of the city, and the two roads run together for eight and a half miles to the west, separating again at the "Y" in Oak Hill. Just outside the city limit on US 290 is perhaps the oldest extant cross in the metropolitan area, measuring 1.5'X2' (Fig. 3.12). Well-weathered and peeling, the white, wooden cross overlooks two lanes of oncoming traffic at a ninety degree angle from atop a small hill (Fig. 3.13). Pink and white plastic rose blossoms flank the cross's south side, and a completely rusted license plate lies face down in front of it. Turning the plate over, the words "Texas Truck" and the year "72" are legible.



Fig. 3.12 Cross dating from 1972 (?) on Highway 71 west.



Fig. 3.13 Cross as viewed from road.

Highway 71 west, as it moves north of 290's course, winds its way through some of central Texas' more spectacular vistas. Motorists driving west from Austin may spot a white wooden cross halfway up the hillside on which is hung a grapevine wreath, highly reminiscent of the biblical crown of thorns, garnished with a colorful array of flowers, greenery and a large, white and blue patterned bow (Fig. 3.14). *The wreath hangs from the vertical piece, and from the transverse, secured with faded pink ribbon, is a sprig of six sunflowers.*

Closer inspection revealed car parts among the flowers at the base of the memorial (Fig. 3.15). A windshield wiper, pieces of brake and turn signal lights, a radiator cap, and bits of tire and black plastic are scattered among medium-sized rocks that make a forty-five degree angle with the base of the cross.



Fig. 3.14 Looking toward Highway 71 west, cross with grapevine wreath faces westbound lanes.



Fig. 3.15 Broken car parts and rocks at base of cross.

Further in toward Austin on the same highway, about twelve miles outside city limits, is one of the most elaborate memorials in the area. The 2'x3' white, wooden cross, simply constructed, is one part of the large assemblage parallel to the four-lane, undivided highway. Hanging from it are three wreaths: a large Christmas wreath, approximately 2' in diameter, decorated with bows and ornaments; a ceramic Easter wreath (incorporating pastel-coloured rabbits, flowers and birds); and hanging on the back side of the cross, a grapevine wreath upon which sits a ceramic angel (Fig. 3.16). Two rosaries dangle from the crosspiece, almost touching the angel's face. Below the angel, on the ground, is a grouping of unidentifiable car parts.

The cross is topped with a gold-tone angel vase containing a silk lily. Two bunches of these lilies flank the base of the cross. A bunch of large pink lilies sit beside a stuffed gorilla, and a line of single bluebonnets (the state flower of Texas) form a soft front border, ending on the right (as one views the memorial) with a bunch of poinsettias (Fig. 3.17). In between these and one bunch of lilies lies a gimme-cap, secured in the back with a rock, emblazoned with the Ford logo and the words "Bad Ass Boys With Bad Ass Toys." Bordering the entire assemblage is a heart-shaped border of large, flat rocks.



Fig. 3.16 Large memorial assemblage on 71 west, viewed from behind cross.



Fig. 3.17 Memorial viewed from front, at edge of stone circle. Cap sits on ground to right of cross.

Austin photographer Doug Powell has taken several pictures of the memorial. He told me that a few years ago, visitors used a magic marker left at the site to write messages, to the accident victim, on the cross. The marker is no longer there, however, and the missives have either been worn away by exposure to the elements or a fresh coat of paint. Time, as well as the effects of sun, wind and rain, take their toll on all memorials (see also Arrellano 42).

Roughly one-half mile west of the memorial, Southwest Parkway dead-ends into Highway 71. One mile east of the intersection is the white, wrought-iron cross bearing the name Kevin Attison (Fig. 3.18). The name runs down the vertical of the 3'X2' structure, and the horizontal gives his dates of birth ("2-7-67") and death ("7-18-89"), all in white clay figures. A wreath of faded silk flowers, red carnations, white impatiens and greenery, is affixed to the transverse with a length of rusting wire. Two bunches of similarly weathered silk roses lie horizontally about the base, along with a single carnation bloom.



Fig. 3.18 Wrought-iron cross on Southwest Parkway for Kevin Attison.

Just west of Austin city limits on FM 2222, I photographed a cross that appeared to be newly constructed. A diagonal spray of yellow silk roses and greenery adorned a white styrofoam cross, to which had also been attached a lapel pin promoting a local restaurant, Carraba's Italian Grill (Fig. 3.19). Attached by a layer of white gauze tape to a thin length of unfinished wood, the structure was further supported by pieces of barrier support beams likely dislodged in the crash (Fig. 3.20). The assemblage was fronted by the dented metal guard rail, sprayed red to indicate the need for repair work.



Fig. 3.19 Newly-erected cross, adorned with floral spray and lapel pin, on FM 2222.

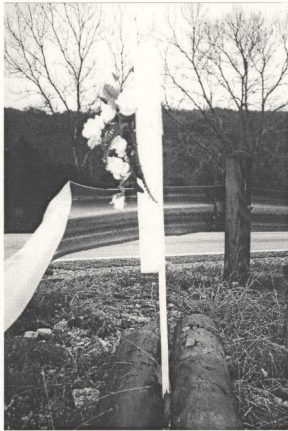


Fig. 3.20 Broken barrier support beams help anchor cross behind dented guard rail.

Back in the city proper, motorists travelling east on North Loop Boulevard between Guadalupe Street and Airport Boulevard encounter a blind curve just prior to an intersection populated by several small businesses. If concentrating on the road, they may not notice the four wooden crosses of various height and finish that border the fence line of a small state cemetery. The westernmost of the four, standing alone between two tall bushes at 1.5'X3', is neither painted nor decorated save for a rusted car part resting on the top of the vertical piece (Fig. 3.21). Also constructed of unfinished wood is the easternmost cross, 1'X1',

bearing no decoration or identifying marks. Nearer the other two crosses, it has been driven into the ground in front of a fire hydrant (Fig. 3.22). Approximately one-and-a-half yards southwest of it is a similarly constructed cross, its 2'X2.25' frame attached to the cemetery fence. Faded lettering inscribed in black ink covers the surface of the cross. Still legible is the name "David Crowley" running along the vertical, and the phrases "Born January 16, 1965" and "Asleep in the Lord" across the horizontal. A small white teddy bear, placed between the horizontal and the fence just above the date, serves as decoration along with a ribbon which anchors the cross to the chain-link fence. A rusted piece of wire affixes the vertical.



Fig. 3.21 Rusted car part tops unfinished wooden cross on North Loop.



Fig. 3.22 Fire hydrant towers above small unfinished cross. To the right, larger cross sits against cemetery fence.

The largest and most detailed cross of the four also bears Crowley's name. A black and gold tone plaque with gold lettering at the crosspiece reads:

IN MEMORY OF
DAVID M. CROWLEY
JANUARY 16, 1965 — OCTOBER 16, 1995
"You always have been, and forever will be, my friend."¹

The cross, measuring 2'X2', is finished with a dark wood stain. A plastic Santa Claus ornament hangs from the transverse. Scattered among a number of large rocks supporting the base are a pine cone and two Christmas ornaments (red balls), as well as silk flowers and greenery. Threaded through the fence behind

¹ This statement on the cross is an oft-quoted line, among Star-Trek fans, from the 1982 motion picture *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. A dying Spock utters the words to his long-time friend James Kirk.

the two crosses are a number of items including a purple tassel, a withered bouquet of fresh flowers wrapped in plastic, a laminated photo, probably of Crowley, in a tuxedo, a string of plastic Easter eggs, ribbons, a bungee cord and a dreamcatcher protected by a plastic covering (Fig. 3.23).



Fig. 3.23 Two crosses bearing David Crowley's name and surrounded by items hung from the chain-link fence, including photograph of Crowley (?).

Although two Austin residents mentioned the site to me, they had no knowledge of what had actually occurred there. Moreover, I was unable to find any information concerning David Crowley or any accident in the area near the date indicated on the cross.

Equally enigmatic are the crosses erected in memory of Mario Castor, who died on July 9, 1996. Located approximately one-quarter mile east of IH-35 on Stassney Lane, they border the eastbound lanes passing over Williamson Creek. Attached to the bridge itself, the first is a small, unpainted cross standing just

over a foot tall (Fig. 3.24). The deceased's name, along with messages, such as "I LOVE YOU," have been printed with a black felt-tip marker. Other messages have been left on the bridge railing: "GOD LOVES YOU MARIO CASTOR," and "MARIO, MAY YOU REST IN PEACE, LOVE YOU ALWAYS, YOUR AUNT, JANIE CANTU, FRIEND JUAN DOMINGUEZ." Multi-colored ribbons affix funeral floral displays to the railing—a wreath of blue silk carnations, greenery, two blue bows and a lavender ribbon bearing the word "Father" in silver lettering; and a grouping of pink and red silk carnations, daisies and greenery surrounding a red bow. A single, faded silk poinsettia is fastened to the center of the cross.



Fig. 3.24 Small cross and messages in memory of Mario Castor on Stassney Lane bridge.

Two yards to the east, at the bridge railing's end, a larger, white wooden cross sits amid a display of silk flowers including white and yellow chrysanthemums (Fig. 3.26). Pink and white rose buds, purple lilies and white

and pink carnations sprout from a white vase attached to the vertical. At the top of the vertical, a wooden cut-out in the form of an open book bears the sentence "Thru [sic] the Love of God We feel Eternal Life." The white plastic crucifix at the center of the cross is backed by a sprig of plastic greenery, and flanked on either end of the crossbar with wooden dove cut-outs also painted white. Black lettering on the transverse reads "MARIO CASTOR, 190[?] 1996." A nicho holding a small drawing of the Virgin Mary atop the vertical in August of 1997 (Everett-Canales) was gone by the time I photographed the cross in December (Fig. 3.25).



Fig. 3.25 View of both crosses for Castor, facing west on Stassney Lane.

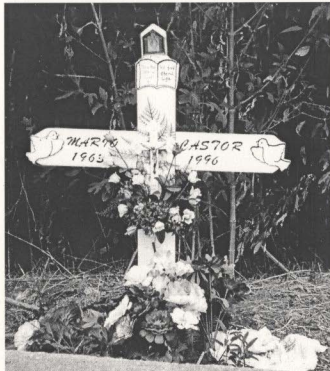


Fig. 3.26 Castor's cross in summer of 1997, topped by nicho.
Photo courtesy of Christie Everett-Canales.

One of my informants directed me to a similarly complex memorial commanding the attention of westbound motorists on Slaughter Lane, just east of Austin's Bowie High School (Fig. 3.27). Heather Werchan, a few days shy of eighteen, was one of two passengers in a truck travelling west on Slaughter that veered off the road and crashed into a tree on May 10, 1997 ("Bowie high student"). The cross was constructed by the driver of the vehicle, Heather's boyfriend, and another school friend. Her father, James, and her mother, Ruby, regularly change the flowers at the cross and mow the grass around it. A few feet

to the southwest of the cross, the driver and his mother have planted a miniature rose bush (Werchan).

At approximately 4.5'X4.5', the cross is the largest I have documented within city limits. As shown in the photographs, "Heather" is spelled out in large, pine green letters which hang across the horizontal piece. Strands of silk sunflowers, black-eyed Susans, orange marigolds, autumn-coloured leaves and other greenery are intertwined about both pieces of the structure. A stuffed teddy bear, with a plastic-covered photograph of Heather attached to its right foot with purple ribbon, sits on the horizontal near the transverse and a ring of purple silk miniature roses. Higher up and around the vertical, a visitor has placed a Bowie graduation tassel (in school colours of red and black). Sitting atop the vertical are five pennies.

The same green letters indicate her middle and last initials on the bottom half of the vertical. A holiday wreath, ornamented by pine cones, holly and miniature instruments and presents, encircles the "N", for Nicole. The "W" is entirely obscured from view by silk poinsettias in a terra-cotta pot, flanked on one side by an empty flower vase and on the other by red and white silk roses stuck in the ground. A white porcelain angel kneels in prayer in front of the bouquet. Surrounding the assemblage are large, rectangular stones. Lengths of artificial ivy and small stones are scattered about the base, one securing a handwritten note, the words of which have been blurred by nine months' rainfall (Fig. 3.28).



Fig. 3.27 Memorial for Heather Werchan on Slaughter Lane, which includes rose bush to left of cross.



Fig. 3.28 Ceramic angel flanked by stones at base of Werchan's cross. Small stone in front of angel serves as paper weight for handwritten note.

FM 1626, at the southern edge of the city, runs parallel to Slaughter Lane for approximately three miles, then turns sharply south toward the Travis County

line. The memorial to Armando Carrizales, constructed in front of a barbed wire fence a few yards from the roadway, lies in adjacent Hays County (Fig. 3.29). A piece of barrier support beam makes the 5' vertical piece; varnished pressurized wood, decorated with electrical tape, the horizontal of equal length. Two unfinished wood pieces, forming diagonal supports running from the lower half of the vertical to the crossbar give Carrizales's date of birth, March 10, 1947, and death, October 10, 1995. The numbers, as well as the deceased's name on the crossbar, are a result of careful wood burning.



Fig. 3.29 Cross constructed from electrical pole, ceramic insulators, electrical and barbed wire for Armando Carrizales.

Ceramic electrical insulators top the vertical and both ends of the transverse, while another is attached to the north side of the vertical nearer the ground. A black bandana encircles the post below the insulator, from which is hung a clear plastic bell (Fig. 3.30). Two wreaths decorate the cross, the first *formed of three strands of electrical wiring and lengths of mistletoe*. An orange electrical tape bow, a miniature deer and a pine cone adorn the wreath. A

grapevine wreath propped at the base of the cross bears a bow of red ribbon and faded greenery. A century plant has been incorporated into the memorial by means of the ring of stones encircling it and the cross.



Fig. 3.30 Cross base decorated with electrical tape, ceramic insulator, bandana and plastic bell ornament.

The university professor who described Carrizales's memorial to me passes it twice every weekday on his way to and from work. He did not know what had prompted it, however, nor was I able to uncover any relevant information or even a death notice for the deceased in the local newspaper. As indicated on the cross, Carrizales died in 1995. The memorial has been in place for at least eighteen months (Hancock).

Crossroads

Approximately two city blocks to the west-northwest of Sara Jayne Solter's well-known memorial are two crosses several yards south of the intersection of William Cannon and Manchaca Road (Fig. 3.31). They sit in the drainage ditch of a large parking lot adjacent to an arts and crafts megastore and a fast-food restaurant. That closest to the westbound lanes of Manchaca Road is constructed of wood painted white with beveled ends, and is covered almost entirely with multi-colored silk roses in the manner of the "flowering tree" used in rituals celebrating *The Holy Cross in Mexico and the southwestern United States* (Cantú 118-9, 125). Two bunches of artificial daffodils sit at the base. No writing is visible on the 1.5' X 2' structure (Fig. 3.32).

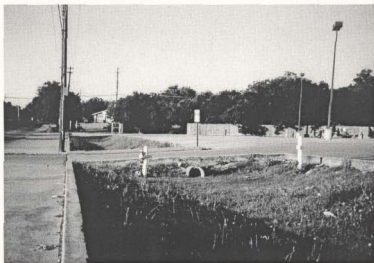


Fig. 3.31 Two crosses commemorating the death of Darel Brad Gonzalez in drainage ditch of shopping center.

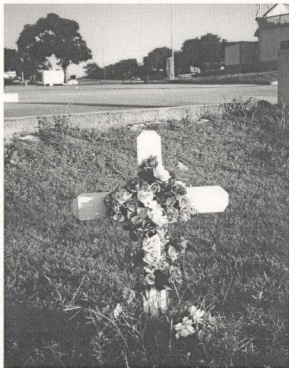


Fig. 3.32 Easternmost cross decorated with red, purple and white silk flowers.

A yard and a half behind it sits a slightly taller, hollow metal cross, also painted white (Fig. 3.33). Although thinner and less decorated, the cross bears a silver plaque which reads:

In Loving Memory
of
DAREL BRAD GONZALEZ
October 30, 1977 - June 3, 1995
We Love You
Dad, Anna, Brandon & Pee Wee

A ceramic vase at its base holds two bunches of pink and blue silk roses; another of red daisy-like flowers sits on the ground. Both crosses were erected by the family following the accident in which Darel, crossing William Cannon on his bicycle, was hit and then run over by a truck. Don Day, who witnessed the accident, confirmed that both crosses were erected in memory of Darel by the Gonzalez family.



Fig. 3.33 A silver plaque adorns westernmost cross for Gonzalez.

Travelling east on William Cannon and crossing IH-35, motorists pass a white cross and floral display on the southwest corner of the intersection of William

Cannon and Rockridge Drive. Adorned with three red poinsettias and a red bow, a small, white wooden trellis and a cross of similar construction form the southern border of the memorial assemblage (Fig. 3.34). The silk floral array includes large bouquets of white and red poinsettias, as well as a yellow, white and orange chrysanthemums. Situated next to a fading red fire hydrant at a forty-five degree angle to the roadway, the 2.5' X 1.5' cross bears a wreath of multi-coloured mums at the crossbar. Obscured from the view of passing drivers by the colorful poinsettias are car parts lying in a plastic plant tray at the cross's base.



Fig. 3.34 A white cross and trellis are fronted by several floral displays on East William Cannon Boulevard.

Although the cross is not marked in any way, judging from the good condition of the wooden structures and flowers, it may memorialize a death that occurred in September of 1997. Del Valle resident Joe Flores, 28, was driving a motorcycle east on William Cannon when he collided with a truck turning onto Rockridge ("Cement truck flips").

In May of 1997, I photographed four crosses a mile and a half to the northeast of Darel's memorials, in a median on Stassney Lane directly across the street from David Crockett High School. Only one remained the following January, although minus the myriad items that had encircled it; a small (not quite 1.5') white cross in memory of Jacorey Williams, an eight-year-old who was hit by a car on his way home from school (Osborn). A picture of Jacorey is taped to the east face, above football cards and notes covered with plastic wrap, and a glow-in-the-dark rosary, all attached with tape (Fig. 3.35). Surrounding the cross was a large collection of stuffed animals, including teddy bears, rabbits and dogs, as well as a white ceramic angel, an empty green pop bottle, a football on which is written "To: Jacorey, From: Zack," three bunches of silk flowers including white poinsettias, and an unidentifiable plant set in dirt in a yellow, plastic cup. A miniature koala bear perches on a thin wooden stick on the east side of the cross.



Fig. 3.35 Stuffed animals surround Jacorey Williams's cross.

Gone now are the three wooden crosses, unmarked and unpainted, erected about two yards to the east of Jacorey Williams's memorial on Stassney Lane. Not quite eighteen inches high, they faced away from each other to the west, east and south. The cross facing Jacorey's memorial was adorned with a silk flower and greenery, and two gift bows. The one opposite it, facing east, was decorated with flowers and greenery as well (3.36). An arrangement of white poinsettias was placed in front of the third cross. The remnants of four potted plants sat amidst an assortment of stuffed bears, rabbits, dogs and ducks. An ornate, pastel blue metal celtic cross, rusted from exposure to a rainy Austin spring lay across a grey bear resting beside a small, yellow and black rubber ball.



Fig. 3.36 Three crosses attended by stuffed animals, silk flowers and potted plants.

On June 28, 1996, sixteen-year-old Paul Anthony Garcia was struck by two cars after exiting a city bus at the intersection of North Lamar Boulevard and Morrow Avenue. He was on his way to a baseball game at a nearby field. His mother, interviewed by *Austin American-Statesman* reporter Nichole Monroe, stated that a cross would be placed at the site ("Friends reflect"). I found the 2'X2'

wrought iron cross, tipped with silver *fleurs-de-lys*, at the northeast corner of the intersection (Fig. 3.37). The plaque crosspiece bears the deceased's name and dates of birth and death in white lettering, as well as a small black-and-white portrait. Slightly behind the cross, stuck in the ground at an eighty-degree angle is a large two-dimensional baseball on which is painted his name, his baseball number (13) and the letters "RIP." Red silk roses are stuck in the ground on both sides of the cross, the larger bunch secured by three large rocks.



Fig. 3.37 This wrought-iron cross and larger-than-life baseball commemorates the death of Paul Anthony Garcia.

Further south, near the intersection of Beanna and 26th Streets on the north end of the University of Texas campus is a white, wooden cross measuring 1.5'X2' (see also Foote 172). Facing the east and westbound lanes of 26th Street, it is anchored in the median with concrete (Fig. 3.38). Silver plates with

black lettering run almost the entire length of each side of the horizontal piece, and read:

STEPHANIE MALMQUIST

1-11-74 11-24-93

Malmquist, then a sophomore at the university, died as a result of massive head injuries sustained when her pickup collided with another vehicle on 26th Street (Granados). I photographed the cross in May 1997, at which time a large basket of woven straw bearing an arrangement of yellow and red silk elephant ears was held in place on the west side by cement blocks. When I visited the site again in January of 1998, the potted plant was gone and a bouquet of fresh flowers lay at the foot of the cross, protected from the elements by a plastic wrapping printed with the words "Feliz Compleanos." A prayer candle in yellow glass cast a dim light about the memorial that evening.



Fig. 3.38 Wooden cross for Stephanie Malmquist set in concrete.

Louisana Hernandez Torres and Eloisa Trevino, two Austin women in their seventies, were killed on January 6, 1996 when their car collided with an eighteen-wheel truck at East Martin Luther King Boulevard and Comal Street (about three-fourths of a mile from Malmquist's cross). The vehicles came to rest on the grounds of Oakwood Cemetery (Kelly). It is here that two plain wooden crosses, each decorated with one white and one pink carnation, were driven into the ground in memory of the two women (Fig. 3.39). Although the writing on the easternmost cross has faded so as to be illegible except for the faint abbreviation "SRA." on the transverse, the other simply states in black ink lettering:

DIED

1/5/96

SRA. TORRES

A rock supports the base. The crosses are two feet away from the cemetery fence, and about the same distance from the roadway. They face Martin Luther King Boulevard at a very slight angle toward the eastbound lanes.



Fig. 3.39 Erected just outside the fence of the state cemetery, these two crosses mark the death site of Louisa Hernandez Torres and Eloisa Trevino.

A mile and a quarter to the east of the assemblage, slightly west of the intersection of Martin Luther King and Airport Boulevards, is a covered bus stop. Behind the north-facing shelter, stuck in the ground just beyond the cement is a wrought iron, Greek cross just over 2' high (Fig. 3.40). The rust forming on the cross is almost covered by the bright red wreath and floral display. Incorporating red ribbons, carnations and roses as well as white roses, baby's breath and miscellaneous greenery, a strand of which sticks out from the top of the cross's vertical piece, it hangs slightly beneath a more weathered bunch of white silk roses (Fig. 3.41). There are no identifying markings on the memorial.



Fig. 3.40 Wrought iron cross at city bus stop.



Fig. 3.41 Cross adorned with silk flowers, greenery and wreath.

On the southeast corner of the heavily traversed intersection, another wrought iron cross sits in a cleared patch of ground some yards away from a Taco Bell and a What-a-Burger (Fig. 3.42). A gold bracelet graces the midsection. Blue, white, yellow and red silk flowers extend from the base, which also includes a funeral display of silk flowers spelling out the word "DAD," and a blue and white plastic open Bible.



Fig. 3.42 This wrought-iron cross sits in a section of specially cleared ground.

I did not uncover any background information about either of the two memorials at the intersection, or discern from informants that it is a dangerous area. With sixteen lanes of traffic facing each other here, however, it is not difficult to imagine what might have happened. Passing through several times during the course of my fieldwork, I often observed drivers peering intently at one or the other of the crosses when stopped at the intersection.

Other memorials mark areas well-known for numerous accidents. Tara Biggs had almost completed her first year of high school when she was killed in an automobile accident on the way home from school. A cross now stands as a memorial to Tara on the northeast corner of the intersection of county road 620 and Debba Drive, where the collision occurred. Approximately three feet high, the wooden cross with beveled exposed ends and planter base was built by family friend Rockey Piazza (Thatcher).

Several days after Tara's death, Piazza took the cross to the scene of the accident, where a number of Tara's friends and teachers from Lake Travis High School had gathered. One by one, they took turns applying paint until the entire structure was white (Biggs). The cross faces westbound traffic on 620. Most noticeable from the road is the profusion of silk flowers that fills the planter and spills out over the sides—yellow, red and purple tulips, pink dahlias, yellow daffodils, white irises, purple, yellow and pink pansies, and sunflowers. Almost obscured by the colorful display are a small, white ceramic angel, molded plastic "Lion King" figurines, and a unicorn figurine encased in a snow globe.

A motorist may be able to see the black plaque with white lettering at the center of each side of the top bar, but probably can't read the words:

TARA
NICOLE BIGGS
7/24/80 - 5/2/95
YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL IN EVERY WAY
WE LOVE AND MISS YOU

Above the plaque on the east side of the vertical piece is a sprig of sunflowers and a note encased in clear plastic gives the following formula:

cara
+
tara
b.f.4.e.
[best friends forever]

Below the plaque, another note from Cara similarly protected from the elements is now virtually unreadable save for the final line and signature (Fig. 3.43).

Photographs of Tara are thumbtacked to the top of the vertical: on the east side, Tara in her cheerleading outfit; on the west side, above a sprig of silk buttercups, a more formal portrait (Fig. 3.44).



Fig. 3.43 Photographs, notes and flowers at the cross for Tara Biggs.



Fig. 3.44 Tara's school photo on western face of cross.

Soon after the accident, a stoplight was installed at the intersection. Concerned residents had petitioned for a light in preceding years, but were flatly told by Texas Department of Transportation officials that a certain number of accidents would have to occur first. Tara's mother Vicki said, "In my mind, if there had been a light there before, I really believe that she would still be here. On one hand I do and on one hand I don't." Notwithstanding that doubt, she finds comfort in the fact that Tara's cross may remind people to proceed through the intersection more cautiously. Such functions of roadside memorials are discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

Speed was also a contributing factor in the accident. Of the driver, a friend of Tara's, Vicki says,

Yes, she was speeding. But, who hasn't? And it was not excessive, it was, you know, 65 to 70. And it was just, it was just, she lost control. And with, evidently, you know, not being experienced, and she over-corrected is what happened.

The driver was injured, but survived. A number of memorials in Austin, however, do commemorate accidents in which the victim was judged by the Department of Public Safety to be at fault (assignment of blame is discussed at length in chapter four). Those documented below mark curves where the driver lost control of the vehicle while speeding.

Winding Roads and High Speed

Several yards west of Heather Werchan's memorial on the same median stands an older structure erected in memory of thirty-two-year-old Frank Beltran (Fig. 3.45). Beltran reportedly lost control of his vehicle while fleeing the scene of an accident ("Austinite is killed"). Encircled by large stones, the white, wooden cross bears at the transverse a bronze plate which states in black lettering:

In Loving Memories

Frank Beltran

8-31-64 - 5-5-96

R.I.P.

A black-and-white drawing of Jesus encased in plastic is affixed to the vertical piece above the plate with two white thumbtacks (3.46). Tacks also hold a similarly protected colour photograph of Beltran on the lower part of the vertical, just above a spray of artificial sunflowers in a green plastic vase. Small stones surround the cross and flowers within the larger stone circle.



Fig. 3.45 View of Frank Beltran's cross facing eastward toward Heather Werchan's memorial on same median.



Fig. 3.46 Photograph of Beltran near base of cross on Slaughter Lane.

Three Hyde Park Baptist High School students were killed on May 2, 1991. As the teenagers headed back to school from a lunch break, driver Tammy Franklin lost control of the car on a curve of southbound Guadalupe and hit a tree head-on. The final resting place of the vehicle is now marked by a white cross, measuring 2'X2', and a spray of flowers adorning the scarred tree. The three unpainted wooden crosses originally erected by classmates of the crash victims were removed twice, an action attributed to "non-believers" by local police (Franklin). Finally, Susan Crane's then-husband constructed an aluminum cross and set it in concrete (Crane).

When I photographed the site in May, 1997, the engraved silver plaque was partially hidden from view by a bouquet including silk daffodils, white carnations and buttercups (Fig. 3.47). The plaque bears the following inscription:

In Loving Memory

Tammy Franklin September 19, 1974 - May 2, 1991
Jeffrey Michael Suggs August 27, 1974 - May 2, 1991
Nathan Eugene Richard Crane November 14, 1974 - May 3, 1991

The cross is further surrounded with greenery including artificial pine boughs, probably left during the previous Christmas season. Margie and Susan generally place flowers at the site at Easter, Christmas, the anniversary of the accident and on the teenagers' birthdays. Susan occasionally find other items at the site that she attributes to visits from Tammy, Jeffrey and Nathan's high school friends. The spray of pink and white silk lilies secured to the tree with a length of matching lace was left by Tammy's mother, Margie Franklin (Fig. 3.48). It is her

custom to decorate the tree, as it was the impact with the tree that actually killed Tammy.

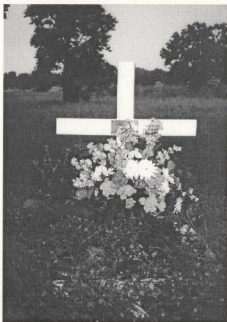


Fig. 3.47 Commemorating the 1991 deaths of Nathan Crane, Tammy Franklin and Jeffrey Suggs, is this cross on Guadalupe.



Fig. 3.48 The memorial for the three teens includes the tree that was struck in the accident.

Thomas Vannatta is an English teacher at the aforementioned Crockett High School in south Austin, across the street from Jacorey Williams's memorial (see above). Vannatta's traffic safety concerns, which have resulted in political activism (see chapter five), were galvanized by the fatal accident he witnessed in August of 1989 on Camp Ben McCulloch Road in northeastern Hays County. A section of FM 1826, the road was described to me as "a really curvy road where people drive way too fast and have lots of accidents" (Everett-Canales). Tami Speir, the fifteen-year-old driver, lost control of the vehicle as she approached a curve while travelling east. The memorial constructed by family and friends for Tami, then a cheerleader at Dripping Springs High School, consists of a white wooden cross, constructed of two-by-fours and measuring approximately 18"X15" (Fig. 3.49).

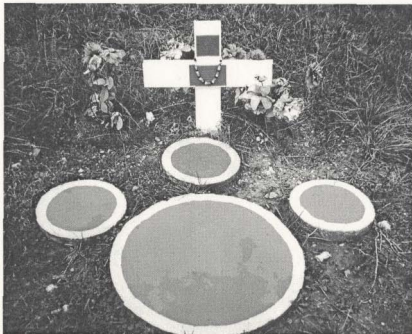


Fig. 3.49 Memorial cross and paw print for former Dripping Springs High School cheerleader Tami Speir.

The maroon plates nailed to each piece state in beige lettering:

TAMI L. SPIER

88-89

D.S.H.S.

Cheerleader

O-TAMI

When I got to hug you that night
I heard your body tell mine, "I know daddy
but really I'm OK." That moment
and your little sister
is what keeps me going today.

♥-U-DADDY

A plastic bead necklace hangs over the plates on the horizontal piece. The cross serves as the focal point for a memorial that includes a cement paw print—the Dripping Springs High School mascot is the panther—painted in school colors, maroon outlined in gold. Silk greenery and flowers in purple and pink stand in back of, and beside the cross.

Southwest Parkway, another road with a reputation, provides a shortcut from one of Austin's major north-south roadways, the Mopac Expressway (also called "Loop 1"), to the highways southwest of the city. It is known to area residents as a particularly dangerous zone due to frequent drag racing, including the one that ended in the death of Robert Pickwell, age twenty-three. In an effort to avoid colliding with a vehicle he had come upon unexpectedly, Pickwell swerved, thus losing control of his car (Canales). His brother Mike and a family friend, Frank Mendez, erected the white, wooden cross in a parkway median near the accident site (Fig. 3.50). Mike built the cross in the family's garage.



Fig. 3.50 Cross on Southwest Parkway memorializing Robert Pickwell.

The approximately 2'X2' memorial is identifiable by the black plastic lettering on both sides. Each side of the horizontal reads "In memory of Rob Pickwell," although the letters on the eastern side are almost entirely obscured by a faded Christmas wreath hung over the crosspiece and assembled from artificial pine boughs, pine cones and poinsettias . A thin piece of string around the vertical is fastened to an empty wicker basket below a length of wide, striped ribbon. The letters and numbers arranged diagonally down the top half of the eastern side spell out "May 1970," the month and year of Pickwell's birth, while the bottom half of the western-facing vertical bears the month and year of his death, "September 1993." Two bouquets of less weatherworn poinsettias sit to the side of the cross, next to the remains of a potted plant still wearing its decorative, though faded wrapping. A plastic bunny and sunflower figurine lie among the dry, brown stems. On the other side of the cross, moulded black plastic pieces, perhaps the top and bottom of an air filter enclosure for a carburetor, rest in the tall grass.

Yet another of the area's notoriously dangerous east-west thoroughfares is the previously noted county road FM 620, west-northwest of Austin. Just prior to a long arcing of the road to the north, a squat, white cross faces the northbound lanes (Fig. 3.51). Unique among wooden crosses in the area in its structural embellishment, this 2.5'X1.5' memorial was erected for Chris Ann Stackable, age twenty-four. Stackable was driving at high speed when she lost control of her vehicle on a curve and collided with oncoming traffic ("Race turns deadly"). Her passenger, twenty-four-year-old Wendell Wayne Sauls, was also killed.



Fig. 3.51 Standing amidst tall grass and black-eyed Susans, this cross notes the death of Chris Ann Stackable.

The cross's vertical piece is topped with a conical motif, its horizontal ends by subtle cut-outs. The gold-tone plaque at the crosspiece, inset into a built-in frame, includes Stackable's name, dates of birth and death—August 17, 1970 and February 2, 1995—as well as the epitaph "ALIVE IN THE LORD FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS." Attached to the bottom half of the vertical by white ribbon is a bouquet of pink, white and purple silk flowers.

FM 620 intersects the aforementioned FM 2222 in the hills west of Austin. Closer in to the city, on a sharp curve between Mount Bonnell Road and Loop 360, a cross was recently erected in memory of Robin Conrad Gullacher (Fig. 3.52). Standing almost four feet tall, with a two-foot cross bar, the white wooden cross bears black etched lettering over much of its face, including Gullacher's name, dates of birth ("12-31-69") and death ("9-26-97"), and a series of three-digit numbers (e.g., 587, 586, 569, 501, etc.). Five medium-sized stones encircle the base. Gullacher, driving a motorcycle, was killed when he lost control of his vehicle on the curve and hit two oncoming cars.

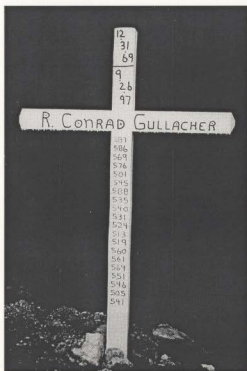


Fig. 3.52 Gullacher cross on FM 2222.

Finally, another cross described to me by my sister flanks the northbound access road of Interstate Highway 35 (IH-35). Everett-Canales first saw the white

cross in the fall of 1997, in the median between the on-ramp and the freeway itself. Gone after only a few days, the cross reappeared in its present location about one month later. It commemorates the death of Carmen Cortinas Vela, age thirty-two, in a head-on collision on the interstate (Monroe, "Accident"). Set back against the fence line and parallel to the roadway, it is situated in a stand of cedar trees (Fig. 3.53).

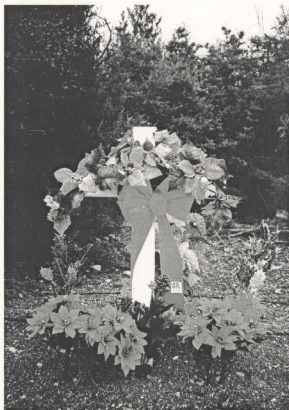


Fig. 3.53 Relocated cross for Carmen Cortinas Vela. Whereas the fatal accident occurred on IH-35, the cross now stands parallel to the frontage road.

The blue plaque at the cross piece is inscribed with white lettering, obscured from full view at the time the photographs were taken by a large red ribbon attached to the vertical, and a garland of artificial poinsettias adorning the length of the transverse (Fig. 3.53). Visible were the words

Carmen Cortinas Vela
Mother, Daughter, Sister and
May 7, 1997

Several sprays of silk poinsettias were stuck in the ground in front of the cross, as were sprigs of holly. Behind it was a tall bouquet of silk marigolds and leaves in autumn colors—gold, orange, red and brown.

In a median of west William Cannon, about three miles east of IH-35, stands a white, wrought iron cross (Fig. 3.54). Facing all four lanes of traffic at a ninety-degree angle, its design is similar to the roadside crosses in northeastern Mexico documented by Henzel. Although I often drove past the cross while living in Austin, as friends and members of my family still do, I have been unable to connect this cross to a particular accident with any certainty. It may be related to a one-car wreck in 1992, in which two teenagers were killed (Lindell).

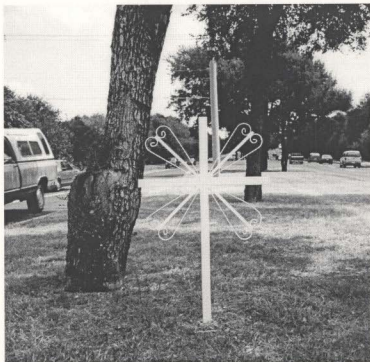


Fig. 3.54 Wrought iron cross at intersection of Westgate and William Cannon Boulevards. Photo courtesy of Christie Everett-Canales.

Murder Memorial

Facing the three westbound lanes of William Cannon is the memorial to murder victim Shawn Albert Deoloz, a white, wooden 1.5'X2' cross near the intersection of William Cannon Boulevard and Emerald Forest Drive (Fig. 3.55). Set in a cement base in the median with a miniature teddy bear tied around the crosspiece with multi-colored ribbon, the cross's black plaque states in white, italicized lettering:

Shawn Albert Deoloz

We brought in a Diamond

April 13, 1975

God took an Angel

August 4, 1996

Though you can't see or touch me - I'll be near,
And if you listen with your heart, you'll hear
All my love around you soft and clear

Mom, Michael, Karrizza, Monica, Family & Friends

Set in a plastic green vase and scattered about the base are white silk carnations. The clear glass vase next to the cross is empty.

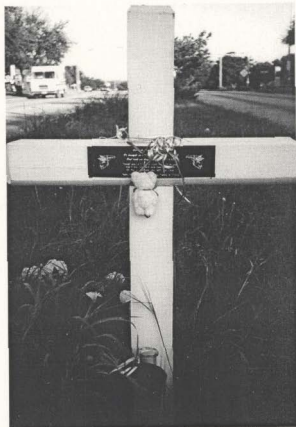


Fig. 3.55 Cross commemorating the murder of Shawn Albert Deoloz.

The location of the cross is somewhat puzzling, as it is approximately equidistant from Deoloz's former home and the reported scene of the crime

("Austin man"). William Cannon is the largest, most heavily traversed street between the two locations, perhaps indicative of the family's desire to memorialize Deoloz in as public a manner as possible. While not connected to a traffic fatality, the cross is akin to the drunk driving protests that the MADD crosses represent in its very public and material commemoration of a crime victim.

Conclusion

Deoloz's memorial is part of one of the most remarkable patterns that emerged during the research period. On William Cannon Boulevard alone I have documented seven crosses. The street, which runs for about fourteen miles across the city (southeast to west-northwest) is not known as particularly dangerous. Most markers have been erected since major improvements, including the addition of lanes and bridges, widening and repaving, were made to the thoroughfare in the 1980s and early '90s. The distribution of crosses in the area runs counter to the general folklore of such markers as indicative of treacherous areas (Foote 171-2; Henzel 97-8; Hurt). While both Foote and Henzel attribute the absence of crosses on stretches of road known to be deadly as indicative of government intervention, either in the form of regular maintenance or the construction of guard rails, safety barriers and warning signs, there is no explanation for the proliferation of crosses noted here.

Additionally, population patterns (as indicative of certain ethnic or religious practices) do not differ significantly from other areas of the city. Mexican-American Catholics do continue the tradition generally attributed to their Spanish ancestors, which is evidenced by memorials such as Castor's, which incorporates the crucifix and, at one time, a representation of the Virgin Mary.

They are by no means the only participants, however, nor as indicated by the examples presented here, necessarily the most creative or active. Crosses such as those erected for Tara Biggs and Heather Werchan reflect Protestant aesthetics—there are no crucifixes, rosary beads or pictures of saints or other religious figures attached to or left at these crosses (Milspaw 119-20, 132)¹—as well as the influence of the Hispanic culture of the southwestern United States.

Participants interviewed do not consider the custom an ethnically or denominationally exclusive one, nor do they voice adherence to any strict aesthetic principles, both of which allow creative license in cross construction, decoration and maintenance. However, there are patterns that emerge from examination of the forty-four crosses described here (see chart below).

The most widely used material for cross construction is wood; wooden crosses comprising eighty percent of the sample. Of these thirty-five, twenty-three, or fifty-two percent, are painted white. The remaining wooden structures that are finished in some way make up seven percent. Sixteen percent of the crosses are fashioned of wrought iron or metal. Overall, sixty-eight percent of the crosses, whether wood, iron or metal, are painted white. In correspondence with Henzel's observations, most of the crosses are between two and four feet high, with those smaller generally unmarked, unpainted wooden constructions (101). Except for a few whose vertical and horizontal pieces are of equal length (Greek cross), or whose vertical is the longest piece, the crosses are usually Latin in form (100). Rings or similar borders fashioned of stone, or piles of rocks at the

¹ Gerald Pocius also notes differences between Catholic and Protestant iconography in home decoration (125). Of particular significance to the present discussion is his reference to the popularity of angels in Protestant popular prints (147).

base of a cross were present at thirteen, or almost forty-three percent of the assemblages.²

Much less common are those seven assemblages which incorporate automobile parts from the wreckage.³ In these memorials, the grieving process encompasses not only the death site, but in a sense the actual instrument of death. Further, although MADD markers, as noted in the previous chapter, are the only approved memorial of this kind, they comprise only three out of the forty-four. Additionally, not all drunk driving deaths described above are commemorated with official MADD crosses.

Far more frequent than the use of political statements (i.e., the MADD plaque which states that the deceased was killed by a drunk driver) are religious expressions. In addition to the cross and its many signifieds, as discussed in chapter two, friends and relatives of the deceased have placed magico-religious items (rosaries, angels, crosses) or declarations ("Alive in the Lord," etc.) at thirteen sites.

Eighty-seven percent of the crosses are accompanied by remembrances of some kind, from the wildflowers atop Robert Manly's cross on 2222 to the stuffed animals and football trading cards left for Jacorey Williams. Most frequent, at eighty-four percent, is the proffering of plants, including items such as flowers,

² Although leaving a stone at a roadside memorial coincides with Catholic Mexican and Mexican-American custom as documented in Mexico, Arizona, etc. (see chapter two), most stones and rocks present at memorials in the Austin area appeared to be decorative (e.g., spelling out initials or forming a heart around the assemblage) or meant to stabilize the cross. At only one cross, Fig. 3.16, did the rocks not appear to be decorative *or* supportive.

³ While I did find car parts at the memorials, I did not come across any that were incorporated into the structure of the cross itself, as observed by Arrellano (42).

grapevine wreaths and pine cones, variations of which adorn thirty-seven crosses. Roses, even during the holiday season, appear to be the most popular flower, and are part of fifteen assemblages. Most offered are red roses, found at seven sites, with pink or white ones at four sites each. Carnations, the second-most utilized flower, was in evidence at thirty-four percent of the memorials, and were most often red as well.

A number of my informants spoke about decorating memorials for certain holidays, especially in cases in which grave site ornamentation is restricted. As noted in the descriptions of the memorials, many of the assemblages, especially those photographed in December and January, bore evidence of holiday visits in their adornment. In addition to decorative elements associated with the Christmas season, a few of the memorials incorporate items linked with Easter. Twenty percent of the assemblages, for example, included one or more bouquets of red or white poinsettias, often accompanied by ornaments, pine cones, wreaths, holly or mistletoe. Two memorials were adorned with Easter-themed wreaths, and the fence behind the two crosses erected in memory of David Crowley (Fig. 3.23) is decorated by, among other things, plastic Easter eggs. I did not observe any Halloween-oriented objects, such as pumpkin or black cat figurines, nor any items generally used in area Day of the Dead celebrations (candy skulls, skeletons, etc.). The following chapter further discusses holiday decoration and its significance in roadside cross memorial tradition.

At least one memorial site reflects a decision not to commemorate a related death. The accident that killed Chris Ann Stackable also claimed the life of Wendell Wayne Sauls, for whom there is no cross. As Barrera notes, "sometimes the memory of how the person died may simply be too painful" (281).

In other cases, family members have participated, in greater and lesser degrees, in memorials erected by others (see chapters four and five). Neither do the crosses commemorate only the deaths of crime victims. As noted, many of the deceased were judged by city or state officials to be at fault in the accident, although family members may maintain otherwise. Absolute guilt or innocence is not always reflected in the construction or maintenance of the assemblages; however, such questions or judgments often render the memorials active sites of negotiation. Family and friends often use crosses as a locus for conflicting emotions connected to a fatal incident. An examination of the public and private bereavement expressed through the memorials detailed above must include the thoughts and words of individuals in varied states of mourning.

Items placed at many of the crosses reflect an ongoing dialogue with the deceased (notes, inscriptions on bridge railings), and the continuation of missed celebrations (toys, homecoming mums, graduation tassels). The memorials become representative not only of the mystery of death, but of the deceased themselves. Robert Plant Armstrong has written that

... such works exist in a state of tension between these two poles; being subject and object. It is perhaps in the energy of such interplay that a fundamental "power"—or energy—of the work of affecting presence is to be found. (5-6)

Documenting the "affecting presence" of the assemblages certainly extends beyond the cataloguing of their various parts. Above I have described a number of ways in which memorial participants have marked, and thus reclaimed sites of tragedy and loss. The reclamation practices of several of my informants, as essential to bereavement and healing, are discussed in the next chapter.

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

Colour Key: b = black g = green pi = pink pu = purple r = red w = white y = yellow

	flora	notes /photos	inscription	automobile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.1 Solter	r tulips		r plaque					w wood	45% angle		MADD cross
Fig. 3.3 Ellsworth			r plaque					w wood	parallel		MADD cross
Fig. 3.5 Manly	dried wild- flowers on top		r plaque, white lettering					w wood	perpendic- ular		MADD cross, small round stone holding flowers on top
Fig. 3.8 Early & London (north)	w, r poinset- tias, r carna- tions, elephant ears, pu daisies		painted g letters			Xmas flowers		w wood	parallel	gold-tone angel	small unpainted cross

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

Colour Key: b = black g = green pl = pink pu = purple r = red w = white y = yellow

	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.9 Early & London (south)	y daffodils, w, y daisies, bl morning glories		w clay letters					w wrought iron	parallel		planter attached, 3 pots
3.10 unknown	disinte- grating pu flowers on ground							w wood	perpen- dicular		necklace with heart pendant at cross- piece
Fig. 3.11 Phillips			initials in rock	yes		red bow		w metal	perpen- dicular		stone circle around tree, pot

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

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	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.12 unknown	r, pi plastic roses			yes				w wood	perpen- dicular		
Fig. 3.14 unknown	grapevine wreath, sunflow- ers, pi, pu, w y flowers, elephants ears, greenery			yes				w wood	parallel		rocks piled at base, bow on wreath
Fig. 3.16 unknown	bluebon- nets, lillies	on cross w/black ink		yes	stuffed animal	Xmas wreath, Easter wreath			parallel	3 angels, 2 rosaries	stone circle around cross, cap

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

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	flora	notes /photos	inscription	automobile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.18 Attison	r carnations, r roses, w flowers		w clay letters					w wrought iron	parallel, half-way up hillside		
Fig. 3.19 unknown	y roses, greenery							styro- foam, unfin- ished wood,sup ported by wrecked beams	45% angle		Carrabas pin,
Fig. 3.21 unknown				yes				unfin- ished wood	parallel		
Fig. 3.22 unknown								unfin- ished wood	parallel		

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

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	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.23 Crowley (east)	pine cone		on cross w/black ink		miniature teddy bear			unfin- ished wood	parallel	dream- catcher	ribbon secures cross to fence
Fig. 3.26 Crowley (west)	pine cone, pi carna- tions, pi rose, fresh flowers (roses?),	photo of Crowley (?)	Black plaque with gold etching			2 r Xmas balls, Santa necklace, Easter eggs		varnished wood	parallel		pile of rocks at base, ribbons, bungee cord, pu tassel
Fig. 3.24 Castor (west)	blu, r carnations, r poinset- tias, w daisies, greenery	notes on bridge and cross in b ink	black ink			poinsettia		unfin- ished wood	on bridge, parallel to street	"God loves you" on bridge	funeral wreath, bows, "Dad" ribbon, ribbon holding cross to bridge

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

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	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.26 Castor (east)	Pu lilies, pi, w roses, w, y mums, green- ery, w flowers		black paint					white wood	parallel	open book (bible?)- "Thru the Love of God We feel Eternal Life", crucifix, doves, nicho w/the Virgin Mary	
Fig. 3.27 Werchan	Sunflow- ers, black- eyed susans, o marigolds, autumn leaves, misc greenery, p u, r & w roses, rose bush	photo of Heather, hand- written note	painted wooden letters		teddy bear	Xmas wreath, r poinset- tias	gradua- tion tassel, spirit ribbon	brown wood	perpen- dicular	angel	five pennies on top, large stones at base, terra cotta pot, empty flower vase

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

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	flora	notes /photos	incription	automobile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.29 Canizales	dried greenery, grapevine wreath, century plant		wood- burned lettering, black			pine cone, Xmas orna- ments		support beam, pressur- ized wood, unfinished	parallel		ceramic electrical insulators, electrical wire, stone cicle
Fig. 3.32 Gonzalez (east)	w, pu, r roses, w daffodils							w wood	45%		
Fig. 3.33 Gonzalez (west)	r & bl roses, r daisies (?)		etched silver plaque					w wood	45%		vase attached to cross
Fig. 3.34 unknown (Flores?)	r, w poinset- tias, r, o, y, pl, pu mums, y roses			yes, in plastic plant tray at base of cross		poinset- tias		w wood	45% angle, across median from oncoming lanes		red bow and poinset- tias on small, white wooden trellis

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

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	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.35 Williams	w poinset- tias, pl flowers, y daisies	photo of Jacorey, hand- written notes			football cards, stuffed animals (14+), football, miniature kolias	poinset- tias		w wood	perpen- dicular, in median	rosary, ceramic angel	green pop bottle
Fig. 3.36 unknown (3)	w poinset- tias, potted plants, r carnation, w roses, pl flowers				stuffed animals (9), rubber ball	poinset- tias, gift bows		unfin- ished wood	perpen- dicular, in median	cross	
Fig. 3.37 Garcia	r roses	photo of Paul	black plaque with painted letters, w		large cut- out of baseball w/name and number			Black wrought iron	parallel		

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

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	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items	other
Fig. 3.38 Malquist	autumn- coloured elephant ears, fresh flowers		silver plaque, with black lettering			flowers in plastic wrapping w/words "Feliz Comple- anos"		w wood	perpen- dicular, in median	prayer candle	cement blocks at base
Fig. 3.39 (east) Trevino	pl & w carnations		black ink lettering					unfinished wood	parallel		
Fig. 3.39 (west) Torres	pl & w carnations		black ink lettering					unfinished wood	parallel		rock at base
Fig. 3.40 unknown	wreath w/ ribbons, bows, roses and carnations, w roses, baby's breath, greenery							w wrought iron	parallel, behind bus shelter		

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

Colour Key: b = black g = green pu = purple r = red w = white y = yellow

	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /relics	other
Fig. 3.42 unknown	blue, r, w & y flowers, greenery, funeral arrang. "Dad"							w wrought iron	parallel	open bible in blue and white plastic	gold bracelet
Fig. 3.43 Biggs	y, r, pu tulips, p dahlia, sunflowers, y daffodils, white lilies, y, pl pansies	photos of Tara, hand- written notes	black plaque, white lettering		"Lion King" figurines, snow- dones,			w wood	perpen- dicular	w ceramic angel	base is also a planter
Fig. 3.45 Beltran	sunflow- ers, flowers planted around base of cross	photo of Frank	gold plaque, black lettering					w wood	perpen- dicular, in median	b & w picture of Jesus	rocks at base, circle of rocks around cross

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

Colour Key: b = black g = green pl = pink pu = purple r = red w = white y = yellow

	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	automo- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.47 Franklin, Suggs, Crane	y daffodils, pl, pu roses, w carnations, butter- cups, greenery		silver plaque, etched letters					w wood	45%		scarred eye is decorated with floral spray
Fig. 3.49 Spelr	pu roses, pu lilies, pu & pl carna- tions		maroon plaque, beige lettering					w wood	parallel		concrete pawprint, bead necklace on cross
Fig. 3.50 Pickwell	r poinset- tias, potted plant		black plastic lettering	yes		Xmas wreath, Easter bunny figurine		w wood	perpen- dicular, in median		empty wicker basket, some- thing used to be attached to top

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

Colour Key: b = black g = green pl = pink pu = purple r = red w = white y = yellow

	flora	notes /photos	inscription	automobile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.51 Stackable	pl roses, pl, pu carnations, pl, w flowers		gold plaque, b lettering					w wood	perpendicular	"Alive in the Lord" on plaque	flowers secured w / w ribbon
Fig. 3.52 Gullacher			carved, b ink lettering					w wood	45° angle		numbers down lower part of vertical, large rocks at base
Fig. 3.53 Vela	r poinsettias, y, r marigolds, autumn leaves, holly, greenery, pine cones		blue plaque, w lettering			poinsettias, pine cones, holly, autumn bouquet		w wood	parallel		large red bow

Roadside Cross Memorial Inventory

Colour Key: b = black g = green pl = pink pu = purple r = red w = white y = yellow

	flora	notes /photos	inscrip- tion	autom- bile parts	toys /sports	seasonal items	school- related items	materials & finish	relation to road	magico- religious items /refs	other
Fig. 3.54 unknown (Payson and Abernathy ?)								w wrought iron	perpen- dicular, in median		
Fig. 3.55 Deoloz	w carna- tions		black plaque, w lettering,		miniature teddy bear			w wood	perpen- dicular, in median	angels on plaque, "God" took an angel"	two vases at base, bear affixed w/ribbon

Chapter Four

Bereavement Made Manifest

In chapter three, I described roadside memorials in Austin and the surrounding area, noting the varying elements of cross construction and offering. In the following pages, I examine the location of the assemblages in the grieving processes of several memorial participants, specifically the relatives and friends of Tara Biggs, Tammy Franklin, Nathan Crane, Heather Werchan and Heather Lamay. The discussion is based on interviews and theoretical approaches including feminist conceptions of reproductive labour, the vernacular in art and religion, and contemporary views of grieving processes in North America.

The memorials for the five teenagers have been the subject of considerable community attention, and some media coverage due to the nature of the accidents. As previously noted, the deaths they commemorate are not attributed to drunk driving, but rather youthful inexperience. In two instances, the driver was killed along with her passenger(s). In the other two, the drivers survived and now actively attend to the memorials for their friends. I address the negotiation of guilt and blame later in the chapter. As humanizing, yet apolitical structures (see chapter five for discussion of MADD crosses in the Austin area), they are affecting examples of grief expressed in a public manner and space. At each memorial, different understandings of people and events are constructed and consumed through an ephemeral confluence of item and image.¹

¹The idea of ephemerality and consumption in Mexican and Texas-Mexican Day of the Dead tradition is thoughtfully discussed by Kay Turner and Pat Jasper (1994).

The Art of Domestic Experience

The communicative power that roadside crosses accrue as a result of the tension between private and public combined with the commemoration of "ordinary" lives and memories contrasts sharply with many traditional responses to death in North American society. Many scholars and health care practitioners, such as Geoffrey Gorer, Jack Kamerman, Kathy Charmaz and Carol Silverman have studied contemporary responses to death in North American and Britain, noting the increasing isolation of bereaved individuals and contributing societal conditions, as well as the development, Kamerman writes, of "mechanisms . . . in American society to keep death out of sight and out of minds," (2). Charmaz provides an overview of the "social construction of the denial of death" and attendant analyses (88-96). She concludes that because actions speak as loudly as words, to understand more fully everyday attitudes toward death, including denial, a researcher must attempt to come to the world of the subject, particularly when events in the subject's world pertain to death . . ." (98). The experience of loss in the twentieth century, documented by Jessica Mitford in her oft-cited *The American Way of Death* (1963), frequently involves the medical establishment and the death care industry in processes that minimize contact between the deceased and his or her survivors.

In nineteenth century America, however, death often took place in the home, as did preparation for burial and visitation by the community. Nearby cemeteries further strengthened the immediacy of death in the sphere of everyday activity (Laderman 23-37) . Indeed, even in the current context of bereavement, the home symbolizes seclusion and detachment from the everyday activity of the public sphere (Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson 46). Roadside

crosses and memorial assemblages occupy a space in the public landscape, and imagination, in between the home and the often geographically removed modern cemetery. As revealed by informants' statements in the previous chapter, many aspects of unofficial memorial maintenance are further indicative of their interstitial nature, as their continued existence evidences a combination of tacit civic support and active community involvement. The parents, and especially the mothers of the deceased, however, often assume the more mundane tasks of clearing trash from the site, repainting or replacing a cross and clearing weathered floral displays.

Viewed as an extension of domestic activity, corollaries to the roadside cross tradition in Texas are observable in the complex of custom and practice that constitute Day of the Dead celebrations throughout Latin America and the United States.² Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloë Sayer discuss traditional observances across Mexico in detail. Generally speaking, women cook the majority of the food items placed on altars and left at the cemeteries. In those families who own bread ovens, the men of the household do the baking, after the women have mixed the dough (18, 78). Freddy Méndez, a resident of La Congregación del Tajín in the state of Veracruz, for example, describes the way in which his mother prepares chocolate ornaments to adorn the house and especially the altar, as taught by her mother and grandmother. Prior to the festival, women across Veracruz produce cooking utensils and incense burners in fired clay for use during the holiday (77-79).

² See, for example, the work of Olivia Cadaval (1985) on the Day of the Dead celebrations in Washington, D.C.; James Griffith's (1992) observations of both Mexican-American and O'odham customs in southern Arizona; and Kay Turner and Pat Jasper (1994) with regard to the custom in south Texas, particularly its economic aspects.

I am particularly interested here in the pattern that emerges in the data collected by Carmichael and Sayer, which includes interviews with a number of artists and craftspeople across Mexico variously involved with the yearly observance, as well as an examination of historic travellers' accounts. In general, women are involved in the preparation of items for use inside the home, or at the cemetery. Men, however, participate in a wider range of activities: reciting prayers for the dead (professional "prayer-makers," or *rezanderos*); going from house to house and singing *alabanzas* in groups of four; or performing as *Xantolo* dancers, sometimes dressed as women, in village streets (plate 23A, 81-82).

The public/private, male/female dichotomy is echoed in the St. Joseph's Day activities of Italian-American women described by Kay Turner and Suzanne Seriff in their 1987 article "'Giving an Altar': The Ideology of Reproduction in a St. Joseph's Day Feast." The altars mentioned in the title are those cooperatively designed and constructed by women in a small Texas town, assemblages which connect "sacred and secular realms by providing a locus of communication, a place for the performance of belief in the home" (448). Their manifest meaning is a tangible, edible thanks offered to Saint Joseph in return for succor in a time of family crisis such as illness, debt or separation. The altar is laden with an abundance of special foods such as *così figli*, *cucchidagli* and *canoli*.

The formal presentation of the altar occurs after a ritual reenactment of the Biblical account of Joseph and Mary's arrival in Bethlehem, in which the Holy Family is played by community members chosen by the woman giving the altar. The reenactment ends with the ritual feasting of the actors and the community, at which time men serve the food prepared by the women.

While the Saint Joseph's day preparations and presentations are not connected with death custom, the similarities between women's (and men's) creative labour for this and the customs previously described are notable as reflections of an ideology of reproduction. As conceived by Mary O'Brien, the "maternally derived ideology of reproduction foregrounds social practices based on affiliation, concern for others, sharing, caring, gifting, and religious beliefs" (Turner and Seriff 447). Such practices certainly encompass the work and artistry evident in Day of the Dead home and cemetery decoration, the St. Joseph's day traditions of Italian-American women and the memorialization of accident victims with roadside crosses as detailed here. Indeed, as Turner and Seriff assert, it is just such practices that can ground the feminist ontology developed by Carolyn Whitbeck that, denouncing the necessity of the self-other opposition that pervades western, and largely patriarchal, scholarship, is defined as "the mutual realization of people" (Turner and Seriff 458). Whitbeck gives as abstract examples "nursing and caring for the sick, disabled and elderly, . . . counseling and various forms of spiritual practice" (75). While St. Joseph's day traditions stem from the desire to acknowledge the saint's intervention in the past, the aforementioned death customs concern the immediate spiritual needs of grieving individuals and communities.

Personalized spiritual practice, when based and performed in the home, may be viewed as vernacular religion (Primiano, Vernacular Religion 44), or the "domestication of religion" (Sered 516). Both imply an active manipulation of religious tenets or iconography for highly personal use, and as such are closely related to materials or built environments studied by folklorists and others as examples of "vernacular architecture." Indeed, as Primiano states,

. . . the beliefs of individuals themselves radiate and influence the surrounding environments. The verbal, behavioral, and material expressions of religious belief mean a variety of instruments and occasions of expressive culture which can be categorized under the rubric of visual or performed arts, public and private cultural performances, and individual acts. These would include but not necessarily be exhausted by the following: speech, music and song, dance, mime, ritual and drama, bodily communication, the manifold uses of writing, foodways, costume, culturally encoded architecture, and *the permanent and ephemeral objects within domestic and public environments* (emphasis added). (44-45)

Moreover, Primiano recognizes the presence of the vernacular not only in the domestic, which often assumes a degree of privacy, but in the public sphere as well.

Correspondingly, it is the ephemeral aspects and objects of built environments that Angela Kwolek-Folland singles out for attention in gendered analyses of vernacular architecture. She writes that "many contributions to vernacular architecture are ephemeral, a fact particularly true in the case of women. In our historical experience of gender, the trappings and interior decorations of buildings, some of which are seasonal, are important to the meaning and experience of vernacular space" (6). Certainly the extension of the scope must also include, in the case of material culture studies, the ephemeral in more public settings, specifically the ways in which women—and men, as discussed below—(re)create and (re)present various events and ideas in ritual altars, yard art, shrines and memorials.

Analytical Intersections

Excessive speed may have been a factor in the accident that killed Bowie students Lisa Wendenburg and Heather Lamay a little over a year earlier. Lisa was driving the car when she apparently lost control of the vehicle. It crossed the

center line of Manchaca Road, and hit another car. Heather, who was in the passenger seat, died at the scene. Lisa died the following day (Hoppe and Gonzalez). When I interviewed Heather's mother, Shilah, in May of 1997, she said that , "they were killed Saturday afternoon, Saturday night there was a cross put up, made by the kids that night." The two crosses, one for Heather and one for Lisa no longer stand at the accident site, casualties of a road-widening project.

At the request of the Texas Department of Transportation, Shilah and her husband, John, had first moved the assemblage back a few yards, to the fence line of the nearest property owner. Later on, they removed the crosses, leaving a granite piece bearing an etching of the two women and a wreath. Shortly before I interviewed Shilah, they removed those items in preparation for a move to another state. Barring photographic documentation, the description of the memorial that follows was pieced together from interviews and newspaper articles.

Shilah identified Lacey Merritt, a classmate and friend of the two young women, as the driving force behind the memorial.

There was two temporary crosses that the kids wrote all over. And basically what they wrote on those crosses was all goodbye notes, and we have one of those crosses. I mean we took those down simply because they were not going to last. Her best friend is the one, Lacey Merritt, put up, they made a cement cross and it had the girls' name on it, and that's, you know, they put that up and put a heart around it. They did all that. We didn't have a thing to do with it. What we did do, though, at the site, was we had two, a granite picture made with just the girls' picture on it.

Shilah's reference to the "heart around it," concerns the heart-shaped border, fashioned out of nearby rocks, around the white, cement cross. The east-facing

memorial, constructed at the spot where Lisa's car came to rest, quickly became a gathering place.

My mother spoke of seeing groups of teenagers at the memorial, for several weeks after the accident, when driving home from work in the afternoon. Questionnaire respondents reported seeing offerings such as beer bottles and coins at the site (see chapter five). When I asked Shilah about items left there, she said,

Yeah, there were coins. They would leave cigarettes. Let's see, I'm trying to think. Of course, they've always left flowers. I would go every once in a while and see a single rose. We had "The Rose," that song, sung at Heather's wedding [sic], and my husband had sent her a dozen red roses the day before at school, and so the rose, anything with rose has always had a pretty special—so I notice that if it's kids who are leaving something for Heather, they'll usually leave a rose, you know. . . .

Items were left at the site up until the time that the cross was removed. In addition, the teens planted a small flower bed, also bordered by rocks.

Heather Lamay's mother, Shilah, emphasized the fact that the memorial was the kids' enterprise in statements such as the following: "Essentially, from our perspective, we were, that was unrelated to us. I mean, we did not have anything to do with it." However, her comments also revealed that she and her husband did in fact spend a great deal of time visiting the site in an effort to show support for the victims' friends. In keeping with O'Brien's ideology of reproduction, Shilah and John showed concern for the teenagers in a time of crisis for all involved. John was especially worried about the reaction of Lisa and Heather's friends, Shilah explained, saying,

We went by. My husband was, more so than me, he was very concerned about making sure that some of these kids, they had lost two friends earlier in the year, and so he was more concerned, "I

don't want these kids, somebody to, you know, to try to commit suicide." So we went to the, to there, and spent two nights with the kids. We went on Monday night right after she was killed and I believe it was Tuesday night we stopped by. Then after that, of course, we kind of moved on with our life and, although we had kids at our house every day for, what, a week and a half, something like that.

Although the cross, as a symbol (see chapter two), was not important to the Lamays, they considered it essential to be present at the memorial for the emotional well-being of the young people gathering there.

As noted in the previous chapter, Bowie students lost another classmate in May of 1997, in the one-car wreck that claimed the life of Heather Werchan. Like the memorial for Lamay and Wendenburg, the large cross on Slaughter Lane bearing Heather's name was constructed and installed by classmates rather than by family members. Her father, James, explained

As far as Heather's, it never, we had never thought about it and it wasn't—she, her friends that she ran around with, she dated two boys in that group. And they were good friends. They were the ones that actually, together they put the cross up. They decided to put the cross up and it was, I guess it was probably about a week after the accident or after the funeral that they put it up. They decided to put it up.

The Werchans were not upset by the young men's decision to memorialize Heather publicly. Moreover, James and his wife, Ruby, have assumed care of certain aspects of the site. In addition to changing the floral displays seasonally, James explained that

It's a grass median. There's a wide median there. And I mow the grass, you know, on the other side of the tree and a pretty good ways back away from the cross toward Bowie. So I keep it looking nice and maintain it.

Ordinarily, city crews mow such medians. Here, James reveals that not only have Heather's family and friends utilized city property for her memorial, they have also taken over its maintenance.

The Werchan family now finds the cross a consoling presence. As lifelong Lutherans, they are comfortable with the cross's symbolism. In contrast, Shilah thinks that the cross, as a Christian symbol, was not particularly meaningful to Heather and Lisa's friends. When I asked if those who had constructed and visited it were practicing Christians, she laughed and said,

Very definitely not. Very definitely not her friends, you know. No. We, uh, you know, I don't think the cross itself from a Christian standpoint has any significance to these kids. I think they see it more as a memorial, yeah. And see, even for us, from our perspective, a cross to me is, it can easily be an idol. So, see, I'm very careful that I don't, you know, to me the spiritual part of this is something inside of us. I don't see it as things from the outside. And so for us that's why, in a sense even though we may be Christians, the cross isn't necessarily a form of any meaning to me at a personal level. But, no, definitely, and you know, based on a few of the other people I know, it doesn't seem to be related at all to kids who tend to be Christians at all.

Even in light of their views about the cross and its place in her family's beliefs, she and John wanted to support the young people in the maintenance of the assemblage. The relationships expressed through their standpoint as described above may be understood as mutually achieved, rather than oppositional, or self-other. The teens' use of a symbol which holds little meaning for Shilah and John, and perhaps negligible meaning for themselves in Shilah's assessment, did not preclude cooperative participation in the construction of the memorial. Indeed, Shilah and John's informal counsel of the teens, which I interpret as reproductive labour, extended beyond participation in the memorial to their home. As Shilah

explained, even after she felt that her family was ready to “move on,” grieving youths continued to stop by their house.

Further, as noted above, Shilah considered the concern for the teenagers’ emotional well-being to be more her husband’s than her own. She stated that

Even after [Heather] was killed, I tended to focus in more on my three kids, whereas my husband would tend to kind of help—not that he didn’t focus on my three kids, but he also kind of included the other kids, you know, her friends and stuff a lot.

Nonetheless, she went with him to visit the memorial in the days following the accident, and on subsequent occasions such as the first anniversary of Heather’s death.

Likewise, the anniversary visit to the accident site was made, at least in part, in response to the needs of someone other than herself. Shilah said

Well, this last January was the year anniversary. And I said to John, “I just really feel like I want something there on that year anniversary.” Because it was blank. So, I made just, I had a little wreath made and then, kind of cowboy-like, and it said “In Loving Memory of Heather and Lisa” and then we put the girls’, the little granite piece back up. . . . We had a lot of things going on that day, but we just felt like we wanted to put something so it wasn’t just blank on the anniversary. And, it was just a way of us knowing we remembered her, you know. And I think a lot of kids were calling us at that time and asking us, you know, where the stuff was and if it was going to be able to go back in.

The above statement also indicates that Shilah and John, in their participation in the roadside memorial, took roles as caretakers of both womens’ memories.

Lisa’s family was not involved in the construction or maintenance of the site. The granite piece depicting both women was ordered and installed at the site by the Lamays, as was the wreath Shilah had made a year later. Thus, the Lamays laboured not only to preserve the memory of both their daughter and her friend, but to support the friends they left behind. Shilah made all concerns her own.

Her attention to the accident site, evident in her desire that it not be “blank” on the anniversary, was echoed in comments made by Heather Werchan’s father, James and Nathan Crane’s mother, Susan. In all three accidents, the driver lost control of the vehicle, and in the case of Werchan and Crane, the cars collided with trees. Marking the accident site, therefore, entails the public recognition of responsibility to no small degree. As above, the cross for Heather was made by two friends, one of whom, Christopher Johnston, was driving the car at the time of the accident. Regardless of the cross’s origin, Werchan knows that “one way or another we would still go down that road. And it’s always nice and comforting to see that there” (Fig. 4.1). Elaborating further, he stressed the significance, both positive and negative, of the site.

You know, we’d never want to forget about her. So, you know, just because that’s there we wouldn’t, if it wasn’t there we wouldn’t forget about her anyway. But it’s just a nice tribute to her. And even though, unfortunately, it had to happen. But it was her time to go home anyway, to see her heavenly father.

James understands Heather’s death as ultimately purposeful. Therefore, the responsibility for the accident rests with God, rather than with Johnston. Christopher and his mother also help decorate and maintain the memorial site. James said

... she just replaced the letters. They were, I think they were dark green letters, I think, before. Now they’re yellow and she painted flowers on them. And she planted, they planted a little miniature rose shrub next to it also. [Fig. 4.2]

Caring for the site—constructing its meaning and thus the meaning of the accident—also involves the construction and negotiation of role and responsibility.



Fig. 4.1 Cross for Heather Werchan constructed by two of her friends.



Fig. 4.2 Miniature rose bush at Werchan's memorial, planted by Christopher Johnston and his mother.

Margie believes that because the circumstances of the accident that killed Tammy, Nathan and Jeff were somewhat mysterious, it was predestined. Noting that there were no other cars involved and no witnesses came forward, she said, "God had a certain amount of days for Tammy. She was in heaven the instant she died." While authorities maintain that Tammy was speeding when she lost control of the vehicle, Margie says she knows "that isn't true." During our conversation, she stressed Tammy's driving skills, the fact that she had taken driving lessons and that she was the best driver of all Margie's children, regardless of what I or others might have read in the newspaper.

As Margie continues to struggle with the circumstances of her daughter's unexpected death, she also grapples with the knowledge that two other youths (Nathan and Jeff) died as well. She stated that Susan has continued to be friendly toward the Franklin family since the accident, alluding to the fact that Susan does not openly blame Tammy or her family for Nathan's death. Both Susan and Margie, however, mentioned that Jeff's mother reacted rather more negatively. In the course of our discussion about the memorial for Tammy, Jeff and Nathan on Guadalupe Street, Susan Crane said,

I wanted something there that was a connection. I didn't want it to be just a lost place. To me that was not, it is a place of violence, but it was not, to me it was more of a, well like I said the last place where I feel like the spirit was last. It's not, I mean, I don't think Jeff's mother, I think that she was very angry about it. So that I know that would not be a place of endearment for her. You know, and I, to say endearment is a horrible word, because a place of a death is not an endearing place, but because of the last place.

Regardless of the circumstances of her son's death, Susan wished to mark the spot for herself as the teenagers' friends first had. At the same time, she helped provide a place for the school community to grieve (Fig. 4.3).³



Fig. 4.3 Memorial for Franklin, Crane and Suggs that incorporates scarred tree.

The site is approximately two miles from the school that the three teenagers attended, a private, religious institution that attracts students from across the city. Susan, too, worried about the emotional impact of the triple fatality on the student body at large, saying

I guess one other thing that that cross does, is it, well I've already mentioned that, but to me, it was traumatic for me. And I knew that it was for those kids at school and a lot of things that I did, not only were for me, but I wanted to do them for the kids at school. Because I wanted them to have a way to deal with it.

Susan did not have a partner at the time of Nathan's death; however, dealing with the tragedy was far from a solitary endeavor.

³ Tammy's parents and Nathan's mother are the primary caretakers of the memorial for the three teenagers. Jeff's mother, to whom Susan refers here, has never been involved. Jeff's father lives in Dallas, about two hundred miles from Austin.

Although Susan and Margie often redecorate their parts of the memorial independently, their labour, or “grief work” applies to the school community at large.⁴ Both women believed it important to include the tree that was struck in the assemblage. Susan explained why.

You know, since that was the scene of the accident and the tree that's there, if you notice the tree the bark is off. And that was from the accident. In the photo that I have of the wreck that was in the paper, they, you can see the different kind of things there. They had the IVs and things for the children while they were trying to get the jaws of life to get them out. They had that hanging from the tree, and I know a lot of the kids went there or were aware of that. So I think that a lot of them went there to deal with the emotions that they had. . . .

While Susan admits that it was a traumatic time for her, she reveals that she was thinking about the accident victims' friends as well—what they had seen or heard, and how they might have been affected. She recognized their need to grieve and attempted to address it through the transformation of the accident site into a memorial.

Vicki Biggs also believes the memorial constructed at the scene of her daughter's accident to be an important place for the entire community. It plays an integral part in the grieving process, she noted, saying,

I think it's a big part of the process for people. And it also, I think, also too what it does is give people—kids, adults, whatever—a place to go. A place to, because, you know, [Tara's] friends tell me all the time that when they're feeling down or they've got a problem or whatever that they'll go up there and sit at the cross. And then they'll feel better when they leave. So I feel like to them it's, it's a

⁴Grief work, as described by Jack Kamerman, involves the expression of grief facilitating a return to normal levels of functioning and may include, for culturally variable periods of time, “*bodily distress, a preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt, hostility, and alteration or loss of normal patterns of conduct*” [emphasis in original]. Although grief work is necessarily “painful and difficult,” failure to work through bereavement often results in severe, and sometimes pathological, grief reactions (66-7).

place to go, someplace that they feel like Tara's still there, you know, and I, it's hard to explain.

It was cooperatively constructed, and still bears the imprint of many hands—the notes from Cara, the plaque that reads “We love and miss you.” Vicki has taken over most of the responsibility for the maintenance of the entire assemblage now, and said that she and her husband, Ronnie, and her daughter, Crystal, decorate more at the cross than at the cemetery.



Fig. 4.4 View of Tara Biggs's memorial facing oncoming traffic on FM 620.

Tara's classmates continue to contribute to the site, as well. Vicki told me:

That cross, up there, really means a lot to the kids. The kids go up there a lot. When it's holidays, or it's anniversaries, or, it's just like here at Christmas. I went up there and put poinsettias out, and decorated it, you know, for the holidays, for Christmas and put a candy cane, and this and that. Well, I had several people calling me wanting to do something. One of her best friends went up and put garland, you know, around the cross, and another one came up and brought a little angel . . .

Additionally, her commitment to the public nature of the assemblage is such that she has not been troubled when something has been taken away. She said,

The only thing that ever happened, and I think—'cause during football season each year, the Cavalette moms do mums for all the Cavalettes. And they're all alike and everything, so we always do one for Tara and hang it on the cross. And then I always bring it back home and then Crystal keeps it as a keepsake and stuff. And when I went up there to get it, it was gone. Somebody had taken it. But nothing else was touched. So I really feel like somebody took it that knew Tara. That it wasn't stealing it, that really wanted it as a keepsake for them. Other than that, no one's ever touched anything up there, which makes me happy as can be.

The act of taking a memento from the cross is in agreement with Vicki's conception of the site, even if an item is removed anonymously. She understands it to be a place where many people go to feel close to Tara.

I've driven by and seen cars stopped there and some of the kids up there, or, they tell me all the time, like, one of her friends, Jamie, she says she goes up there and talks to her all the time [laughs]. She said, you know, anything big going on in her life and she goes up there and asks her to be her guardian angel and to pray for her and make, help her get through it, or whatever. They kind of use that as, everybody, I don't know, everybody feels, that knew Tara, that were close to Tara, which was a lot of people!

Her efforts to maintain the memorial emphasize her acknowledgment of the community's participation in her grieving process, and she in theirs, a mutual realization that honors the needs of bereaved individuals and groups, such as

Tara's dance team, the Cavalettes. The Werchans understand Heather's memorial similarly. James has noted that although the site has never been disturbed, nor have items been taken away, he regularly finds other offerings.

The seasonal, or event-centred nature of the decorating that is done at roadside memorials—such as placing a custom-made homecoming mum at a cross during football season—underscores the transitory nature of the assemblages, as does the very real threat of destruction due to roadway construction or safety considerations. It is imperative that not only the crosses or other more permanent structures be documented, but that the ephemera be equally noted. The memorial for Heather Lamay and Lisa Wendenburg is already gone, and that for Tammy, Nathan and Jeff has seen at least three incarnations. As noted above, Kwolek-Folland's call for vernacular architecture studies to consider transient, as well as permanent characteristics of vernacular structures, is certainly applicable here.

It is equally important to recognize the way in which the ephemeral nature of the memorial sites facilitates participation. As noted by Turner and Jasper with regard to Day of the Dead gravesite decoration customs in Texas, "... participants in the tradition know that their offerings inevitably will be consumed by time and nature. Someone who buys an impermanent product will have reason to return" (145). The maintenance of an outdoor memorial assemblage including items such as fresh and artificial flowers, stuffed animals and notes necessitates regular attention. Thus the memorials represent the construction and consumption of memory, while simultaneously acting as a reflection of the attendants' own lives.

Religious beliefs are bound up in the expressions of everyday life—a white cross, facing east, adorned with plastic beads, or a note from a friend. While Shilah questions the value of the cross in her spiritual beliefs and those of her daughter's friends, James, Margie, Susan and Vicki embrace the cross as a symbol of hope. Tara's gravesite happened to be in the shadow of a white, fifteen-foot-high cross. Vicki explained that she and her husband had not previously known where she would be buried, as they had purchased the family plots some years earlier. When they went to see the site, following Tara's accident, Vicki asked to see the plot. She said, "And so they took us out there, and I went, 'What more appropriate?' I mean, she's buried right there below that big cross. And I was like, 'Wow!'" Although, as Vicki says, the Biggs family is not "very, very, very religious," they hold firm Christian beliefs.

We do go to church. We don't go to church every Sunday. We believe, you know, that you don't necessarily have to go to church to believe and to be a Christian. Yes, you should be [laughs], but with our lives, we're one of those people, we make excuses. But we, we're very religious and we believe that Tara's in heaven and we're going to see her. One of these days. It may be awhile, but [laughs]. . . .

The cross, and the decorating that accompanies it, has become an integral part of Vicki's expression of spiritual convictions.

The cross constructed for Tammy, Jeffrey and Nathan is viewed similarly by Margie Franklin and Susan Crane. Susan wanted the cross to face east, "because Jesus will come back in the east."⁵ Additionally, in Christian belief the cross signifies death-as-transition. Susan explained:

⁵ However, when she and her friend, Jim, were setting the cross in the concrete, she thinks, he gave it a bit of a twist at the last minute as he was securing it in its base. As a result, it does not have a true east-west stance.

I'm Baptist, because of the fact that I believe in, in when you die you go straight to heaven, somehow or another the cemetery did not hold anything for me. I mean, I do, I do flowers at the cemetery also, but it did not, I don't go there. To me, the last place that Nathan was was at that tree. You know, that was, the symbolism is there and even though I go to the cemetery, I don't, it didn't seem like that was where I was drawn because he's not really at the cemetery. For some reason or another this location is where he was, so I would go there and I wanted to put a cross there because that was where I went the most. And so I guess the symbolism is that that's kind of where I felt his spirit was last.

In accordance with her religious beliefs, Susan views the accident site, marked with the cross, as more hopeful and comforting than the cemetery. Like Susan, Margie feels connected to the accident site because it was where her daughter was last alive on this earth—"that's where everything ended and began."

Margie and Susan generally place flowers at the site for Easter, Christmas, the anniversary of the accident and the teenagers' birthdays. Margie attributes her continuing desire to maintain the site to her sex, saying "I know it has a lot to do with being a woman, [you want to] make sure everything's in order." Susan, especially, has taken great care with the decorating, even going so far as to make arrangements with someone else to change the flowers when she has been unable to herself.

... I'm in the process now, once it gets a little enough away from Christmas, I'm going to do the January flowers. Of course, I'm fixing to go into the Valentine's Day flowers. I have been doing seasons. Each of the holidays and things like that. There's been a time or two when I've been out of town and I've put something there and it kind of disappeared right away, or something like that, or I thought someone, I was going to have someone else do it for me and they either didn't get there or whatever ... if I could not go there, then I had arranged for someone else to take it over there for me, if I was out of town.

Every time she changes the flowers at the cross, she tries to change them at the cemetery as well.

Margie, Susan, James and Shilah all spoke of cleaning or reorganizing the assemblages. Susan said

You know, the flowers have been—one time, one Christmas several years back, the flowers and things that are there, someone threw them everywhere, the little tree and everything that I'd put. They were, I couldn't find them, I had to start all over and finally I found them. And occasionally, I found them off in the bushes where they used to have trash there. And occasionally the grounds keepers would find things and bring them back and put them over there for me.

The statement refers to the times that has Susan visited the cross only to find her previous decorations scattered about the site. James and his wife, Ruby, have assumed care of certain aspects of Heather's memorial. As previously noted, in addition to changing the floral displays seasonally, James mows the grass in the median, a task he has apparently taken over from city maintenance crews. In performing such acts, Heather's family and friends not only utilize city property for her memorial, they have also taken over responsibility for its maintenance in every aspect. Shilah and her husband regularly checked the site of Heather and Lisa's cross for refuse.

We asked the kids, I said, "Please keep the trash, you know?" Lot of smokers. I mean, these cowboy types think they have to have Marlboro cigarettes. You know, so we would, my husband and I, one of us would kind of try to like, on a weekly basis, you know, stop by and make sure that things were kept clean.

Thus, labour included not only providing decorative elements, but maintaining the overall orderliness of the memorial site as one might straighten up one's own home or yard.

Grey Gundaker, in a study of Halloween and other decorations in an Alabama cemetery, writes that the life and death symbolism of the holiday, together with the traditional images (angels, praying hands, lambs) found in

graveyards, help “construct interlocking worlds and open lines of communication for the living, the dead, and the spirits in between” (263). Displays more often associated with home and yard adornment, she asserts, allow bereaved individuals to incorporate the dead into the world of the living, and vice versa—a function, I would argue, also performed by roadside memorial assemblages. Changing the flowers, seasonal items and even the figurines or photos left at the memorial crosses described in this chapter keeps the memory of loved ones highly accessible and vital.

Grief Work

In a quantitative study of seventy-eight cultures, Paul Rosenblatt, Patricia Walsh and Douglas Jackson documented emotional responses to death, including crying, anger, self-mutilation, aggression toward others, and fear (e.g., fear of a corpse, fear of ghosts). Their survey, which included groups as far-flung as Thai villagers, Pawnees, Trobrianders and Egyptian Fellahins, did not produce results as disparate as one might expect. In fact, the trio’s work serves as confirmation of certain gender stereotypes: women tend to cry and self-mutilate more frequently, while men more often express themselves through anger and aggression (144-46). Also noted are various tie-breaking rituals of “destroying, giving away, or temporarily putting aside personal property of the deceased” (68). What the authors do not address are ways in which grief manifests itself in the *production* (or offering) of material goods.

Roadside memorials and altars such as those connected with Day of the Dead celebrations materially express such profound feelings of loss and remembrance. In the examples detailed here, the remembrances speak not only to the creator(s) of the assemblage, but to family and friends, and perhaps even

to the wider community. Phyllis Silverman, in a study of widows, battered women and young birthmothers who have given their children up for adoption attributes the severe and often debilitating depression experienced by women in mourning to the inability of western society to acknowledge and support the bereaved. Grieving women, Silverman believes, suffer a double loss, losing the part of their identity based on their relationship with the deceased, and societal support at the same time (23).

The key then, is to develop a new identity as part of the grieving process (Kamerman 72). For those whose loss is associated with sex, violence or death, such as my interviewees, the process can be extraordinarily difficult.

In many ways . . . society conspires with women to reinforce their initial numbness and their reluctance to acknowledge the meaning of their losses. Death, for example, is not an acceptable topic of conversation. Moreover, it is regarded as a failure, an affront which should not have been allowed to happen. (Silverman 29-30)

The "numbness" mentioned above is one condition that prevents people from undertaking meaningful grief work. The completion of grief work results in, according to Erich Lindeman, timely "emancipation from the bondage to the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships" (qtd. in Kamerman: 66). The work of those who have lost someone unexpectedly is often rendered exceedingly difficult (Charmaz 142, 289-291). Kamerman attributes the inability of bereaved individuals to accomplish meaningful work of this kind to the paucity of meaningful death-related rituals available in the western context.

His statements reiterate the pleas of Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson for either the ritualization of death customs already practiced to some degree in the United States, or more widespread acceptance of the rituals, whether grounded

in formal religious or civil culture or not, that individuals and groups have developed for themselves in order to work through a loss in a more timely and successful fashion (109-11). It may be, however, that the lack of codified mourning rituals in North American society bemoaned by psychologists and sociologists has left individuals cultural space in which to fashion their own.

Conclusion

In 1959, David Mandelbaum noted what he termed the deritualized nature of American culture in general, along with his belief that new rituals would arise. In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which a number of individuals in Austin, especially women, have adapted and reshaped a custom with roots in the Spanish conquest of the Americas into an extension of the reproductive labour they are accustomed to performing in and around the home.

In south Texas, Kay Turner and Pat Jasper have found that Day of the Dead activity centers on cemetery cleaning and decoration, which more clearly "demarcate the difference between the living and the dead" (140). The authors stress the social impulse anchoring the annual event in community practice. While the dead are remembered and honored, so too are extant community ties between family and friends reaffirmed.

While the Mexicans interviewed by Carmichael and Sayer formally greet their dead once a year with meticulously constructed and ornamented altars, my interviewees honor the memory of their children annually, seasonally and daily. Vicki estimates that she drives through the intersection where Tara was killed an average of ten times as she goes about her daily routine. She said,

But I go by there so much, now, that, you know, I just—I know this is going to sound silly, but as I go by, I go, 'Hi, sweetie!' And I just keep on driving. So, you know, no, it

doesn't bother me, I guess. I guess, in a way, it makes me feel better. Makes me feel closer to her because she's, she's out here.

Tara is still an important part of Vicki's life.

In their self-assigned grief work, the individuals I interviewed have engaged in a process of reifying relationships and personal convictions—acts of regeneration (Turner and Jasper 149). The construction and maintenance of the memorial assemblages has allowed them to incorporate their memories of, and abiding affection for, their loved ones into the everyday life of their families (Zimmerman 5). Simultaneously, they have sustained the community ties the deceased may have had in life by (re)creating a public site which friends may visit anonymously and quickly, by simply driving past.

As memorials, roadside crosses are symbolically representative of such grief work. In contrast to the successful grieving process as envisioned by Kamerman, Lindemann and others, however, they do not always reach a state of completion. This is not to say the assemblages, or those who create them, have been unsuccessful, or failed in any sense. As Silverman writes,

The past is not cut out of the person's life and renounced, but rather the person changes [their] relationship to it. The gap between the past life and the future life is bridged more easily when elements of the past are incorporated into the present, but with an altered emphasis. (28)

Indeed, the memorials depict a rather more fluid understanding of life, death and the respective role of memory. Further, the participatory possibilities they afford play a part in the communicative processes of the crosses, especially as indicative of danger. Other functions performed by the crosses, as well as the attendant lessons drawn by area residents, are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Functions of the Cross

Folklorists such as William Bascom have emphasized the integrative functions of traditional culture—education, entertainment, validation and the maintenance of conformity, each of which are applicable to the present study. In addition, I will argue that roadside crosses function as agents of economic integration and social levelling. It is important to note, however, the non-integrative, or subversive functions of traditional culture as well. Functionalism does not adequately account for social conflict or change, but rather, resulting from its origins in the idea of socio-cultural evolution, embraces only those aspects of culture contributing to (re)integration (Doucette 132-33, Oring 67-80).¹ It is precisely in such *counter-hegemonic* expression that grieving individuals often find voice. Thus, a modified functionalist analysis is presented here.

The crosses “perform” social functions in their public representation of generally accepted, or at least tolerated religious belief (validation), their conformity to traditional memorial aesthetics (Barrera 279 - 80), their educational value as warning signs, and their ability to evoke an emotive reaction while serving as a diversion from the monotony of vehicular travel (entertainment). The memorial aesthetic figures into economic integration and social levelling in decorative choices of assemblage construction and

¹ See, for example Radner, and Greenhill and Tye, for essays concerning the subversive in traditional culture.

maintenance of the site. Whereas a cemetery displays an array of construction and decorative materials, from crudely fashioned crosses and plaques to elaborately detailed granite headstones and stone angels towering above equally impressive crypts, the range of materials utilized in the construction of roadside crosses in the Austin area is limited (as separate from the wider spectrum of decorative materials and items left at the crosses). Affluence is not essential to the erection of an eye-catching or well received memorial, nor is impoverishment an impediment. Further, the egalitarian nature of the memorials, and indeed of vehicular travel in general (McLuhan 197-200), plays a part in the educational function of the crosses, as viewers are reminded that everyone, regardless of income or status, inevitably faces death, often unexpectedly.

This chapter is primarily based on data obtained from questionnaires I administered to high school seniors (appendix three). I decided to focus on students at Crockett High School, in south Austin, for several reasons. Firstly, as an alumnus of the school, I was able to work with a former teacher of mine and make a connection with the participating students on the basis of shared experience. Secondly, Crockett is located in an area of the city in which there are a number of roadside crosses, not the least of which is across the street from the school (the memorial for Jacorey Williams described in chapter three). Thirdly, the school is attended by a mix of students, from different ethnic and economic backgrounds, that loosely mirrors the city's larger population. While given an option to include their names and phone numbers if they were interested in speaking with me privately, participants were not required to include any personal information. Many of them opted for total anonymity.

Additionally, I interviewed individuals connected to and employed by city, county and state governmental entities, as well as a random sampling of area residents. The analysis also incorporates the words and ideas of interviewees introduced in the third and fourth chapters.

Validation and Conformity

As discussed in chapter two, Travis county's largest religious group consists of adherents to Roman Catholicism, at 48.4% of the total population (Ramos 489). Christian belief and its general acceptance by area residents are manifest in the proliferation of religious symbols such as roadside crosses. The fact that they are seldom vandalized is further evidence of tacit approval.² Interestingly, however, only a small number of questionnaire respondents cited religious belief in their assessments of such crosses.

Jenny Stinson wrote that the crosses "remind me that I could die in a heartbeat and I have to be in the right standing with the Lord." Another student noted seeing "crosses signifying that the person was or is Christian." One individual defined roadside memorials as "a white cross with usually flowers or a picture of Jesus."

More explicit statements of personal belief came from the student who wrote that she contributes prayers to such sites. Another stated that "when I pass a marker that I know something about, I usually say a quick little prayer of friendship." Debbie Wimberly, a friend of Heather Lamay and Lisa

² Acts of vandalism, however, have occurred, as noted in chapter one. Margie Franklin has been disturbed more than once. Susan wonders if the acts of vandalism are the work of "punks or cultish-type children" who might collect such crosses, "anti-religion groups," or "someone that was real angry or unhappy about the wreck."

Wendenburg's, wrote "When I pass the site I turn off the radio and remember Lisa and Heather with a prayer." Interviewed by phone, she elaborated, saying that she also prays "for everybody to watch after everybody else." For Debbie, Jenny and the other teenagers quoted above, the crosses function similarly to the descansos and traveller's shrines described by Barrera, Griffith, Henzel and West, as special places at which one may offer prayers not only for the deceased, but for the living as well, regardless of denominational affiliation (Heather and Lisa were members of Protestant congregations). It is important to note that none of the students raised objections to their presence, nor deemed them inappropriate.

I asked Don Day, a witness to the accident that killed Darel Brad Gonzalez, if it bothered him to see a religious symbol by the side of the road. His answer was equivocal, as he stated, "No. I don't know, I think those things help people think. I mean, golly, it's something for people to remember." Texas Department of Transportation employee John Hurt asserted, in May of 1997, that to be fair, the state should either allow the display of any religious symbol, including the Star of David and the crescent moon, or none at all. He noted further that his office had received complaints about the religious overtones of roadside crosses. In February of 1998, Hurt informed me that the department had issued revised guidelines for the MADD markers which stated that "markers may be various types of symbols." Only one of my informants, however, a computer programmer in her late twenties, voiced strong opposition to the use of religious symbolism in such a manner. As a clear violation of church and state, she believes that no religious symbol is appropriate to a public memorial.

As discussed in chapters one and two, the prevalence of American civil

religion underlies the tacit acceptance and validation of Christian belief evidenced by the custom of erecting roadside crosses. The validation of belief is closely related to conformity to its tenets, a factor also important to the continued vitality of the tradition. While the crosses may not represent the exact beliefs associated with their origins in Mexico and the American southwest—especially the belief that persons dying suddenly without the benefit of last rites require the assistance, in the form of prayers, of the living to find peace after death—those detailed in chapter four are all basic to fundamental Christian doctrine.

Most often, the cross is accompanied by bunches of silk flowers. Not surprisingly, questionnaire respondents and other informants frequently noted the pattern, writing “I see many small white crosses usually with flowers.” One student compared markers in Austin with others s/he has seen in Mexico:

Most of the markings I've seen consist of crosses decorated with flowers and religious pictures. I've also seen small chapel-like structures in Mexico which have a gate that open so that you can put gifts inside.

Another student described those she saw most often, along with variations:

They are white crosses about 2-3 feet high. They usually have flowers (plastic) around them or on them, and sometimes even stuffed animals or letters or dedications on them.

Conformity to the beliefs associated with roadside crosses would also seem to inform and regularize memorial design. As presented in chapter three, the most common roadside memorial in the Austin area consists of a wooden cross, painted white, with some form of identifying lettering at the crosspiece.

Contributing decorative or personally meaningful items to the assemblages is another aspect of the custom. Several questionnaire

respondents described such participation, writing that they, or friends of theirs, had given money toward the cost of a cross or plaque, and/or left bouquets of flowers, candles, stuffed animals or other toys at various sites. One student stated that she "wrote a little message on the cross" erected for Heather Lamay and Lisa Wendenburg. Debbie Wimberly recalled that friends of Heather's once took a case of beer to the cross, and would sometimes drink half of one and pour the rest on the ground.

Education

Certainly roadside crosses perform an educational role in that they emphasize the hazards of routine vehicular travel. Their presence on city streets travelled by thousands every day underscores the danger that a society enamored of automobiles tends to disregard in favor of cars as symbols of "freedom and independence" (Steinhart 346). As noted in chapter three, the intersection that now features a memorial for Tara Biggs was known throughout the community as a dangerous one for years prior to the accident that killed her. When I asked Vicki Biggs if she and Tara's friends think of the cross as a warning, she replied,

It was so funny because after the accident happened, that cross was there, kids and parents would come up and say they would automatically slow down, every time, when they got to that spot. Not only because they wanted to see her cross, but because it was a warning.

Whereas the cross's initial purpose was to memorialize Tara, it became an important, informal road sign. Later in the interview, Vicki said

You know, when something first happens, everybody is just really, you know, "I'm never gonna speed, I'm never gonna do this, I'm not gonna do that, I'm gonna pay attention, I'm gonna"—but then, as time goes along, you start getting back into your old habits and

going right back into, you know, being reckless and thinking you're invincible. And, it, I think it helps to bring that back to them. Every time they pass there they see that cross and realize I'm not invincible, that I do need to take care of myself. And if, there was a lot of positives that came from that, and those are a few of those positives, that as long as they continue to do that, then I mean, there's a meaning behind everything that happens. So. And there was a lot of positives that did come from that, as far as the community and the closeness and her friends and everything. So that it's not meaningless.

Viewing the crosses as cautionary and potentially life-saving helps those who have lost a loved one in a fatal collision locate meaning in an otherwise senseless death. Shilah Lamay considers the element of warning an important part of the custom of erecting roadside crosses, and acknowledges that it was a factor in her response to the cross constructed for her daughter Heather:

And, i think sometimes too, some people put them up because they think, "will it make somebody slow down, will it make somebody think before they go around that corner too fast?" Now in our case, that's a part of it.

Although Shilah and her family did not participate in the construction of the original crosses erected for Heather and her friend Lisa, as noted in the previous chapter, Shilah and her husband came to value the memorial's educational, as well as its emotional value. James Werchan said

. . . having it there is really good. You know, because it is a reminder for two things, you know. Of Heather, of course, and the other is for people just to slow down and be more cautious, too, of people that are dying because of traffic accidents.

He regards his daughter Heather's cross as equally memorial and educational.

Margie Franklin also expressed the hope that the cross for her daughter, Tammy, and her friends on Guadalupe Street will always be a "reminder to people to be careful." Although it was not an integral part of her desire to erect a cross (see chapter four), Susan Crane now considers the cross to be a warning

as well as a tribute. She said,

It seems to me like also, and I know that this, one other thing is that somehow or another, it immortalizes them, so that they, even though you know that they're not in your life anymore, nobody's going to forget them. And, possibly, I think, and of course a lot of the crosses are DWI crosses. But even still sometimes a cross, and people, you know, like these they said, 'Why do you have this 'Ice on the Bridge' sign, when you haven't had ice here? And they said, 'So that you'll be aware of it.' But a lot of times, by having it there, you take it for granted. But, a lot of times, too, a lot of people have told me 'when I see that, I always say a prayer for my children,' or for such and such children, or for the children, you know. It reminds them that, you know, that you have to be safe when you're driving.

Susan's statement addresses an attitude expressed by a number of Crockett students, who stated that there were so many crosses now, and they passed by them so often, that they do not pay much attention to them anymore. For example, one student wrote "Sometimes I glance at them, but most of the time I ignore them since I see them all the time," while another noted "usually no reaction because of the consistent site [sic]." Finally, one young man wrote that while he is always surprised to see a new one, he soon becomes accustomed to its presence.

Such statements reveal area residents' perception of the "lessons" (or lack thereof) of the markers, just as memorial participants explained the instructional or cautionary intent of the assemblages they constructed and maintained. Apart from the designs of those responsible for a given memorial assemblage, passersby draw their own conclusions regarding the message, apart from straightforward indications of Christian belief, of the marker. Questionnaire respondents who did note reactions to the memorials wrote that the crosses reminded them to "slow down," "drive safely," or "to be a careful driver," noted "the decline of responsibility when it comes to drivers" and

wondered "what happened; if it was anyones [sic] fault; if it could have been avoided." "[Seeing a roadside cross] Makes me more alert when driving because obviously someone else wasn't," wrote another student. A similar sentiment was expressed by the statement "I get depressed because it's hard to believe how careless some drivers can be and also how careless people walking or whatever can be." Here, the writer extends responsibility for traffic safety to pedestrians and conceivably bicyclists. Further, to some respondents the crosses suggest the need for civic action, such as the woman who discussed the accident that killed Jacorey Williams (see chapter three) with her mother: "She [her mother] thought it was sad and thinks the bus ought to stop on the other side of the road since that's where the apartments are." The utilization of roadside crosses in civil protest is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

As noted in chapter one, the crosses also denote dangerous driving conditions or topographical features. In addition to crosses, one student recalled seeing actual "warning signs done by the mom, dad, or friend," while another wrote, "I'm a little more cautious at these intersections and curves, I also tend to avoid them because I realize they are dangerous." Here the crosses are read as overtly cautionary.

Distraction

Providing a somewhat paradoxical diversion from the tedium of everyday travel, roadside crosses provoke a range of emotive responses, from pity to anger. Not surprisingly, many informants reported feeling sad at the sight of a cross by the road. Others noted sympathy for those dealing with a sudden death. Hannah Day wrote, "I tend to wonder what happened, who it was—did I

ever see them in the store or did they wait on me in a restaurant?" Like several other respondents, Hannah speculates about the people represented by the crosses.

For a number of students, the crosses and the deaths they signify stimulate perhaps their first thoughts about the nature of death and their own mortality, as the person who wrote, "It gives me a weird feeling to think that at one time someone died right there, and now everyone just goes on with their business like nothing ever happened." Similarly, another respondent was "sad, gloomy" to "realize that everyone is going on happily living while everyone who knew the person [who died] in the accident is dying inside." One student recounted seeing someone at the cross on Stassney Lane.

I saw this grown man kneeling next to the flowers and the toys, and he was crying. It was raining hard but he stayed there crying and he put a new toy down and left. My heart went out to him and the little boy that died.

While many students expressed empathetic feelings toward the family and friends of the deceased, one woman, who had recently lost three friends in two separate accidents, wrote that she also feels sad for the "person(s) who made the accident happen" upon seeing a cross.

One young woman stated, "If I see them, it kind of scares me. It could have been me just as easily. A lot of them were my age," while another responded that "It makes me wonder if that could ever happen to me or someone I love." Still another student stated that seeing them caused her to realize that she was lucky to be alive.

The reactions of individuals who have lost a friend or family member similarly often involve memories of the accident or of their deceased loved one.

Sometimes I get sad and sometimes I get angry and other times I

feel happy cause [sic] that is how I can remember people and also it makes me think about my life and that I don't want to die in an accident.

Following the death of her boyfriend's brother in an auto accident, one woman stated that every time she sees a roadside cross, she is reminded of him (the brother). A student who witnessed the accident that killed Jacorey Williams wrote that upon seeing Jacorey's cross, s/he sometimes cries. Another witness, describing her reaction, stated

I get a flashback of seeing his little body laying in the middle of the road. I remember the saddness [sic] that I felt and that my class mates felt as we stood 10 ft. from them [emergency medical technicians] working on him.

Maegan Wheeler did not see that accident, but she has lost a relative to a traffic accident. She feels "weird" when passing any roadside cross, she says, because

I mean, I've had someone in my family die in a car wreck. And it's such a big deal to you and your family. But then, like, after it's over and you know, like, everything's cleaned up and all you see is that cross. Anybody else driving along, it's like, 'Oh, there's just a cross.' It's so weird that it can mean so little to one person, and so much to, like, a whole family of the person that died.

Although a cross was not erected at the site of the accident in which her relative was killed, Maegan thinks that it is a good idea.

I think it is, because it makes you think about it. And also, when people are driving they see them. I think it kind of makes me, like, be careful. I think, okay, someone died there and it's kind of dangerous. Because I know there's one, like, at the end of, like, down Manchaca, that two girls had just gotten their drivers' licenses. And there was, like, a curve and they wrecked because she was trying to change the radio station and the same time as she was driving. And, whenever I go around that curve now I'm really careful.

Further, Maegan believes that newer drivers—as opposed to cyclists, more

experienced motorists or people who travel mainly by public transport— pay more attention to roadside crosses, especially those memorializing young people.

Art and Artifact

Austin resident Doug Powell, a part-time photographer and long-time building contractor, has been especially interested in roadside crosses since he started seeing them in increasing numbers about five or six years ago. His first memories of the custom date from the 1950s, travelling with his family between Utah and Arizona.

The state [Arizona] used to put up a little white cross everywhere there was an accident on the side of the road. And then they quit doing that in the sixties, the late sixties, and they removed all of them. But for a long time those crosses were there. Now they were just a little white cross. Probably on the order of, maybe even as small eighteen inches, eighteen inches to two feet high. And they'd put one for each death, so there might be a cluster of six or seven at a site.

Powell noted that the crosses seemed to disappear about the same time that he stopped seeing Burma Shave signs along the road.

His main interest at present, however, is not the history of the custom, nor the details behind more current manifestations. He does not pay much attention to newspaper articles about the respective accidents. Nor is his artistic focus necessarily the cross, although he has never seen an accident memorial that did not include one. Elaborating, he said

My focus is not on the cross, per se, but on the—I'm not quite sure how to describe it. It's like people pick a spot for special meaning. And they mark it in certain ways, and it's that special meaning associated with some place that interests me. It's not the crosses, per se. It's not just because somebody died there, but that's the most common form of it.

In search of these special places, he also documents yard shrines and cemeteries, but finds roadside memorials particularly intriguing. Comparing the accident markers to grave sites, he said

This seems to me to be more alive [indicating photo of roadside cross] than this [indicates cemetery photo]. Like this is something that's happening to people now, and this is something that happened and is over and done with, and the monument's there, you can go check it when you want it, you know. But it's over with, you know, it's abandoned. A lot of this stuff's not, nobody takes care of it, it's all eroded. Its value is as an image, but nobody's going back and looking at this stuff, it doesn't mean anything to them.

As public displays, Powell asserts, the markers communicate in a way that grave markers, tucked away in secluded cemeteries, cannot.

Trying to capture a site's unique qualities, Powell prefers to work at sunrise and sunset, and during foggy conditions if possible. He visits a few sites regularly, "just to see what condition they're in, what's happening with them." Over the years, he has seen memorials change and sometimes abandoned.

. . . dead people don't die. Death only means something to people who remain alive. So death's only for the living, you know, to put it in kind of a, kind of, so you know, this is all, all this has, has meaning for the people still alive.

Eventually, Powell plans to include his cross photos on a web site that would also feature portraiture, his "paying gig."

Folklore, Functionalism and Conflict

Although not one of the oft-cited four functions of folklore, the practice of incorporating aspects of traditional culture in efforts toward social change is not new. Past scholarship has focused on the use of folksong by unions and other organized movements, e.g., John Greenway's seminal *American Folksongs of Protest*, first published in 1953. Greenway presents the songs of textile workers,

abolitionists, miners and other formal groups, stating that "labor has used established songs from the earliest times to carry its protest, and in so doing continues in a tradition that is as old as English folksong itself" (13).³ In a 1966 issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*, R. Serge Denisoff, quoting Terence Qualter, details the similar efforts of singers of "propaganda songs" to "recruit supporters, arouse sympathy, to counteract the feelings of despair, to encourage or inspire with hope for a new and happier future" (582-83).

More recent studies explore a similar use of folklore in the creation of the AIDS quilt and quilting in general, as in the work of Jacqueline Lewis and Michael R. Fraser, and the previously cited work of Hawkins. In the nineteenth century, quilts afforded women, who had no voice in the political sphere, a way to communicate socially critical sentiment. Hawkins provides examples of specific, politically meaningful quilt patterns, such as the Radical Rose, the Drunkard's Path and the Underground Railroad (Hawkins 771).⁴ Today, the AIDS quilt, which Lewis and Fraser call "the largest piece of folk art ever

³ Greenway relates further :

William of Malmesbury, writing in the early twelfth century, tells of his ancient predecessor, Aldhelm, standing beside a bridge, singing secular ditties until he had gained the attention of passers-by, when he gradually began to introduce religious ideas into his songs. Twelve hundred years later Jack Walsh, who had never heard of Aldhelm or his biographer, posted his Wobbly band beside a highway and sang religious songs until he had gained the attention of passers-by, when he gradually began to introduce secular ideas into his songs.

See also R. Serge Denisoff, *Sing a Song of Social Significance*, Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer, and Archie Green.

⁴ The Radical Rose, "popular in the North during the Civil War, had a black center for each flower and was a wordless statement of sympathy for the slaves," as were the other patterns noted above.

created," is a political tool as well a statement of profound grief and loss (434, 448).

Four factors unite uses made of customary folklife in protest song, AIDS-related projects and vehicular safety activism: the use of symbols with currency in a certain community, dynamic meaning behind the symbols, their connections to shared rites of passage, and the counter-hegemonic nature of the collective statement. Linked to traditional symbolism and customs surrounding death, political uses of vernacular expression acquire meaning and forcefulness. The following discussion will draw parallels between other uses of custom pertaining to rites of passage, life and death symbolism and social protest utilizing roadside crosses.

Jack Santino describes contemporary Halloween activities involving jack-o-lanterns, witches and skeletons—figures associated with liminality and death—as "personal statements made in a participatory group or community situation, using culturally valued and shared symbols, most of which are centuries old" (2). Likewise, as detailed in chapter two, the custom of marking a burial site with a cross is widespread in the Americas, as well having a long history in Europe. The roadside crosses, imbued with at least four hundred years of shared relevancy, tell basically the same story now as they did in the newly-colonized Mexico of the mid-sixteenth century. As Solter stated, explaining the rationale behind MADD's choice of the cross as a communicative symbol, "the cross would call attention to a death . . . There wasn't just an injury, but they actually had a death." Although passers-by may speculate as to the particulars of an automobile accident, the fact of a death is sure.

Further, the cross may be interpreted as something of an appeal to God,

as in the custom of embroidering the letters "I.H.S." on a religious habit intended for burial use,—the initials representing the Latin phrase *In Hoc Signo*, or "In This Sign," (i.e., the sign of the cross) . . . a visual means of commending oneself to the mercy of Christ" (Buckley and Cartwright 15).⁵ In Roman Catholic belief, a sudden death requires such a commendation, as the individual has died without the benefit of last rites. As a sacred symbol appearing in the highly public and profane realm of the road, the cross is denotative of mediation, and thus liminality. Gary Butler notes that "when a death occurs, the sacred enters into uncomfortable contact with the profane and is embodied in the deceased, who is suddenly neither profane nor sacred . . ." (31). The cross represents not only a death, but the deceased, and renders the loss that of the entire community (Hawkins 757).

Employed as a tactic for incorporating a particular death into the consciousness of a community, a roadside cross actively confronts "the bureaucratization, specialization and compartmentalization of modern death," (Narváez 289-90)⁶ another aspect of its counter-hegemonic capacity. Commuters pass crosses on major city and county thoroughfares at least twice a day. Vannatta passes the cross that inspired his past political efforts every day. He wrote, "I never fail to look." The memorialized death is not easily set aside after the funeral and burial, but remains a fixture of daily life. The tension between private grief and public rage is embodied in the memorial cross. It not only represents a death, but in the case of the MADD campaign, an organized,

⁵ Comparison between death customs in Texas and those in Newfoundland, particularly those of the wake tradition, are made on the basis of a shared religious foundation—Catholicism and Protestantism.

⁶ See also Buckley and Cartwright 13.

political movement and sentiment; drunk driving causes deaths. In Vannatta's proposed program, the message is similarly cautionary; he "envisioned the crosses as warnings to slow down," as well as a "comfort to the dead and their loved ones." It seems only appropriate that such communication take place in the arena of city and county roadways; the symbolism of death and tragedy, and the hope for rebirth of some kind, moving from the privacy of church and cemetery to the street. As with the stark listing of names on black granite that constitutes the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, contrasting with the more traditional war memorial imagery of glorious, triumphant aggression, viewers find themselves face-to-face with the reality of death.

The negotiation of death necessarily involves one's beliefs about life, and the expression of these beliefs is the complex result of conflicting forces (Primiano 43-45). While the particular message of a roadside cross is currently in flux, so too is the cross in society at large (see chapter two) and the expressive behaviour of which it is a part. The use of the icon in popular culture, which incorporates Christian symbolism without obligation to the religious tenets usually accompanying it, is similar to its place in American civil religion. Crosses have long been a staple of popular fashion, from the punk (anti-) aesthetic born in 1970's England to the current Celtic and Gothic chic. Jenny Stinson told me, "Crosses aren't strictly religious anymore. Everybody wears them, whether they're Christians or not." The ambiguity and vigour of cross symbolism affords it a broad spectrum of meaning and importance in contemporary society.

The dynamism of publicly negotiated meaning mirrors the processes of separation and incorporation that grieving individuals must navigate. The

liminal state of the individual, family or social group brought on by death confers upon them special status upon them, and perhaps makes their actions more influential. However, whereas death customs such as those found in wake tradition provide a mechanism for both separation and incorporation, the custom of marking the site of a fatal accident with a cross renders the death, in a sense, permanently betwixt and between. At Halloween, "death and randomness are incorporated into family stability and routine through home decorations," while "the street seems to be the arena for the airing of more topical fears . . . but the dread of the unknown and the uncontrollable continue to be addressed in both cases" (Santino 18). By focusing ongoing political activity on a public, tragic event and site, an individual simultaneously incorporates, yet refuses to accept passively, their loss.

Several people I spoke with in the course of my research indicated puzzlement about the desire to construct such a public memorial. Tom Hurt, at the Texas Department of Transportation, said he would definitely *not* want a visible reminder of fatal accident involving a member of his family, even if its purpose was to make a political statement. Even those choosing to memorialize a death with a cross experience difficulty with its public nature. Solter said, "at first it really bothered me to go through the intersection. In fact, it took me several years to be able to go near William Cannon and Manchaca [a major intersection near the accident site]." The permanent liminality of politically-imbued roadside memorialization represents a counter-hegemonic approach to contemporary death customs—the "paucity of ritualistic conventions in the mourning period,"—as well as the authority of civil culture (Blauner 174-209). Further, deaths caused by drunk driving or carelessness contradict the natural

order of the life cycle. Here, institutional religion's assertion of "cosmological unity of life and death through the immortality of the soul," can be of little comfort (Narváez 285). Accordingly, Solter and Vannatta do not identify the roadside crosses with any codified religion, but have incorporated them into their vernacular religious practice, as they have incorporated the deaths they memorialize into their daily lives.

Solter visits Sara's cross, and her burial site, at least three times a year—on Christmas Day, Easter Sunday and Sara's birthday (20 October), leaving flowers at both locations. When other family members pass by the cross, they make sure there is at least one bunch of flowers present. While his political efforts were not as successful as he had hoped, Vannatta continues to honor the memory of the young woman whose accident he witnessed by warning other drivers of dangerous road conditions. "I flash lights and signal with the universal slow down arm out the window when some large hazard looms," he wrote. He added, though, that young drivers and "the newer yuppies . . . pay no heed."

His concern for public safety was deepened following the aforementioned collision in which he was seriously injured.⁷ Death statistics are not publicized as they were in the fifties, sixties and seventies, he notes, except on "dangerous" holidays such as Labor Day and New Year's Eve. Attributing it to a lack of proper concern on the part of government entities, he writes, "Highway safety awareness has fallen to the wayside and has been replaced by an internal reliance on automotive engineering—a faulty hope. So I theorize that

⁷ Vannatta explained that, "a Bowie student rear-ended my wife and I while stopped at an intersection. I am two years plus in treatment for massive disk herniations and am facing a shortened career." Bowie is the high school that Heather Lamay, Lisa Wendenburg and Heather Werchan attended.

the public has taken the problem of warning and memorializing into their own hands. Often, as in my accident and after \$25,000 in medical expenses and endless pain and treatment, there is no justice."

Jennifer stated that at the time she put up Sara's cross, the MADD members in Texas believed that a forceful public statement was necessary—state politicians seemed to think that drinking and driving was a right in Texas, and tended to blame fatal incidents on minority populations. She worked hard to pass legislation that would make Texas roads more safe, and she feels that this helped her work through her loss:

Because when I went to change the laws and we lobbied, you know, for the first DWI [Driving While Intoxicated] law, and when we passed the first DWI law in fifty years, you know, I mean I felt like, that we really have accomplished something and I was doing something good out of something bad that had happened to me. And when I stood with other victims, you know, it made me feel stronger and that I couldn't feel sorry for myself because I understood there were other mothers hurting as much as I was.

In uniting with other victims of drunk driving—an act made material by the construction and maintenance of Sara's memorial cross—Solter found solace and renewed strength.

Early in our interview, Jennifer alluded to a concern that the proliferation of extra-legal crosses (non-MADD) were weakening the anti-drunk driving message of the MADD memorials, saying,

The whole thing about starting putting up the white crosses was to call the attention to the drunk driving fatalities. And now, we see so many other crosses, and I'm—many times, and maybe I'm, you know, sometimes I feel like I'm maybe being selfish about this, but the meaning behind our crosses was to call attention to, you know, the drunk driving fatalities. But I understand, you know, everybody has to go through a grieving stage. But that's how all these crosses started in the state of Texas, I guess.

She made these statements in the course of telling me about the first MADD

crosses in Texas. However, when I asked about her perception of the other crosses directly, she said,

These other little crosses—I know the parents, you know, are grieving and if their way of grieving . . . that's great. They're not taking away from us at all. I did feel at one time that maybe it did, you know. Just as long as they're not a duplicate of the MADD crosses, I don't think it will take away from our issue at all.

These contradictory statements indicate that while Jennifer wonders about the possibility of mixed messages, she is sensitive to the pain of the loss represented by each memorial, regardless of its origin. Daniel London's mother, Ana—who erected and maintains a non-MADD cross in memory of her son, echoes Jennifer's sentiment and includes the parents of drunk drivers as well. Reporter Harmon writes that "she feels for [Andrew Papke's] parents as they go through their own turmoil. 'I feel for them, because I'm a mother'" (qtd. in Harmon).

Solter concluded that "if those few crosses out there have made the difference, you know, for MADD, I think we did make our statement." Just as the AIDS quilt's "provocative appearance on the [Washington] Mall gave the project's leadership an opportunity to denounce the country's indifference to the AIDS epidemic and to rally for greater attention to research and support" (Hawkins 759-60) the MADD crosses, and roadside crosses in general are a grassroots cry for greater attention to safe roadway travel and harsher penalties for vehicular carelessness and crime. As Vannatta notes, "the crosses are also an expression of the frustration people have with the justice system. People and I can [not] simply let go of traumatic life changing events that easily." As powerfully positioned mediators of beliefs about life and death, the crosses inhabit an equally unique position between private and public spheres of

conformity and protest.

While the cross is an ancient symbol with centuries of accrued meaning, it is also a dynamic reflection of grief, hope and guidance to a measureless audience. Victor Turner has written that, "Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art . . . Each of these productions has a multivocal character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many psychobiological levels simultaneously" (Ritual Process 128-29). The crosses occupy a unique place in Austin's urban landscape, especially those that are extra-legal. Their continued existence and increasing appearance are highly-charged reminders of the dangers of vehicular travel, stricter driving regulations and technological advances in automobiles and roadway construction notwithstanding.

In agreement with the popular feminist maxim—"the personal *is* political"—my informants have attempted to use, with varying degrees of success, the memorial custom of the roadside cross to help prevent further tragedy, communicating with a largely unknown audience through the shared meaning of an universal symbol. Political intent, rather than locating the roadside cross outside the realm of vernacular expression, confirms the objects' informal communicative power, especially among members of diverse community groups. As noted above, for viewers of the crosses—Austin motorists and other travelers—such distinctions between manifest meanings are often not consciously made, or are irrelevant. Finally, while such crosses and their attendant assemblages often represent a community's perception of the deceased individual, Solter and Vannatta have chosen the crosses—like

protesters have utilized vernacular song and AIDS victims and their loved ones have stitched quilt blocks—as active symbols of their hope for the future as well, and for their desire to prevent any further loss and suffering akin to their own.

Between Incorporation and Conflict

The examples cited here should not be interpreted as indicative of total familiarity with the custom throughout the area's populace. Several respondents wrote that they had never seen or heard of objects by the side of the road marking the site of a fatal accident. One student stated that she had only *heard* of them, and that they consisted of "yellow tape saying 'Do not cross.' cones around the incident, etc." In fact, urban planner John Hickman expressed disbelief when I told them that Austin area residents were familiar with the custom:

Now I'm surprised that you find that most people know about them. . . . I think, en masse, I would be surprised if the majority of folks who drive every day in Austin know where any of them are. . . . I think they're oblivious to that. I mean, I couldn't tell you where they are on [Farm to Market Road] 2222. I know they're there because I remember reading newspaper articles.

Hickman here refers to an aforementioned highway with a particularly bad reputation for fatal accidents, a few which are currently marked by roadside crosses. Several questionnaire respondents noted crosses they have seen on FM 2222, as well.

Other informants perceive the phenomenon to be primarily a rural one, although certain areas of the city, as noted in chapter three, are home to several crosses. Ryan Britton, introduced in chapter one, wrote, "Most of them are out in the country—or at least the suburbs, and since I don't leave the urban center of Austin, I don't see them too often." Similarly, Vannatta wrote "I've seen more of

these crosses in desolate areas of wide open Texas roads than in heavily maintained and heavily signed area of cities." Trevor Sosebee, a computer software developer and amateur cyclist who has lived in central and west Texas, as well as California, did not recall seeing any crosses on Southwest Parkway, a highway he travels often by bicycle and home to at least two roadside crosses.

Hickman offered his professional assessment of the memorials as follows:

I think that if it [a cross] raises the societal consciousness about—most of these are driving deaths—that's good. On the other hand, if it creates distraction to someone who is driving, to look at the sign, cross the center strip and have a head-on collision, then it has not done a good thing. So, there's a bit of a clash here in that if the purpose is to raise the consciousness, they have to be visible. But if they're too visible, you can create the kind of problems you're trying to raise consciousness to eliminate. I think it might, on a more individual basis, provide some sort of balm for the soul of those who have been wounded in some way.

He believes the markers to be important for those personally involved, but perhaps not to the general populace, especially motorists and other passive viewers.

His assessment is grounded in his experience as an employee of both private firms and city government, and as a self-employed consultant. Hickman details his encounters, or rather the lack thereof, with the issue of roadside crosses in the following exchange.

Hickman: The existence of a memorial cross on a piece of property has never, ever come up in any project I've ever been associated with in Austin or any where else, and I've been practicing eighteen years.

Everett: And that's not because there was one and nothing was done about it? What you're saying is that there never was one on any of this land.

Hickman: No. I'm saying that that issue has never come up, whether there was one on the property or not, I don't know and probably most everybody who worked on all these projects didn't know either. It never came up. In the course of a development project, where parking spaces are, where buildings are, where driveways go, all these issues always come up. Okay? And there's a lots of other issues come up. The issue of, "Oh, and by the way there is a cross at this location, on this property" has never come up. It is not shown on site plans to my knowledge. I mean it's sort of an informal thing. Yeah. They have tree surveys. . . . Caves, habitat, wildlife surveys. Each property is different, but if you're in, you know, endangered species country then you've got to get Parks and Wildlife to sign off on your endangered species list. There's all sorts of issues that come up when you're trying to develop a piece of property. The issue of the existence of a cross does not.

In the development of area land for projects ranging from city bus stop shelters to downtown strip malls, Hickman says, contractors and sub-contractors must consult City of Austin manuals. None of the manuals, to the best of his knowledge, include guidelines pertaining to roadside crosses (MADD-related or no) or other vernacular memorials.

In sharp contrast to his experience is that of Texas Department of Transportation employees such as John Hurt and Tom Ohlendorf, and those at the Pharr district office discussed in chapter two. Upon my arrival at the Austin district office for an interview, public relations officer Hurt told me that he was glad I was looking into the increase in roadside crosses because it had become "a pain in the neck" for the department. TxDoT actively advocates the installation of memorial plants out of the clear zone, at the back of the right-of-way line (usually at the fence line) or scattering a variety of wildflower seeds as an alternative to memorials that may hamper driver visibility and concentration. Hurt notes, however, that "most people don't do that, most people just go out

and put their own thing up." Both Hurt and Ohlendorf, director of maintenance for the Austin district, bemoan the lack of concrete guidelines regarding such assemblages. As it stands, only safety or directional signs are allowed *in* the right-of-way (as opposed to MADD markers, which are placed at the fence line),⁸ and policy regarding them is quite strict.

The responsibility for the absence of a "policy to hang our hat on," asserts Ohlendorf, lies "downtown,"—the word by which Hurt and Ohlendorf refer to the state legislature, which meets in Austin. Authorization of MADD crosses, Hurt says, is the result of intense political pressure, and the desire of lawmakers to appear sympathetic to the concerns of their constituents. The TxDOT, however, is similarly concerned with public opinion for, as Hurt says, the people of Texas are their "board of directors." Throughout the interview, both Hurt and Ohlendorf stressed their sympathy for those mourning a loss. Therefore, while local newspaper articles state that unauthorized markers are routinely removed (Greig), TxDOT employees are more likely to leave them as is, if at all possible. In fact, road maintenance crew members routinely refuse to disturb the assemblages, and Ohlendorf himself considers them "pretty creepy."

Conclusion

The fact that roadside crosses do not register on the cognitive maps of all area residents or civic and county site maps further highlights their informality and liminal status. Adding to the outlaw quality of the markers is the absence of concrete guidelines for governmental entities. The city of Austin, for example, has a graffiti hotline which residents may call to report tagging and thus hasten

⁸ Both highway signs and MADD crosses are designed to break away upon impact.

its removal. Crosses, while occupying similar space in the city landscape, communicate in a less obscure and thus less threatening manner. It is difficult for city, county and state officials to condemn emotionally charged objects that might encourage motorists to slow down, be more alert, or think twice before driving while intoxicated; and perhaps equally easy to ignore them—as the student who wrote “I try not to look,”—or become immune to them as have a number of other informants.

In this chapter I have detailed the ambivalent reception of roadside crosses in the Austin area, as both integrative and subversive elements of traditional, and as discussed in chapter two, popular culture. Further, the markers represent an active locus for troublesome questions about the ever-present risks of injury and death in contemporary society. A questionnaire respondent poignantly expressed a sentiment with which perhaps all informants would agree, regardless of religious or political stance. Upon seeing a roadside cross, she feels sad and, she wrote, “[I] hope I don’t see any more.”

Conclusion

In the pages of this thesis I present a number of perspectives on roadside crosses, and other memorial structures and assemblages, in the Austin area. Discussing formal and informal uses of public space, icons and symbols, the memorials have been analyzed as polysemic manifestations of a number of cultural threads. The manner in which such threads come together has been traced through the perceptions of area residents who make, decorate, maintain, and view the memorials.

Similarly, the thesis weaves together current ideas and analyses of roadside crosses. By grounding the study in the examination of data and theoretical approaches utilized by a number of scholars—folklorists and researchers in the related disciplines such as anthropology, cultural geography and sociology—I have attempted to present an accurate account of the history and practice of a transient, vernacular art form crossing religious, cultural and class lines in an increasingly fast-paced and congested urban environment. As illustrated in the preceding pages, it is not an easy task. During the fieldwork period, the last vestiges of at least two memorials were removed. In just the time since I photographed the last cross in the study sample in mid-January 1998, I have learned, from informants, of three new crosses in the metropolitan area.

Contributions of this Study

A major benefit of the study lies in its contextualization of roadside cross tradition within contemporary western memorial tradition. Drawing on the work of Holocaust scholars in particular, as well as accounts of events leading up to the

construction of memorials such as the Vietnam Veterans memorial, I have discussed a number of structures as attempts to acknowledge and commemorate the unthinkable, as well as to address significantly different perceptions of the past and the present. Here, too, are struggles between the vernacular and the governmentally sanctioned: the private and public interpretation of tragic and sometimes criminal events.

Like Barrera, Griffith, Kozak and Lopez, I have presented another context in which roadside crosses mark sacred space, if perhaps only to a small community of family and friends. While the accident sites are not municipally constructed memorials, nor locations at which formal ceremonies have taken place, individuals and groups attend them with a mixture of grief, reverence and hope. The roadside memorials are markedly different from the urban manifestations that surround them, and are treated accordingly by city, county and state officials, as well as the Austin community at large.

While scholars such as Bellah, Foote, Sellars and Walter discuss both formal and vernacular memorials in the context of American civil religion, the connection between civil religion and roadside crosses had not been addressed until the present study. It is especially important to consider such ideological links in relation to the civil sanction of the MADD roadside cross program in the Austin district and elsewhere. The cross, a powerful signifier, communicates on a number of levels as evidenced by informant response. Drawing on a discussion of the symbol's semiotic versatility, the study includes both emic and etic views of this roadside communication, whether based in Christianity, political ideology or neither.

The sample presented here documents the tradition's non-denominational, intercultural acceptance and practice. Additionally, it provides insight into the custom as an urban, as well as rural phenomenon. The quantitative analysis of the memorial sites reveals widespread as well as more unusual vernacular aesthetics, which may be utilized in other material culture studies. Moreover, in consideration of the sites' ephemerality, the eighteen-month fieldwork period, encompassing all major American holidays, allowed me to document their mutability over time. In accordance with the writing of Kwolek-Folland and Primiano, I have stressed the relevance of documenting not only the more permanent aspects of a site, such as a cross, but the decorative ephemera as well.

Consequently, the thesis explores the memorial sites as regenerative manifestations of domesticated religion and grief work. Individuals mourning the sudden death of a loved one must negotiate a complex field of emotion, often dealing not only with their own grief, but that of other relatives and friends of the deceased. Additionally, magico-religious beliefs may be called into question and/or reaffirmed, as are individual priorities and expectations. In an effort to incorporate an unexpected loss, a number of my informants maintain memorial assemblages as places of intimacy and community, sacred spaces in which death may be contemplated, and life celebrated.

Whereas contemporary funeral custom and landscape emphasizes the difference between the deceased and those who mourn, roadside cross memorials present a more universally active, and thus affective threshold. In addition to reporting the views of memorial participants, I have presented a broad spectrum of viewer reaction, from commuters, to newly-licensed teenaged

drivers, to civic authorities. In addition, two major threads identifiable in Austin's roadside cross tradition, MADD crosses and those without organizational affiliation, are compared and contrasted, a distinction not noted in previous studies.

Directions for Further Research

Overall, I have striven to provide an ethnographically sound picture of a large number of sites in the Austin area's roadside cross memorial complex, and their roles in the lives of area residents. Due to the ephemerality of the assemblages, and to time constraints, however, although the sample presented here includes both crosses in and outside of the main study area, I cannot claim that it encompasses *all* roadside cross memorials in the city. More research—photographic documentation and interviews—especially in sections of Austin further east (the city's Hispanic center) and north, is needed.

Not only will the addition and analysis of such data in Texas and elsewhere make possible the documentation of regional ecotypes, it will facilitate the exploration of hegemony and counter-hegemony within roadside cross tradition as a cultural practice. Throughout the thesis, I have indicated the shaping force of Catholic and Mexican-American custom, and noted Austin's unique relationship to both. Current cultural pluralism and syncretism aside, the relationship between European Americans and Mexican Americans in Texas has been problematic, and in many instances violent and ugly (León 1983). While I am unwilling to label European-American Protestant practice of the memorial custom simply another example of appropriation, I am equally hesitant to attribute what might be interpreted as a decline of the tradition in the Hispanic community

to cultural domination and assimilation. I do believe that both possibilities deserve further investigation.

Another important avenue for research involves the extension of work already begun by scholars such as Kozak, Lopez and others. As noted in chapter two, Kozak and Lopez explore the place of roadside accident memorials in the O'odham cult of the dead, while Edgette notes the practice of transferring items, from roadside assemblages in Pennsylvania, to grave sites in the process of "bridging the memory" of the deceased (7-12). Zimmerman also describes the multiple sites of memory maintained by bereaved individuals, including roadside memorials, home shrines, memory books and burial sites (5-7). Such studies are certainly of value in placing vernacular memorial assemblages in the broader context of death-related custom.

Fieldwork and Folklore: Final Thoughts

Throughout the research and writing period, I struggled with the responsibility of eliciting, recording and reporting extremely sensitive, personal information, and accurately representing the beauty and power of the memorials my informants create, recreate and describe. Days of photographing crosses on busy streets and highways sensitized me further to the danger communicated by each memorial. The force of cars speeding past at upwards of eighty miles an hour added to the nausea and fear I felt gazing down upon a weathered teddy bear, or assemblage of broken car parts. Such moments of solitary contemplation, however, were nothing in comparison to hearing a grieving father struggle not to cry on the other end of the phone or seeing video footage, recorded at a funeral home, of a sixteen-year-old woman in her casket. I describe

my experiences not to evoke sympathy for myself, but to underscore the suffering and love informing the memorials, and in turn this study.

Additionally, I wanted to provide a reasoned presentation of "official" views of vernacular memorials. The assemblages may be distracting, and are certainly difficult to mow or build around. Nevertheless, city and state employees in the Austin area are sensitive to their importance to families and communities, for which they are to be recognized and commended. While the public display of religious symbolism, not to mention the manifestation of intense emotion, creates problems of policy and enforcement which may ultimately effect or indeed prohibit their existence in the future, the current situation allows area residents what is apparently much-needed creative space betwixt and between regulation and reality, past and present, public and private, sacred and profane.

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Appendices

MEMORIAL CROSSES

Anyone interested in having a cross erected please fill in the form below and return to:

MADD, Heart of Texas Chapter
611 S. Congress Ave Ste 505
Austin, TX 78704

GUIDELINES TO ERECT MEMORIAL CROSSES

- (1) Limited only to fatalities caused by drunk drivers.
- (2) Provided the family of the victim request permission or grants permission for a cross to be erected.
- (3) The Highway Department District Office in the area in which the crash occurred must approve the location where the cross is to be placed.
- (4) Crosses should not be located in such a manner as to be distracting to motorists.
- (5) Crosses should not be located between the main lanes and frontage roads of a controlled access highway.
- (6) Crosses should not be over 24 " high and should be constructed of wood or PVC.
- (7) Crosses should not be placed in front of developed property unless written permission of the adjacent property owner is secured by the requester.

I would like to request a cross be erected in memory of:

_____ my _____
(name of victim) (relationship)

I give my permission to Mothers Against Drunk Driving to erect a cross on _____
(roadway)
_____ in memory _____.

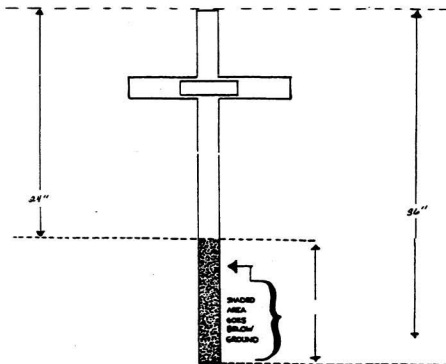
who was killed in an alcohol-related crash on _____
(month, day, year)

Signature: _____

Phone: _____

Date: _____ Victims DOB: _____

MEMORIAL CROSS



CROSS CONSTRUCTION:

CROSSES SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED OF ^{2x2} WOOD OR PVC AND SHOULD BE 36 INCHES IN HEIGHT WITH ONLY 24 INCHES SHOWING ABOVE THE GROUND.

A PLAQUE MADE OF RED ENGRAVABLE PLASTIC SHOULD BE LOCATED IN THE CENTER OF THE CROSS.

Highway No. _____

Maintenance Section No. _____

CROSSES TO MARK LOCATIONS OF FATAL ACCIDENTS

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) offers no objection to the installation of a cross to mark the location of an alcohol related fatal traffic accident on highway no. _____ in _____ County. The cross will be located _____ The following

Brief location description

conditions must be met in order to place the proposed cross:

1. Crosses can only be placed for fatalities caused by drunk driving.
2. The family of the victim must request permission, or grant permission, for the cross to be erected.
3. The local TxDOT maintenance section office in which the accident occurred, must approve the location where the cross is proposed to be erected.
4. Crosses shall not be located in such a manner as to be distracting to motorists.
5. Crosses shall not be located between the main lanes and frontage roads of a controlled access highway.
6. Crosses shall not be over 24 inches high and shall be constructed of wood or PVC pipe. The foundation of the cross shall not be buried to a depth of more than 12 inches below the usual ground level. No concrete shall be used in the foundation of the cross. The construction and installation of the cross shall meet the approval of the TxDOT District Engineer or his authorized representative. If, in the opinion of the District Engineer or his authorized representative, the cross poses a threat to the safety of the traveling public within the highway right-of-way, the cross will be removed by the State.
7. Written permission of the adjacent property owner must be secured by the requestor prior to installation of the cross. Proof of this permission must be made available to the State upon request.

Roadway Maintenance Supervisor

Name of Organization

Address

Date

Signed

Date

ACCIDENT MARKER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Have you ever seen or heard of objects by the side of a road marking the site of a fatal accident? Please describe the objects in as much detail as you can.
2. Do you ever go past the site(s)? How often?
3. If you can, write down directions to the site(s) from the school.
4. Please describe your reaction to the site(s), if any, when passing by. If you don't have any reaction, please note that.
5. Do you know the name of anyone involved in the accident? How (e.g., word-of-mouth, newspaper, radio, TV)?
6. Have you ever contributed anything to one of these sites? If so, what?
7. Have you ever talked about the site(s) with anyone? If so, who (friend, parent, teacher, sibling)? What was said about it?
8. Please write down any stories you know that are connected with the site(s). Continue on the back if necessary.

9. Have you ever known anyone who was injured or killed in an automobile accident?
10. Do you know anyone who has put a marker up to commemorate an accident?
11. Do you know how to drive? When and how did you learn?
12. Do you have a driver's license? Do you have your own car?
13. Do you own a bicycle, rollerblades or a skateboard? Do you use it/them as a regular mode of transportation?
14. Do you ride the bus to school?
15. Do you ride the city bus? If so, which routes, and approximately how often?

Thank you for your assistance. If you would be willing to speak with me on an individual basis regarding a road marker, please write your name and phone number at the bottom of the page. Your time is greatly appreciated.



