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CULTURAL PERFORMANCE OF ROADSIDE SHRINES: A POSTSTRUCTURAL POSTMODERN ETHNOGRAPHY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by
Rebecca Marie Kennerly
B.S., Eastern Michigan University, 1996
M.A., Eastern Michigan University, 1998
May 2005

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EPIGRAPH
LOCATING ROADSIDE SHRINES IN/AS MEMORY

Driving Directive: Southwest Michigan
Sometime in the mid 1970s

Visit a friend on the other side of the state far from familiar hometown stomping grounds. Wander away from the cluster of weekend cottages and year-round homes surrounding the lake, step through the narrow line of trees, meander through the apple orchard, cross the hard dirt road and into the fallow field lush with tall summer grasses, zig zag through the field. Stumble upon a two-track dirt road. Follow the road as it rises over a culvert. At the bottom of the culvert/hill, in a ditch, is a small (1 1/2 to 2 feet tall) wood cross nailed together painted white. The cross is tilting, perpendicular and parallel to nothing, pointing where?

Forget this incident, this image, for nearly thirty years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is dedicated to my friends, family, fellow graduate students, and teachers. I especially want to thank my community of friends in Michigan, who sent me off in style and who never let me go, and to my family members, the Firth and Clancy contingencies, who continue to put up with my comings and goings--our tethers (our heart-strings) are long and elastic. I also want to thank my teachers and mentors, Bill Whalberg, who gave me my first solo performance assignment where I first danced this dream, and Judy Whalberg, who gave me a name to grow into, "Guardian of the Family and Keeper of the Feminine:" a challenge I continue to embrace. I also owe a huge debt to Miles Richardson for giving me the performance assignment that restlessly concludes my dissertation, without which I might still be out there somewhere chasing ghosts. I also want to thank my performance community at Louisiana State University: my professors, mentors, and friends Ruth Laurion Bowman, Michael Bowman, and Trish Suchy, who taught me how to live and work and play and study, all at the same time, and especially to the community of writers in Michael Bowman's performative writing class--it was with you that I discovered my reading/writing audience, we do this work together. I thank Richard Flynn, *my love*, for his generous "Richard Flynn 2002-2003 Dissertation Fellowship," and for his love, encouragement, and constant push for me to "just get the damn thing done:" this is it! I also thank my step sister, Patty Clancy, for welcoming us into her family, to her daughter, Beverly, who I looked up to, and to my mom, Paula Kennerly Wilhelm, my bother Kim, and my sisters, Claudia and Jane, and to my two dads, Ray Wilhelm, and William Kennerly. Ultimately, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to shrine-builders everywhere. This work is dedicated to you (all). I could not have traveled so far without you, I will never forget you, you dance in my heart.

PREFACE
LOCATING ROADSIDE SHRINES IN/AS ACCIDENT

> Somehow, it is [as] improper to travel when we work, as it is improper to work when we travel. The first category includes traveling salesmen, gypsies, anthropologists, convention goers, stewards and sailors, and our folklore is full of obscene jokes about such people - for their very occupations are questionable, whatever their behavior! (Graburn, "Tourism: The Sacred Journey," 23).

It is a slippery process, an inexact science, to pinpoint in time and space precisely *where* this study begins--or ends for that matter. One might say that this study began "accidentally on purpose" (J. B. Jackson, *Landscape in Sight*, 2), the way a child who gleefully jumps through mud puddles on the way to school later claims, unappologetically, that it "just happened."

Early on I garnered the reputation of the road, and cars, as threatening and dangerous. I, like many teenagers before and after me, saw highway "gore" films during my driver's training in 1969 before the practice of showing these films, begun in 1958, was discontinued in the late 1970s (*Hell's Highway*). I, like many teenagers of the time, danced to teen-death-on-the-road songs like the Shangri-Las' "Leader of the Pack" and Jan and Dean's "Dead Man's Curve," swooned over Surrey and Surrey's "Teen Angel," and later tormented parents with protest songs that linked the road and death to anti-war sentiments, like Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Highway 61 Revisited," and John Prine's "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You Into Heaven Anymore." And who could forget Ralph Nader's 1965 landmark book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, his "indictment of the auto industry," particularly General Motors (Evans), and the images of a flaming rear-ended Corvair? In addition, given that the *annual* death toll on all U.S. roadways hovers near 42,000 ("US Auto Deaths"), I believe that I can safely count myself among the millions of people living in and/or traveling

through the United States who have lost friends and family members in auto-related incidents.

Early on I also, and perhaps more significantly, came to know the road, and cars, as thrilling and *sexy*: I can still see George Maharis and Martin Milner crusin' down the road in that Corvette on CBS's 1960-1964 television show *Route 66*, and hear the theme song in my head, "Get your *kicks* on Route *6-6*" (Riddle and Styne, ital. and hyphenation in orig.). Television also served up the road, and cars, as a means and mode of an expansive freedom, liberty, and a source of national pride:

> See the U. S. A. in your Chev-ro-let.
> A-mer-i-ca is ask-ing you to call.
> Drive your Chev-ro-let through the U. S. A.
> A-mer-i-ca's the great-est land of all.
> On a high way or a road a-long a lev-ee
> Per-for-mance is sweet-er no-thing can beat-'er
> Life is com-ple-ter in a Chev-y
> So make a date to-day to see the U. S. A.
> and see it in your Chev-ro-let.
> (Corday and Carr; "See the U.S.A.")

Compounding my budding desire for adventure, ideological freedom, and deep-seated sense of pride were my own family ties to the automotive industry: my home state of Michigan is (according to my first liscense plate) not only the "Great Lakes State" but also the home of Detroit, "Motor City Capital of the World" ("Welcome to Detroit"). We lived near Pontiac, an automotive/industrial city northwest of Detroit, a city named for a great Ottowa warrior chief (Nolan) and the family car. My dad was a Standard Oil Dealer and I grew up, from crib to college, at home in a gas station looking up at the underbelly of cars, the familiar smell of gas, oil, and thick black grease in my nose and underneath my dad's fingernails. And my stepfather was a steel-buyer for General Motors. My dad gave me my first car while I was still in high school, a turquoise four-door 1964 Chevy Impala with a big

V-8 engine, and man, she was "cherry." And my stepfather paid for the insurance and made sure that I understood the perils and responsibility of driving. But it was my mom who taught me how to *drive*, and as soon as I could, I took to the road and got gone. I was the privileged one of my friends who owned a car, and we went everywhere; my best friend and I named the Impala "Spgs" after a funny road sign we saw driving through Colorado Springs in the spring of 1972. In the fall, we packed up Spgs and drove ourselves to college--a wild and (seemingly) endless ride. I *loved* that car, still sometimes dream of her. I continue to this day to experience my greatest sense of freedom and daring, pleasure and power, when I am driving, followed closely by (tailed by) like sensibilities when I am writing, both of which are now associated with my recognition of the contingencies of (and on) the road, are moderated by a contingent (sometimes relinquished) sense of control.

It may be no coincidence then, that in the fall of 1992 two things "just happened"; I returned to school, taking evening classes to finish my bachelors' degree, and got the first of a series of really great sales jobs that allowed me to spend much of my work day driving. I was *not* a traveling salesperson who spends days *and nights* "on the road." I was, however, a salesperson who traveled a lot within a hundred mile radius of my (adopted) home-base in the Ypsilanti/Ann Arbor area. Then in 1996 I began my graduate work at Eastern Michigan University and changed jobs; during the summer and on weekends I drove around the countryside and sold advertising space for *The Ann Arbor Observer*, an upscale monthly tabloid whose primary market is Ann Arbor. The publisher's goal at the time was to expand *The Observer*'s market to the rapidly growing surrounding smaller villages and towns, including among others the towns west of Ann Arbor along US-12; Saline, Clinton, Brooklyn, and the Irish Hills. It was my job to help launch the *Community Guide*, designed

ostensibly to promote trade between the smaller towns, encourage Ann Arbor ex-patriots living in the outlying areas but commuting to Ann Arbor to spend their shopping dollars closer to (their new) home, and to bring Ann Arbor residents "out" into the surrounding areas for "day trips" and "mini-vacations." Significant sections of US-12 west of Saline had a reputation of being "scenic" and "pastoral," the villages "quaint," the roadside attractions "kitschy"; an image that the monthly tabloid wanted to build in the minds of readers.

Enchanted with my sales territory and persuaded by my own professional rhetoric, I moved to one of those small towns. This move improved my credibility with the community folk, increased my sales commissions, extended my commute, and decentered my route. The dichotomy of away-place and home-place (Tuan, "Cosmos versus Hearth") became an intensely pleasurable complex of triangulated geographic and intellectual centers--home, work, school--likened to Denzin's (who borrows from Ulmer's) recommended tripartite "Mystory" narrative genes (16-20), framed initially by the blue-green glass of my windshield, side windows, and rear view mirrors of my car. This intertextual triangulation continued, increasing in geographic and intellectual scope, as I relocated my (decentered) routes from Michigan to Louisiana in my pursuit of a terminal degree at Louisiana State University, and then to Georgia, the place where this writing takes place.

During my time as a professional salesperson, my understanding of the freedom and danger of the road was kept to the fore by consistent and oddly ominous warnings to "be careful," particularly on a certain stretch of US-12 connecting Saline and the Irish Hills; the cautionary closure to many sales meetings were markedly different in tone than the customary "take care" often said while waving good-bye to friends and family as they drive away. In addition, these warnings to "be careful" were punctuated on one end of my route by

a little hand-made cross that said "Miss You" under the speed limit sign on US-12 between Saline and Clinton, and at the other by the cross carved into the cliff near Brooklyn in the Irish Hills. Then in the winter of 1996 the little crosses, which had become familiar and rather friendly *memento mori,* took on a greater significance; driving too fast on my way to class, I came upon the scene of a crash just east of the "Clinton Gulch" involving a really big commercial truck and a very small car. The Emergency Medical Transport (EMT) teams were wheeling covered gurneys into the backs of their vehicles. The next day the site was marked with two large wreaths on tall wire stands. Later that semester, when I added "oral historian" and "ethnographer-in-training" to my resume, I began to initiate conversations with people who live with, work near, and pass by what I now call roadside shines. Later still I began to map the location of the sites, to periodically scan Lexis-Nexis, Proquest, and Google search engines for news of the practice, and to dig through the archives.

Thus grew my obsession with the cultural performance of these sites of and on the side of the road; a performance that elusively explodes out into contemporary culture, enacts a refusal to be pinned down in time and space, and is always already escaping, performing freedom and liberty *differently,* what Phelan calls "the failure of the signifier [the shrines on the side of the road] to convey meaning exactly" (*Unmarked* 13). Furthermore, I acknowledge that this work, with the help of all whom I have encounted along the way, is a partial attempt to negotiate my singular, popular cultural, and academic relationships with these various and interconnected experiences, group memberships, the host of ghosts present in the car, and with you, dear reader, as we take this (interupted) journey on the road and on the page.

Accidentally on purpose, I stumbled upon various sets of practices, my own and those of others, that provide great pleasure, pause, and (always already) the potential of getting very messy indeed.

Parable: Metaphor for Method

> The object that is "invested" with vision will be an object in which she is deeply invested (Schnieder, *The Explicit Body in Performance* 184).

School was out! It was a bright, cool early summer day and we were playing "mud pie" down the (dirt) road in front of Tony and Ruthie's house. It had rained the night before, so the driveway was squishy with mud (both warm from the sun and cool from the rain, alive between our toes) and the grass (the lawn, the field, the cracks in the sidewalk) yielded easily to our tug. Taking my time, I carefully choose a multi-textured and colorful mix of grasses. Kneeling here and there in the muddy driveway, I tested small handfuls of the stuff, carefully considering what would best bind the grasses together to make "pie." The mud from the center of the driveway was slippery, the mud from the edges was gritty and rough on my palms. No good. The best mud came from the deepest pothole at the far end of the driveway where the turn-around space was. The mud from the bottom came up thick like oatmeal, mealy and sticky and workable. Jackpot! I mixed the grasses with the mud in a gallon-sized glass canning jar I'd discovered poking around the garage. No metal pails or plastic buckets or wood boxes for me; I wanted to see my concoction, to show it! Besides, the glass had a faint blue-green tint that was so pretty. And it altered the look of the stuff inside just so, which I liked very much. It was beautiful.

Wrapping both arms around the (big) jar, I carried it into the house to clean everything up. Then, carefully holding the thing out in front of me, I hurried through the screen door, shouting "Look, look, looooo . . " and tripped on I don't know what. The

concoction catapulted out of my hands and went sailing over the cement porch, landed on the sidewalk, and splintered into a million pieces. My own body kept its forward momentum, and in a flash I realized that I either had to somehow throw myself backward (to avoid landing square into the center of the exploded mess), or try to leap over it. I decided to leap. I threw all of my weight onto the one last step that I had and pushed off and up. I looked down as I flew over my shattered masterpiece. Shards of bright shining blue-green glass, swaths of mud and leaves of grass all mixed up, shimmering. I felt threat and thrill at once, in the strange and dangerous and accidental beauty below me, and in the freedom and power and unaccustomed daring I felt in my body as I flew, still not sure where or how I would land.

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ABSTRACT

Marking the site of death on the road with a shrine, an increasingly popular cultural practice in the United States, is a deeply personal, private affair, however, because shrines are placed in the public right-of-way, they attract attention and invite participation, comment, and criticism. These sites, the materials that mark them, how people come to build them, the messages that those who build them hope to convey, and the accumulative force these sites bring to bear in various contexts offer unique insights into our complex, fragmented, and often confounding relationships with death, living memory, and selective forgetting.

This project takes roadside shrines, material cultural artifacts, as points of departure for a multi-track journey. This journey locates shrines on the road and in cultural imagination, in historical records and cultural mythology, and in the researcher's personal archive. The construction of the text makes apparent the researcher's cultural poesis and invites readers to participate in like manner.

Chapter One situates roadside shrines within academic discourse, explains the construction of the written text, provides a brief review of literature pertinent to the study of roadside shrines, and describes the scale, scope and methods employed during the research process. Chapter Two describes roadside shrines from the perspective of the passer-by along two local routes and two cross-country road trips. Chapter Three examines the popularity of shrine-building in the vernacular and academic press, historicizes the practice of shrine-building, explores recent institutional attempts to regulate roadside shrines, and offers a provisional interpretation of shrine-building as resistant performances of protest and warning. Chapter Four explores roadside shrines from the perspective of the participant-observer engaged in various rituals while visiting specific roadside shrines and during additional

cross-country road trips. Chapter Five examines shrine-building as social ritual in the popular and academic arts, historicizes shrine-building as a mourning ritual, offers a provisional interpretation of shrine-building as performances that resist normative constraints of "healthy" mourning while simultaneously re-inscribing a dominant formal aesthetic. Chapter Six restlessly concludes as the researcher returns to the field.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: LOCATING ROADSIDE SHRINES IN/AS SUBJECTS OF STUDY

> . . . institutions can be viewed as "cultural sites" in the sense that they are created through an interplay between dwelling and traveling, presence and absence, localizing and globalizing (Olwig, "Cultural Sites" 35).

> What are these instructions asking us to do? (Ulmer on Barthes, *Teletheory* 118).

1.1: Locating Roadside Shrines as Points of Departure

Traveling along on almost any paved road on any given day in the contemporary United States, chances are good that one may come upon a cross, a wreath on a wire stand, bouquets of fresh or fabricated flowers, a collection of bottles, balloons, notes, candles, or other smaller items clustered together on the side of the road or in the median. We may be initially surprised by such encounters, see these objects as being strange and out of place, yet in a flash recognize the objects as marking the place where someone died. Perhaps we take for granted such an occurrence, accept as commonplace these unhomely assemblages. Perhaps not.

My study seeks to place itself within the complex cultural performance of roadside shrines--as performances that have consequences, that set something in motion. My study is driven by the desire to engage in the historically situated and on going conversation in which the meanings, values, policies, and practices regarding marking the site of death on the road in the US is being negotiated so that we might begin to move beyond recognition of these sites as places of death of another, and begin to bear witness to the particular and accumulative forces that these sites bring to bear in various and specific contexts.

Borrowing from Gregory Ulmer's "mystory" experiment (*Teletheory* 209), and Bowman and Bowman's "Performing the Mystory," which compares the neologism *mystory*

to a similar neologism, *herstory,* which brings to light "the collective story of women suppressed in patriarchal history," I put into conversation a sampling of the material gathered while in pursuit of a series of interconnected and interdependent questions organized under the rubric of three discursive forms: "mystery," "history," and "my story" (Bowman and Bowman 164). Specifically, my study investigates roadside shrines as a mystery (where are shrines located on the road and in cultural imagination?), interrogates roadside shrines in/as history (where are roadside shrines located in the historical record and cultural myth?), and seeks to discover roadside shrines in/as my story (where are roadside shrines located in my personal archive?).

The patterning of this conversation is inspired by Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, which, according to Ulmer, shows us "how to articulate the private, public, and learned spheres of culture" (*Teletheory* 118). These "spheres" are represented with shifting narrative positions in different genres of writing: performative writing in/as autoperformance, ethnographic writing presenting a series of partial explanations of cultural phenomenon, and critical theory. The assemblage of questions, research materials, narrative positions, and genres of writing are stitched, glued, and mounded together, are occasionally torn apart by chance encounters and flashes of insight, and are summarily patched together yet again.

The embracing--and disrupting--figure that guides the conversation is that of "an interrupted journey," a phrase used to describe a specific funereal practice which has its own complex history (Arellano, "Descansos" 42), is used broadly and in varying social contexts in a struggle to attribute meaning to contemporary shrines (Barrera; Remey; Minutaglio; Sonenshine), and is employed to trouble contemporary values and policies regarding the

practice of marking the site of death on the road in the US (Gonzales and Rodriguez). This conversational pattern, this "interrupted journey," attempts to work through the particulars of the research material rather than merely repeat them (K. Oliver 218; Phelan, *Unmarked* 3), likened to Benjamin's "constellation of ideas" (Schleifer 314-15), is an appropriate method of representation in the face of death, and is an ethical response to the textual and visual images representing, among other things, the suffering of singular and collective "others" (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*). Ultimately, this mystory hopes to make apparent my own cultural poesis in order to open the way for you, my reader/audience, to make your own sense of the shrines and the worlds in which you encounter them, "to write in turn another text" (Ulmer, *Teletheory* 118), to create another pattern, to make another shrine.

1.2: Moving Through the Text

This project is a *mystoriography,* a method of creative research and composition that seeks to "track down and interrogate" dominant institutional discourses and practices that propel the researcher's interests, frame the researcher's interpretations of experience, and temper the researcher's personal and social identity, the goal of which is to generate new texts or stories out of bits and pieces of the research material (Bowman and Bowman 164-65). This text, this mystory, is constructed, or performs, a series of narrative "standpoints" (Denzin 220-21) from which to describe and analyze roadside shrines in the current and historical landscape of the US, and puts into conversation--constructs a bricolage from--the sometimes complementary, often contestatory, always already overlapping locations of meaning by representing the research material in a nonlinear, cyclic fashion, performs a series of attempts, and failures, to locate and settle upon the contemporary meaning and function of roadside shrines in the US.

Drawing from a figure of speech, "interrupted journey," used in popular and academic discourse to describe, interpret, and contest the cultural performance of roadside shrines in the US, I put "interruption" to work throughout the project to enact a Brechtian defamiliarization to unsettle or make strange what may be taken for granted regarding the cultural performances of and at roadside shrines. The written text works to destabilize the circulatory power of authoritarian discourse that makes normal and natural the landscapes of and on the road, and works to make the landscape graphically visible in space via extensive mapping of roadside shrines and intensive description of specific sites. Furthermore, drawing from humanist geographer Folche-Serra's use of Bahktin's chronotope, the text teases out a series of landscapes that are narratively visible in time through a dialogue "whose outcome is never a neutral exchange" (255), in a field of discourses negotiating various accounts of human experience wherein neutrality "becomes an impossibility" (258).

Chapter Two takes place and explores the view of roadside shrines from "on the road." "On the Road," in triptych fashion, describes roadside shrines on the side of the road from the perspective of the passer-by in context with the visible, soci-cultural landscape of the public thoroughfare on two local routes and two cross-country road trips. "On the Road" explores the politics and poetics of place and the private use of the public right-of-way--roadside shrines as both in and out of place. Chapter Three takes place and pursues roadside shrines within the archives, conducts a rhetorical analysis--a mapping--of the representation of shrines and shrine-building on the Internet and in the popular and academic press, historicizes the practice of roadside shrine-building and the dynamic role these discourses and practices play in the creation of, and resistance to, public policy which attempts to regulate marking the site of death on the road. Chapter Four engages roadside shrines in/as

"ritual." "Ritual" describes roadside shrines from a participant-observer standpoint, and engages in personal, public and professional rituals while visiting specific roadside shrines on one local route and during several new cross-country road trips. Chapter Five examines intercultural relationships--the choreography--of social rituals in the popular and academic arts, historicizes shrine-building as a mourning ritual, and contemplates the relationship between roadside shrines, funeral homes, cemeteries, and churches--places where shrines are *not*. Chapter Five also explores the mourning arts, where art belongs and to whom, what is judged as "good" art and what is "garbage," and concludes by interrogating what Rebecca Schneider calls the "blind spots" (184), takes into account what Stephen Hartnett calls the cultural fictions that ground and generate the discourses and practices of American democracy (168-82). Chapter Six restlessly concludes as I return to the field.

1.3: Locating My Project Within the Academy

While the immediate response to the question "Where are roadside shrines located?" might be, "right there, and there, and there" as one travels the roadway, the propensity of particular shrines to appear, disappear, and change from day to day obviates rather than simplifies issues of "Where?" Equally complex is the response to questions of location regarding the place of this work within the academy. I can firmly state that this work is situated within the discipline of communication studies, where human communication is central to the social formations of cultures made visible in various expressive, communicative forms such as "art, play, display, and performance" (Bauman xiv), and as such is nestled under the rubric of performance studies. However, this rubric is often unruly and hard to pin down because, as Kirk Fuoss states, "performance is simply too complex and too varied for any single perspective to fully encompas its many aspects" (*Striking*

Performances xi). Indeed, in an essay addressing the dynamic possibilities of the continually emergent field of performance studies, Strine, Long, and HopKins tell us that performance studies scholars in general assert that *performance* is an "*essentially contested concept*, meaning that its very existence is bound up in disagreement about what it is" (183, ital. in orig.). Strine et al. point not toward a field divided, but a field in which multiple, necessarily partial perspectives contribute to a vital discussion about performance aesthetics, performance in/as intellectual inquiry, and about performance as cultural memory, social ritual, and political activism. Broadening the scope of performance studies scholarship further, Dwight Conquergood has argued for an ethnographic practice which combines "intellectual rigor with artistic excellence that is critcally engaged" ("Interventions and Radical Research" 316-20), and historiographer and literary critic Joseph Roach situates his own work with/in the field of performance studies, which is "on the cusp of the arts and human sciences" delimited "only by what people actually do" (*Cities* xvi). To be "nestled" on the cusp is a precarious position, one that nonetheless funds the generative power of performance studies scholarship.

My study is placed at the conjunction of these already interconnected and overlapping sites of performance, is focused on the communicative practices and performance of everyday life in dynamic relationship with social and cultural discourses and practices, and is mobilized by the performance of ethnography. This work also enacts, drawing from the work of Elspeth Probyn, a series of interdisciplinary negotiated belongings: along the way this work picks up and employs discourses and methodological tools from across the humanities in an effort to engage in the materially grounded, rhetorically contexted, historically situated conversations regarding the practices of marking the site of death on the

road in the US. Clifford Geertz tells us that while ethnographers begin in a "state of general bewilderment as to what the devil is going on," they do not, however, begin "intellectually empty-handed" (27). Following Geertz, and in the spirit of interdisciplinary conviviality, I acknowledge below a series of interrelated, interdependent fields of scholarship that highlight key features of this study.

My work benefits from the vibrant relationship between performance and cultural anthropology, scholarship related to cultural performance and ritual, particularly those studies engaging Victor Turner's theory of liminality (*Anthropology of Performance; From Ritual to Theatre*), and the performative thresholds marking the betwixt and between temporal structures of everyday realities ("Variations"). I am particularly indebted to, indeed have been deeply influenced by, Colin Turnbull's study with the Mbuti. Turnbull "finds himself," by accident, in the Ituri forest in (the former) Zaire (51-52), enters the field as a curious non-expert, travels back and forth over the course of several years between Oxford and the Ituri forest, accumulates a set of theories and anthropological practices and a growing wealth of field notes, and eventually becomes fully enmeshed in the Mbuti culture, participating in, among other things, several death-related rituals--a process of accumulation, participation, and negotiated group belongings that resonates with my own research process. However, whereas Turnbull's work was grounded in the study of non-Western, geographically bounded socio-cultural groups, my study draws from scholarship directly addressing Western socio-cultural relationship(s) with death and death-related practices, particularly Phillip Aries' *The Hour of Our Death*, and Jonathan Dollimore's "Denial of Death?" in *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*. I also am indebted to scholarship wrestling with issues of representation of death, grief, and mourning, particularly from

Ronald Schleifer's treatise on Walter Benjamin's influence regarding death and writing and Benjamin's "absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure" (Benjamin, *Origin* 28, in Schleifer 314).

My study is most directly influenced by postcolonial, poststructural reflexive scholarship which engages the politics of representation of death, memorialization, and cultural memory in the US, specifically Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead*, and Miles Richardson's "The Gift of Presence: The Act of Leaving Artifacts at Shrines, Memorials, and Other Tragedies." I am particularly indebted to Karen Halttunen's "Mourning the Dead: A Study in Sentimental Ritual" in *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle Class Culture in America*, and Michael Bowman's mystory "Killing Dillinger," which directly addresses the interdependent, generative relationship between death, performance, and cultural criticism.

One area of study closely linked to roadside shrines is the recent cross-disciplinary interest in the contemporary vernacular practices of shrine-building at sites of public tragedy. There is a growing wealth of cross-disciplinary scholarship linking shrine-building at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial ("The Wall") and the on going practice of shrine building at "The Wall," vernacular shrine-building at other high profile sites of death, and shrine-building at the more homely sites of death on the road. This scholarship serves, individually and collectively, to initiate and support various aspects of the present discussion. For example, sociologists Allen Haney, Christina Leimer, and Julian Lowrey point toward the possibilities of shrine-building as political action; rhetorical scholars Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp and Lori Lanzilotti historicize various practices at shrine sites; folklorist Sylvia Grider engages the celebratory potential of vernacular ingenuit ("Preliminary Observations";

"Spontaneous Shrines"); and architect Harriet Senie examines the relationship between shrine-building, cemetery practices, and public monuments ("Mourning in Protest"; "A Difference in Kind"). While these studies focus primarily on large-scale, high profile shrines and mention roadside shrines in passing, sometimes as an afterthought (Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti), there is a growing interest in the humanities specifically about the practice of marking the site of death on the road.

Scholarship interested specifically in roadside shrines ranges from shrines located in Australia (Clark and Franzmann; Hartig and Dunn; R. J. Smith), Great Britain (Monger), the Netherlands (Steng), and to shrines located in Eastern Europe (Rajkovic), Greece (Saccopolulos), and Mexico (Henzel; Weir). There is also a growing number of scholars writing about the practice of marking the site of death on the road in the US (Arellano; Arellano, Chavez, and Anaya; Barrera; Everett, "Roadside Crosses," *Roadside Crosses*; J. Griffith, *A Shared Space, Beliefs and Holy Places*; Owens; Reid and Reid). This scholarship also serves, individually and collectively, to initiate and support various aspects of the present discussion. Folklore scholars writing primarily since 1990 locate and describe roadside shrines, conduct interviews with shrine-builders, and investigate the history of the practice in specific geographic regions, primarily in the Southwest (Barrera; Everett, "Roadside Crosses," *Roadside Crosses*; J. Griffith, *A Shared Space*, *Beliefs and Holy Places*; Reid and Reid), but also in the North Atlantic region (Ingersol) and in the South (Owens). I am particularly indebted to folklorist Maida Owens's on going research and writing about roadside shrines in Louisiana. Framing these studies in time are Juan Estevan Arellano's work, published in 1986, which explores historical and contemporary practices of marking the site of death by Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, citing the practice as one of the

last noncommercial forms of Indo-Hispano art, and art educator Sandra McCollister's essay, published in 2000, which investigates roadside shrines in the Southwest as a complex cross-cultural communicative art form. Framing and cross-cutting these studies as national discourse and practice are McCarthy's 1997 *Wall Street Journal* nation-wide survey of roadside shrines and institutional attempts to curtail them, and Robert Rabinowitz's 1999 interrogation of the political ramifications of placing what he refers to as baroque-style Catholic shrines on the public thoroughfare across the largely Protestant US landscape. Indeed, if McCarthy's and Rabinowitz's treatises are any indication, the practice of marking the site of death on the road has become increasingly popular--and politically volatile--all across the US, even as scholars struggle to keep apace with the complexities of these cultural performances.

The strengths of the above essays, individually and collectively, lie in their willingness to explore a wide range of interconnected cultural practices related to death, grief, and mourning. In addition these studies, while not employing a performance paradigm *per se*, do frame the practice in terms of culture, cultural performance, and ritual. Indeed, with the exception of Rabinowitz, scholars frame the building of shrines as a ritual response to grief and loss, and so bring into clear focus the relatively stable patterns that codify and normalize the practice. One exception, a study of roadside shrines conducted in Eastern Europe, is also of particular interest to the current project.

Folklore scholar Zorica Rajkovic conducted a long-term, geographically extensive study of roadside shrines in (the former) Yugoslavia. Rajkovic's primary fieldwork was conducted in 1977, and continued sporadically until 1983, in response to the proliferation of the shrines despite a 1974 Yugoslavian Federal ban imposed on private citizens' practice of

building shrines, and the government's unsuccessful attempt to implement a program to standardize the markers. The author historicizes European death and memorial practices in general and the practice of marking the site of death on the road in particular, and explicates the shrines as symbolic communication and as aesthetically complex objects. The study also looks at shrines through other interpretive lenses: Western and Eastern ideologies and socio-economic factors in relationship to the automobile, driving, and the road; institutional interests including the tourism bureau and the national government; traditional folk customs in conflict with individual expression; and in relationship to other contemporaneous, high profile shrines at sites of tragic death in the US and elsewhere. Rajkovic's study suggests the dynamic nature of the cultural performance of roadside shrines, and points toward the possibilities of conducting a similarly complex study in the US.

Most of the scholars writing about the practice of marking the site of death on the road, in the US and elsewhere, base their findings on studies conducted in geographically delimited, regionally specific areas within a relatively narrow time frame. Moreover, most of the studies of shrine-building tend to focus on the ritual aspect of the practice as a response to tragic death. While ritual is a key aspect to the initial building of the shrines, substantiated by shrine-builders themselves (e.g., Chaz; Miller in Minutaglio; Patsy), it is also an *a priori* deployment of ritual theory which, according to Catherine Bell and Rene Gerard, may obscure other crucial aspects of the practice. In addition, while Rajkovic's study provides a model for expanding my project in geographic and interpretive scope and points toward the generative potential of the practice, and does indeed situate roadside shrines as symbolic communication, the communication model employed by Rajkovic to interpret the meanings of the shrines is overly simplistic. Rajkovic employs a transmission, or linear, model of

communication, the deployment of which leads, in her analysis of communication aspects of the shrines, to a finalizable locutionary statement: shrines "are objects that people have shaped to transmit messages . . . reduced to one basis: A person was killed in a traffic accident here!" (174), an analysis which forecloses the very dynamics her study exposes.

1.4: Scale, Scope and Method

Where do we place these sites, these roadside shrines, within the current cultural milieu? While the obvious answer is "there, and there, and there," on the side of the road, according to Jane Blocker's deployment of the theory and practice of performativity in her book *Where is Ana Mendiata?,* posing the question "Where?" also points to where shrines are not, and/or where shrines should not be. Roadside shrines--both in and out of place--call upon discourses of location and dislocation, of place and placement, which are "laminated, mutually sustaining, sometimes indistinguishable sources of power" (Blocker 2). Therefore, by *repeatedly* asking "Where are roadside shrines?" I invest the cultural performance of roadside shrines with a powerful indeterminacy.

My journey in pursuit of "Where?" resonates with James Clifford's call for ethnographers to seek out, observe, and participate in zones of contact where folks from various cultures meet in transit ("Traveling Cultures"). My itinerary is fine-tuned by Hastrup and Olwig's examination of the role of place in the concept and performance of culture. Hastrup and Olwig assert that, while many scholars are struggling to write within and about the "postmodern condition" and foreground displacement, "the people we are studying are creating material and imagined places which may or may not correlate to places called 'home' or 'away'" (i). My journey in pursuit of "Where?" also crosses paths with Joseph Roach's monumental "genealogy of performance" project, a method of research and writing

that identifies and traces the transcontinental history of deeply problematic "hot spots" of social behavior in the US ("Slave" 50-51). My genealogical excursions are tempered by several scholars' call to abandon the search for origins in favor of engaging the multiple perspectives that made the writing of certain histories possible (R. Bowman; Doyle; Pollock). "Where?" also corresponds to asking what Paul Edwards might call an "improper" question that creates a social writing space for something surprising--seemingly accidental--to happen ("Drift" 15), a philosophy and practice that informs and propels my desire to discover my own connections with and within the cultural performance of roadside shrines.

1.4.1: Investigating Roadside Shrines as Mystery

Where are roadside shrines located on the road and in the cultural imagination? In order to investigate this mystery of marking the site of death on the road, I take roadside shrines, material cultural artifacts, as points of departure and travel across time and space--on the road and in the archives--to gather a wide range of materials that are contingent upon the corporeal presence of roadside shrines and the varied and emergent images, and responses to those images, that the shrines evoke.

This study extends the geographic survey to multiple regions of the US, including the New England, Mid-Atlantic, Southern, Midwestern, Southwestern and Rocky Mountain regions. This survey covered 6,356 one way miles in twenty-six states on a combination of Interstate and US Highways, and rural two-lane roads, and mapped the specific locations of 335 individual shrines at 241 shrine sites. The only region not traveled by car was the Pacific Coast. While the following chapters describe specific survey routes in several regions of the US, the actual survey area is much larger. Below are maps from two different perspectives of the entire survey area covered between the years 1992 to 2004 (Figures 1.4.1 and 1.4.2).

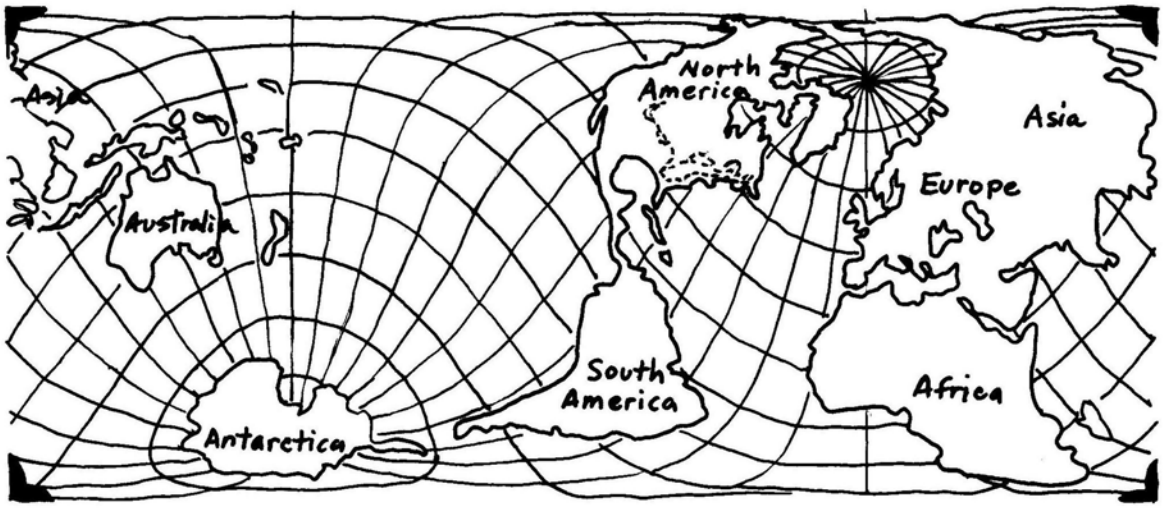


Figure 1.4.1: Map: Global Perspective: North American Survey Routes, 1992 - 2004

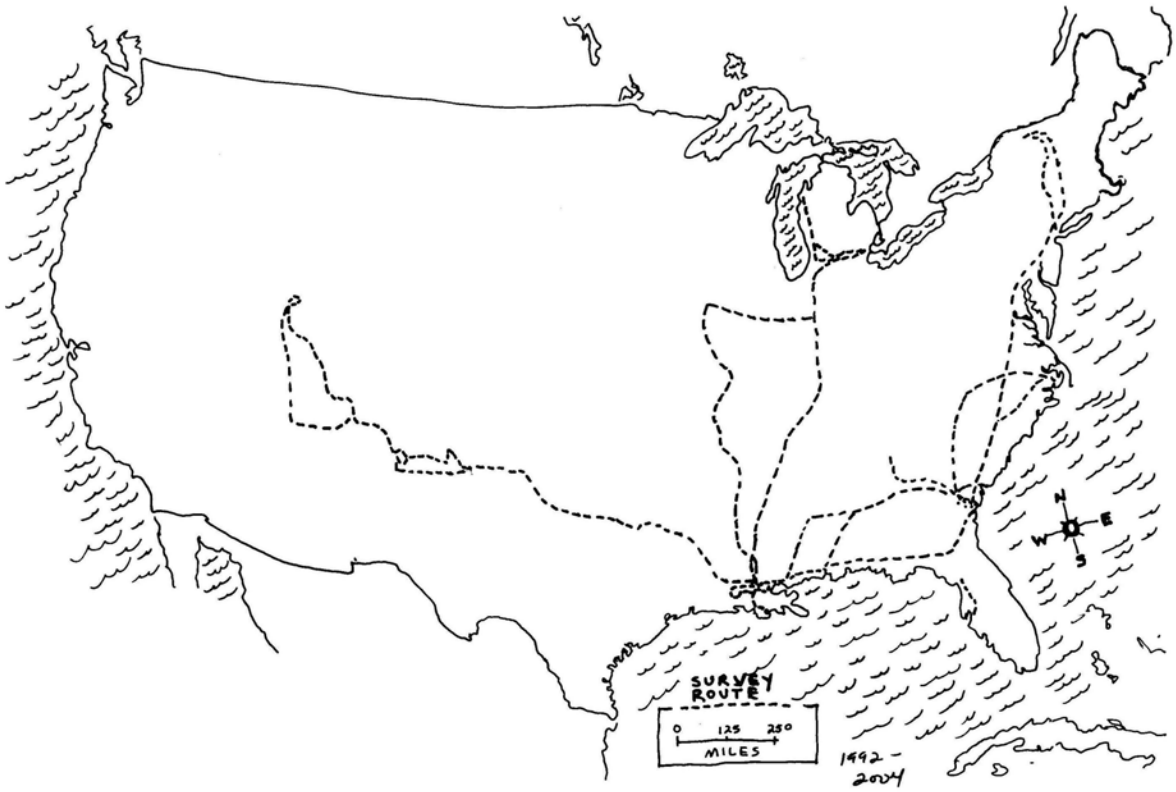


Figure 1.4.2: Map: National Perspective: United States Survey Routes, 1992 - 2004

This study also contributes an intensive description of specific sites in regions of the US not covered in previous studies, and extends this work with the added dimension of time. I map the location of, ritually revisit, and intensively describe changes in forty-five specific roadside shrines over a six year period between 1998-2004 on approximately eight hundred one way miles on two and four-lane roads in southeast Michigan, southeast Louisiana, southeastern Georgia, and on the US Highway system connecting those areas. This method of intense "in scene" description draws from the relationship between communication, performance, and material cultural studies. According to Babcock, material objects have the potential to perform polysemically, communicatively, and as "bricolage" (206-16), providing a particularly useful frame from which to engage the broad range of objects assembled at sites of death on the road, as well the method of assembly of the research material in the written text. Indeed, according to Daniel Miller, material cultural studies emphasize what people actually *do* with things, which opens "a clear latitude for the critique of ideology" (12).

This study also includes multiple perspectives of other persons involved in some way with/in the cultural performance of roadside shrines. Primary research includes a total of sixty-four ethnographic interviews, ranging from casual conversations to formal taped and transcribed interviews, with persons living and/or working in close proximity to one or more roadside shrines in fourteen different states, shrine-builders in two states, and those intimate with shrine-builders, also from three different states. The names of these conversants have been changed to preserve confidentiality. Other, more formal interviews were conducted with scholars and journalists writing about roadside shrines, government representatives from five different states, road emergency workers in three states, and a death-trade professional in

Louisiana. The names of public officials and those with whom I conducted formal interviews have not been changed.

1.4.2: Interrogating Roadside Shrines in/as History

Where are roadside shrines located in the historical record and cultural myth? Just as Roach wanders the city looking for "vortices" of behavior (*Cities* 26-29), so I drive the highways looking for similar "hot spots . . . nodal points in a network of common but deeply problematic enunciation--gestures, expressions, protocols, manners, habits, and attitudes--whereby a culture remembers and reinvents not only its most public relationships, but also its most intimate ones" (Roach, "Slave" 50-51).

Roadside shrines, as material cultural artifacts, mark several interconnected layers of performance and as such can be investigated as performance vortices. The initial building of the roadside shrine functions as a ritual performance that enacts, marks, and negotiates tenuous and porous boundaries, at once linking and dividing the living and the dead, grief and memory, here and not here. Roadside shrines, however, function as sites of performance not only in the moment of their initial construction, but also in subsequent moments when the original builders of the shrine and others return to the site, confront the ghosting traces of that past performance, and supplement these traces with new actions—prayers, tears, conversations with the dead, observances of silence—often leaving behind additional objects—toys, candles, flags—and sometimes removing "spent" ones—withered flowers, candle stubs, rain-soaked notes. Roadside shrines are constructed in moments of performance, leave traces that bear witness to those past performances, and invite future performances.

While many of the future performances to which we are invited transpire at or near the site of the initial performance, others take place miles (and years) away in contested negotiations regarding meanings, values, policies, and practices related roadside shrine. In order to interrogate subsequent performances that emanate from roadside shrines, secondary research was conducted of various print and electronic media which address roadside and other shrines at sites of sudden and violent death. I analyzed 184 newspaper articles concerned with various aspects of roadside shrines first published in print between January 1993 and April 2003. These articles were located with the help of periodic visits to Lexis-Nexis, Proquest, and Google.com search engines, and several individuals who collected and sent me actual printed texts, including 171 articles published in twenty-nine states, including Hawaii and Alaska--representing every region in the US--and thirteen articles published in international newspapers about shrines in other nations. Other secondary sources include thirty-nine web sites, eight television shows, one televised public service announcement, and five stories on National Public Radio, all featuring roadside shrines, and a wealth of scholarship related to roadside shrines and key aspects of shrine-building.

I document roadside shrines, duly noting my participation in these cultural performances. Then I turn to the archives, conduct a "genealogy of performance" (Roach, "Slave" 50) in an attempt to a historically situate various contemporary behaviors and figures of speech related to shrine-building and attempts to assign meaning to the shrines, not in search of origins but rather to engage the multiple perspectives that make the writing of certain histories possible. I return repeatedly, however, to the roadside shrines themselves, seeking something of and beyond both shrine and archive. Along the way, with the help of Stephen Hartnett and others, I encounter our "nationally sanctioned cultural fictions" of

freedom and liberty (Hartnett 12) of which the road, and roadside shrines, are materially and discursively keyed, and bear witness to the length that individuals and groups will go in order to invest in and/or fortify those fictions.

1.4.3: Discovering Roadside Shrines in My Story

Where are roadside shrines located in my story? At the outset, I entered the field as a non-expert equipped with individual and social experiences and taken for granted modes and means of meaning-making which worked in concert to pique my interest in roadside shrines. Mystoriography seeks to discover this personal archive--these frames of interpretations, the previous experiences in which they are anchored, and the specific dominant institutional discourses that underpin and sanction these ways of seeing and being in the world--for the express purpose of destabilizing them. Once destabilized, the bits and pieces of ones story--of my story--can be reconstructed, or performed, in a new way, one that carries with it the possibility of generating an open text in which readers can interrogate and generate their own ways of seeing and being in the world. This is a particularly useful process when conducting an ethnography of the culture in which one lives--a practice in which "the embodied researcher is the instrument," and in which critical theory unveils the political stakes that anchor cultural practice (Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography" 180).

Ulmer, drawing on Barthes, suggests that human beings are not defined by ideas or languages but by imagination, and he calls for "the return of the poetician" whose concern goes beyond analysis or comparative scholarship to invention, poesis, the "production of new work" (*Heuretics* 4). Ulmer's mystory experiment does not abandon established theoretical discourses of critique and interpretation, but instead adds to these practices "a generative productivity of the sort practiced by the avant-garde . . . as a step toward achieving

alternatives" (*Heuretics* xii). Akin to Brechtian theatre practices that attempt to critically engage an audience using techniques of defamiliarization that represent cultural texts and artifacts in order to "refunction" them (M. Bowman 362), mystoriography, adapted to performance-based research by Bowman and Bowman, "exploits a property of performance art that tends to be underrepresented in much scholarly writing: its ability to delight and entertain" a reader/audience (165).

My study in pursuit of roadside shrines *as* performance by *means of* performance, via the various methodological tools gathered along the way, affords the opportunity to engage current and historically situated material and textual practices in a responsive, inventive manner. In addition to including my own attempts to come to terms with roadside shrines--what Ulmer calls "eureka" moments (*Heuretics* 7), and what Denzin refers to as "epiphanies" (221)--key moments of insight and inspiration, confusion and failure, strategically placed in the text to enact the narratively visible poesis of cultural invention (Ulmer, *Heuretics*), my project adds a unique material aesthetic dimension to the study of roadside shrines. Throughout the research process, I actively participated in the creation, placement, and interrogation of various aesthetic forms of roadside shrines in various social contexts, images of which perform in this document. I have created drawings, paintings, photographs, several miniature models of shrines, and a full-scale roadside shrine installation. I have strategically placed these objects on the stage during several public performances of this research, at a strategic location during a national conference ("Theatron"), and on the side of the road (*Independence Day*). I am also in an on going negotiation with a roadside shrine strategically placed in my own back yard (*Adaptation/Adoption*).

This mystory--my own negotiation with/in the cultural performance of roadside shrines--is offered in an attempted to tease out a performative space that mirrors Barthes's quest for wonder, desire, and pleasure, that takes up Gould's search for the illocutionary suspense or perlocutionary delay by way of writing with and within "gaps" in meaning (31), and that heeds Pollock's call for an exploration of those "spaces betwixt and between emerging differences . . . [that are] fertile with the possibility of both reviewing and revising history" (4-5). In this way, I have (hopefully) created an open text, one that makes apparent my own politics and poetics in negotiation with/in the cultural performance of roadside shrines, one that provides unique and provisional insights regarding the politics and poetics--the cultural performance--of roadside shrines in the US, and one that, ultimately, opens the way for you, my reader/audience, to negotiate your own relationships with and within the cultural performance of roadside shrines.

1.4.4: Operational Definitions

For purposes of this study, the term "roadside shrine" refers to material artifacts that mark the site of unexpected, violent death, placed by individuals on the side of public roads to mark the death of a loved one. These sites are sometimes the place where a person actually died, was pronounced dead on the scene by emergency medical personnel, however, this is not always the case. Sometimes a roadside shrine marks the place where a loved one was last "alive, regardless of the place of clinical death" (Everett, "Roadside Crosses" 96-97). Other roadside shrines mark the place where the body of a loved one was found after being murdered elsewhere.

The term "shrine-building" refers to the practice of leaving objects at or near the site of sudden and violent death. Furthermore, although the terms "roadside shrine," "roadside

memorial," "roadside marker," and "roadside cross" are used, often interchangeably, by scholars (e.g., Everett; Grider; Haney et al.; Owens), and journalists (e.g., DeMillo; Galletta; McCarthy) to describe the sites, I use the terms "shrine," "roadside shrine," and "shrine-building" because of their performative connotations. Miles Richardson discusses performances at similar sites as embodied material practices that invite future interaction and are relatively unfinalized ("Gift"), which suggests that the terms "memorial" and "memorialization" connote a less open-ended and more prescriptive process. I use the term "marker" to refer to the standardized signs that some government institutions use to replace shrines created by individuals. I use the term "cross" to describe the general shape of specific objects. I also include the specific details of cross construction, one of which is height, which I have categorized--ranging from tiny to very large--for greater readability. However, as each size category is introduced, I will also provide the technical measurements associated with that category in a parenthetical reference.

While I reported previously that "[r]eligious artifacts [placed at the sites] are . . . common; rosaries, crucifixes, holy cards, and statues of . . . saints" (Kennerly, "Getting Messy" 235-36), further research indicates that this is an overstatement. It is more accurate to report that these types of objects *sometimes* appear. Artifacts do often surround a Latin cross, one in which the horizontal arms are shorter than the vertical, but this is not to be confused with the crucifix, a Latin cross with the figure of a crucified Christ. The inclusion of a crucifix is rare, and will be noted accordingly in descriptions of specific sites. It must also be noted that no symbol can uncritically be associated with religiosity. Indeed, the Latin cross is used for various purposes, ranging from the decorative arts to political protests. For example, Tasha, sporting a cross entwined with a leafy vine tattooed on her wrist, told me

that she and her friends all had a similar tatooed image "because it's pretty." I have also encounterd political groups that use the cross in protest of various social practices and policies. For example, white crosses have been used since 1984 by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) as an official symbol to mark sites of alcohol related death because the cross "calls attention to death" (Everett, "Roadside Crosses" 111-12). At Louisiana State University during the anniversary week of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, hundreds of small white crosses are placed on the parade grounds by anti-abortion groups to protest that decision. In Santa Barbara, California, every Sunday since the US invaded Iraq in 2003, a growing number of small white crosses "to honor our fallen sons and daughters" have been erected on the public beach by Town Hall Activists and Veterans for Peace to protest the war (Veterans for Peace). To be forthcoming, it is this last group whose efforts I most admire and with whom I deeply identify.

In the following chapters I rarely narrate the events surrounding a particular death. My silence on this issue amounts to an intentional mirroring of a silence at the sites themselves. While the names of the dead do sometimes appear on individual shrines, I offer that this relative anonymity is at least partially responsible for the power of the sites, individually and collectively, to initiate and maintain a dialogue with/within other discourses and practices that make up the complex cultural performance of roadside shrines. It follows then that this relative absence be allowed to guide my work. My position is supported by Denzin who asserts that a responsible, reflexive text embodies certain and specific characteristics, one of which is silence, where "silence is presented as a form of resistance" (77). This silence provokes the emerging images of/at these places that mark the absence of various and specific corporeal bodies.

CHAPTER TWO
LOCATING ROADSIDE SHRINES ON THE ROAD

> "Travel" has an inextinguishable taint of location by class, gender, race, and a certain literariness. It offers a good reminder that all translation terms used in global comparisons--terms like culture, art, society, peasant, mode of production, man, woman, modernity, ethnography--get us some distance *and* fall apart (Clifford, "Traveling Cultures" 110).

> "Let the prose take the wheel" (N. Griffith, *I'm Not Drivin' These Wheels*).

2.1: Navigating the Narrated Tour

This chapter provides a narrated tour, as if moving through time and space while driving down the road, as if looking over the narrator's (the researcher's) shoulder, looking at roadside shrines and other sites of interest to this study through the tinted windows of the car. This "tour" takes place while traveling on specific roadways, surveyed at various and specific times and time-frames; sometimes a tour "goes down the road" narrating what is visible on, and on the side of, the road on a single road trip; other tours describe not only what is there at a specific time, but what is *no longer* there and what *will be* there in the future. At times, the narrated tours will be interrupted by attempts of the narrator/researcher and others to come to terms with roadside shrines as they perform on the side of the road and in context with contemporary or historical cultural moments.

This "literal" journey is constructed in such a way as to describe particular sites in context with the material and social landscape of--and on--the road in an attempt to avoid, or at least forestall, any attempts at generalization of these sites: each roadside shrine marks the site where a once living, breathing being is thought to have met the circumstances of his or her death, and as such deserves to be treated with singular care. This "literary" journey is constructed in such a way as to account for the researcher's attempt, and failure, to hold a distanced, third-person-observer stance in relation to the subject of interest, roadside shrines.

The following description is also constructed, initially, to resonate the literature of travel and tourism. While roadside shrines are not a feature of most road travel and tourism guides, encounters with these sites are becoming an inevitable part of road tourism. These encounters make this experiment in form and the inclusion of roadside shrines appropriate, especially given the researcher's intent to unsettle taken-for-granted meanings of roadside shrines in relationship with the road and related discourses and practices related to the road. Furthermore, there are an increasing number of online travel and tourism sites that do feature roadside shrines, like McClure's *Southern New Mexico Online* travel newsletter, and Zihrena's tour and narrated "pilgrimage of sorts" of "drive-by shrines" in Mexico. My project takes substantial cues from these vernacular practices. However, while enticing photographs are part and parcel of the allure of print and electronic travel literature, I resist, for this leg of the journey through the dissertation, the use of the photographic image. Support for the absence of photographic images is found in yet another popular medium. While newspaper stories about roadside shrines often accompany those stories with photographs, the search engine Lexis-Nexis, one of the primary research tools used by newspaper (and other) writers, is a text-only retrieval system and so provides only the captions of the photos. Text-only systems leave it up to readers' imagination to visualize the site, a practice my work hopes to encourage.

In this chapter the reader will, however, encounter several different types of figures. There are two types of maps: one type provides the survey route of a specific survey area, the other indicates the approximate geographic location of shrine sites on the survey route and/or a specific section of a survey area. Later in the chapter, numerous sketches of specific roadside shrines, drawn from the researcher's fieldnotes, also make appearances. The

sketches of roadside shrines will be re-presented as they appear in *and* on the fieldnotes to lend an additional contextual layer to the reading. A few of these sketches, isolated from their place in the fieldnotes, have been previously published in the author's essay, "Getting Messy: In the Field and at the Crossroads with Roadside Shrines."

2.2: A Tour of Roadside Shrines in Southeast Michigan, 1992 - 2004

While the following tour narrates a specific route, the map below (Figure 2.2.1) indicates the entire survey area in the lower peninsula of Michigan. Subsequent maps with the approximate location of roadside shines will appear throughout the following section.

Figure 2.2.1: Map: Michigan Survey Routes, 1992-2004

2.2.1: Increasing Circulation: Detroit to the Irish Hills, Michigan, September 1992 to July 1998

During the years 1992 to 1998, the researcher held various sales positions that required travel in and around southeast Michigan. The description below provides readers with a tour of roadside shrines and other sites of interest to this study on one specific stretch of road: US-12 between Detroit and an area to the west known as the Irish Hills. The map below (Figure 2.2.2) indicates a slightly wider survey area and the approximate location of several other roadside shrines documented between 1992 and 1998.

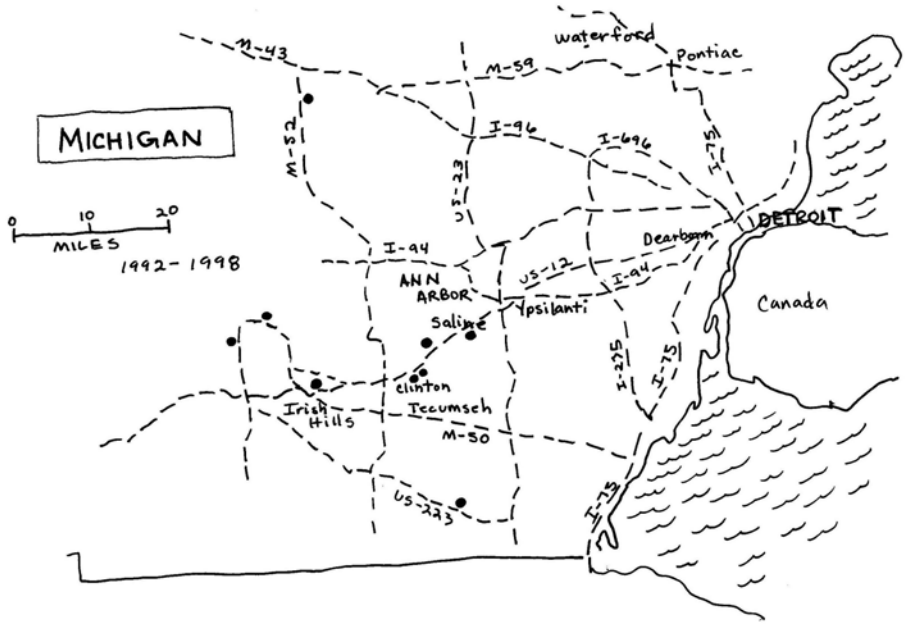


Figure 2.2.2: Map: Southeast Michigan with Roadside Shrines, 1992-1998

Driving west on US-12, one travels away from Detroit, the self-proclaimed "Motor City Capital of the World" ("Welcome to Detroit"), to the auto/industrial border town of Ypsilanti where the highway, up to nine lanes wide to the east, turns into a two-lane ribbon of road between Ypsilanti and Saline. The land itself, relatively flat from the Detroit River all the way to Saline, becomes increasingly hilly to the west, where the road narrows and begins to climb, curve, and wind. Land use becomes primarily agrarian. The landscape is dotted

with corn, soybean, and wheat fields, patches of woods standing close to the road, farm houses, big red barns, dilapidated out-buildings in various stages of collapse, sheep, cows, horses, the occasional chicken (or fox) trying to cross the road, and shrines–white crosses, wreaths of fresh and fabric flowers, and statues of saints--on the side of the road where presumably someone died in an auto-related incident.

Just west of the Saline village limit, on the north side of the road there once was a large (4 to 4 1/2 feet tall) wood cross attached to a telephone pole. The cross was painted white, with "Prom Night '98" hand-painted in black cursive letters on the horizontal cross-piece. Pink and yellow fabric flowers were stuck in the ground at its base. For several weeks in June of 1998 the cross accumulated more flowers; some were fresh and wrapped in cellophane. By July the cross and flowers were gone.

Fifteen miles farther west, the "Fieldstone Wall Shrine" marks the halfway point between Saline and Clinton, the next village on the trail. The shrine has been there "for as long as anyone can remember," according to Mark Pedersen, the keeper of the Historic Clinton Inn. Situated under the "55 MPH" speed limit sign, the small (1 1/2 to 2 feet tall) wood cross is painted white. The inscription, "Miss You," on the horizontal cross-piece can easily be read as one passes by. The cross stands in front of a semicircular fieldstone wall which partially encloses the cross and the two metal legs of the sign. The shrine complex is situated on top of a small mound of dirt which is scraped clean and planted with flowers in various stages of bloom and decay. In winter, when the snow is deep or drifting, the site seems to disappear.

Ten miles farther west, at the top of a rise and just before the "S" curve east of the "Clinton Gulch," in a field of wild grass bordered by a small grove of trees, two large (2 to 3

feet in circumference) wreaths of fresh flowers on tall (4 to 4 1/2 feet) wire stands stood side by side facing the road. The wreaths straddled deeply rutted tracks made by a very large vehicle, stood there for several months during the winter of 1996, slowly deteriorated, and then they were gone. A year later a similar pair of wreaths appeared at the same spot for several months, then they too disappeared. As of June 1998, the tracks, running all the way to the tree line, remain.

Driving farther west on US-12, one passes through the village of Clinton and travels on into the Irish Hills, an area noted for its tree-lined winding curves, cliffs overlooking the area's many recreational lakes, and roadside attractions. There is one particularly beautiful and cruel area known as Dead Man's Curve (Adman; Cherry) where the tarmac torques up a steep incline into a hairpin turn at the top of the hill.

Rounding the first section of the "S" curve and climbing, one can glance to the left at the sloping mound between the road and the lake thirty feet below, *or* one can quickly glance to the right and catch a glimpse of the small cross etched into the cliff wall. One local legend has it that the road was tortured into this shape to avoid an "Ancient Indian Burial Ground" (Adman) alongside an old Potawatomi Indian foot trail. Other legends abound of high school students losing their lives from "takin' the curve too fast, and bein' too loose with the booze" (Summer). At the top of the hill, behind metal guardrails on the south side of the road, is the Twin Towers Scenic Overlook and Gift Shop. On the north side of the road one can pull off and enjoy the outdoor life-sized depiction of Christ's journey to Calvary, located at the site where Father Gabriel Richard ministered to the Potawatomi Indians beginning in 1790 ("St. Joseph's Shrine"). Down the hill and a few miles farther west are Mystery Hill, Prehistoric Forest, and the Frontier Village and Stagecoach Stop which is not, unlike several other

establishments in various stages of restoration and decay on US-12, one of the original stagecoach stops on the "Old Detroit to Chicago Road" (Michigan State, Department of History). At the intersection of US-12 and M-50, on the northwest corner, one can visit the site where the Potowatomi man's bones, unearthed at the top of the hill to the east, were reburied at Walker's Tavern. Walker's Tavern was deemed, in 1998, an excellent candidate for designation as a HUB Gateway on the National Heritage Route for its role as an interpretive center for early road travel *and* for pointing the way toward the Michigan International Speedway (Bodurow).

Persistent Image: Performing Chronotopic Convergence, a.k.a. "Snow Job"

Late afternoon, gray day darkening, wind howling and swirling the snow drifting across the two-lane road, across US-12, obliterating guidelines, guardrails, ditches. "Windshield wipers slappin' time" (Joplin), slapping fat wet snowflakes, thick slush freezing at the edges of the frame. Headlights follow the fast-disappearing two-track trail of some previous, now absent traveler, traveling west. Leather-gloved hands clutch the steering wheel, brow furrowed, breath held, lips pursed, expletives deleted. Plow forward on the straight-away, fight to stay on the slightly elevated stretch of road that cuts through this swath of Michigan farmland, navigate between the tiny orange reflectors barely visible, visibility deteriorating. Crawl by the halfway point between Saline and Clinton--the bare brown tip of the rotting wood cross peeks out from under a blanket of white. Imagine approaching the "S" curve over the "Clinton Gulch": guts wrench, breath quickens. Anticipate the upcoming test of skill, the terrible pleasure of the challenge, tempting fate. Take the hill, the dip, the bend, pick up speed and slip, skid slightly through the curve to the right, headlights flash over a pair of crosses (that won't actually appear until the summer of

2001) “Paul” and “Paul” on the south guardrail on the narrow bridge, then briefly caress another smaller (future) white cross on the north guardrail. Climb up and over another rise, and blessedly, down the gently sloping hill into the village of Clinton. Turn left at the stoplight, make delivery to client in Tecumseh before 5:00.

Check.

2.2.2: The Irish Hills to Saline, Michigan, January 2, 2004

While the narrated road trip below describes roadside shrines sighted on a specific date on a particular stretch of US-12, the map below (Figure 2.2.3) indicates the approximate geographic location of roadside shrines sited by the researcher (and others) over a longer period of time in a wider survey area. Some of the sites in the Ann Arbor area were documented by feature writer Susan Oppat (“Other Area Memorials”), and were later discussed at length in a telephone interview with the researcher.

Working Holidays, Hardly Working

Bright, cold, dry mid-morning. Light snow covering the ground in patches, no wind, road clear of snow and traffic, traveling east on US-12 through the “Irish Hills” area, approaching “Calvary” and the “Twin Towers.” “Rotting Holiday Xmas Tree Shrine” with the tiny cross wedged between the steel guardrail and the slope on the south side of road at the top of Dead Man’s Hill, first documented in May 2000, gone. “Old Cross on Cliff Wall,” first spotted September 1992, provisionally confirmed in rearview mirror. “Three at Clinton Gulch,” one small white cross mounted on the south guardrail at the western side of the the bridge crossing the gully, and two larger crosses, both inscribed “Paul,” mounted on north guardrail approximately ten feet apart at the eastern side of the bridge, first documented in June 2001, now gone. “Double Wreaths in Ruts” at the top of the “S” curve at the “Clinton

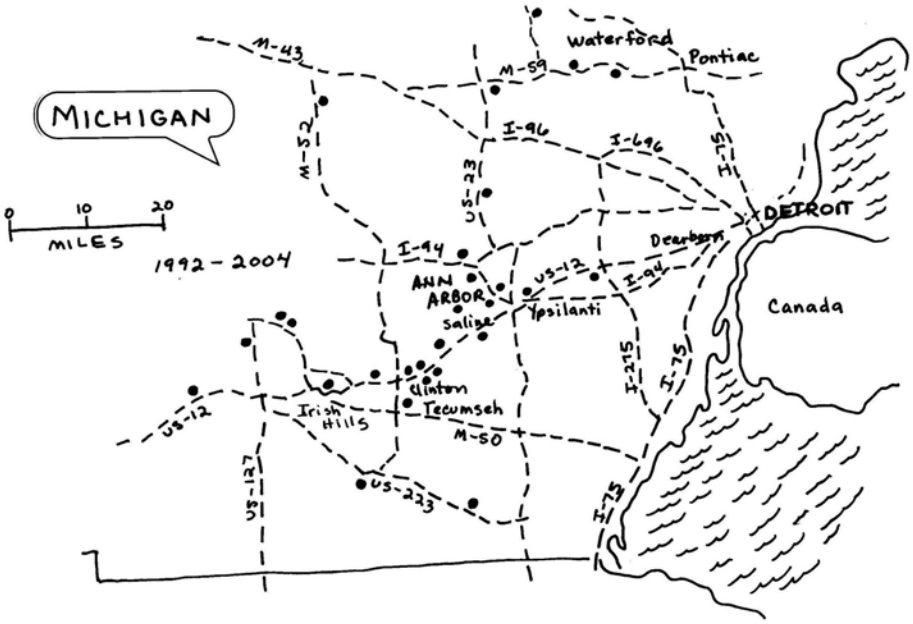


Figure 2.2.3: Map: Southeast Michigan with Roadside Shrine, 1992-2004

Gulch," first spotted in November 1996 and again in 1997, gone, but deep ruts running through the tall grass all the way to the tree line remain. "Fieldstone Wall Shrine" a.k.a the "Saline-Clinton Halfway Shrine," first spotted in September 1992, remains, refurbished: new small cross, painted white; red and green ribbons attached to the horizontal cross-piece; dead/dried plants in ground around cross; "garden" mound appears to have been recently raked. "Saline Graffiti Rock" still active: gold paint glistening in the sun; "Class of 2005," in large black letters scrawled across the face, facing the road. "Prom Night '98" cross on telephone pole still gone. East of Saline, road improvements, five lanes wide with center turn lane. Turn north on State Street, meet friend in Ann Arbor for coffee.

Check.

2.3: A Tour of Roadside Shrines: Michigan to Louisiana, June 1998

While the following narrated tour of roadside shrines is segmented into states, each of which is accompanied by a map of the survey route and the approximate location of roadside

shrine sites, the map below (Figure 2.3.1) indicates the entire survey route documented on June 9 and 10, 1998.

2.3.1: Seeking Scenic Highways: Ypsilanti, Michigan to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, June 9 - 10, 1998

A month after graduation from Eastern Michigan University at Yspilanti, Michigan, and days after putting the second annual *Community Guide* to bed, the researcher drove to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to find a place to live somewhere in the vicintity of Louisiana State University. A pile of road maps and travel guides to "scenic routes" sat in the passenger seat.

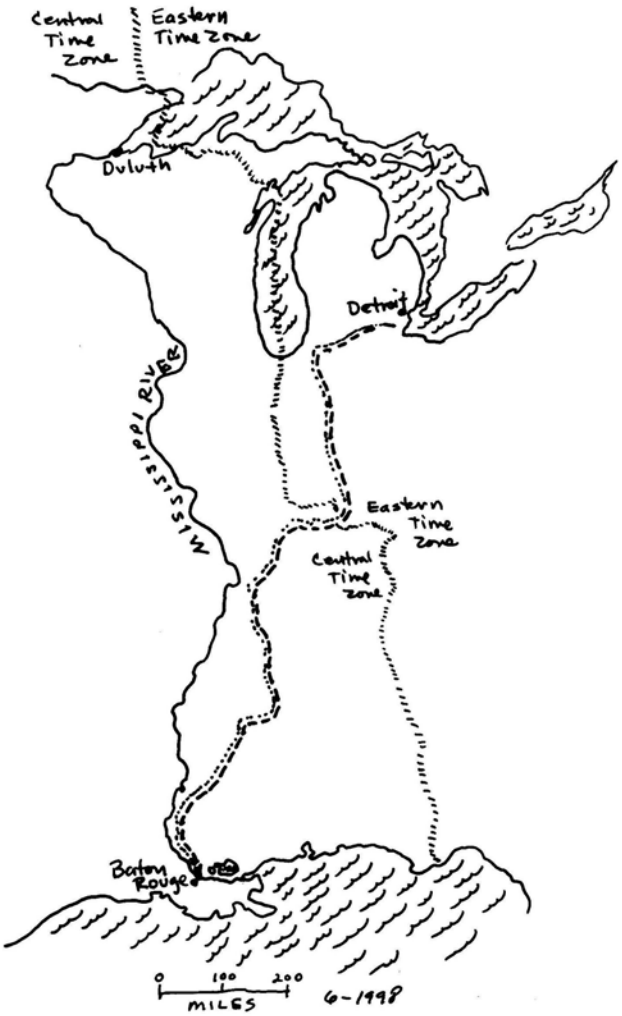


Figure 2.3.1: Map: Total Michigan to Louisiana Survey Route, June 1998

Niles in the southwest corner of Michigan, the landscape, land use, and road conditions are similar to that to the east (see Section 2.2). However, on this day, there are no roadside shrines visible from the road.

2.3.2: Indiana: South Bend to Jeffersonville

Turning south on US-31, crossing into Indiana and traveling all the way to Indianapolis, the land is flat and land use is primarily agricultural. The long, straight, four-lane divided highway connects the small towns of Plymouth, Rochester, Mexico, and Kokomo. Continuing on US-31 south of Indianapolis, the land is increasingly hilly. The Driving west on US-12 from the Irish Hills all the way across the state to highway, a two-lane road south of Columbus, begins to curve and wind through the hills. Today, thereare no roadside shrines visible from the road (Figure 2.3.2). However, this will not be the case in June of 2000 (Figure 2.3.3).

Figure 2.3.2: Map: Indiana Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, June 1998

Figure 2.3.3: Map: Indiana Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, June 2000

2.3.3: Kentucky: Louisville to Fulton

Crossing the border into Kentucky (Figure 2.3.4), circumnavigating Louisville on I-65 and traveling south all the way to Elizabethtown, the landscape becomes increasingly wooded and mountainous. Leaving the interstate in favor of the old highway system at Elizabethtown, traveling on US-62 through Kentucky, the two-lane road goes up, down, and around mountains and through several small towns, on the outskirts of which one finds, on a curve on a steep incline, a small, weathered white cross nailed to tree. Traveling fifteen miles farther, a small bare wood cross decorated with faded plastic flowers stands in a ditch just before the "Reduced Speed Ahead" sign. Leaving US-62 at Eddyville and continuing west on I-64, the interstate moves traffic to the southwestern corner of Kentucky and across the border into Tennessee. The freeway crosses the northern edge of the "Land Between the Lakes" (United States, Dept. of Argriculture), a huge tract of land and fresh water that owes its existence, in part, to the National Defense Act of 1916 (Moore).

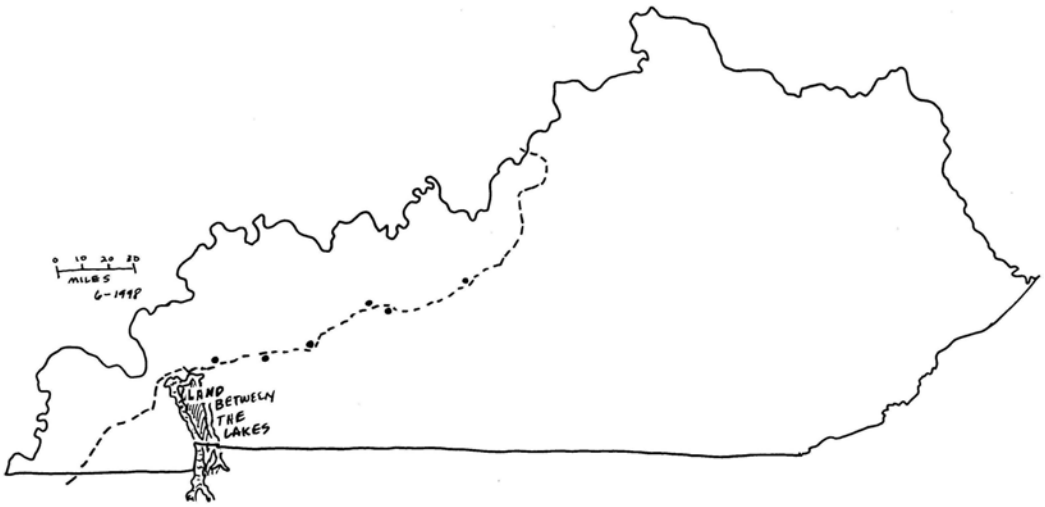


Figure 2.3.4: Map: Kentucky Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, June 1998

The "Land Between the Lakes" was created by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in 1944, a controversial project that dammed and diverted the Tennessee river and its

tributaries and flooded what had been privately owned land. Congress created the TVA in 1933, after the War Department failed to develop several projects in time for World War I (United States, Tennessee Valley Authority). The TVA-- a federal corporation whose three trustees are appointed by the President of the United States and report directly to the President--was created to conserve the natural resources of the Tennessee Valley (40,910 square miles that include parts of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Kentucky), to speed the economic development of the area, and to use the resources for national defense in case of war. Today the corporation controls thirty-nine dams and the major waterways in the region, which move millions of tons of frieght and generate electric and nuclear energy (Moore), and is a major source of power on the East regional energy grid--one of three discrete energy vortices in the US ("Energy"). While driving west on I-64 over the "Land Between the Lakes," which is located in the northwestern-most segment of this system, I briefly recall that somewhere, submerged below, is the family land of my (long lost) friend Big Johnnie Rose. The high ground, the "Land Between the Lakes," was designated a national park and wildlife refuge by President Kennedy in 1963, and new highway projects made the area accessable to tourists in 1964 ("Land").

2.3.4: Tenneessee: Union City to Eastville

Cross into Tennessee on I-64 (Figure 2.3.5). Briefly consider continuing south southwest through Union City on US-51 across the Mississippi River into Missouri, then into Arkansas on US-49 all the way to Jonesboro to visit Westside Middle School (Reynolds et al; "Coming to Terms with Tragedy"; "Clinton to Address Jonesboro"; Islam). Instead, leave the freeway at Union City and head south through Tennessee on US-45W. Here, the

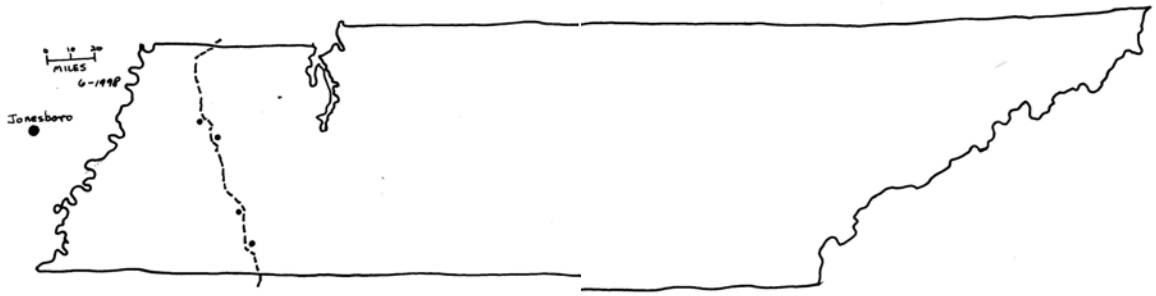


Figure 2.3.5: Map: Tennessee Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, June 1998

highway, alternating between two and four-lanes, winds and curves through the wooded mountainous region of western Tennessee. Here, the rural countryside is interrupted by several small towns and a smattering of white crosses on curves and in the trees. Relax, try to stop thinking about death and memorialization, cross the Tennessee border into Mississippi.

2.3.5: Mississippi: Corinth to Woodville

Spend the night in Tupelo, sleep deeply. The next morning, continue on US-45, notice how the land begins to flatten as the road becomes a straight stretch of four-lane divided highway (Figure 2.3.6). Leaving US-45 at Tupelo for the Natchez Trace Parkway, the road crosses diagonally through the Mississippi countryside. The 444-mile two-lane parkway, first traveled on foot by Natchez, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Indians, is now, according to the National Park Service, an "All-American Road" (United States, Dept. of the Interior). The Trace is sheltered on either side by gently sloping manicured lawns edged with trimmed trees and painted fences. The trees and fences separate the road from "back forty" pastures, fields, and far-off buildings in various stages of reconstruction. There are also numerous picnic areas, trails, and overlooks at sites important to the Indians who used to live in the areas as well as brass-plated historic markers noting sites important to Spanish and French explorers, Christian Missionaries, and the Civil War ("Natchez Trace Parkway -

Mississippi”). On this day, there are no roadside shrines marking the site of death in auto-related incidents on the Trace. Leaving the Parkway at Natchez, the oldest town on the Mississippi River and the beginning of the Plantation Homes Tour (*Country Roads*), and traveling south on US-61, one finds the “Blues Highway” (“U.S. Highway 61”; Doughty) actively under construction all the way to the southeastern corner of the state. Older sections of the two-lane highway wind up and down through wooded rolling hills where trees draped in Spanish moss often overhang the road. Here, one passes crosses that are intermittently attached to, and/or planted in the ground at the base of, trees. Newer sections of four-lane divided highway cut through the rolling hills. Here, the trees are cut back up to twenty feet from the road on each side. Here and there, piles of felled trees continue to smolder. Here, the emerging pattern of marking the site of death on the road is interrupted.

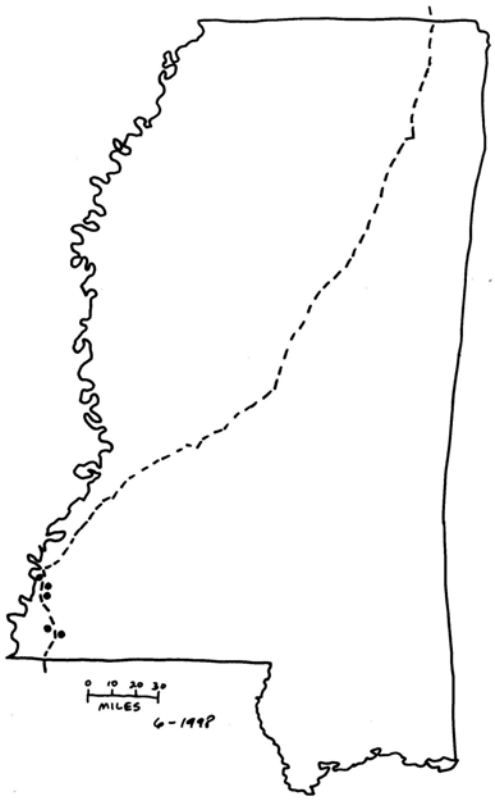


Figure 2.3.6: Map: Mississippi Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, June 1998

2.3.6: Louisiana: St. Francisville to Baton Rouge

In Louisiana, continuing on US-61 and crossing into West Feliciana Parish, the road is marked at regular intervals with "LA Scenic Route" signs featuring an old model "T" automobile (Figure 2.3.7). From the Mississippi border south to St. Francisville, the old two-lane highway descends to level ground, travels through sugar cane fields and stands of woods, and passes by four "Antebellum Plantation Homes," three of which are open to the public (Gleason). Traveling farther south on US-61 between St. Francisville and Scotlandville, the road widens to four lanes and parallels the Mississippi River. Here, the land is flat, land use is increasingly industrial, and the rural landscape is dotted with petro-chemical plants. Just north of Scotlandville, US-61 angles slightly to the east of the river, and in addition to being designated a "Scenic Route," the local road is named, on street signs and road maps, "Scenic Highway." Whereas industrial use increases along the river bank, along US-61/Scenic Highway from Scotlandville south to the Baton Rouge city limits, land use on the "Blues Highway" changes to include small businesses interspersed in a dense residential area. Traveling into north Baton Rouge, between the open-air fruit stand and the fish market on the east side of the street, one medium-sized (3 to 3 1/2 feet tall) cross, with several notes pinned to the base, is attached to a utility pole. Two miles farther, a row of used clothing, furniture, and appliance stores are sandwiched between long rows of small houses standing several feet from the sidewalk, which abuts the curb. Here, two smaller crosses, approximately fifty feet apart, are attached to the chain-link fence next to the sidewalk on the west side of the street. Traveling a half mile farther south, at the intersection where US-61, LA-19, LA-408, and two separate railroad tracks meet, two small bare wood crosses are mounted on the metal pole of a street sign.

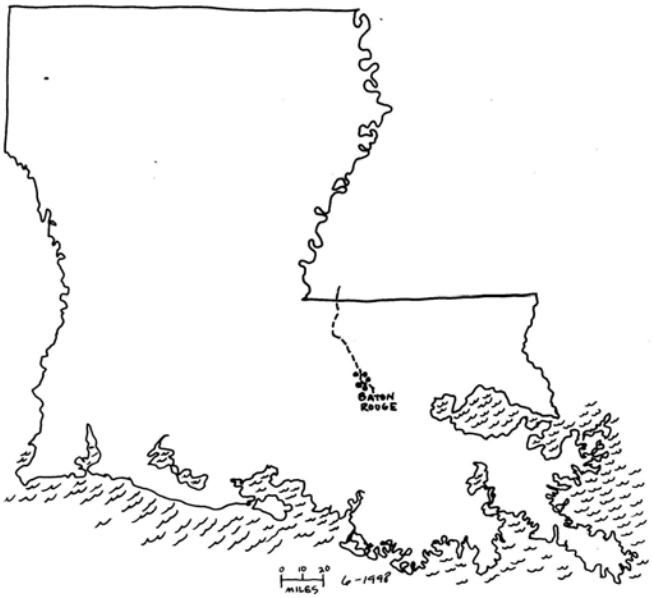


Figure 2.3.7: Map: Southeast Louisiana Survey Route, June 1998

Drive across the tracks and take the Scenic Highway all the way to Baton Rouge's downtown redevelopment area. Turn right onto Chippewa Street, veer left onto River Road under the bridge, and make way to Highland Road, to school, and higher ground. Find a new place to live, turn around and head back to Michigan. Pack up everything for the return trip to Baton Rouge and graduate school.

2.4: A Tour of Roadside Shrines in Southeast Louisiana, 1998 - 1999

While the following "tours" narrate specific routes in Louisiana, several of which which are accompanied by maps and the approximate location of roadside shrines in the area, the map below (Figure 2.4.1) indicates the entire survey area in Louisiana from 1998 to 2003.

2.4.1: Seeking Scenic Highways Continued: New Roads, False Rivers, August 1998

On a hot, hot day in late August of 1998, the researcher takes a "Sunday Drive," scouts new territory, takes the back roads in search of access to the "Mother" river (Jorday; Hoebing), the Mighty Mississippi.

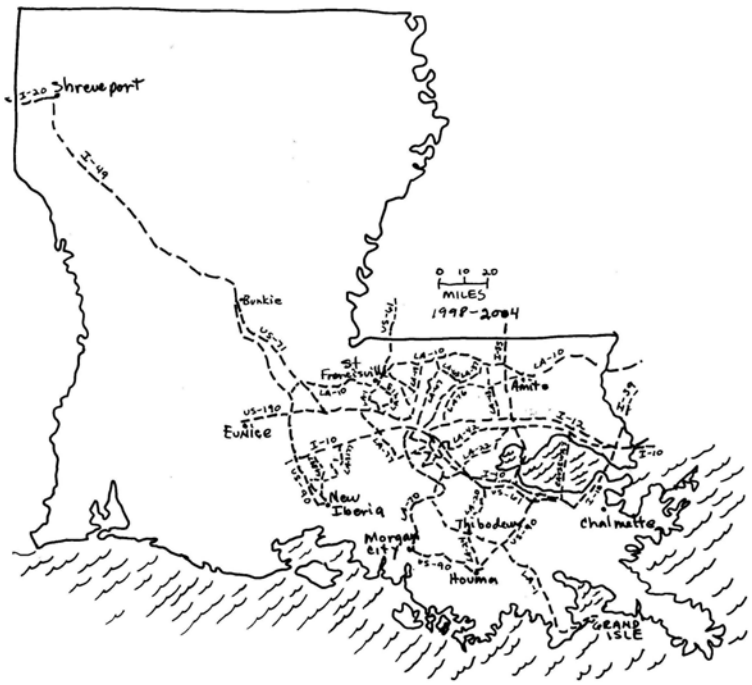


Figure 2.4.1: Map: Louisiana Survey Routes, 1998-2003

Take Scenic Highway north out of Baton Rouge to LA-964, called "Old" Scenic Highway on the tourist map. Continue north until that twisting, bumpy two-lane road runs into US-61 just south of St. Francisville. Take US-61 north to the St. Francisville cut-off and veer left. Travel through the "quaint" little colonial town following the sign for the ferry. Veer left onto a two-track dirt road that follows the crest of a short levee. Notice the grayed and rotted remains of a few small buildings groaning under the weight of the kudzu. Cross a narrow creek and emerge from the dense overhanging foliage with a clear view of a wide curve in the Mississippi River. Take your place in line. Discover much later, from a few passages culled from the 1975 Audubon Pilgrimage Booklet, one of the histories of this place:

> This oldest town in the Florida Parishes--the instep of the boot that is Louisiana today--[was] created by the dust storms of the Glacier Period. Swept in from the western plains, this soil formed vertical cliffs sometimes ninety feet high which rested on the sand and clay bottom of an ancient sea. These formations occur only in a

> narrow strip of land extending from Baton Rouge into Tennessee; the ridges are actually the foothills of the Appalachians.
>
> This bluff attracted early Spanish Cauchins [monks/missionaries] in need of a highland burial ground. They received a land grant from their king and built a wooden monastery sometime between 1773 and 1785. The settlement which straggled up around the cemetery and monastery took its name from the order's gentle patron [St. Francis of Assisi].
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Below the bluffs of St. Francisville a different sort of town grew. Bayou Sara took its name and impetus from the creek which provided flatboaters a safe anchorage. With the [introduction of the] steamboat, Bayou Sara became one of the largest cotton ports on the river. Its rowdy richness fell before civil war, fire, flood, and the boll weevil. Hardly a trace remains today (St. Francisville).

On an increasingly hot afternoon in the summer of 1998, while waiting for the ferry in the long line on top of the levee, see Ms. Emma, an old black woman dressed in her Sunday clothes and a great gracious hat, sitting in a metal folding chair under a large striped umbrella. At her feet is a cardboard box filled with hot homemade food wrapped in tin foil. A man, who might be her husband, and several young children help deliver the meals to folks who roll down their car windows and lift a hand, holding up a certain number of fingers, in her direction: one meal, two meals, please, keep the change and tell your missus (your momma) thank you. Ms. Emma says that she be doin' this for a long, long time–it's a tradition, a certain Sunday ritual. There is also someone selling cold "cokes" (a wide variety of carbonated beverages), taking a dollar bill in exchange for the icy cold treasure dripping wet from the bright red cooler. Often, people rub the icy can over their foreheads before popping the top; the snap and phizzzzz of opening tops is familiar, friendly. Ms. Emma's hot, fat, and spicy homemade sausage and buttery sweet potato is *to die for*.

A small community (of sorts) develops. Lots of people get out of their cars and mill around, fan themselves in the sultry heat, talk quietly, eat, and sip cold drinks. Where are they coming from? Where are they going? They certainly seemed to be expected. The

researcher walks right down to the edge of the deep brown murky waters of the river, picks up a few stones, a shell, and a tiny slotted spoon—a child's miniature kitchen tool with a chewed-up turquoise-blue plastic handle. The spoon lives in the keep-it-cold foam beverage holder tucked between the front seats of the car, becomes part of the rolling collection of artifacts collected along the way: a shrine?

Years later, on a cold and rainy, rainy fall day in 2004, the researcher returned to St. Francisville. At "Grandmother's Buttons," a curious little shop located in an old brick bank building, she inquired about Ms. Emma. The clerk, Josephine, reported that yes, indeed, the old woman is still selling her food at the levee--when the weather is good--and that folks stop by the store often and ask after her. "She is famous for her peach pie," said the clerk, but the researcher swears on her mother's grave that on that hot, hot day in 1998, she ate the best baked sweet potato that she ever had. On that cold and rainy day in 2004, turn around and head back for Baton Rouge, caress the tiny slotted spoon, and feel the warmth of Ms. Emma's hot, spicy, buttery food, deep in the center of her belly.

On that sweltering summer day in 1998, the ferry approaches the bank of the river, folks scurry to their cars: the community disperses. Ms. Emma, her helpers, and her box of hot homemade supper, and the red cooler with the cold drinks, remain on the grassy bank at the top of the levee: they wait for the next line of folks waiting for the ferry. It seems that (perhaps) more than a trace of the old bayou town continues to thrive.

A breeze follows the ferry across the river.

Drive off the ferry into Pointe Coupee and follow the signs to New Roads on the north side of False River (Figure 2.4.2). False River is a lake-like intestine-shaped section of the original Mississippi River before the great levee was built to control seasonal flooding.

False River and New Roads grew up around this old section of river and is now a resort (of sorts): there is one small hotel/motel, a few restaurants and bed and breakfasts. However it is the camp-cottage built on stilts that claim the primary territory along the water. On this day in the summer of 1998, the water is blue.

Hang around (drive around) False River's edge until late afternoon. Watch lots of people fish and water ski. Then take LA-1 back to Baton Rouge. As the shadows get long, long, and longer, notice that the traffic becomes more and more congested, is traveling fast, faster, much faster than one may be comfortable with on the winding, curving, dark, narrow, watery-ditch-lined, pitted and pot-holed road. As the sun sets (and driving becomes more hazardous), realize that one is on the fast-track back to Baton Rouge with the other weekend campers. Between New Roads and US-190, count *at least* ten roadside shrines, most of them white wood crosses attached to trees on sharp curves (it may be closer to fifteen, but one must pay close attention to the road and the chrome bumper of the preceding truck).

Do not pass this way again, not on Sunday or any other day, after dark.

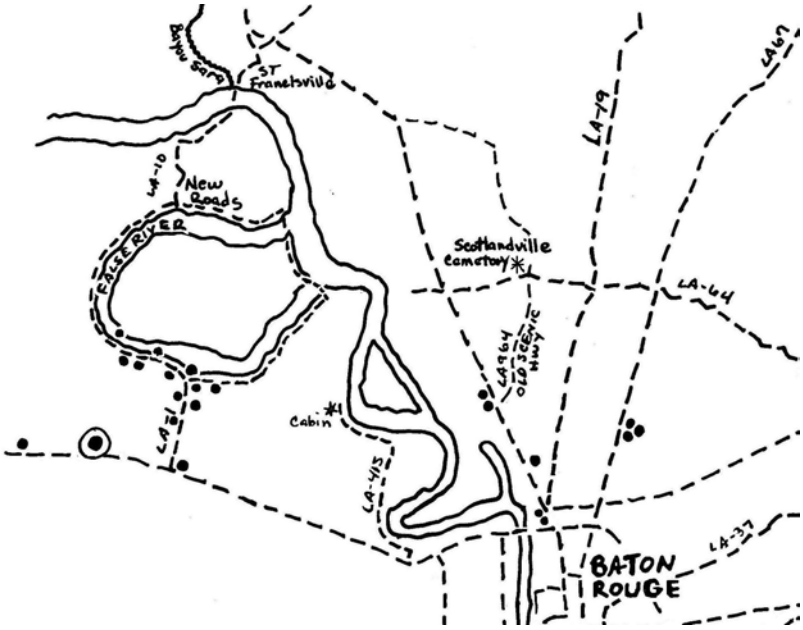


Figure 2.4.2: Map: Southeast Louisiana: False River with Roadside Shrines, 1999-2000

2.4.2: Circuituous Blues: Baton Rouge to Port St. Vincent, Louisiana, September 1998 - April 1999

The researcher scouts new territory, takes the back roads south and east of Baton Rouge in search of water clean and critter-free enough to get into for a swim. Encountering watery ditches, swamps, the bayou, and roadside shrines instead, the researcher turns back, meets with Louisiana Folklorist Maida Owens, and returns with maps, tour guide books, and Owens' own roadside shrine field notes sitting in the passenger seat.

The following narrated tour travels back and forth in space and time, describes roadside shrines on one particular back road route between Baton Rouge and Mandeville from the fall of 1998 to the spring of 1999. In addition, on one particular day in May of 1999, the tour retraces the previously described route and then continues on to New Orleans and back to Baton Rouge via a more circular route.

While the narrated tour is presented in segments, the map below indicates the entire "circular" survey route and the approximate location of all roadside shrine sites documented between September 1998 and May 1999 (Figure 2.4.3).

LA-42/Highland Road rises above the floodplain created by the 1928 US Army Corps of Engineer Mississippi River Levee project (United States, Army Corps of Engineers, *New Orleans*), travels away from the city of Baton Rouge, the self-proclaimed "Chemical City" ("Bumper Sticker"), and passes through the campus of Louisiana State University. The land itself, relatively flat and alternately wet and dry depending on seasonal rainfall north of Baton Rouge, remains flat and becomes increasingly and consistently wet as the land mass descends to sea level, and below, to the south.

Four miles beyond the east gates of the LSU campus and traveling around the bend and under the ancient oak arching over the curve, one first passes Mount Hope Plantation,

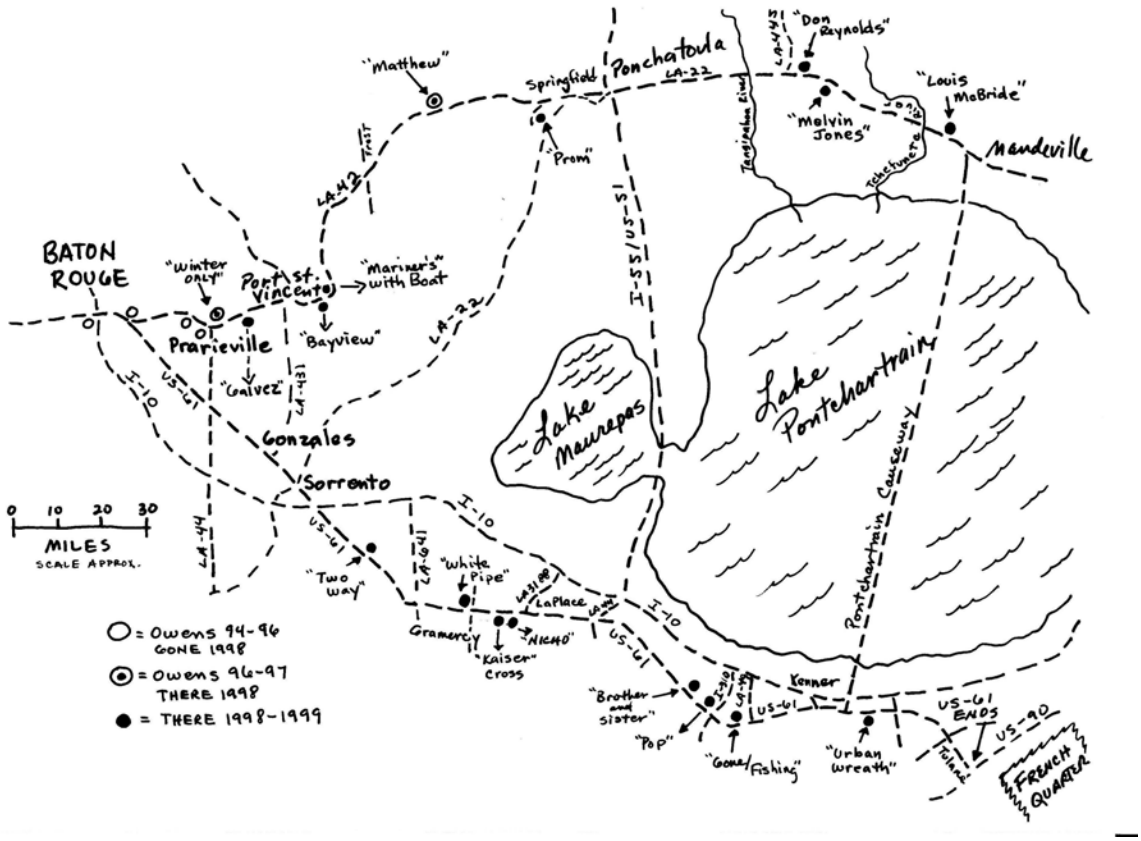


Figure 2.4.3: Map: Southeast Louisiana "Circular Survey Route" with Roadside Shrines, 1998-1999

then a series of stately brick homes where, here and there between the expansive lawns and rows of azaleas, one can also see several narrow wood homes in various stages of disrepair. Continuing east under the oaks, one passes Plantation Trace and other suburban neighborhoods that line either side of the road all the way to the southeast border of East Baton Rouge Parish. Here, LA-42 begins to wind its way through the rural "back country," where land use becomes alternately residential, agricultural, and recreational. The road twists and turns around densely wooded areas, crosscrosses over wide slow-moving bayous and the Amite and Tickfaw Rivers, and runing parallel to deep, watery ditches across Gum Swamp all the way to Springfield, where LA-42 terminates at LA-22. The landscape is dotted with weekend fishing camps, year-round homes on stilts, bars, restaurants and bait

shops on stilts, horses, goats, the occasional dog (or armadillo) trying to cross the road, and roadside shrines.

Traveling east on LA-42, leaving East Baton Rouge Parish and traveling into Ascension Parish east of Oak Grove, rounding the wide curve at the "T" intersection with LA-44, one *might* see "Winter Only in Tree"; the medium-sized wood cross secured to a tree with nails and the boney fingers of thick foliage. The shrine, first documented by Louisiana folklorist Maida Owens in December 1995, was at one time painted white and decorated with a grapevine wreath, a silver ribbon, and the remnants of a fresh flower arrangement (Owens, "Field Notes"). In the fall of 1998, the site seems to have disappeared.

Rounding the next curve between LA-44 and LA-431, "Galvez Sentinel" stands on the south side of the road in a ditch next to the culvert that creates the driveway leading to the Galvez Baptist Church. In the fall of 1998, the medium-sized white-painted wood cross was decorated with pink and violet silk flowers. Sometime later the cross will disappear for several months, then reappear freshly painted.

Rounding the curve at the "T" intersection with LA-341, one may or may not find "Matthew's Cross" (Owens, "Field Notes") somewhere in the general vicinity. Crossing over the first Amite River Bridge, and continuing on LA-42 east of Port St. Vincent, one crosses into Livingston Parish. Traveling 14 miles east of LA-16 and rounding the wide, tree-lined curve just west of the Bayview Restaurant, right there, in the grassy field sloping away from the road, stands a medium-sized wood cross. In the fall of 1998, the weathered cross leans into the ditch. In the spring of 1999, the cross is freshly painted and decorated with purple flowers.

Rounding the next curve, passing the Bayview Restaurant and dockside bar, and crossing the next bridge over the river, one gets a clear view of the "Mariner's Shrine," which, according to the waitress at the bar, has been there "for a long, long time" (Bayview Waitress). The two weathered wooden crosses, one on top of the other, are nailed to the trunk of a small tree whose roots extend into the water. At the base of the tree is the wreckage of a small, rotting wood boat, the hull of which is crushed and partially submerged, the aft a gaping black maw.

A Satisfying Insufficiency: Performing Failure
April 24, 1999

Howard Berkes, the announcer on National Public Radio, describes the scene outside Columbine High School (as a recollection see Berkes; as reported by Burkes see "Trauma Scars"); parents, children, and community members gather in the parking lot . . . a car belonging to a dead classmate is mounded with flowers and trinkets and notes. Rain is threatening and people make shelters to protect the shrines from the coming storm. *And there was nothing I* could do *about what was happening* there*, so I get in my car and drive.*

I take LA-42 and look for "Winter Only in Tree" . . . *there it is!* weathered to a silvery gray, revealed because the kudzu is only just beginning to thicken. Taking this as a good omen, I forge ahead and give a passing nod to the "Galvez Sentinel" shrine in front of the Baptist Church. Finally I round the curve and cross over the first Amite River Bridge at Port St. Vincent where LA-42 meets LA-16. I park on the side of the road across from the old cemetery at the intersection, and for the first time since my shrine-spotting activity began, get out of the car intending to actually *visit* a shrine site.

I am determined to find, this time, the little boy's site of death marked by a cross near the Amite River Bridge, called "Matthew's Cross" by a clerk in a nearby market (Owens,

"Field Notes"). I'd read in the local newspaper that the townspeople had cared for his shrine since 1994 ("Matthew") even though roadside shrines are illegal in the state. Surely, *there* I can find some sense of, of . . . *something*.

I look up and down one side of the river. I look across to the embankment. No cross. It's hot, even by Louisiana standards. The breeze is gentle. The air actually smells clean. There is laughter and a friendly sort of yelling and a splash of water as boats launch into the river. *Where are you, Matthew?*

I spot a white painted stick about thirty yards from the river. *How could such a thing happen here? It's so* public *and* . . . pleasant. I pick a flower, intending to leave it at the shrine (how do I know to do that?). Closer now, I bend to read the letters on the stick: "Gas Valve." I stand, startled, then stick the flower behind my ear. I cross the road and walk the bridge. I spot a path that leads under the bridge. I go there. No cross, only beer cans and fast food wrappers and condoms and what looks like a tattered piece of ladies underwear. I emerge from under the bridge and search the perimeter of the parking lot filled with pickup trucks and empty trailers: it is a popular access site for boats. No cross. Where *are* you?

January, 1981

Like a momma dog whose teats are full,
frantically searching for her pups who have been taken away too early.
Nothing she can do will locate her young,
but she searches until she is exhausted just the same.
If she is lucky, during her search
she will happen upon a hungry batch of pups to feed,
temporary surrogates for temporary relief.
But soon enough (too soon) she is left on her own
to ease the swelling of her breasts,
licking them like wounds.
The milk seeps out slowly, like tears.
(Kennerly, "Getting Messy" 249)

I walk back across the bridge and stop to rest on the wide stone railing and see *something* . . . Yes! A weathered four-by-four piece of lumber set in concrete, the cross-piece missing. Another little path. Then, at the base of the structure, looking for signs. Nothing. Neglected. No inscription. Just a five-foot yardstick nailed to the wood, marked in red ink too faded to read. Not a cross, but the standard high-water marker found along rivers in southern Louisiana, marked in red, marking the aftermath of a storm, a flood, an overwhelming tide. I am strangely satisfied.

Sweaty and tired, I stop at the "Snowball" trailer, order a single scoop of pink lemonade-flavored crushed ice. I inquire. No one there remembers Matthew or his cross, but I do hear a story about a little boy who was standing on the top deck of his daddy's boat when it passed under the bridge. "Poor little fella," Sally says, "got his head cut clean off. Terrible thing."

I do not find "Matthew's Cross" until weeks later, much farther out of town.

2.4.3: Circuit-Breaker: Baton Rouge to New Orleans, Louisiana, May 15, 1999

On May 15, 1999 (after school was out), accompanied by maps, "back road" tour guide books, and a growing pile of field notes, the researcher takes to the road again in search of Matthew's cross and Lake Pontchartrain State Park, where it was rumored that the brave continue to swim. Along the way the researcher reluctantly, inevitably, and ocassionally stops on the side of the road and gets out of the car to pay a visit.

While at the scene, the researcher, reluctant to employ the mediated mechanics of the camera, chooses the more time-intensive, and seemingly intimate, technology of paper and pencil. Secretly, the researcher fears being seen and judged by passers-by as undisciplined, inappropriate, and out-of-place--a tourist indulging (perhaps) in bits and pieces of some

elses' private pain--and so stands there, head bowed while sketching. Performing a certain reverence for the site, the researcher hopes not to be called to task for being a ghoul, what Foley and Lennon have "coined" as a "dark" tourist (in Clark and Franzmann *n*2, 9).

Retracing the LA-42 route west from Baton Rouge and into Livingston Parish, look (again) for "Winter Only in Tree"; it has "disappeared" (again), covered in thriving kudzu vines. Continue on.

Pull into the Galvez Church parking lot, get out of the car and stand in the grassy ditch.. Sketch "Galvez Sentinel": the paint has peeled away, the flowers faded (Figures 4.4.4a and 2.4.4b).

Continue on. Pull off to the side of the road in front of the Bayview Restaurant, walk back to the "Bayview Curve Shrine," and sketch (Figure 2.4.5). Pickup trucks whiz by. Someone tosses a beer can into the ditch across the road.

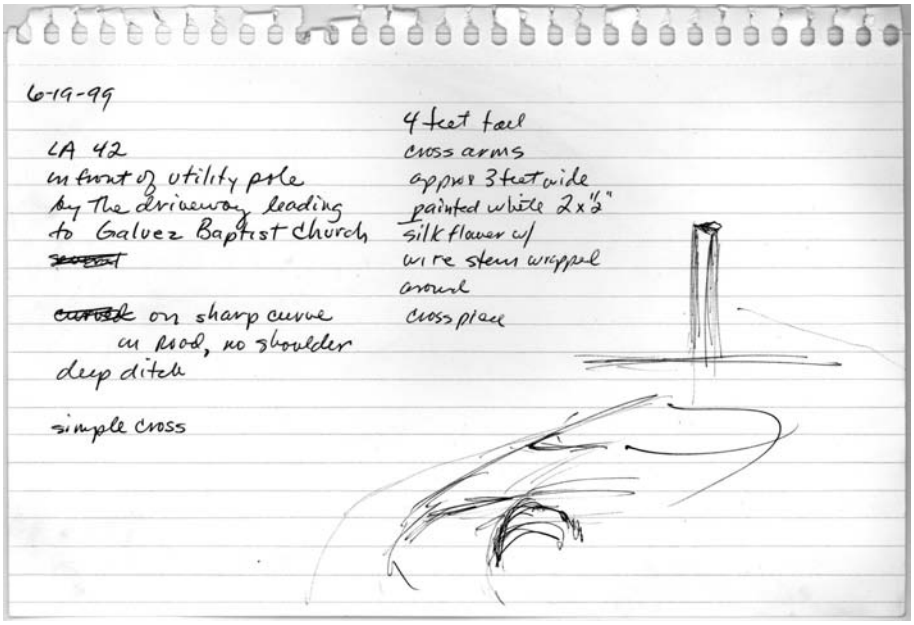


Figure 2.4.4a: Drawing: LA-42: Galvez Sentinel

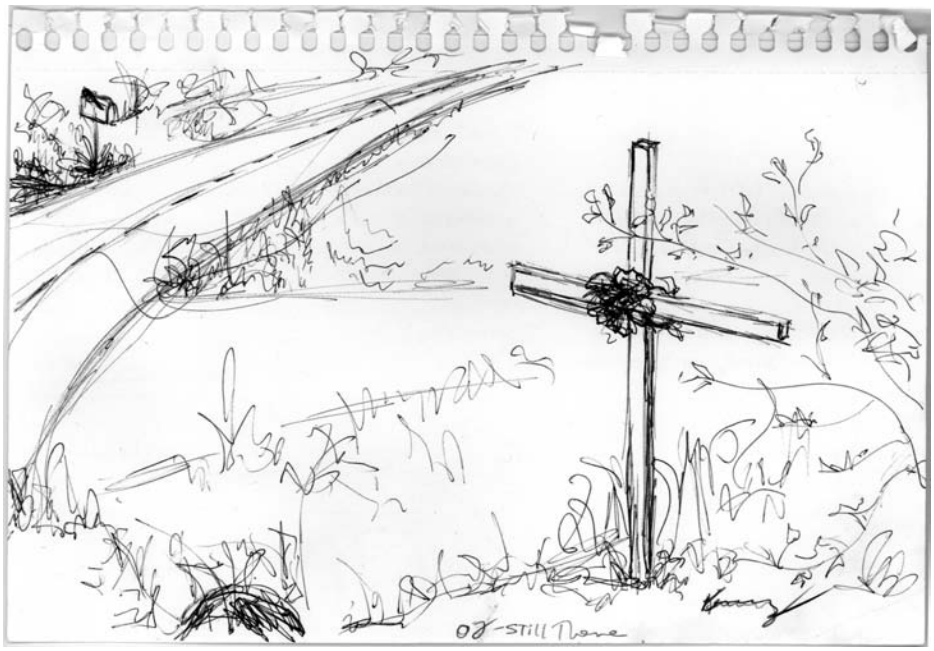
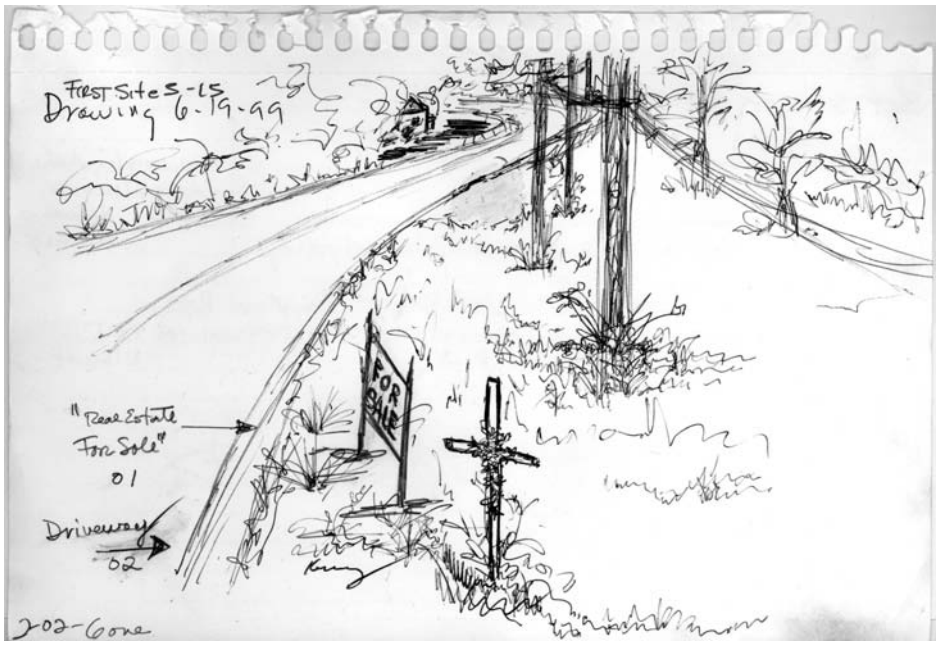


Figure 2.4.4b: Drawing: LA-42: Galvez Sentinel



Figures 2.4.5: Drawing: LA-42: Bayview Shrine

Continue on. Pass the Bayview Restaurant and dockside bar, round the curve and cross over the bridge. Slow down just enough to confirm the presence of the "Mariner's

Shrine." The water continues to lap over the side of the boat, the boat rocks gently as a larger pleasure boat glides by (on its way to the Bayview dock?).

Two miles farther east, on the north side of the road just this side of the bridge crossing the Tickfaw River, the sharp-eyed observer might be able to spot "Matthew's Cross" driven into the ground behind the new metal guardrail (Figure 2.4.6). The large wood cross is made of heavy two-by-four lumber with mitered ends and is painted white. Stenciled in black paint, the inscriptions read "Matthew R. Populis" on the horizontal, and "1994" on the vertical. A round-faced cherub figure is burned into the wood at the top of the vertical piece. A fading blue plastic rosary dangles from the center, the string holding the beads together blackened with mildew. At the base of the cross, just inches from a swath of new road tar, is a growing pile of red dirt--a large, thriving red ant colony has claimed the ground around the cross as their home.

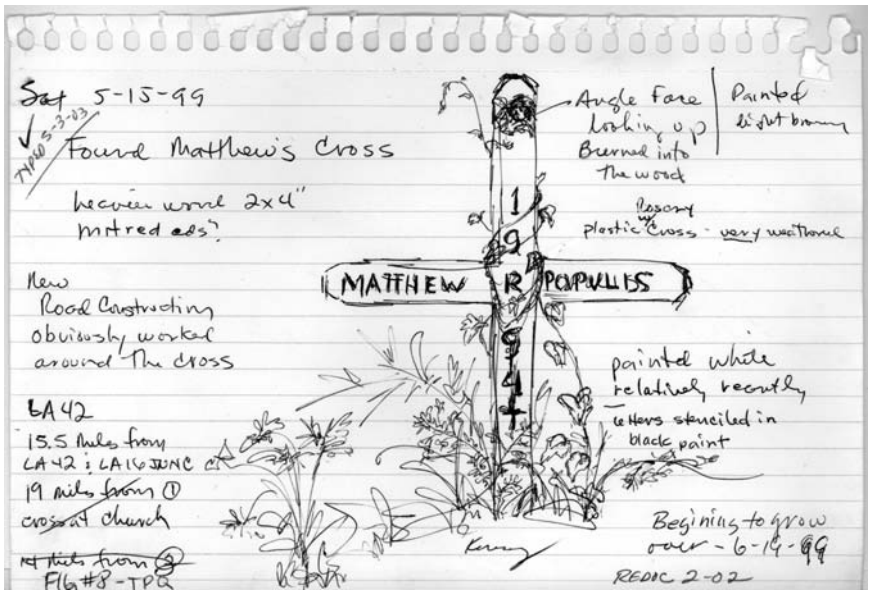


Figure 2.4.6: Drawing: LA-42: Matthew's Cross

Traveling around the next bend in the road and driving another two miles to Springfield, one comes to the eastern terminus of LA-42, where the road intersects with

LA-22. Continuing east on LA-22 and traveling into Springfield, one gets in line to drive over the drawbridge crossing the Natalbany River and into Tangipahoa Parish. On one's right, on the south side of the road, is a row of seafood restaurants, and to the left on the north side of the road are several antique and collectible shops. On the eastern side of the river to the south is a small dockside park where several large pleasure cruisers anchor. Crossing over the bridge, on the western side of the river, one passes a small community of condominiums on stilts hanging over the river bend, over individual slips where large private boats are housed.

Crossing the river and continuing east on LA-22, one travels away from the swampy areas to relatively drier ground north of Lake Maurepas through to the village of Ponchatoula. Here the gently curving two-lane road alternately travels through dense woods and acres of cleared tree-lined private land, and over old cement bridges spanning the Tangipahoa and Tchefuncte Rivers. The road runs parallel, for the most part, to wide, grassy, sloping ditches between the road and the tree line and/or fence all the way to where LA-22 terminates at the Pontchartrain Causeway in Mandeville. Between Springfield and Mandeville, the landscape is dotted with large homes, small homestead gardens, groves of pecan trees, grazing land, cattle, horses, sheep, and the occasional domestic cat (or wild pig) trying to cross the road, and roadside shrines.

Pass through the village of Ponchatoula, dubbed by *Country Roads Leisure Guide* as "America's Antique City." Drive approximately five miles across the Tangipahoa River, and travel the straight stretch of road just east of the bridge with cement railing. There, on the north side of the road, one passes the "Don Reynolds" shrine site (Figure 2.4.7).

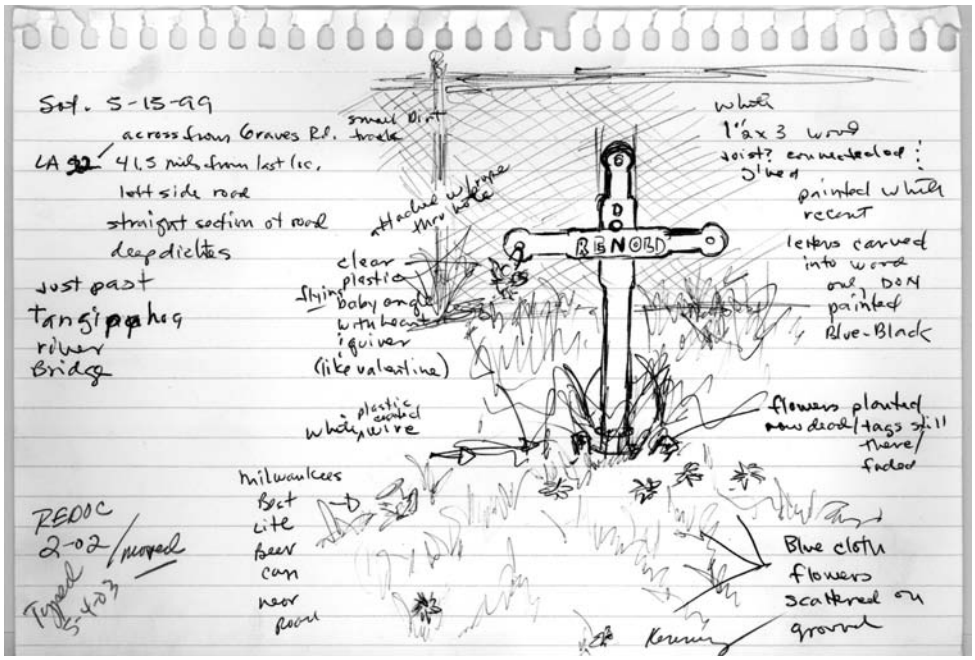


Figure 2.4.7: Drawing: LA-22: Don Reynolds

Planted in the dirt on the far slope of the ditch is a medium-sized wood cross with carved circular ends and wider carved areas at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal cross-pieces. The rounded ends of the cross are drilled in the center with large holes. The inscriptions are carved into the wood: "DON" is carved into the vertical and completely filled in with black, "REYNOLDS" is carved on the horizontal and outlined in black. A clear plastic winged cherub carrying a heart and a quiver (like a Valentine?) dangles from the hole at the end of one of the horizontal "arms" of the cross. At the base are dried, once-living flowering plants. Bits of faded blue cloth flowers and a crushed beer can are scattered in the ditch close to the road.

Driving about a half mile farther on LA-22 one encounters a shrine site next to the culvert on the south side of the road on the far side of a wet ditch. The small wood cross, painted white, is inscribed on the vertical with "1963 TO 11/27/1998," and "In Loving Memory of Melvin Jones" on the horizontal.

A few miles farther down the road, after crossing the Tchefuncta River and rounding a wide tree-lined curve, one locates the “Louis McBride” site on the north side of the road in a wide deep ditch (Figure 2.4.8). The medium-sized wood cross, painted white, is intricately carved, “LOUIS MCBRIDE” inscribed on the horizontal and “Aug 12 95” at the top of the vertical. Pink and green faded cloth flowers are nailed to the “center” of the cross (where the horizontal and vertical cross-pieces meet).

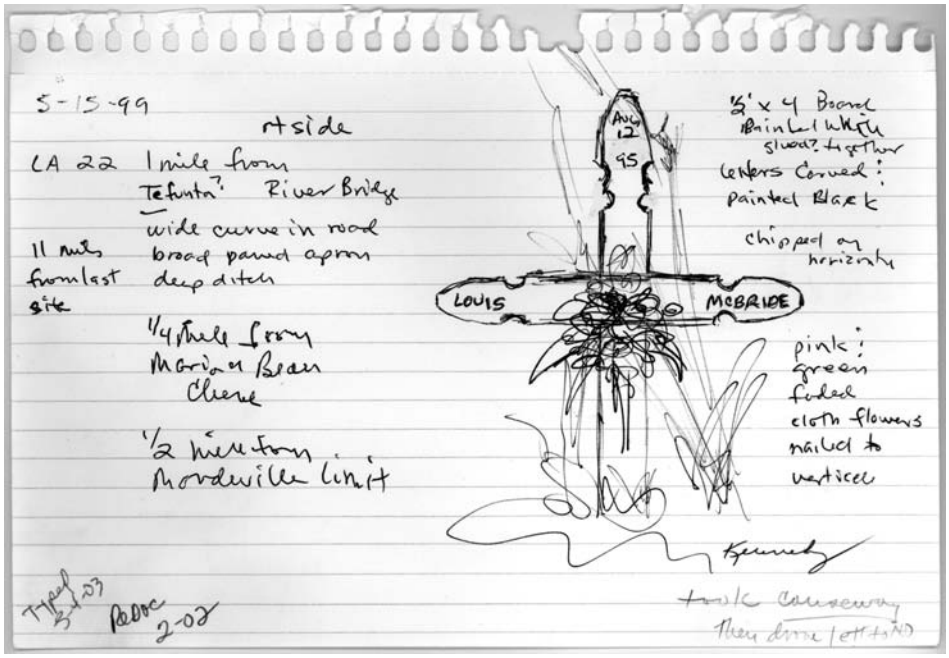


Figure 2.4.8: Drawing: LA-22: Louis McBride

Traveling another mile east, passing rows of new shopping areas, coffee and pastry shops, and seafood restaurants, LA-22 terminates at the Pontchartrain Causeway. The Causeway, a toll road and “the longest bridge in the world” (“Lake”), spans Lake Pontchartrain and connects Mandeville, the self-proclaimed “Gateway to the North Shore” (“Welcome to Mandeville”) with New Orleans.

Intrigued by the bridge and urged on by the shrines, forget about Lake Pontchartrain State Park and swimming. Pay the toll and travel twenty-four miles south *across* Lake

Pontchartrain on the steel-girded, waving, rolling road until it descends to level ground. In the spring, drive slowly and watch the migration of birds pass through the Mississippi River Flyway, and take care to avoid injuring roosting birds as they dart from under the southern end of the bridge (National Wildbird Refuge). Continue south until the road meets up with US-61 near the southern terminus of the "Blues Highway." Turn left and travel toward New Orleans proper, alternately called "The Crescent City," "The Big Easy," and more obscurely "The City That Care Forgot" (Foster; Ingersoll; "Welcome to the 'City'"), and look for "Cities of the Dead" ("Cities"; Roach, *Cities*).

Turning onto southbound US-61 at the southeastern edge of New Orleans in St. Tammany Parish, one is, by the compass, traveling due east. Here, US-61 is a straight stretch of four-lane undivided highway bordered on the northbound lane by strip malls, convienence stores, and large outlet/discount warehouses. The southbound lane is bordered by a wide, deep drainage ditch that separates the road from residential neighborhoods. The ditch is part of the canal and levee system designed to keep New Orleans (which is five feet below sea level) and the surrounding area from washing away into the Gulf of Mexico (United States, Army Corps of Engineers, *New Orleans*).

Less than a mile due east of the Causeway, facing oncoming southbound traffic on US-61 athe Wilcher Neal Street bridge, a multicolored wreath of fabricated flowers is attached to a leaning utility pole. Tacked to the pole above the wreath is a rain-soaked newspaper clipping wrapped in a clear, leaky plastic baggie. On the ground at the base of the pole are candle stubs and the rotting remnants of a fresh flower bouquet (Figure 2.4.9).

Traveling another five miles due east on southbound US-61, one travels into the heart of New Orleans. At the intersection with Carrollton Avenue, US-61 changes toTulane

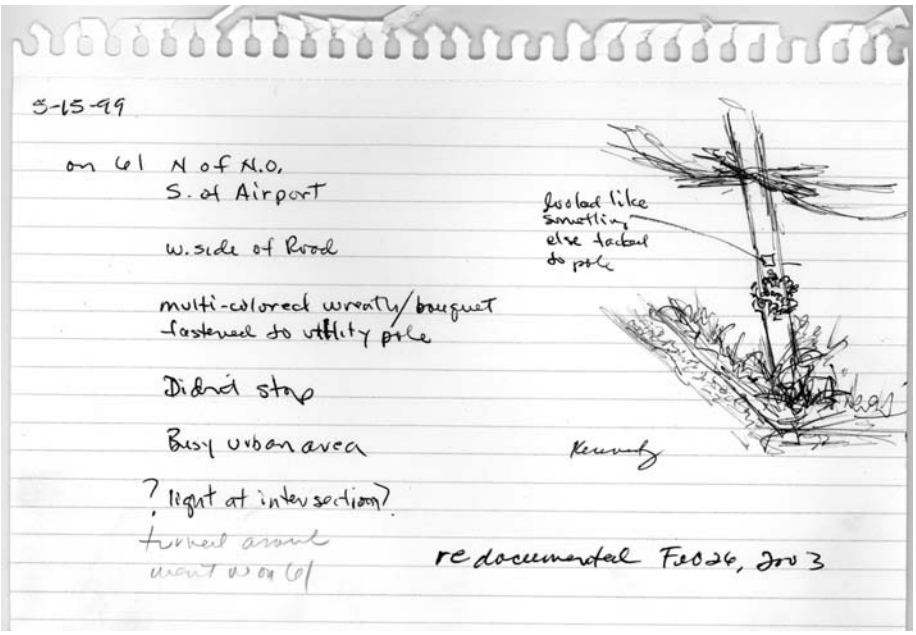


Figure 2.4.9: Drawing: LA US-61: Urban Wreath on Utility Pole

Avenue before teminating at US-90 near the French Quarter. Turning around in the Bingo Hall parking lot, passing the "Urban Wreath on Utility Pole" shrine again, now on the left, and heading back to Baton Rouge on US-61, one is, by the compass, traveling west by northwest along the ragged southeastern edges of the Mississippi River Delta, where the land is flat, consistently wet, and often soggy. Five miles due west of the Causeway, one leaves the dense residential area behind. Here the land and land use change rapidly.

Continuing north on US-61, just west of LA-49 at the southern edge of the New Orleans International Airport, and for the next several miles to US-51, which bounds the western edge of Lake Pontchartrain, the highway runs parallel with the bayou and the levee in the interstitial gap of the Bonnet Carre Spillway between the Mississippi River and the lake. On the southern edge of the road the land is swampy; the trees and shrubs rise out of standing water. To the north, the bayou, up to 30 feet wide in some sections depending on the season, cuts between the tree-lined road and the densely wooded swamp. Here one finds

a few small fishing camps on stilts, rotting wood bridges crossing the bayou, cars and pickup trucks parked alongside the bayou on the wide gravel apron and grassy, gently sloping ditch, people fishing in the bayou, and roadside shrines.

Traveling due west of LA-49, near the I-310, attached to a broken mass of tree limbs overhanging the bayou is a small (Styrofoam?) cross covered with (fresh?) white flowers (Figure 2.4.10). A sky-blue bow decorates the center of the cross. A man stands nearby, fishing in the rain.

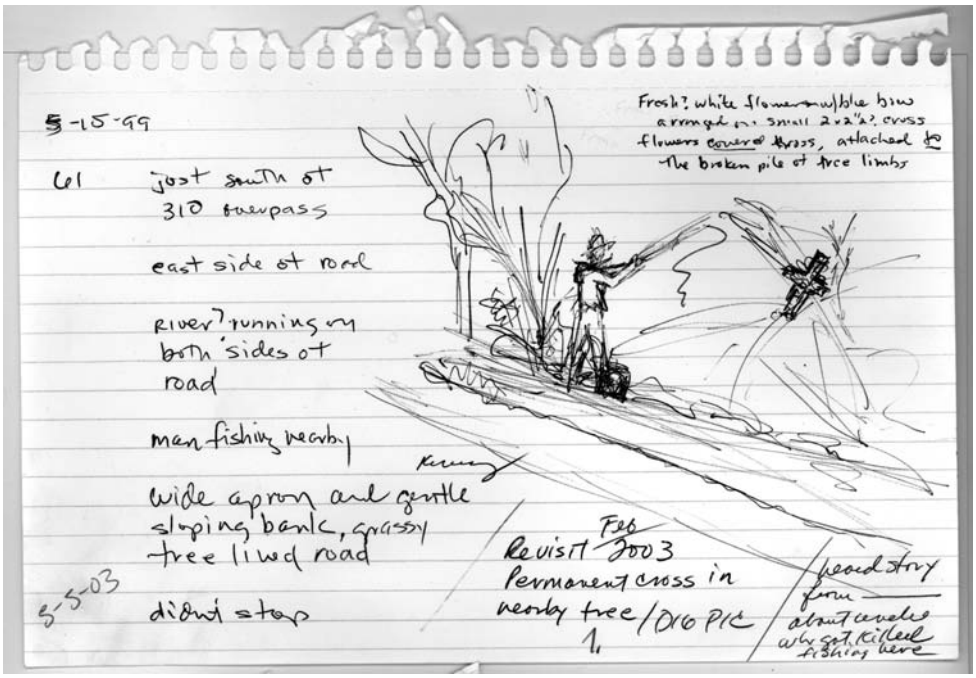


Figure 2.4.10: Drawing: LA US-61: Gone Fishing

Traveling one mile farther on the "bayou side" of the road just past the I-310 overpass where US-61 angles north by northwest, a small wood cross, inscribed "Pop," is attached to a tree about eight feet from the ground. Nestled between two large knots, the cross--perpendicular with neither the ground nor the tree--was once painted white, but has now faded to gray (Figure 2.4.11).

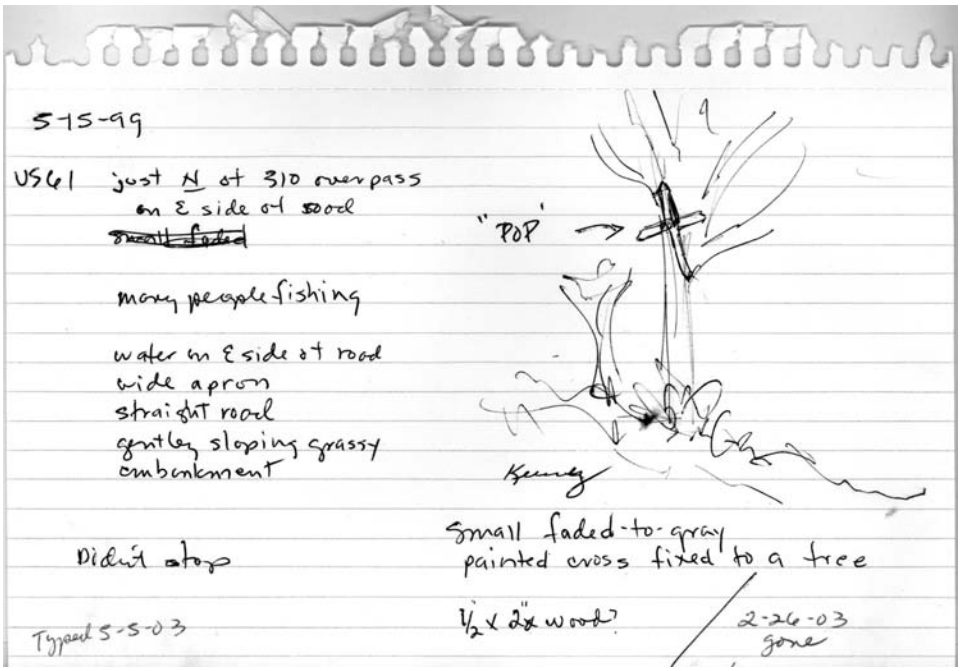


Figure 2.4.11: Drawing: LA US-61: Pop

Traveling two miles farther on US-61, just before LA-627, in the grass near the tree line also on the "bayou side" of the road, is a large wood cross, painted white, a shiny (metal?) plate attached at the center. The area around the cross appears to be trimmed short.

Continuing on US-61 in the northbound lane, the road curves away from the bayou and angles due west just before the intersection with US-61 and LA-44, and cuts across a wide swath of farmland and the Garyville Reserve for approximately thrity miles to LA-641. Here, land use includes riverfront industry bordered primarily by large agricultural tracts of land interspersed with commercial and sparsely populated residential areas. Here the horizon to the south is crowded with pipe stacks and giant holding tanks, the landscape dotted with large farm equipment and rolling irrigation systems, banks and restaurants at intersections leading toward the river, and roadside shrines.

Five miles due west of LA-627, there in the grass near the tree line on the south side of the road, is a medium-sized wood cross painted a bright white. No inscription is visible from the road.

Two miles farther, in the grass between the pavement and the ditch on the south side of the road, is a very small (1 to 1 1/2 feet tall) white cross. The cross is angled so that the inscription faces oncoming traffic traveling in the southbound lane of US-61. The inscription is not legible from looking in one's rearview mirror while traveling in the northbound lane.

One mile farther one encounters, at the stoplight on the northeast corner of the intersection of US-61 and LA-637, a medium-sized cross made of white plastic plumbers' pipe (which I later learn is called polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, pipe), is planted in the grassy bank of a gently sloping ditch (Figure 2.4.12). The cross is decorated at the center with a brightly colored bouquet of cloth and plastic flowers.

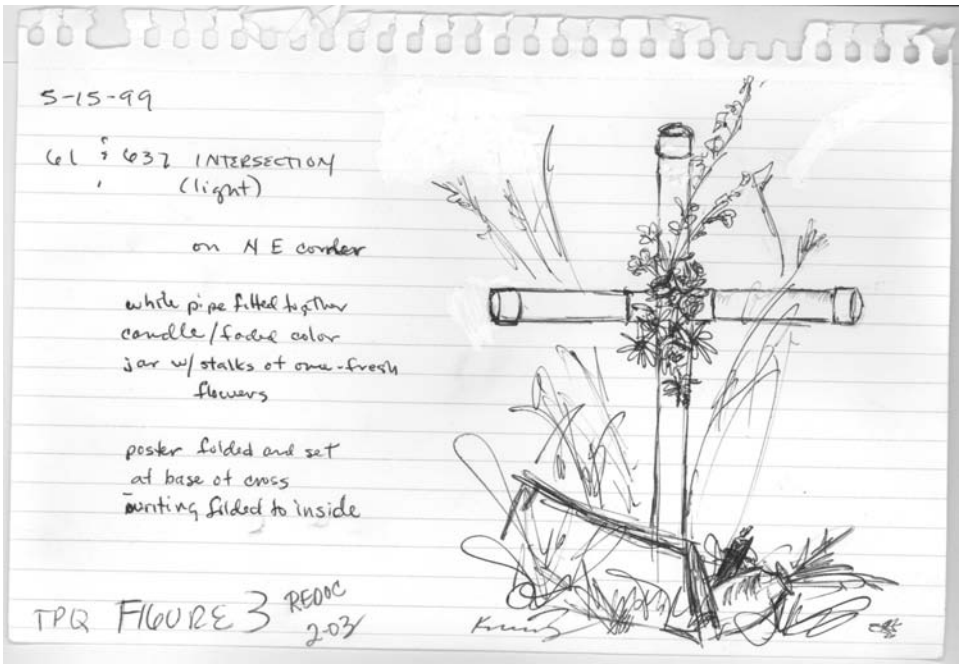


Figure 2.4.12: Drawing: LA US-61: White Pipe Cross

On the ground at the base of the "White Pipe Cross" is a red candle stub, a greenish glass jar with stalks of dried, once-fresh flowers, and a large poster board folded in half like a tent. Whatever is written on the poster is facing the ground, perhaps indicating that the message is private and/or that the message must be protected from the ravages of the weather. In any case, the message is not visible to the passerby.

Traveling due west for another few miles, there, and there, on the side of the southbound lane of US-61 in front of the Kaiser Plant just before LA-641 in Gramercy, on the edge of the grass right next to the pavement, one passes two shrines less than a quarter mile apart. The first is a *nicho*, or a hand-made walled enclosure open on one side. The *nicho* is small, made of roughly textured, cement-like material, and painted a bright blue. Inside, one can catch a glimpse of candles and brightly painted statues. The next shrine is a small cross, painted white and decorated with flowers.

Continuing on northbound US-61 a few miles past LA-641, where the four-lane undivided highway once again angles north by northwest, in the grass between the road and the paved driveway of the commercial truck weigh-in station, is a very small wood cross. The cross is painted white, with the inscription "WE LOVE YOU," on the vertical cross-piece and,"OUR FRIEND," on the horizontal one. At the base of the cross are two tiny (8 to 12 inches tall) white plastic lattice-work crosses, each of which is decorated with tiny star-shaped red and white poinsettias. As one turns on the emergency flashers and slowly drives by the shrine, one can see in the rain-streaked passengeriside mirror that the wood cross is inscribed on the other side in a different configuration: "OUR FRIEND" on the vertical and "WE LOVE YOU," on the horizontal.

Dancing with the Dead

You (whoever you are) have gotten my attention. Now, what is it you want?
You want me to listen to you. to see you, to attend to whatever it is
you are performing for me, here, there, no/where, between the road and the ditch,
between death and the grave. These places where I have been and where I am going.

Is there something wrong? Is there something I should *do?*
WHAT DO YOU WANT!
You (whoever you are) ask me to dance with the dead.
Your dead, my dead, all the dead
Lined up on these roads, and not only the ones marked here.
You have a face (all of you who were one here and are now gone)
the ambulance crew
the operator of the jaws-of-life
the tow-truck driver
the cops on the scene
the clean-up crew
the grieving family
the devastated friends
the gawkers
the passers-by
the dead
all of you, performing *something* . . .

Now I too have a face, become a player, become "fair game," worthy of investigation. I travel back to Baton Rouge through Sorrento and Gonzales, and prepare for the long-delayed road trip to Salt Lake City, Utah.

2.5: A Tour of Roadside Shrines: Louisiana to Utah, July 1999

Late Thursday afternoon on a surprisingly cool, dry Louisiana summer day, loaded down with enough provisions to last four days on the road, enough clothing to last a month of Sundays, and enough grief and rage to potentially last a lifetime, I hit the road and travel west to Utah, to say goodbye to a friend who is dying, who says to hurry. An accordian file filled with maps, an empty notebook, and a clutch of sharpened pencils--my now-familiar traveling companions--sit in the passenger seat (Figure 2.5.1).

The prose-poetry treatment of that journey interjected into the following "tour," beginning below with the title "Once, Here, Still," was written the following year, in response to (or more pointedly perhaps, while writing *with*) John Berger's *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, and the community of writers in Michael Bowman's Performative Writing class at Louisiana State University.

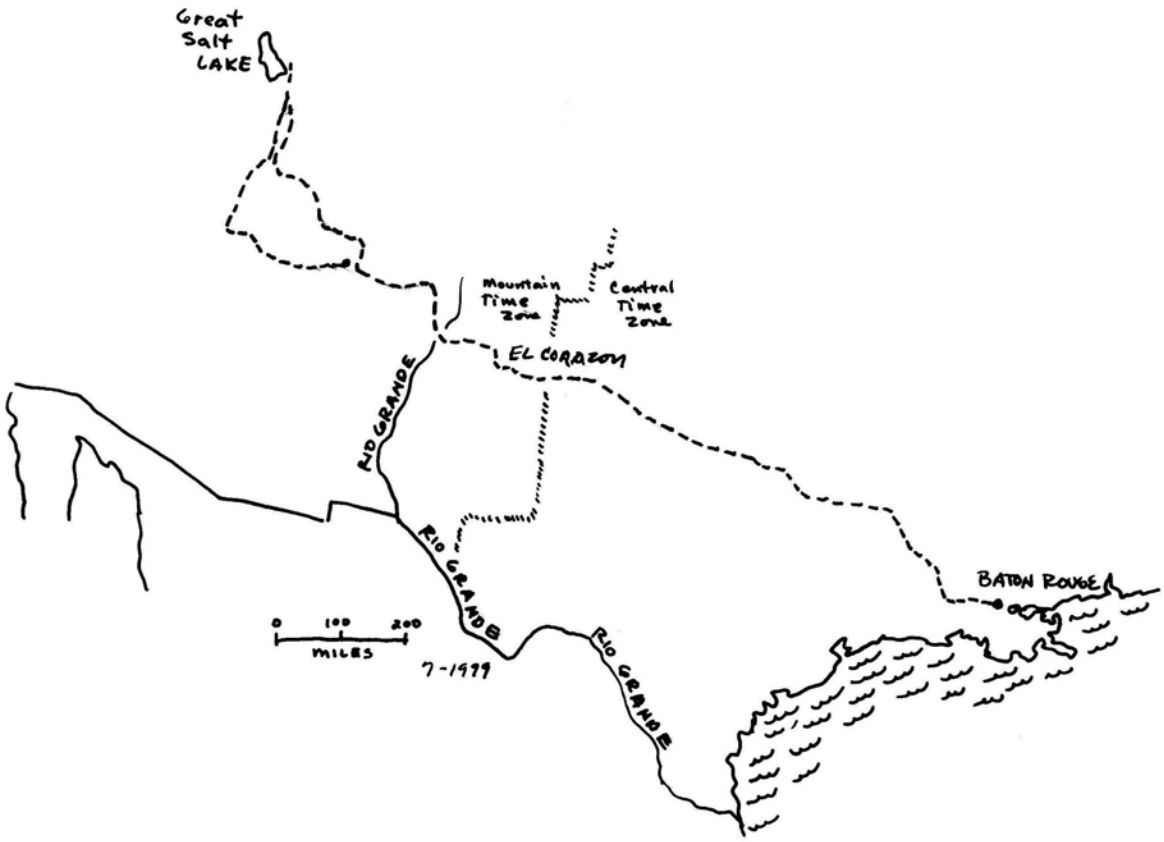


Figure 2.5.1: Map: Louisiana to Utah Survey Route, July 1999:

Once, Here, Still

Time. I must reach you - *in time.*

When I first met you, met your eyes, it seemed as if I had known you forever. But we were young then, and cared little for the length of days or years or lives. We knew we would live forever.

I see you still, your eyes.

Still, coming to meet you now, I try to make my mind's eye see you as not still. I try to make my mind's eye see you as time has turned upon your body, aged you. I try to see you as your life choices have ground round and upon your body, ravaging you. But my mind's eye refuses. I see you still as I saw you then, when my eyes met yours for the first time and I knew that I had known you forever. When your eyes close for the last time, where will you be? Where in time will I meet you, know you, see you?

Space. I must reach for you - in space.

When I first slept with you, laid down next to your body, it seemed as if I'd known you forever. Now, I must reach you, reach for you, while you still occupy that space, your body.

I feel you still, your body.

2.5.1: Louisiana: Baton Rouge to Shreveport

I leave Baton Rouge by way of the old US-190 bridge across the Mississippi River (Figure 2.5.2). Just west of Port Allen, I take note that the beat-up bare wood cross and the small metal disk etched with a tiny cross, first spotted on the previous Memorial Day, is still wedged into the dinged-up steel guardrail narrowly separating the narrow-shouldered four-lane highway (Figure 2.5.3).

The edges of the pavement are ragged, worn by rain and neglect, the pavement itself pitted and pot-holed; it is a bumpy first leg of the journey. I watch the pastoral, tree-lined, public-right-of-way go by at a fast clip then cross into the northeastern edge of the Atchafalaya Basin, heart of traditional Cajun culture ("Atchafalaya Basin") and focus of state legislators' latest tourist/economic development efforts (Louisiana State, Department of

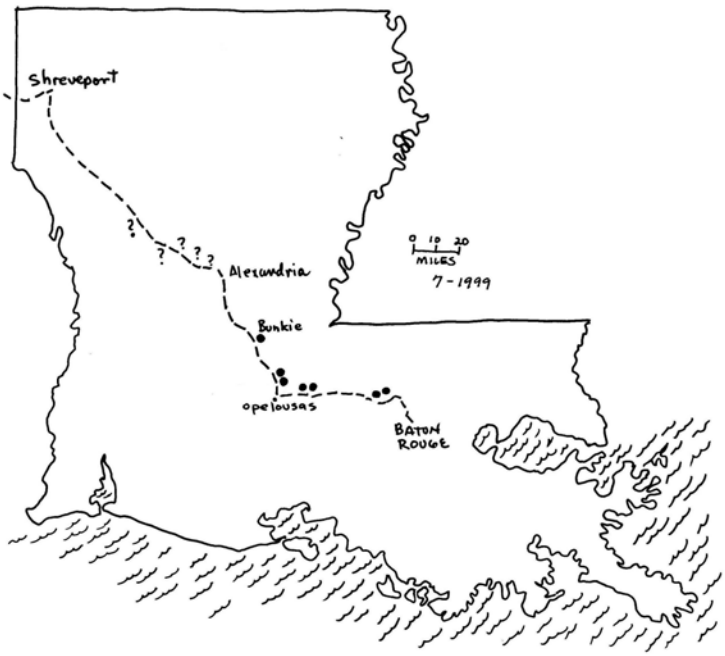


Figure 2.5.2: Map: Louisiana: Baton Rouge to Shreveport with Roadside Shrines, July 1999

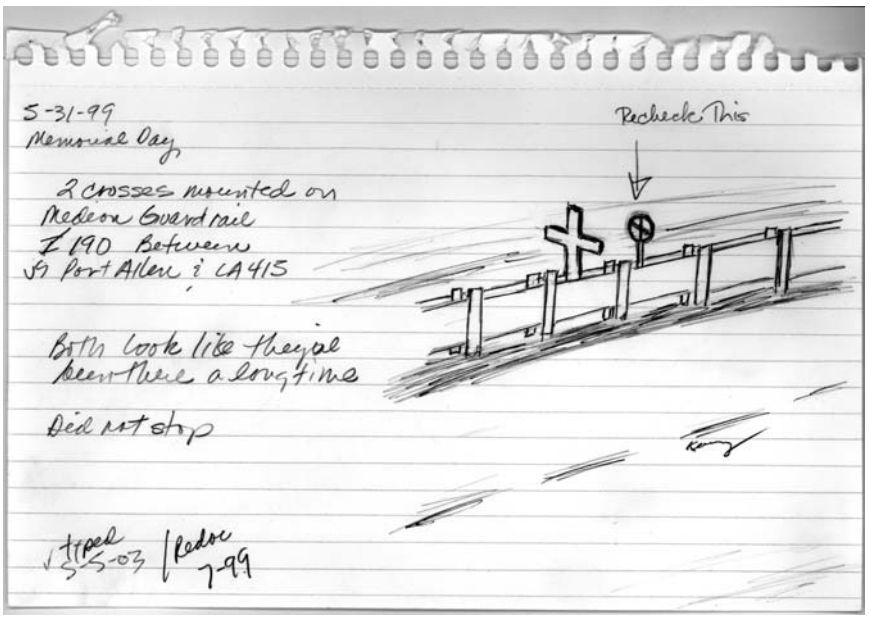


Figure 2.5.3: Drawing: LA US-190: Two in Guardrail

Natural Resources). The old pylons supporting the road plunge into the dark waters teeming with wildlife, the hot rushing wind and the urgent throbbing sound of the Atchafalaya fills and pushes the car across the swamp to relatively solid ground. Just east of Port Barree , I

take note of a small white cross with carved ends decorated with a yellow flowered wreath the ditch at the LA-71 intersection (Figure 2.5.4).

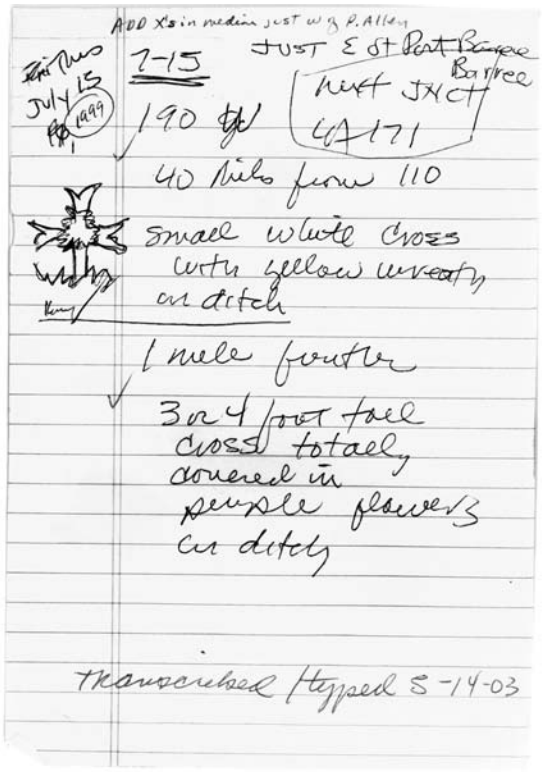


Figure 2.5.4: Drawing: LA US-190: Carved with Yellow Wreath

A mile farther, I take note of a larger cross completely covered in purple flowers in the same ditch, then turn north onto I-49. Interstate 49 is a relatively new, widely-divided, broad-shouldered four-lane stretch of highway, efficiently creating the south-north corridor between Lafayette, Alexandria, and Shreveport on the northwest border with Texas and I-20/US-80.

Immediately upon turning north on I-49, I take note of a large white cross in the median. This cross, first spotted by Maida Owens in 1993 ("Field Notes") is still tended, the neatly-trimmed grass an oasis. A scant half mile farther north, I take note of the small white cross, first spotted on Memorial Day 1999, still tilting into the tall grass on the upper bank of the shoulder of the northbound lane (Figure 2.5.5).

Figure 2.5.5: Drawing: LA I-49: Neglected?

Twenty miles farther near the exit to Bunkie, I take note of another white cross on the shoulder of the road. At dusk, north of Alexandria, I spot deer at the edge of the right-of-way near the tree-line, and watching for movement, pass several undocumented white shapes on either side of the freeway. Traveling through Shreveport and heading due west on I-20, I chase the sunset through the gently rolling hills and the piney woods all the way into northeast Texas.

2.5.2: Texas: Longview to Amarillo

Taking the Longview/Eastman exit north from the interstate (Figure 2.5.6), I stop to refuel at the combination Texaco/Taco Bell and inquire about the tiny white cross with living flowers planted in the dirt across the street. “Oh, that’s nothin’,” says the clerk, “you should go up to the next intersection, lots of those things -- a real bad spot with lots of wrecks.” Staying the night at some unremarkable chain hotel in Longview, the “hub” of “Texas Lake Country” (Longview) and one of anthropologist John (Junior) Doughty’s recommended

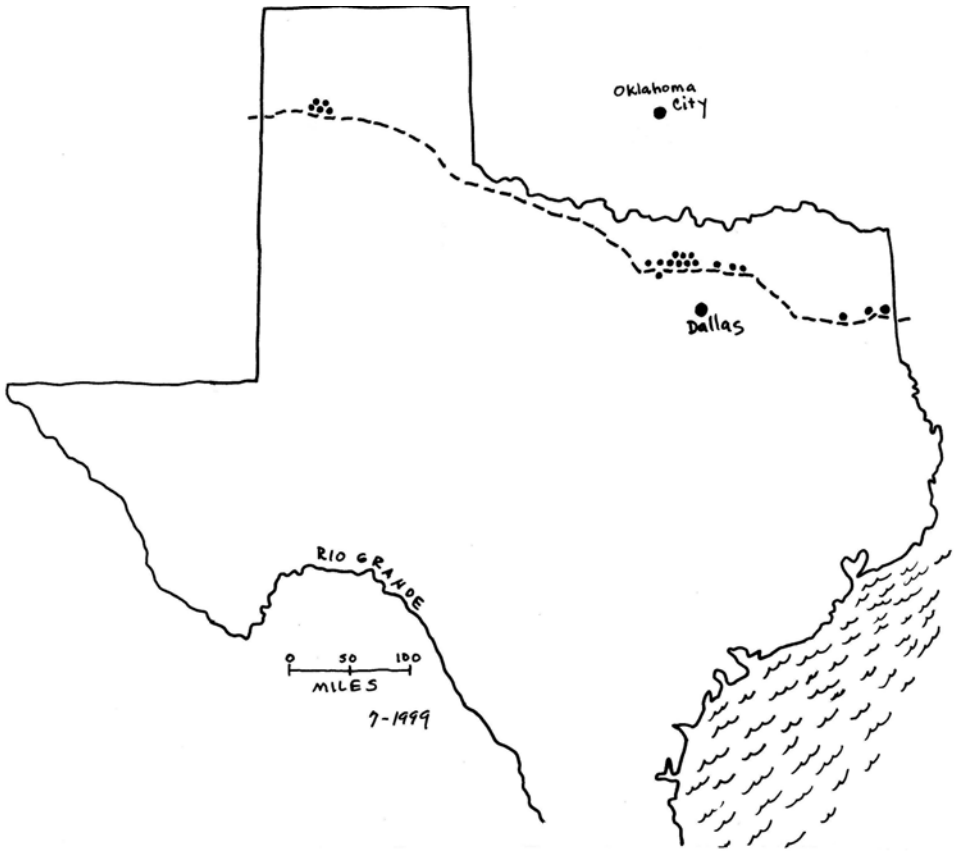


Figure 2.5.6: Map: Texas Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, July 1999

detours off the US-61/Blues Highway, I refrain from investigating Junior's "Juke Joints" and sleep. On Friday morning on the way out of town, I drive through the aforementioned dangerous intersection and take note of a large wreath of fresh flowers on a low-to-the-ground wire stand sitting next to the pavement.

Rejecting the interstate for a more direct albeit "back road" route, I travel west on the old two-lane US-80. This will prove to be my introduction to a road that will later become integral to this work; US-80 is the first contiguous highway connecting east and west coasts crossing the southern states and one of a few in the vast US highway system that continues primarily in its original form (Jensen; "US 80 Hi-Way"). However, on this day on US-80, traveling through New Hope to Mineola, I encounter no roadside shrines. I resist the urge to continue west into Dallas to visit the long-belabored, highly-contested John F. Kennedy

memorial site (Foote, *Shadowed Ground* 1997 ed., 58-70), and leave US-80 by turning northwest on US-69 to Greenville. At Greenville, I take US-380 due west, and look forward to another relatively straight and dusty stretch of two-lane highway connecting the small towns across northern Texas. At the stoplight at US-380 and US-69, in the grassy ditch on the northwest corner of the junction, I take note of the small white cross decorated with a wreath of multi-colored fabric flowers, inscribed "Alice D." Traveling a few miles farther, just west of the small town of Floyd, I take note of a white cross inscribed "WILL" near the "Slow Speed Ahead" sign, and slow down. On the other side of town and five miles farther down the road, approaching Princeton, I take note of a small unpainted cross decorated with orange flowers dedicated to "DAWN," slow down, pass through town, and continue on to Denton. At Denton, I resist the temptation to hop on I-35 north to Oklahoma City to visit the new national memorial in front of the bombed-out Murrah Federal Building (Kass; "Symbolic Concepts"). Instead, I take the US-380 detour under and around the construction of a new interchange. Just east of Texas Route 5, while waiting for traffic to move forward, I spend a few moments considering the construction workers as they carefully avoid the dusty row of six tiny pink and blue crosses covered in flowers that lay claim to the only remaining patch of grass at the edge of the pavement. I move on when the man with white hard hat and the orange flags waves traffic to the right. Hoping to be free of the shrine site, the construction site, and the traffic snarl, I resume westward movement on US-380. However, immediately west of the old I-35 interchange, I take note of a set of crosses with mitered ends planted in the ground near a new utility pole; the crosses are inscribed "Father," and "Son," the ground is blanketed with fresh flowers. Looking down the road a bit, I watch the next

cross in the ditch grow larger upon approach, then in passing, I notice the small purple bouquet of plastic flowers at the base.

Just west of Decatur, I turn onto US-287, a widely divided four-lane highway that takes me northwest to Wichita Falls, Vernon, Childress, and into the Texas Panhandle. Blessedly, I see no roadside shrines for nearly three hundred miles while crossing the broad, flat expanse of north Texas, and so watch the blue-black storm clouds roll across the plains far to the south. Then, approximately twenty miles east of Amarillo, the self-proclaimed "Step Into The Real Texas" ("Step"), I encounter another row of five tiny crosses, covered alternately in pink or blue flowers, planted in the ground on the westbound shoulder of the road. In passing, I take note that stuck in the ground at the base of each cross is a multi-colored nosegay.

2.5.3: New Mexico: Tucumcari to Santa Fe

I take I-40 due west through Amarillo and on into Tucumcari, New Mexico, get off the road, and bed down for the night at the circa 1950s motel at the intersection of US-54 and New Mexico Route 104 (Figure 2.5.7). For company, I turn on the television and encounter, on every channel, the news that John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife Carolyn, their companion/co-pilot, and their plane are missing. I sleep restlessly, get on the road early Saturday morning and -- following the New Mexico license plates -- look forward to getting lost in America's "Land of Enchantment" ("State Nicknames") (Figure 2.5.8).

Traveling northwest from Tucumcari on NM-104, immediately north of a crossroad with one of the rare sections of the decommissioned US-66 still in use, I pass a large square state roadside marker with small bouquets of flowers attached to the legs. All I could read of the sign was "Please Don't Drink and Drive," but I could see that, underneath in smaller

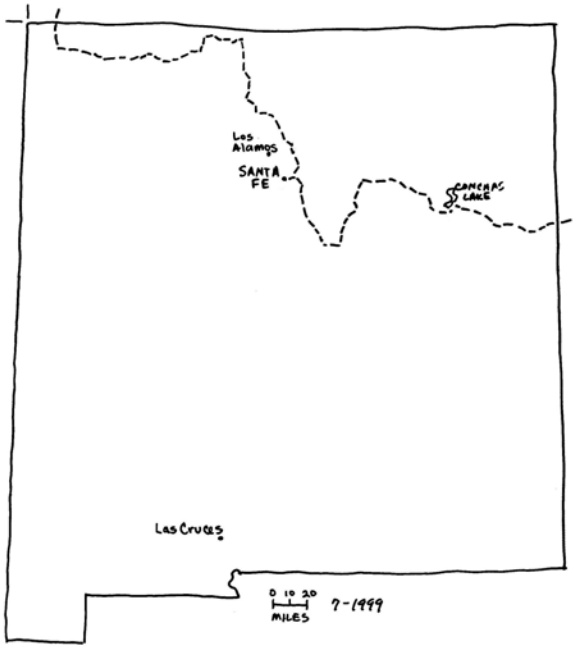


Figure 2.5.7: Map: New Mexico Survey Route, July 1999

letters, were the names of four individuals. Twenty minutes later I take note of a white wood cross on the side of the road. The cross is decorated with a single red rose and a tiny US flag.

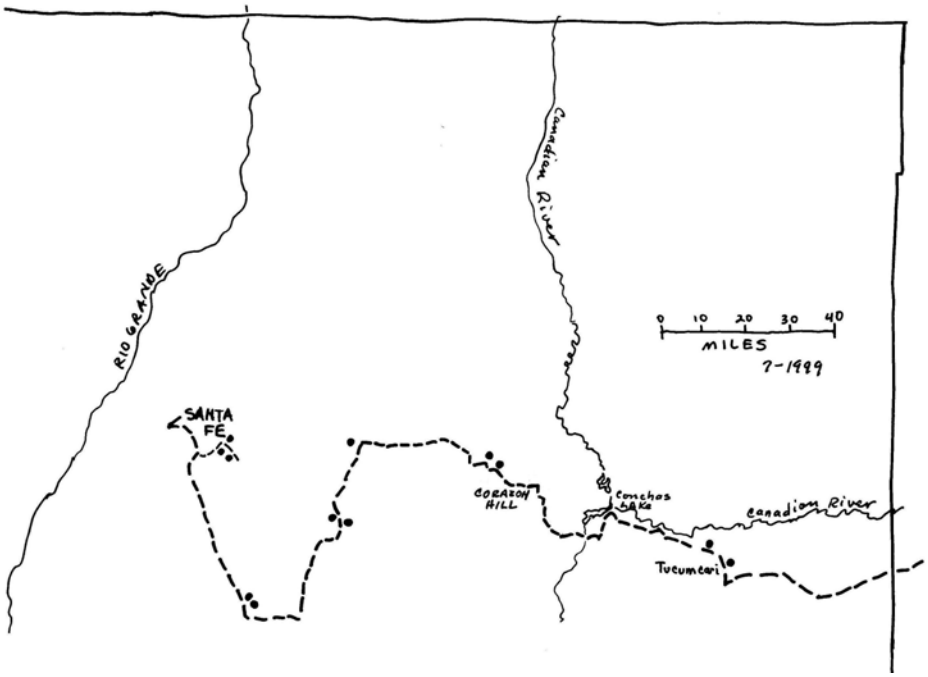


Figure 2.5.8: Map: Northeast New Mexico Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, July 1999

Passing through the Conchas Dam and Lake area, the smell of fresh clean water pulls me like a parched animal to a watering hole. Breathing deeply, urgently, I continue on, the two-lane ribbon of road rising and winding as I approach what at first looked like a massive glacier of red rock thrusting itself from the northeast into the undulating volcanic tides of rock I was crossing. To continue on would mean running headlong into the sheer wall of striated rock rising straight out of the canyon floor. Instead, I drive headlong into the tiny ghost town of Trementina, which I later learn was (first) the site of an Apache village, (then) a European settlement, and (later) abandoned by all during the Dust Bowl and Depression. However, before the last family left in 1959, the television series "Rawhide" shot several episodes on location in the "ghost town" (Las Vegas/San Miguel). Contrary to Jean Baudrillard's contention in (his) *America*, this is the only time I have actually driven through a film set.

At the base of the looming rock face (and the edge of town), I turn 90 degrees to the west, and begin climbing the road that winds around the escarpment. I later learn, looking at my map, that I am ascending Corazon Hill, climbing 6,270 feet in the course of the next fifteen miles. Traffic is sparse, I feel alone on this trail; *corazon* is a Spanish term of (perhaps in this case dubious?) affection meaning *heart*, and the scenery ascending the heart-shaped Canyon del Cerro del Corazon is "dramatic" (Las Vegas/San Miguel). Thrilled to the point of terror, my heart in my throat, I dare to look out the driver's side window across the single equally narrow descending lane, and see a sheer drop into nothingness. I glance in the rearview mirror to see the relatively level ground I have left behind stretching away over the horizon, appear to drop away, again, to nothing. I look ahead, over the hood of the car, off into nothing but sky.

The sky is blue, a blindingly beautiful blue, the blue of Mary's robes against the ever-rising sheer cliffs. The cliffs are a rich reddish-brown, the color of the skin of the few people who drive past me, the color of Mary's painted pensive, compassionate face and open arms. The dulled steel guardrail, the dinged-up and at times twisted and broken rail, is held together and anchored to the cliff edge with rusted metal poles; the ravaged stretches of the rail flash like so many broken teeth, like the broken strings of a rosary, the once-blue beads dulled to a pale silver, the string rotted by time and the weather, broken, grinning, hungry. I beseech the godless sky for a turn-off just to catch a breath, but am too terrified to stray from the course. Then, I take note: there, just before the road turns so radically that to stay my course will take me hurtling over the cliff, a *nicho* carved out of the side of the mountain. Inside, a statue of the Virgin Mary, she who is said to protect travelers. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and forever, and please see me safely to level ground. Amen." Miraculously, I round the last curve, a 90-degree turn to the right around the last lip of del Corazon; up and around and into the village of Trujillo. At the top, at the edge of town, I take note of a small white wood cross planted in the ground for "Mario Artez."

On the other side of Trujillo, the road levels out and crosses a wide, gently rolling swell of grassland. I pull over, get out of the car, and listen to the wind whoosh and thrum the utility wires strung diagonally across the road, across the mesa. I see no roadside shrines for the next thirty miles.

Then, south of Las Vegas on I-25, I take note of a small weathered cross on the side of the road. The cross is draped with a garland of fresh flowers. A few miles farther, I detour into the small village of Villanueva on NM-3, and meet a life-sized statue of Mary standing in the hot sun by the edge of the road on a sharp curve. Next to Mary is a large,

white wood cross, and both Mary and the cross are enclosed in a short wire garden fence. The ground is covered with bright yellow summer blooms. At the next corner, at the intersection with a dirt road, I take note of a small cross inscribed with a name I cannot read. I meet Mary again on the other edge of the village. This time she is in a grotto-style *nicho* built of small stones rising on three sides to a rounded roof. Four short red glass votive candles, a small pile of stones, and a large bowl of water are at her feet. I resist the urge to stop, to dip my fingers in the bowl and cross myself; the first two fingers of my right hand, wet from the holy water, touched briefly to my forehead, the center of my chest, then my left and right shoulders. I resist the urge to kneel in front of the grotto and plunge both hands in the bowl and splash my sweaty face and tired eyes. I drive on.

Winding my way into Santa Fe on US-285, between the villages of Clines Corners and White Lake, I take note of two crosses, one large and one small, attached to a fence on the side of the road. I stop for the night in Santa Fe at a friend's house, a welcome respite from where I have been and where I am going. I am nurtured by her company. That evening on the way into town for dinner and drinks, she gives me a tour of a few urban roadside shrines. On Old Las Vegas Highway on the south side of the road, my friend points out a medium-sized white wood cross with multi-colored flowers hanging from the center. A few miles farther up on the grassy berm of a four-lane busy highway, she shows me a large wood cross painted white. "It looks like a little grave," she says; an oblong area in front of the cross is edged with rocks, the earth inside is mounded, scraped free of grass, and planted with flowers (Figure 2.5.9).

Around the corner, we simultaneously spot a medium-sized wood cross, painted white, with a small wreath of multi-colored flowers hanging from the center. We park, have

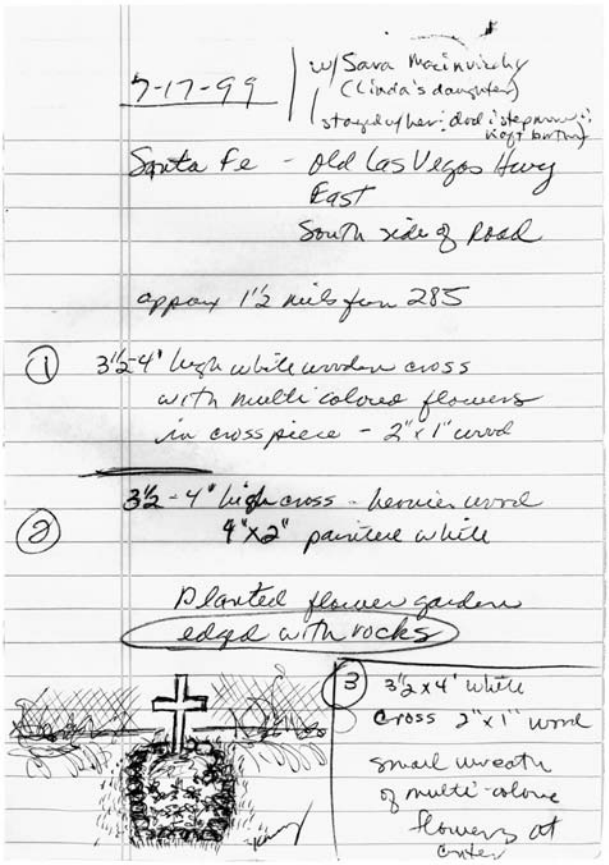


Figure 2.5.9: Drawing: NM Old Las Vegas Road: Urban Grave

dinner, drink too much at a hippie/biker bar, walk around window shopping to sober up. A replica of one of Georgia O'Keefe's "cross" paintings takes me by surprise, vibrates there behind the layers of glass. Of these crosses, O'Keefe wrote:

> I saw the crosses so often--and often in unexpected places--like a thin dark veil of the Catholic Church spread over the New Mexico landscape.
>
> One evening when I was living in Taos we walked back of the morada toward a cross in the hills. I was told it was a Penitente cross but that meant little to me at the time. The cross was large enough to crucify a man, with two small crosses--one on either side. It was late light and the cross stood out--dark against the evening sky. If I turned to the left, away from the cross, I saw the Taos mountains--a beautiful shape. I painted the cross against the mountains although I never saw it that way. I painted it with a red sky and I painted it with a blue sky and stars.
>
> I painted a light cross that I saw often on the road to Alcade. I looked for it recently but it was not there. I also painted a cross I saw at sunset against the hills near Cameron--hills that look small until you see telephone poles like toothpicks going up and down and you know they are high. The hills are

> grey--all the same size and shpae with once in a while a hot-colored brown hill. That cross was big and strong, put together with wooden pegs [(Plate 64: "Black Cross, New Mexico, 1929")]. For me, painting the crosses was a way of painting the country (n.pag.).

We take a road home where there are no roadside shrines. I sleep fitfully, get up early, hug and kiss my friend goodbye. "Be careful" she says, waving as I drive away, as I make my way to Utah, and to my friend, who says to hurry.

Gathering Intensity: Taking Note

I come to meet you.

Traveling across time and space to you, to another world. To what end? And then, what space will we occupy, together, after/words?

In this vehicle, my body, I journey moving through space as I come to meet you. I come bearing gifts gathered along the way, my eyes, my heart (pried) open and present as I move through space coming to meet you. Along the way I gather what presents itself to me: take me, they say, take me with you. I gather what chooses to gift itself to me: see me, see me and image me, imagine me, they say, take me with you. I remain responsive to my imagining self as I gather what is presented to me, gather and respond to the gifts bestowed upon me. I come bearing gifts that I have gathered along the way.

I must reach you in time, while you still occupy space, your body.

2.5.4: New Mexico: Santa Fe to Shiprock

Along US-285 North on the thirty odd miles between Santa Fe to just north of Espanola, I take note of fifteen *descansos*, many of them finely crafted crosses of wrought iron and decorated with brightly colored flowers. These shrines are attached to fences, appear on the legs of a stop sign located between the ditch and a driveway, and stand starkly against the golden cliffs. Eight shrines perch precariously on the edge of the cliff, which

drops away to (an often dry) riverbed on my right, hundreds of feet below. At one point, I take note of the rusted remains of a car stuck in a tree as I glance over a relatively newer section of steel guardrail. Like a scared kid whistling in the dark, I begin to hum the theme from the old Warner Brother's *Road Runner* cartoon, half expecting to hear that high-pitched whistle as an ACME crate comes hurtling over the cliff from above.

> If you're on the highway and the Road Runner goes *beep beep*
> Just step aside or [you] might end up in a heap
> Road Runner, Road Runner runs on the road all day
> Even the coyote can't make him change his ways.
> Road Runner, the coyote's after you.
> Road Runner, if he catches you you're through (Cameron).

"All *right* already!" I cry out to no one. I am aware that I am piloting a huge machine with more than the potential to give me a smooth, comfortable, stylish ride--even as car jingles run through my brain. "See the U.S.A. in your Chevrolet" (Corday and Carr). "Have you driven a Ford lately?" ("The Boss"). *"Zoom-Zoom!"* ("Mazda Goes"). *Okay! Okay!* I check my speed, note that I am on a hill or a sharp curve or next to a cliff, and that there is no shoulder on the side of the road, only a deep treacherous abyss. I take note that I am harnessed into my vehicle, and thank god for all the times I have made it home not exactly sober. And I acknowledge that it would be absolutely crazy for me to stop and get out of the car *here*, so I slow down, holding the steering wheel with one hand and scribbling notes, notes, notes in my journal with the other, checking the rearview mirror, half expecting to hear that high-pitched whistle as the lone Sunday-drivin' semi, barreling down the road, hurtles around the curve and catches up with me here, in the middle of . . . *where*?

North of Espanola, US-84 branches off and continues northwest through the San Pedro Mountains between the Santa Fe and Carson National Forest (Figure 2.5.10). Along this winding stretch of mountain road, I take note of fourteen shrines, some of which are

grouped together. At two separate sites, two crosses are situated side-by-side, their "arms" touching. At another site, I take note of a "family" of crosses: one large, one medium-sized, and one small cross, standing in a row as if holding hands. Another cross is attached to the mountainside on a winding, ascending curve. Another cross is made entirely of flowers, attached to the "Do Not Pass" sign. Just before US-84 intersects with US-64 at Charma, there on the south-bound side of the road, I take note of a bare wood cross decorated with flowers and a large carved, painted butterfly. The butterfly is attached but is not fastened down, its wing span is about two feet across, and I wonder if a strong wind might take the whole thing airborne. Then again--now breaking Barthes' rule by looking back (*Camera Lucida* 47)--I wonder (borrowing from Pope), if the "butterfly" will break "upon the [steel] wheel" of language, analysis, and criticism (l. 307).

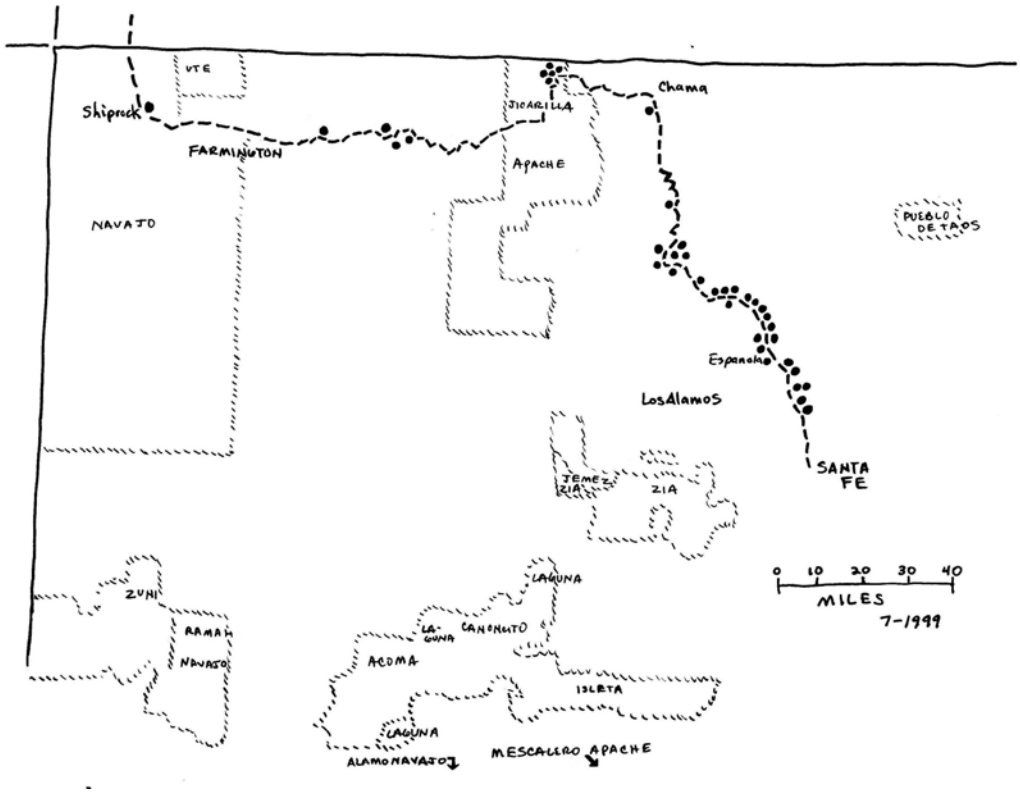


Figure 2.5.10: Map: Northwest New Mexico Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, July 1999

US-64 winds west along a mountain pass, following a rushing river. Traffic on the road is eerily absent. However, proof that others have passed this way is apparent as I approach the northeast edge of the Jicarilla Indian Reservation at Dulce. The border is marked with what appears to be a community shrine site. Several small wood crosses clustered loosely together under the large sign announce the border of the reservation: one cross is adorned with red roses, one is decorated with straw flowers, and several others--small white crosses, one large black iron cross--display what appears to be a mandala or medicine wheel, a red *Ojo,* or *Eye* of God, and tiny prayer flags. "Bobby Jo" died here--his name is hand-written on another small white iron cross close to the road.

I turn left and travel due west across Navajo land on US-64. An hour east of Farmington, I take note of a large white iron cross, the name also worked in iron. Five minutes later I take note of a large cross draped with deep pink and purple flowers. Later, just before I pass "Trading Post: Navajo City," the only building for at least half an hour as I travel through a canyon, I take note of a large wood cross decorated with red roses. Odd, I think: according to my friend Dan (a ceremonially adopted Navajo and ocassionally practicing Catholic), traditional Navajo do not tolerate reminders of death in their living spaces. Then, at the eastern edge of Shiprock, in the median, I take note of a wood cross painted white, inscribed "IN LOVING MEMORY."

2.5.5: Colorado: Shiprock, New Mexico to Dove Creek

I turn north at Shiprock onto (the soon-to-be decommissioned) US-666 and drive north into the rugged southwest corner of Colorado, the Ute Mountain Indian Reservation, on into to Cortez, and then northwest to Dove Creek just east of the border with Utah (Figure 2.5.11). At the crossroads at the top of a hill that *is* Dove Creek, I take note of a large wood

cross, painted white, inscribed "CAGEY." The cross is decorated with a small bouquet of multi-colored flowers.

I briefly consider traveling northeast to visit Littleton, Colorado, to participate in *some* way in the meaning-making processes taking place at Columbine High School ("Students Return to Design Lively Tiles"; Sullivan). Instead, I continue west into Utah.

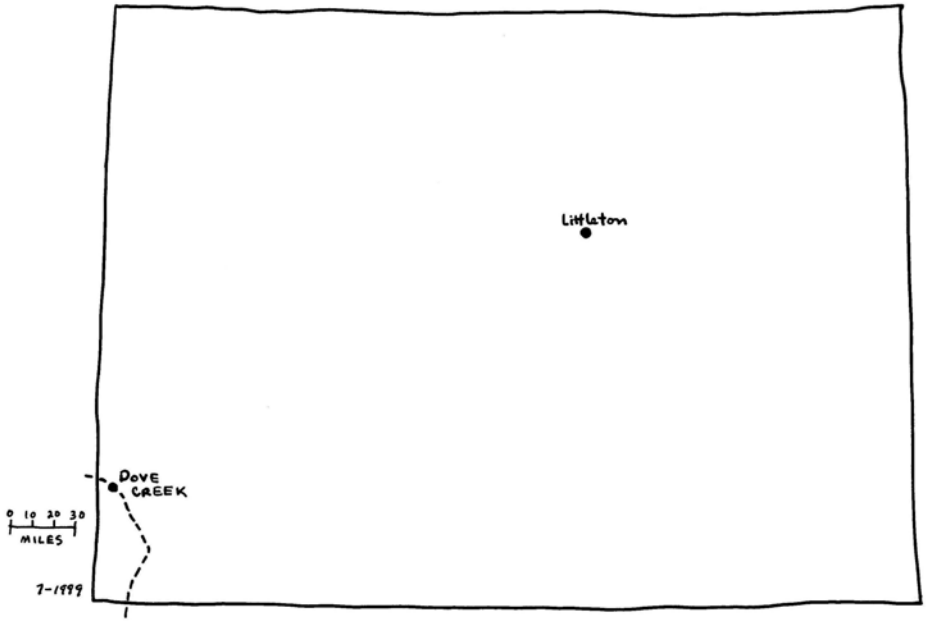


Figure 2.5.11: Map: Southwest Corner of Colorado Survey Route with Roadside Shrines, July 1999

2.5.6: Utah: Dove Creek to Salt Lake City

I cross the border into Utah and drive northwest for a long, long time (Figure 2.5.12). I take note of only one roadside shrine, on US-6 just north of the Wasatch County line: a tiny white cross decorated with red flowers attached to a cattle fence on a hill bordering the northbound lane. I keep going. I make it to Salt Lake City, in time.

Many years later, I will remember that I once stood on the banks of the Great Salt Lake at Rozel Point. Looking north, I watched the breeze gently move the heavy red water over the black basalt mounds of Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty"; looking down, I peered

into the depths of the water pushing on the bones (the steel pylons) of an abandoned oil rig; looking south, I looked back at you standing on the top of the hill.

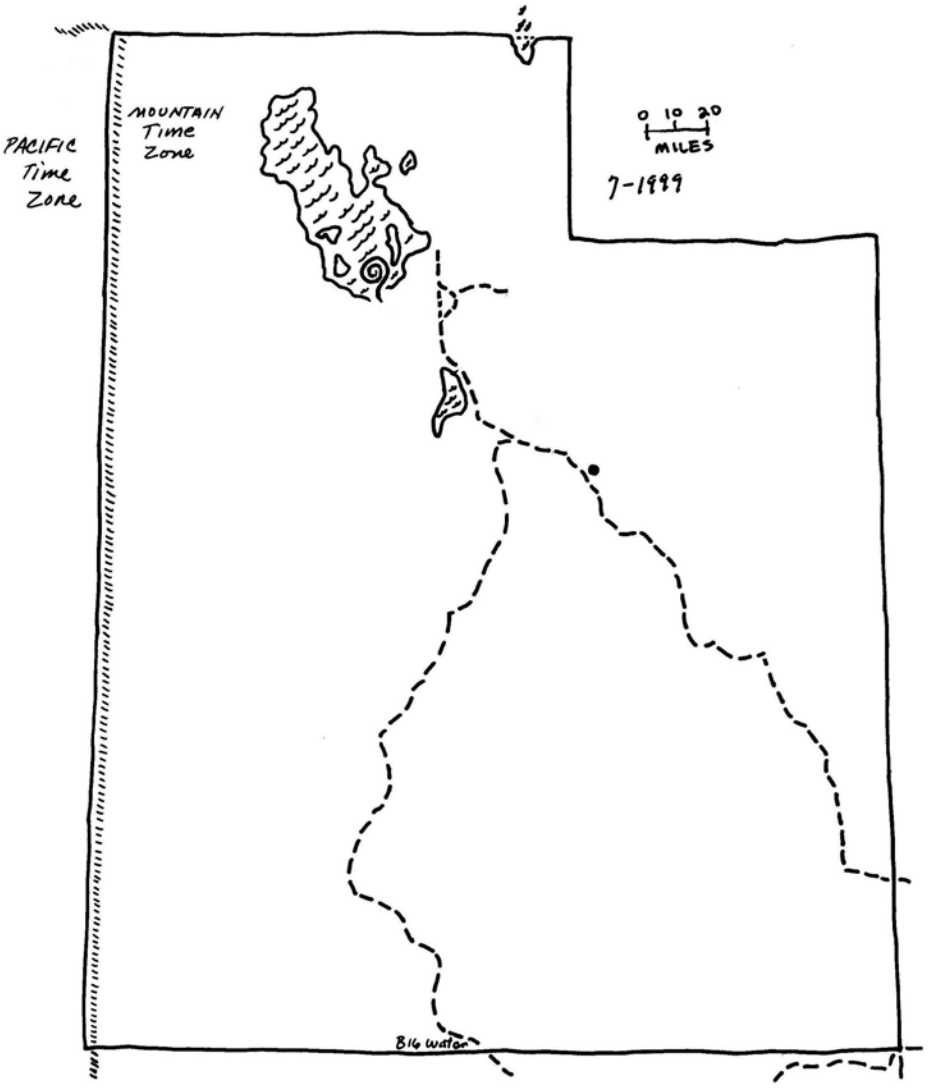


Figure 2.5.12: Map: Utah Survey Routes with Roadside Shrines, July 1999

Performing Loss Without Regret

There you are. On the couch on the porch attached to your house that you call home, you are surrounded by the garden you have so carefully tended. You've been there longer than anywhere, you say.

How long was I there? An eternity, not long enough.

We meet again, eye-to-eye, face-to-face. We drink each other in, and in that willful act, relax in each other's space. Timeless. Meeting you in time and space, willfully merging, journeying into another time and space that is boundless—a "crack between the worlds" (Swiftdeer). I am here to see you off, to see you in and of this other-worldness. My living vibrating being matches the rhythm of your slowly beating heart, slowing down, and simultaneously I am in my own body, a second rhythm. I lost track of time. I dared to believe in the Benevolence of Being. The gift returned.

I am with you matching the rhythm of your life, and simultaneously I am in my own body, a second rhythm, inhabiting a mutual landscape. I see your horizon, our mutual horizon--not a ribbon of road running to an inevitable vanishing point, but a broad vista of blooming desert--the sunlight slanting sideways as it does between the time of darkness and light, setting the landscape ablaze with deep shadow and scarlet fire, shimmering in the heat. From this distance, this fully engaged distance, I know Beauty--a vibrating stillness. In a not unpleasant morphine haze, your toes curl and uncurl, slowly, sensuously, they way they have always done as you fall asleep.

We sit together, not speaking, on your porch that is attached to your house that you call home. Bird song. Warm breeze. I make our morning coffee, and later, tuna salad, and later still, baked chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy. It is the best food we've ever tasted. So much pleasure, to be alive. Your garden. The garden speaks to us of cycles, of seasons, assuring us, now that we do care for the length of lives, of years, of days, of moments. At the feet of your beloved blue-robed and ruddy-skinned Mary, the yellow rose with the flaming coral center takes its time, budding, swelling, daring to open, winking back

at us as tiny raindrops fall on the petals on the ground, fall on what bloomed the day before and is now gone. The grass needs cutting again.

Dan's favorite poem was "Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night," by Dylan Thomas. Dan would agree with Cyr's contention that Thomas' poem was more about the rage to live than a negotiation with death. Dan said this reflected his way of "Walking with Beauty," of living the Navajo Beauty Way. His last utterance was *"No."*

I gather the gifts making themselves known to me, that reach for me, that cry see me, feel me, take me with you. Image me, imagine me. Remember me. Do not let me go, "gentle."

You. Vibrating, still, in my mind's eye.

And after/words? Image, imagine, remember, vibrating, still. A vibrating, shattering stillness.

CHAPTER THREE
MAPPING CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES OF MARKING SITES OF DEATH

> Needless to say, the tour you get is not necessarily the tour you are given. There is always a gap. Humans interpret (MacCannell, *The Tourist* 192).

> . . . anyone with access to the Internet, a computer with CD-ROM, or a public library can generate her own map representations (MacEachren, *How Maps Work* 461).

3.1: Introduction: Locating Shrines in Popular and Academic Discourse and Practice

Roadside shrines seek our attention, not only as we pass them—some of us routinely—on our way from one place to another, but through print and electronic media as well. These sites, the materials that mark them, how it is that people come to build them, the messages that those who build them hope to convey, and the specific and accumulative force that these sites bring to bear in various contexts may offer unique insight into our complex, fragmented, and often agonistic cultural relationships with life and death on the road, in the media, and with/in state regulatory agencies. This chapter will put into conversation the sometimes complementary, often contestatory, always already overlapping locations of meaning in popular and academic discourse regarding the politics and poetics of place and the legal implications of the private use of the public right-of-way; roadside shrines as both in and out of place.

This chapter first situates the present study with/within shrine-building practices that have attracted national and international media attention, followed by a brief overview of the work of several scholars from various disciplines regarding these high-profile shrines. This broad view of shrine-building practices is followed by a section that historicizes the politics and practices of marking the site of death on the road, followed by a section addressing the

contemporary politics of these practices. The final section presents roadside shrines as resistant performance of protest and warning.

Eastern European folklore scholar Zorica Rajkovic, investigating the contemporary practice of marking the site of death on the road in (what was then) Yugoslavia, sets precedent for a multi-dimensional study of the politics of marking the site of death on the public-right-of-way in the United States. Her interest in the subject was piqued by the proliferation of "roadside memorial signs" despite a 1974 Yugoslavian Federal government ban of the practice. Rajkovic therefore approached the practice as a puzzle whose pieces may never fit into a single completed picture—that marking the site of death on the road was a complex practice that did not fit comfortably within any single interpretive frame. This is an approach that this chapter intends, to some degree, to employ.

Of interest to this study is the measure to which Rajkovic speculates on the relationship between roadside shrines and other high-profile shrine-building activities at sites of international socio-political and historical significance. I found similar speculation about the relationship between high-profile shrine sites and roadside shrines in US the popular and academic press, as well as in everyday conversation about roadside shrines. My own exposure to high-profile shrine sites, the comments of my conversants, my early encounter with feature stories in various local and regional newspapers, as well as an early reading of Rajkovic have influenced my own field and archival work. Indeed, high-profile shrines have at times made it difficult to focus on the subjects at hand. When traveling the road "spotting" roadside shrines, I often felt a pull of the wheel and a curious desire to turn toward these and other sites of inter/nationally mediated tragedy. The following section will thus provide a

brief overview of some of the more spectacular sites as represented in the popular media and in the academic press.

Rajkovic also brings into play various institutional responses to the contemporary practice of marking the site of death on the road, ranging from traffic authorities to the tourism bureau to newspaper features and editorials. Similar responses have been found in the United States, with the added influence of the world wide web as print materials are subsequently posted online. Internet interest specifically about roadside shrines is also evident as a broad range of web sites address the subject, ranging from online roadside shrine tours, to scholarship, to commentary making fun of and/or raging against the practice. These and other secondary sources as well as primary field work will be engaged in this chapter.

Fuoss' agonistic framework is helpful in exploring how roadside shrines perform in the current cultural milieu. Fuoss assumes that cultural performances "make things happen" that would otherwise not have occurred, that they either work to undermine or further "entrench" hegemonic forces, and that they operate on multiple spheres, including textual, spatial, and conceptual ones ("Performance as Contestation" 98-99). In *Striking Performances, Performing Strikes*, Fuoss further develops the interpretive power of these interdependent spheres of cultural performance when he advances that multiple axes of effectivity exist, including class, race, and gender, and that a cultural performance may function hegemonically along one axis and resistantly along another or ambiguously along any single axis. I maintain that the effectivity enacted in, through, and around roadside shrines is still more dynamic--unstable even--as if the axes Fuoss identifies are blades of a radiator fan that can be, and often are, nicked by a stone flung up from the side of the road. The fan continues to operate, but the rotation of the blades is off center and out of kilter.

3.2: Locating Shrines in Contemporary Culture: A Significant Practice

Rajkovic conducted field and archival research from 1977 to 1983 in (the former) Yugoslavia and published her findings in a 1988 essay "Roadside Memorial Signs for Traffic Accident Victims," in which she speculates on the relationship between roadside shrines and other high-profile shrine-building activities. These sites included "spots where victims of terrorism, political conflict, and violence of other sorts have met their death" (171). Some examples include:

> flowers and permanent monuments along the Berlin wall where those who tried to escape were killed; flowers and candles on the spot in Prague were Jan Palach burned himself to death [protesting the Soviet re-enforcement of an ongoing occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1969]; flowers at the spot where [Italian Prime Minister] Aldo Moro was kidnapped and his chauffeur killed [by the Red Brigade in 1978]; heaps of flowers, wreaths, decorations and death notices at the spot where victims of terrorism ["were struck down"] in Munich during the 1980 Oktoberfest; flowers at the place where John Lennon, member of the Beatles, was killed [in New York City in 1980]; wreaths tossed into the sea near Sahalin following the South Korean airplane crash [in] 1983; the laying of wreaths by official representatives of Yugoslavia and France on the spot where the Yugoslav airplane crashed on Corsica, etc. (Rajkovic, 171-72).

Similar speculation regarding the relationship between various shrine-building practices in the United States was encountered at the outset of the current project. In 1996 when I began to discuss roadside shrines with friends, family, colleagues, and co-workers, each person inevitably responded with something like: "Oh, like the shrines at Oklahoma City?" and later in 1999, "Oh, like the shrines at Oklahoma City and Columbine?" Indeed, newspaper writers also began to speculate about the relationship between shrine-building practices at high-profile sites of "public tragedy" and roadside shrines in the United States soon after the April 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. For example, in the 5 September 1995 issue of the *Detroit Free Press*, Mary Otto

writes in her feature story, "Update from Oklahoma: Where Grief Takes Its Own Time," that "[t]he chain-link fence around the bomb site looks like one of those roadside shrines that spring up where death has taken a soul unprepared. Solemn pilgrims leave flowers, notes, cards, crosses" (1F). Five months later, in the 4 February 1996 issue of *The Dallas Morning News*, investigative reporter Bill Minutaglio's article "Roadside Remembrances" compares the local practices of marking the site(s) of plane crashes and auto-related "brutal, senseless death," including the sites of car crashes, abductions, and the assassination of John F. Kennedy, to the shrine-building activities at the site of the Oklahoma City bombing (F1).

Rajkovic also brings into play various contemporary institutional responses to the practice, ranging from traffic authorities to the tourism bureau to newspaper features and editorials:

> Although legislation and public opinion have come out against them, they tenaciously survive. […they have] been the cause of profound concern to police and traffic authorities, and for different reasons, to those engaged in tourism. [. . . newspaper articles have] come out on "highway graves," on "turning our roads into avenues for the dead," and on the depressing effect of this "funeral atmosphere" on tourist and drivers in general" (167)

While Rajkovic presents a primarily agonistic relationship between various institutions and the contemporary practice of marking the site of death on the road in Yugoslavia, responses from similar institutions in the United States have varied over time and from region to region. In the United States scholars have been writing since the mid 1980s about local and regional practices of marking the site of death on the road with a certain respect, even reverence, for the practice (Arellano; J. Griffith "Southern Arizona Folk Arts"). In addition, the grass-roots organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), which began in California in 1980, successfully negotiated in 1986 with the Texas Department of Transportation (DOT) to place a cross at the sites of alcohol-related deaths on

the road ("Some Texans Balk"), a relationship which indicates a rather gracious authoritarian attitude toward the practice. In the 1990s the interest of journalists, legislators, and the general public in the practice of marking the sites of death on the road, as well as more "high-profile" sites of death and violence, grew steadily, as has the practice itself, although there is no known figure for the number of roadside shrines in the United States (M. Oliver). Newspapers feature local site coverage, in-depth investigative reports, and beginning in Florida in 1996, legislative attempts to outlaw or regulate the practice, as well as editorials arguing the merits of such attempts.

3.2.1: Media Attention and the Cultural Performance of High-Profile Shrines

Public acts of grief and the "spontaneous" building of shrines at the site of sudden and violent death have, at times, permeated the media. Some of the more spectacular sites have been along the fence surrounding the bombed-out federal building in Oklahoma City, at the site of the car crash where Princess Diana and her companion died in Paris, at the site of the shootings of school children and teachers at Columbine High School, and at the site of the plane crash that killed John Kennedy, Jr., and his traveling companions. Indeed, it seems that the media attention afforded these shrines has become part and parcel to the event itself--well before the spectacular shrine-building activities during the weeks following the collapse of the World Trade Center on Septermber 11, 2001.

Take, for instance, the "live" televised coverage of the site along the fence surrounding the bombed-out Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, around which grew mounds of flowers, notes, toys and tiny crosses woven into the chain link immediately following the April 1995 attack. In the days and weeks following the initiating event, still images of the shrine site appeared in local and regional newspapers and national

magazines, many of which were reproduced later that year in books like *Requiem for the Heartland: The Oklahoma City Bombing*. The photographs in *Requiem* were donated by photographers and media sources across the nation, and the profits generated by the sale of the book were used to benefit victims and their families.

The internationally televised shrine sites where Princess Diana and her companion Dodi Fayed died in Paris and at Diana's childhood and London homes were also remarkable, the building of which anthropologist Sylvia Grider, in an interview with reporter MSNBC news Lisa Napoli, likened to surging waves in an undulating sea of (material cultural) grief. Furthermore, according to Napoli, people participated in "Diana" shrine sites not only in literal and televised public space but in the creation of virtual "Web shrines," which Napoli called "a milestone event in Net history":

> After all, many point to August 31, 1997, and the days immediately after that as a pivotal point in the development of the World Wide Web. Millions of people [approximately 12.5 million on America Online alone] shared their grief by posting to online bulletin boards and even building Web shrines to the Princess, and hundreds of those are still [in 2000] maintained (n. pag.).

The shrine-building activities related to the 24 March 1998 shooting of middle school children and teachers in Jonesboro, Arkansas also drew media attention, albeit expressly unwelcome. Two days after the shootings, a BBC News *Special Report* entitled "Coming to Terms with Tragedy" noted that reporters were asked to leave the grounds of the school and to stop intruding on parents' grief. Emerging patterns of mourning were noted, however: Jonesboro residents were not only laying flowers and teddy bears at the scene, they were also attempting to link with other "kin" communities which had experienced a similar event. "In Pearl, Mississippi, where [a teen] killed two students and injured seven, residents wore gold ribbons on their lapels. In Paducha, Kentucky, where [another teen] killed three members of

a prayer group, residents wore white ribbons. Now in Jonesboro, residents are wearing white ribbons" ("Coming to Terms"). White ribbons also adorned fence posts and trees throughout the community ("Clinton to Address Jonesboro"; Lang). Furthermore, whether the residents of Jonesboro wanted it or not, the *Cat Stevens.com* web site posted a special page to "serve as a memorial to the little ones in Arkansas." The site includes a RealAudio link to the first song Yusuf Islam, formerly known as Cat Stevens, had written in nearly twenty years entitled "The Little Ones," written about children killed during the war in Bosnia.

The surge of media attention afforded the shrine-building activities related to the April 1999 shootings of students and teachers at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, was also a landmark in these increasingly complex cultural performances. Local newspaper writer Mary Voelz Chandler described the scene:

> It is the perfect suburban shrine, sprawling, growing without boundaries and taking on a life of its own. . . . piled under tents and draped along fences. It crawls up and over hills in Clement Park, interrupted by parking lots filled with news media trucks, satellite dishes and other trappings of the communication machine. . . . From a distance, the memorial looks like a fair (n.pag.).

Web activity was also a prominent feature of the events surrounding the Columbine High School shootings. Take, for example, the interactive "This Website is Dedicated to Columbine High School and the Tragic Day of April 20th, 1999," posted on the internet by Columbine students the next day (Ryan). Another example is David Emery's 30 April 1999 offering in "Urban Legends and Folklore" on the About.com's website. Emery classifies, by degrees of sincerity ranging from "genuine" to "hoax," a series of "Littleton [web] chain letters," one of which I actually received in my email "in box" that week. Other Columbine-related web activity also garnered national attention. A series of newspaper articles focused

on the "dark" side of 'the Net' began the day after the shootings when an Associated Press (AP) story ran in national newspapers. Take, for example, the AP story in *USA Today*, which ran under the headline "Harris' Web Page Had Disturbing Imagery" (Eric Harris was one of the Columbine High School gunman), and the follow-up in an 27 April 1999 story entitled "Shooting Shows Net's Darker Corridors":

> If cyberspace is a brave new world, America Online [with it's "bustling community of 17 million"] is its capital city. And Littleton, Colo., teen Eric Harris was one of its inhabitants. […This week] Republican leaders will announce … "a national dialogue on youth and culture" […in which] participants will examine to what extent the Net is a . . . place where hate groups can share intentions and ideology. . . . the Federal Communication Commission, which regulates broadcast media, is expected to announce a task force in response to the shootings (Miller and Thomas).

Attempts to monitor and achive electronic and other forms of communication was another feature of the events related to the Columbine High School shootings. A scant three weeks after the shootings, telephone, fax, and emailed "outpourings of grief" and rage were being carefully preserved. In addition, all of the mementos at the shrine surrounding the school, including decayed flowers, were also preserved (Duran). The Colorado Historical Society and Foothills Park and Recreation District, the first organizations to offer to archive the items, told one reporter that "[we] understand that this is not just today, it is history" (in Chandler)

Another spectacular event in the history of shrine-building and media coverage is the saga of the search for John Kennedy, Jr., Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, Lauren Bessette, and the pilot of their missing plane in July of 1999. Almost immediately after the media announced that Kennedy's plane was missing, shrines began to materialize along the water's edge where the plane was thought to have gone down. The search efforts to find Kennedy and his party commanded round-the-clock coverage by the cable-news networks and

remained the focus of all network news stories for the better part of a week (Moss). The televised play-by-play included frequent pan shots of what commentators referred to as the growing "Wall of Memory," recalling shrine-building behaviors by visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Newscasters commented on and questioned the public's need to express grief by leaving flowers, notes, photos, poems, hearts, handmade crosses, and other items at the water's edge, at the Kennedy and Bessette homes and work places, at Kennedy's birthplace, and at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston. On 21 July 1999, a television crew for *NBC Evening News* asked people why they were there and why they brought things to place at the scene. Some said that they "wanted the family to know that they cared." Others revealed "I feel like I've known Jon-Jon since he was a little boy, my heart went out to him when his father died—I'll never forget that." Still others insisted "I don't know. I just had to come" ("Public Grief"). Newscasters for the most part just shook their heads in wonder.

The link that shrine-builders and journalists have made at the site of the Kennedy Jr.-Bessette shrines to the assassination of Kennedy's father John F. Kennedy are of particular interest to the current study. Notably, one of the images reproduced in the media the week following Kennedy's disappearance, and often left at the 1999 shrine-sites, was the photo of little Jon-Jon (John F. Kennedy, Jr.) standing and saluting during the funereral rites for his father, President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963. Although the practice of leaving items at the site of sudden and violent death of public figures has gained notoriety in recent years, similar public performances of shine-building manifested in the US in the early 1960s. Bob Porter, veteran newsman and spokesperson for the Sixth Floor Museum inside the Old Texas School Book Depository in Dallas, told Minutaglio in a 1996 interview that

the site where John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 continues to accumulate flowers, notes, and other items on the anniversary of his death, all of which have been archived since they first began to appear.

On-going shrine-building activity has also been linked to horrendous plane crashes as well. Minutaglio wrote that mourners who lost loved ones at the 1982 crash site of Flight 1141 and the 1986 crash site of Flight 191 at the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport covered the runway with flowers, notes, toys, and various personal items, and continued to do so for many years. Minutaglio also links these behaviors to the shrine-building activity at the site on the side of the road where Amber Hagerman was abducted and later murdered in Arlington, Texas in 1996. The outrage and directed efforts of the Hagerman family and their community eventually resulted in the 2003 National Amber Alert Program, an emergency broadcast system (radio, television, and the internet) used by police when children are reported missing (*Amber Alert Now!).*

The links that journalists, with the help of various scholars, have made between high-profile sites of death to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial ("The Wall") are also of interest to the current study. Chandler, writing for a Colorado newspaper in May 1999, interviewed local art historian Erika Doss, and subsequently observes that the "wave of memorials springing up across America" are similar to the shrines dedicated to Princess Diana, at the "Oklahoma City bombing," and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC Jeff Kass, writing for the national newspaper *The Christian Science Monitor* in June 1999, interviewed psychologist Frank Farley, and wrote that the US is approaching an "emotional tectonic shift" as evidenced at the shrine-building activities at Columbine High School and other sites of "massive public mourning." Kass links these larger, high-profile sites to

"simple" roadside shrines and locates the epicenter of Farley's "tectonic shift" at the unveiling of the Vietnam Memorial in 1982, "The . . . leaving of gifts at the wall were not only new in themselves, but were also broadcast live on CNN. Almost overnight," Kass writes, "those images changed the way Americans mourn." Kass' observations about visitors' interaction with the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial are supported by many scholars, however one essay is particularly helpful to the present study.

Communication scholars Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr., in their 1991 essay "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype," note that Maya Lin's design purposefully broke with realistic conventions of memorialization intended to evoke a prescriptive response in order to allow for a more performative, presentational dynamic between the landscape, the structure, the individual names of the dead, personal memory, and the community of mourners who gather there. However, shrine-building--the practice of leaving objects at the site--was unanticipated in Lin's design. Furthermore, while the shrine-building at the base of the memorial wall is well documented, it was later learned that individual interaction with The Wall began while it was still under construction. In the fall of 1982 a US Naval officer approached the trench meant for the marble slabs bearing the names of the dead, gently threw something into the wet cement, and saluted. A construction worker reported that the officer said he was "giving his dead brother's Purple Heart to The Wall" (in Moser). Shrine-building at The Wall continues today, with the objects collected and archived daily by the Smithsonian Institute. During an evening visit in July of 2002, I was surprised to find objects, previously archived by the Smithsonian, tucked in large plastic bags marked with blue tags noting the original date of collection, placed at regular intervals at the base of the memorial. Clearly, the "spontaneous"

activity of shrine-building has become an integral, and expected, feature of the site. Later in 2002, during the twentieth anniversary of the dedication of the memorial, it was reported that "the foot of the Wall was heaped with [new] floral tributes and mementos" (Fish). I imagine these mementos are also now preserved. I will look for them the next time I visit The Wall, and imagine what it might have been like to be there, then.

Not since the flurry of inquiry and debate concerning the placement and design of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, and visitors' responses to it, has there been in the United States such an intense cross-disciplinary interest in the nature, ceremony, and aesthetics of individual and public expressions of grief and mourning, the construction of personal and cultural memory, and selective forgetting. Researchers continue to draw on scholarship addressing the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and the continuing practice of shrine-building at The Wall, linking this scholarship to other instances of shrine-building, including both high-profile sites previously mentioned and the more homely sites of death on the side of the road.

3.2.2: High-profile Shrine Sites in the Academic Press

In the 1998 essay "Public Memory and Private Grief: The Construction of Shrines at the Sites of Public Tragedy," rhetorical scholars Cheryl Jorgensen-Earp and Lori Lanzilotti focus on shrines in Oklahoma City and in Dunblane, Scotland, where school children were shot and killed in 1996. They link modern mourning practices to Victorian mourning practices that urge a "particular understanding of a chaotic, inexplicable event . . . a highly conventional one" (163) that promised "continuity and certainty in a time of chaos" (150). They construe the contemporary building of shrines as an expression of "pure vernacular culture," noting that the shrines and the behavior at them precede official commemoration (153) and that the expressions of grief are active rather than received, and personal, local, and

secular rather than sacred, timeless, and transcendent (152). In their conclusions, the authors extend their findings to the building of shrines where Susan Smith drowned her two sons in North Carolina in 1994, where young people working in a restaurant in New Orleans were shot and killed in 1995, at the site where JonBenet Ramsey was murdered in 1996 in Boulder, Colorado, and "at the sites of roadway accidents" (164), noting that these sites provide insights into the rhetorical negotiation of vernacular and official mourning and the "permeability of the boundary between public and private grief" (164). While the authors confine their analysis to Christian, white, middle-class practices (154), they advise that further studies need to explore cultural differences based on race, ethnicity, and religion (168). A study published a year earlier, studying similar sites, offers that the practice is primarily cross-cultural and so provides a different interpretation of the effectivity of the practice of marking the site of violent death.

In the 1997 essay "Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual," Haney, Leimer, and Lowrey investigate, from a sociological perspective, issues of public death, private expressions of grief, and emerging mourning rituals at "impromptu shrines" that mark both sites of intentional violence and accidental death. They consider shrine-building behavior at the site of the 1993 Waco shoot-out in Texas, Susan Smith's drowning of her children, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Columbine shootings, the "mobile spontaneous memorials" in tribute to Selena, and automobile accidents (163-67). The authors contend that such rituals "extend the opportunity for mourning to individuals not conventionally included in traditional rites and call attention to the social and cultural threat raised by these deaths" (161). They suggest that "spontaneous memorialization" has the possibility of becoming a political act insofar as the activity is pervasively cross-cultural and

demonstrates the shared values of subgroups that "demand a reinterpretation of the event [the deaths] by the broader culture" (169). A later essay, concerned with the socio-political implications of the practice of shrine-building on traditional and contemporary institutional memorial practices offers that spontaneous memorials simultaneously serve to stabilize an uneasy populace *and* question the circumstances surrounding the tragic event.

In the 1999 essay "Mourning in Protest: Spontaneous Memorials and the Sacralization of Public Space," art historian Harriet Senie discusses the "identical" response of those who "rush" to mourn at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, at local and national sites of violent death in the US, and "traditional cemetery rituals" in the US (24), in order to frame the public need in the US for personal expression and civic engagement at institutionally sanctioned memorials. Specifically, Senie considers the "spontaneous" shrines at two roadside sites where African-Americans were beaten to death by policemen, first in Detroit in 1992 and later in Los Angeles in 1999. She compares these incidents with shrine-building activities at the site of the Oklahoma City bombing, the many sites dedicated to Princess Diana, the site surrounding Columbine High School, the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington DC and the smaller "Traveling Wall" which tours the country, and the ancient Hebrew practices of site commemoration and post World War II memorials and museums in Europe. Senie asserts that spontaneous memorialization provides consolation and healing by bringing groups together in grief as well as exposes rifts in perceptions of national identity and rents in local civic cohesion. The author concludes that "spontaneous" shrine-building is "democracy in action" which urges those who commission and design permanent memorials to consider: "Which history are we burying or incorporating in their foundations? Can we

create, in stone and steel, monuments that actively engage a society so clearly in need of them?" (27).

The scholarship that rhetorical scholars, sociologists, and art historians have produced regarding the building of shrines is of particular interest to this study insofar as it frames the practice in terms of culture, cultural performance, and death-related ritual performance, the latter most of which will be discussed in chapter five. Scholars draw links between the various sites at which shrines are built, and offer significant insight into an increasingly popular cultural practice. These links and insights serve to initiate a potentially dynamic interdisciplinary discussion of the phenomenon, and provides a broad context in which the practice of shrine-building at the sites of death on the road can be situated. Of particular interest to the current project is the assertion that the practice of marking the site of death potentially calls out for multiple and/or alternative interpretations of violent death (Haney et al.; Senie, "Mourning"). However, in that the scholarship briefly sketched above mentions roadside shrines in passing, sometimes as an afterthought (Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti), or as an inference (Senie), it is now appropriate to turn attention toward the varied and specific activities that make up the complex cultural performance of roadside shrines which, I maintain, have a historicity and a genealogy that will provide insight into these and other road-related discourses and practices.

3.3: Historicizing the Practice of Marking Death on the Road

Many journalists and scholars conclude that the practice of building and maintaining shrines along roads in the United States originated in Mexico and is Spanish-Catholic in origin**.** They often map the spread of shrines from Spanish-Catholic *Conquistadors* moving north through Mexico into what is now the southwest United States and from there to points

east, west, and north. Indeed, the dynamic relationship between the media, particularly print and later web journalism, and academia provides key insight into the way the practice of marking the site of death on the road is understood.

Investigative reporters tend to consult a wide range of professionals, including grief counselors, psychologists, clergy, and scholars from across disciplines whose research interests relate in some way to grief, mourning, and ritual. For example, Thomas Ropp, writing for the *Arizona Republic* in 1995, interviewed folklore scholar James Griffith and archaeologist James Cunkle. Griffith, who conducts research in the border communities of Arizona and northwest Mexico, is quoted as saying the practice of marking the site of death on the road is rooted in Mexican-American Catholic practices. Griffith's scholarship however, discussed later in this section, complicates that notion. Cunkle notes that Spanish-Catholic symbols have combined with Native American ideas as seen at roadside shrines on Indian reservations. Another key example is Bill Minutaglio's treatise on the subject. Minutaglio, writing for the *Dallas Morning News* in 1996, interviewed lay ethnographer Alberto Barrera and local folklore scholar Eliseo Torres, both of whom study "Mexican-American roadside shrines" in Texas. Minutaglio writes that Barrera, author of the 1991 essay "Mexican-American Roadside Shrines in Starr County," travels "obsessively . . . from one end of Rio Grande City [and] Starr County to another . . . adding to his seemingly endless study of Texas shrines, markers, descansos--or roadside resting places, as Mexican-Americans call them--that people have spontaneously built for those restless souls who died in some unnatural way." Indeed, Barrera's published work places the use of the cross to mark the site of death on the road as a "contribution" of early Spanish Christian "pioneers' who died on the road "during Indian attacks or accidents" (278). According to Torres,

"Mexican-Americans may do things in a different, sometimes more elaborate, way at their shrines. But if you look at it, it's all the same. People do similar things at car-crashes in south Texas. The federal building in Oklahoma. The Kennedy site" (in Minutaglio).

Rebecca Jones' work is another example of journalists' reliance on scholars and other professionals to understand the practice of marking the site of death on the road. Jones, writing for the Coloroado *Rocky Mountain News* in 1998, interviews C. Allen Haney, a sociologist at the University of Houston and co-author of the 1997 essay "Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual," the first scholarship to appear after the Oklahoma City bombing to address the rise in popularity of shrine-building in the US. Haney links the behaviors at high-profile shrines to roadside shrines, and discusses at length his own experiences at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Jones also interviews Peter Poses, a Denver grief counselor, who is quoted as saying "the objects people leave behind at shrines are actually . . . containers for feelings of loss and sadness . . . without it, people go into madness," and notes that roadside shrines are prevalent in heavily Hispanic areas and in most of the South (D8).

Two later examples illustrate a broader range of interpretive frames used in an attempt to understand the increasingly popular practice of roadside shrine-building in the US. Merlyn Oliver, investigating roadside shrines for *Tahoe.com*, a Nevada web news source in 2000, interviewed Carole Blair, rhetorical scholar and co-author of the 1991 essay "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype." Blair is quoted as saying that roadside shrines, part of a larger cultural trend of compensation in the absence of formal death rituals, are rooted in Hispanic tradition, and that immigration patterns help to account for the spread of the custom across the country. Rick Barrett,

investigating the proliferation of roadside shrines in the Midwest for a Wisconsin print and online newspaper in the spring of 2001, interviews anthropologist James Green and David Nance, local attorney and lay ethnographer. Green links the behaviors at roadside shrines to ancient Greek practices and the resurgence of "makeshift memorials" to the practice of leaving objects at Vietnam Memorial. Nance, who has photographed roadside shrines and posted them on his website, offers that the US practice "*probably* has its roots in Indian and Hispanic cultures of the Southwest" (emphasis added). While acknowledgment of, and curiosity about, the practice of shrine-building at the site of death on US roads gained momentum, the interpretive frames used to understand them both broadens and continues to be anchored, albeit tentatively, in Hispanic (Spanish-Catholic) practices in the Southwest US.

Roadside shrines have appeared consistently and profusely in the area now known as the Southwest US, indeed have been the subjects of aesthetic study as early as 1929, as evidenced by O'Keefe's *Black Cross, New Mexico* painting, and others (see Chapter Two) attest. However, as Barrett's report, discussed above, suggests, contemporary roadside shrines are located in the Midwest US as well. Further research suggests that the practice of marking auto-related death with a cross or other shrine is not necessarily linked to any particular geographic region. For example, in their search for literary references to what they call "roadside death memorials," Reid and Reid cite Warren's 1946 novel *All The King's Men*, in which a character describes a "skull and crossbones" sign at the site of an auto fatality, placed on the side of the road by the Highway Department outside of a sleepy Southern town (343). The practice by road officials of marking the site of death on the road is also noted by folklore scholar James Griffith. According to Griffith, the Arizona Highway Department marked the site of auto fatalities during the 1950s (*Beliefs* 103). The American

Legion as well, in agreement with road officials in Montana, have marked the sites of auto fatalities with small white crosses since the early 1950s (DeMillo). In addition, anecdotal evidence gathered in conversation during the present study points to the existence of roadside crosses marking traffic fatalities in the Midwest as early as the 1940s (Nickson).

More recently, stories about roadside shrines have appeared in newspapers in the North Atlantic region of the US at least since the early 1990s. The *Washington Post* ran stories about local roadside shrines associated with driving under the influence of alcohol and teen death on the road in 1993 (Twomey) and 1994 (Mooar), and a Worchester, Massachusetts paper, the *Telegram & Gazette,* ran a story about a police "crackdown on bad drivers" along one stretch of road marked by a "series of stark roadside crosses" in 1997 (Tompkins). Newspapers in the South ran stories about roadside shrines in the region at least as early as 1995. The Baton Rouge, Louisiana, *Sunday Advocate* ran a story about Matthew Populis' mother who was jailed for "stealing" his roadside cross in 1995 ("Matthew Populis' Mother Arrested"). Owens's notes that the New Orleans, Louisiana, *Times-Picayune* and *The Birmingham News* in Alabama ran stories about roadside shrines in their respective areas in 1996 ("Louisiana Roadside"). The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* ran a story about roadside shrines in the region in 1997 (Cullum).

Not only has the practice of marking the site of death on the road been documented in many regions of the US, but the practice is evident throughout North America and is increasingly global. Indeed, Georgia O'Keefe provides a description of several shrines in Canada as early as 1930:

> After my summers in New Mexico where I had heard the Penitente songs and painted the dark crosses as I felt them there, the Canadian crosses seemed very different. The Canadian crosses were singing in the sunlight. Sometimes

> there were pottery figures around them--always they had a feeling of gaiety [(67: Cross with Red Heart, 1932)].
>
> There was one pure stark cross in the center of a profusely blooming potato field overlooking the water where the river was very wide. Each end of the cross was carved and there was a plaque in memory of a father who drowned trying to save someone else who was drowning at sea [(Plate 68: Cross by the Sea, Canada, 1932)] (n.pag.).

Christos Saccopoulos' 1986 essay discusses the proliferation of roadside memorials erected to commemorate traffic fatalities in Greece in the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, Rajkovic's 1988 essay cites auto-fatality related roadside shrines in the former Yugoslavia as early as the 1960s. George Monger wrote in his 1997 essay of the practice of marking the site of death on the road in Great Britain in various conveyance-related fatalities (carriage, wagon, etc.) as early as 1886, a practice carried through to the present day. Robert James Smith, in his 1999 essay, wrote of roadside shrines marking the site of auto-related death in Australia as early as the 1960s, and Ried and Reid provide anecdotal evidence of a state government practice of marking the site of auto-related death in Australia in the early 1970s. Roadside shrines are also becoming popular in certain areas of the Middle East. In a 2001 interview with me, an international student at Louisiana State University and her fiance noted, respectively, that marking the site of auto-related death on the road with a cross or other shrine was becoming popular in the United Arab Emerits (Moonea) and in Jordan (Salomon) in the early 1990s.

Whereas roadside shrines have been documented in many regions of the US as well as around the globe, humanist-geographer Daniel Weir's recent study shows they proliferate in Mexico--Weir documented over 9000 "roadside sacred places" marked with *descansos*. However, the contemporary practice of marking the site of death on the road is also not as recent or as deeply rooted in Spanish, Catholic, or Christian traditions as some have

surmised. Saccopoulos' study of roadside shrines in Greece, for example, concludes that the practice there constitutes a direct transfer of ancient "pagan" beliefs, practices, and sites of worship to Christian traditions (146). Furthermore, Saccopoulos asserts that the ancient practice of marking the site of death on the road has not only survived into the twentieth century, but--where the auto-related fatality rate in Greece (in 1986) is one of the highest in the world (144)--the practice is also a "cultural response to a new need" (148). Rajkovic's study of roadside shrines in the former Yugoslavia documents the existence of thirteenth-century shrines, noting that legends and folk wisdom link the practice of shrine-building to pre-Christianity, and to places such as ancient Corsica, where it was the custom of passers-by to leave heaps of stones and broken branches at the site of violent death (171 *n*3). Senie discusses a similar ancient Judaic practice of of leaving broken branches and stones at sites of death ("Mourning"). Senie's assertion was confirmed by Rachel, a young woman who traveled to Israel to live and work during the summer of 2004. Rachel told me that she saw such a pile of stones along an ancient wall in Israel--her guide explained that the stones have accumulated since 1978 at the place where his friend was shot while walking home from temple. Veronica, a native of Rumania, told me that a long history of "gypsy" folklore in rural Rumania attests to signs of warning at crossroads "in the wilderness" where "anything can happen. God can snatch you up at any time. So the people put up crosses at these intersections to warn of this danger, and to beg protection from the good spirits." The folk tradition accredited to "gypsies" is further explicated in Monger's essay about shrines at road crossings in Great Britain:

> One of the most well-known is the Gypsy Boy's Grave near Newmarket, Suffolk, . . . at a cross roads. The grave is said to be tended by the gypsies, and there are often fresh flowers. In recent years . . . 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 driver. […In fact, an] informant . . . told me that when she was young (1950s-60s) her father, who was a lorry driver, always put money on the grave when he passed (n.pag.).

The ancient tradition of marking the site of death on the road to beg protection from the "road gods" and to "chase away the demons," is also noted in a 2001 (post "9/11") article in *Overseas US Armed Forces News* about roadside shrines near the US air base near Binsfield, Germany, where the practice is attributed to pre-Christian Romans (Reiff).

The practice of marking the site of death on the road in the Americas also points to a more complex set of practices that predates European Catholic and Christian presence. While several scholars investigating "spontaneous" shrine-building practices at high-profile sites of tragedy have asserted that contemporary practices in the US are "identical" to (Senie, "Mourning" 24), or draw heavily from (Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti), nineteenth-century Protestant cemetery practices, scholars studying shrine-building at the site of death on the road in the United States and Mexico complicate the Eurocentric relationship between "spontaneous" shrine-building and cemetery practices. Take, for example, Owens' study of contemporary roadside shrines in southern Louisiana. While Owens maintains that, there, the practice represents a transfer of older cemetery practices, she also notes that these cemetery practices are regionally specific ("Louisiana Roadside Memorials") and bound up in death-related practices from all over the world.

Owens' assertion that roadside shrine-building is a transfer of regionally specific death-related practices is supported by several studies. Death practices throughout the entire Louisiana Purchase have been shown to be influenced by the indigenous people of the region (Jeane; Regis), by slaves brought to the area from West Africa and the Caribbean Rim (Roach, "Slave"), and by the beliefs and practices of colonists from many European

countries, including among others, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, and Spain (Owens, "Louisiana Roadside Memorials"; Jeane). Furthermore, roadside shrine-building practices in the area bear a striking similarity to the once common regional practice of visiting cemeteries to reminisce, clean and refresh the site, leave meaningful items, and mark the site with stones (Jeane; Milbauer). These "cemetery day" practices--once thought to have died out (Milbauer)--are remarkably persistent, as Owens' work, local news reports (Sefton), and my own research illustrate, some of which will be presented in more detail in Chapter Five.

Explanations of roadside shrines that emphasize the syncretistic, harmonious evolution of shrine-building are increasingly common. Henzel's study, published in 1991, of roadside *cruces* (Spanish for *crosses*) in a region of northwestern Mexico near the Texas border, for example, suggests that the shrines are a combination of European Catholic traditions and the customs of indigenous peoples (95). Henzel notes that, while there is a proliferation of small white crosses, some plain, others decorated with flowers, candles, and personal artifacts, there are also many more "elaborate" shrines that include permanent structures. These structures are also referred to as *cruces* in the vernacular, although they may not actually include a cross. *Cruz* (singular) and *cruces* (plural) are inclusive terms that can refer, depending on who is speaking, to *nichos* (Spanish for niches or walled enclosures), wrought iron or carved wood and stone crosses, statues of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or other saints believed to protect travelers (94-95). Henzel writes that while the construction of the crosses and especially the more elaborate shrines may appear to have an obvious Christian meaning, this may be misleading:

> The custom found in northeastern Mexico may be the result of several indigenous Indian religious observances, however, as well as a tradition brought from Europe . . . some of the region's Indians believe that the soul returns to the earth, perhaps to the specific site of death, for a certain number

> of years after death. This belief gave rise to the much-celebrated observance of the Day of the Dead throughout Mexico. The custom of erecting a *cruz*, like many events in Mexico may therefore be seen as a combination of European Catholic traditions and indigenous Indian customs (95).

Furthermore, Henzel writes that while many roadside shrines indicate a direct relationship to the family of the deceased, many of these sites of death on the road concern the welfare of the entire community. "Ill fortune may be deflected from the victim's village […by] employing a *compadre* [a person of ritual kinship] to maintain the *cruz*. Passersby may offer prayers for the repose of the soul thrust violently into eternity, their petitions represented by stones placed at the base of the cross" (95). Henzel surmises that contemporary changes in the practices mark yet another evolution, a trend toward secularization. *Cruces* "which once had spiritual significance […are] being replaced with a marker of purely human grief and remembrance" (100).

James Griffith's work in the Pimeria Alta region, a region bisected by the Arizona-Mexico border that encompasses the lands of the Tohono O'odham and Yaqui Indians, published in 1992 (*Beliefs and Holy Places*) and 1995 (*A Shared Space*), also emphasizes the syncretistic evolution of practices at roadside shrines. In the Pimeria Alta region, writes Griffith, death practices from different cultures influence and modify each other (*Shared* 14). Underscoring the permeability and malleability of cultural boundaries, he notes that "roadside death markers and crosses" and "roadside shrines" of petition—often for a safe journey--stand as examples of a confluence of cultural practices that predates European colonization and the introduction of Christianity to the region (*Beliefs* 135). Well before the establishment of the first Jesuit mission in the area in 1688, a dynamic intercultural exchange was already underway. He asserts that the region has been in a complex process of negotiation and cultural invention at least as early as one thousand AD, when Mayan "high

culture . . . trader-priests" from Central Mexico brought goods and ideas into the region (*Beliefs* xix, 8-10, 173-75). In addition, J. Griffith notes that rock piles are used to mark dangerous areas on the road as well as on the trail, and that some of these rock piles have grown large over time as travelers add their own offering as they passed. He notes that some of these "points of potential risk to travelers [. . . that he has found] must date back to pre-Spanish times" (*Beliefs* 131).

Like Henzel and J. Griffith, Cunkle also recognizes the transcultural process at work in the practice of marking the site of death on the road. Cunkle cites shrines near the Gila Indian Reservation in Arizona that combine the cross with Native American ideas, evidenced in their use of rocks, rock piles, and particularly the circle of stones that often surround roadside shrines. Cunkle is quoted as saying in an Arizona newspaper that the stone circle "defines a sacred area and represents your center . . . It is also a horizon line, symbolic of looking at Earth in all four directions from a point in the center of the circle" (in Ropp).

It is important to note here that, according to my Cherokee-Irish (Swiftdeer), Anashanabi (Fortunate Eagle), Navajo (Little Feather), and adopted Navajo (Vice) conversants and teachers, the "center" that Cunkle refers to does not indicate that the human being is the center of the universe (what Freudian and other Euromodern interpretive frames might refer to as solipsistic, narcissistic, or infantile), but that a centered human being is connected *to* the universe, is connected to the material and ephemeral web of life ("The Everything") of which the human being is a part, of which the human being does indeed *play* a part. This centeredness is an internal/external dynamic exchange of energy or life force, a state of being that *moves* and *changes* with/in the living world--what the Navajo call "The Beauty Way," or "Walking in Beauty." Therefore, Cunkle's reference to a cross that marks a

"horizon line," from certain North American indigenous perspectives, does not mark a vanishing point *on* a horizon *line:* from a centered, interconnected, and interdependent perspective, one stands in the center of a *dynamic* circle of life and upon *turning* can "see" in all four directions, a world view from which one understands the horizon *as a circle* always already all around. Furthermore, it takes commitment and hard work to walk (live) "The Beauty Way." The place of death is *not*, then, a vanishing point, but a place of re/turn to a dynamic universe, whence one becomes, again, an integral, effortless part of "The Everything." (My apologies to my conversants and teachers and to their teachers if I have misspoken (stumbled) or have in any way done violence to these ways of being in the world.) When the site of death is marked as Cunkle notes, it is perhaps hoped that the person died in a state of "Beauty." However, traditional practices of Navajo, Zuni, and Hopi people would not include marking sites of death, indeed would avoid sites of death if at all possible.

My own documentation of roadside shrines at the border of the Jicarilla Indian Reservation and on the side of public roads running through the Navajo Indian Reservation in northern New Mexico (see Chapter Two), as well as interviews with Navajo people familiar with what they would call traditional and modern death-related practices, attest to a meeting of these cultures. In a series of uneasy conversations about the subject, a man with a Christian family background now living with/in (married into) a traditional Navajo community expressed personal and communal distress regarding the practice of marking the site of death on the road in areas where one must pass, preferring instead the series of shamanic rituals and ceremonies that maintain a separation of the living and the (perhaps) uneasy spirits of the dead. This separation includes the strict avoidance of places where the spirit left the body as well avoidance of the lifeless body itself, even (or especially) that of an

intimate family member. Cunkle and Jaquemain also note a similar avoidance of the dead, as well as avoidance of talk about practices and symbols related to death, by "modern" Hopi and Zuni Indians (73). However, in some contemporary Native American spiritual groups there are practices that combine select traditional North American indigenous and Spanish Catholic beliefs and practices. Members of these organizations *may* have a more ambiguous relationship with the dead and so may tolerate roadside shrines. According to my conversants, this may account for the roadside shrines on or near Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, and other Indian Reservations in the southwest US (and elsewhere), although it should not be assumed that these shrines were built by Native Americans, even when prayer flags, medicine wheels, or an *Ojo* are present. So, as many scholars mentioned previously note, while some indigenous and post-colonial practices have, perhaps, syncretically evolved over time and/or transferred from one type of practice (or location of practice) to another, this confluence of cultures is not inclusive, nor is it without contest.

Today, in some parts of the southwest US and Mexico, sites referred to as *descansos,* or "resting places," characterized by crosses and sometimes *nichos*, mark the site where a person died suddenly (J. Griffith, *Shared* 16-17). While *descansos* may bear some form of the inscription "Rest in Peace," the use of the term *descansos* does not indicate a belief that the deceased is "resting in peace" or merely sleeping. These last sentiments, as suggested by Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti, are more closely related to northern European Protestant or non-Catholic Christian notions. The term *descansos*, instead, refers to places where the coffin was set down by pall-bearers for a short period of time on its way to the grave, usually between the church and the cemetery. These "resting places" were marked by twigs twisted together in the form of a cross and planted in the ground (Anaya 18), or a series of stones

placed on the ground in the shape of an "X" (Arellano *Descansos*; Anaya et al.; Barrera; van Lent in Lang). Barrera reports that when informants were asked why they continue to mark the site where a loved one died with a *descansos*, responses included: "It is the place where the victim's soul departed from the body"; "It is a marker to remind us where a loved one was lost"; and, citing Juan Estevan Arellano's earlier (1986) work, "It is a mark of an interrupted journey on the road of life" ("Descansos" 279).

Descansos, according Barerra, invite the community to commemorate loved ones who are "gone but not forgotten" (in Minutaglio). Stones left at the base of roadside shrines may indicate an acceptance of this invitation. Still other roadside shrines, according to Henzel, concern the welfare of the entire community and invite travelers to stop and petition the spirits and/or saints for "a safe journey [away from the community] or to give thanks for a safe return [to the community]" (104-05). J. Griffith supports this notion when he writes that (perhaps ancient) rock piles and contemporary roadside shrines are often "protective petitions . . . that attempt to make that stretch of road a safer place" (*Beliefs* 131). Thus, while the practice of marking the site where a loved one died may indicate a direct relationship to the family of the deceased and, as such, serve for individual persons or families to grieve (Barrera 281), other sites have "transcended their individual or family significance" (J. Griffith, *Beliefs* 105).

Indeed, roadside shrines are now and historically have been thoroughly political. While Henzel maintains that sites marking death and danger on the road eventually took on the veneer of Catholicism (104), J. Griffith notes that, at one time, the practice was frowned upon and even outlawed by representatives of that institution. The first bishop in the Pimeria Alta region, de los Reyes, "concerned about the custom of erecting crosses where travelers

had been killed by Apaches," ordered the governor of Sonora in 1783 to remove the death crosses and forbade the practice because "it cheapened the holy symbol [and . . .] served to frighten passers-by . . ." (in J. Griffith, *Beliefs* 101-02). "This exercise in colonial bureaucracy," J. Griffith notes," had no lasting effect" (*Beliefs* 102-03).

Other contemporary death-related practices found in both cemeteries and on the road also have a rich and complex history. Certain indigenous death-related practices, such as visitation and decoration of roadside shrines and grave sites in the cemetery during Day of the Dead celebrations, also take on "the veneer of Catholicism" (Henzel 95-104). J. Griffith notes that although the Day of the Dead celebration in Mexico and parts of the southwest US includes November 2, which is All Souls Day in the Roman Catholic Church, "the day of the year in which the Catholic community remembers and prays for all of its dead" (*Beliefs* 120), *Dia de los Muertos* is actually a "season" that is prepared for well in advance and lasts several weeks. Furthermore, this season is one that also embraces various forms of political satire and subversion, "touching in one way or another most of the societal groups and classes" where the 'high' are brought 'low': we are all mortal and subject to life's everyday pleasures, needs, and indignities as well as subject to death's inevitable call (J. Griffith, *Shared* 18-19).

While the practices of marking the site of death on the road and adorning roadside shrines as well as markers in the cemetery on specific days had long been a practice that has either escaped regulation in the US or has been as accepted as an ethnic tradition in parts of the southwest US, these practices have recently been targeted as a nuisance, and various regulations have been put into place in an unsuccessful attempt to control them. For example, Everett's study of contemporary practices in Texas documents a bureaucratic

failure similar to that noted by J. Griffith. She notes that while many cemeteries forbid adorning markers with objects of tribute and remembrance, such regulations are largely ignored, and while laws designate some roadside shrines legal, the majority of them are illegal ("Memorial Complexes"). Thus, while death practices frequently incorporate the symbols and ceremonies of dominant institutions, these practices often serve to circumvent and at times usurp the authority of those institutions (J. Griffith, *Beliefs* 105-15), and may be understood as a form of Bakhtinian carnivalesque, the Catholic "veneer" a deliberate performance of masking or masquerade.

The contemporary practice of placing a cross or other shrine at the site of death, at dangerous crossroads, and at the margins of the community is an ancient one, predating Christianity. The practice that James Griffith notes of marking dangerous road crossings with rock piles is similar to that found in pre-Christian indigenous practices in north and Central Europe where folklore attests to marking dangerous crossroads with a cross. It may be construed, then, that the indigenous practices of marking dangerous road crossings, whether with a pile of rocks or a cross made of wood (under which one may find a pile of rocks), has more to do with marking sites of danger with what is at hand and less to do with specific religious symbols: indeed, there is little wood to be found in the desert, but rocks are abundant. Furthermore, as described in the previous chapter and as Everett notes in her study, roadside shrines are passed at least twice a day on commuter routes everywhere in the US. These shrines incorporate "a particular death into the consciousness of a community [. . . and so] is not easily set aside . . . The tension between private grief and public rage" is made manifest in the shrine. It not only represents death, but in the case of the MADD campaign, an organized, political movement" (Everett, *Roadside Crosses* 111-12). The

proliferation of roadside shrines throughout the United States may have more to do with the often contested behaviors related to death, remembrance, travel, and protection that link individuals to communities, both geographically bound and imagined, than with any particular religious symbol or practice.

While the practice of leaving stones, as noted by the studies cited previously and as described in my own field work at the "Mary Grotto" in Villanueva, New Mexico, is not as prevalent in other parts of the US as it is in the Southwest, the act of leaving other objects may indicate a similar desire by visitors to mark their participation in the performance at the shrine, to acknowledge their own hazardous journey and, perhaps, to express what Everett calls "public rage" (*Roadside Crosses* 111). Moreover, to stop the car and pull to the side of the road, to interrupt one's journey and disrupt the daily business of life, is itself a potentially transgressive act, especially on interstate highways where Federal law prohibits anyone from stopping, except for emergencies (Parsons in Oppat).

3.4: Contemporary Politics of Marking the Site of Death on the Road

The recent proliferation of roadside shrines has been seen as a problem not only in the US but by authorities around the world. Take, for example, roadside shrines in Australia that have gained a measure of notoriety, according to a 1997 article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* entitled "Memorials May Help the Grieving, but Road Experts are Divided" (Delvecchio). Similarly in New Zealand, according to a 1998 story in *The Wellington Evening Post*, a regional road commission voted to adopt the Transit New Zealand policy, which allows plain white crosses marking the site of death on the road because they were seen as providing a public service message of warning to passing drivers, however

"memorials around the crosses and attachments or messages on the crosses" were to be discouraged ("Roadside Shrines a Problem").

Roadside shrines in the United States began to be seen as a problem beginning in the mid 1990s. A series of articles about Florida's attempt to regulate the practice and the ensuing debate appeared in Florida newspapers in 1996 (Chardy "Makeshift Shrines Now a Memory") and in 1997 (Chardy, "New Markers Are Designated for Fatal-Crash Sites"; "Cross Controversy Obscures Serious Issue"). Marking the site of death on the road gained nation-wide attention in Michael McCarthy's 1997 *Wall Street Journal* article "Roadside Memorials Bring Some States a New Kind of Grief," in which the author provides examples of attempts by local and state authorities in Florida, Kentucky, California, and elsewhere to curb the practice. A year later, *The Boston Globe* printed a scathing letter to the editor decrying the practice of marking the site of death on the road (Yalenzian), and by 1999, "Law Would Limit Roadside Memorials," a news story by a Boston news service, appeared in *south coast Today* (Ring). News stories credited to the Associated Press (AP) originating in cities on the North Atlantic seaboard also began to appear. For example, three AP stories from cities near Boston were querying state attempts to restrict the practice ("Bill Would Restrict Roadside Memorials"; McMillian, "Could Permanent Roadside Memorials Curb--or Cause--More Vehicle Crashes?" and "Push is on for Roadside Memorials"). The following year an AP story originating from Danbury, Connecticut, "DOT Says Roadside Shrines Creating Highway Hazards," that addressed the enforcement of roadside shrine removal policies in that state, was picked up by a local television news channel. . Similarly, news of attempts to regulate local practices of marking the site of death on the road and its attendant controversy began to appear in the Midwest in 1998 in the *Detroit Free Press* with "Anti-

Drunk Driving Signs to Honor Victims" (Laitner). In 2000, the *Albuquerque Journal* (New Mexico) picked up an AP story "Roadside Memorials at Issue" originating in Colorado Springs about controversial Colorado DOT policies which declare roadside shrines "public nuisances." The AP story compares policies in Southwest and Rocky Mountain states, noting New Mexico's respect for the practice.

Stories of state disputes regarding the practices of marking the site of death on the road gained national momentum not only when national newspapers like *The Wall Street Journal* addressed the issues, but as stories distributed by the AP News Wire and other news services were picked up by local and regional newspapers across the nation. Often running as a side bar to an AP story was a photograph of local roadside shrines and/or text commenting on state policies and practices related to roadside shrines in their area. These stories were also made available on Lexis-Nexis and other search engines and posted online. As one reporter suggested in an email exchange with me, while auto-related deaths customarily don't get much media attention because "They're so frequent that unless it's [. . . particularly] tragic, they're uninteresting" (Gelinas), controversy *is* interesting. Indeed, in the spring of 2001, Robert Rabinowitz's essay "Roadside Shrines, George W. Bush, and the Transformation of Church-State Relations," roadside shrines provided a point of departure from which Rabinowitz could explore a myriad of controversial issues associated with the Bush Administration's "compassionate conservative" agenda.

Rabinowitz reminds us that the separation of Church and State is based on the Protestant premise that religion is a private matter, hence, public institutions must remain secular. It is this premise that sanctifies the boundary between church and state and ideally provides sanctuary from religious persecution and freedom from state-sponsored evangelism,

the erosion of which causes some people to shudder. Therefore, Rabinowitz notes, G. W. Bush Administration policies which serve to institutionalize the erosion of the "sacred" boundary between Church and State is alarming, particularly Federal funding for religious groups and the President's "prominent invocation of Jesus Christ" during his 2000 inaugural speech. However, Rabinowitz notes, the erosion of certain Protestant sensibilities may also be cause for celebration, in fact some have leapt into (or helped to pry open) the breach. Indeed, the spread of roadside shrines across the US and shrine-building activities at high-profile sites of death, according to the Library of Congress magazine *Civilization*, "invite participation by all" (in Rabinowitz), which demonstrates a fundamental break from Protestant sensibilities related to death and mourning and are therefore at once "sacred," transgressive, *and* democratic when the "participation" is vernacular. However, the side of the road is a public right-of-way, the responsibility for which rests with public servants, and so the boundary between the vernacular and the institutional is also a participatory, negotiable material and discursive space.

Federal law prohibits roadside shrines on interstate highways (McCarthy A1; Parsons in Oppat), and laws in most states render them illegal on other roadways either explicitly by prohibiting them or by prohibiting personal use of the public-right-of-way (Galletta). Montana is something of an exception insofar as that state has an informal agreement with the American Legion, whose members have been planting white crosses at the sites of death along the road since 1953 (DeMillo). However, as Ross notes, "in probably no other area of public life does practice diverge so dramatically from official policy."

Despite federal and state laws, local government agencies responsible for safety and maintenance of public roads often indicate a reluctance to remove roadside shrines. Take, for

example, Martin Merzer's 1996 article in the *Miami Herald* that notes a "new custom" taking root in South Florida" where shrines are erected at auto fatalities and that "[c]ompassionate police and traffic engineers leave the often illegal markers untouched. " Indeed, officials seem willing to speak with newspaper reporters about their personal feelings or attitude regarding policies designed to restrict the practice of marking the site of death on the road. I imagine that these road officials are quite aware that they are not only speaking "on the record" to reporters, but that they are also speaking *to* a community of readers *through* the reporter. In an attempt to further the (perhaps imagined) goal of these speakers, I attempt below to step aside temporarily in order to foreground others' voices while employing the visual rhetorical style found in several newspapers which juxtaposes images that complement and comment on the written/oral text.

Angel Johnson, spokesperson for the CaliforniaDOT, told Jeff Kramer, writer for the *Orange County Register* (California) in 1996 that for safety purposes the DOT removes memorials on the interstate highways, "but it is more lenient on state highways such as Carbon Canyon road, where small crosses stand."

Captain Ronnie Jones of the Louisiana State Police is noted to have said to McCarthy in 1997 about efforts by other states to ban roadside shrines, "We're not going to go around kicking over memorials on the highway" (A1).

Glen Raschal, regional traffic coordinator for the Tennessee DOT tells Jan Galletta, staff writer for *The Times & Free Press* in 2000, that roadside shrines "are probably illegal, but when we see them, we ignore them [unless other people complain]. We leave them alone, out of respect for the family."

Johnny Harris, division engineer for the Arkansas DOT, told Galletta ". . . we have a lenient practice when it comes to flowers and crosses on the shoulder, slopes, and ditches . . . we aren't really pursuing the encroachment law in those cases."

Joe Fletcher, district traffic engineer for the Georgia DOT , also speaking to Jan Galletta, is quoted as saying "There are no specific written guidelines for the placement of shrines on state rights-of-way, and if they don't interfere with our regular maintenance, they could stay up until the next time the grass is cut." Galletta concludes the article with a description of "dozens of roadside shrines that dot the highways and rural routes of Tennessee . . . ranging from plain hand-painted crosses to elaborate grottoes" and local crosses in that have been up for a long, long time, some made of metal, many mounted in trees, and one shrine consisting of three ceramic statues set in poured concrete.

Mark McKinnon, a communications specialist with the Georgia DOT, told Bo Emerson at the *Atlanta Journal–Consititution* in 2002, that "we don't like them in the right of way . . . for safety reasons. But we're very sympathetic to the families of the victims. We realize they need time to grieve, and that's one way that a lot of them choose to grieve."

Ed Wilson, spokesman for the Nevada DOT, told Merlyn Oliver, staff writer for the Tahoe, Nevada *Appeal*, that as of 2000 "our unwritten approach is that these memorials reflect the grief of loss. If they are well off the roadway and present no . . . distraction, we let them alone. . . . Let's face it, how far do you take the letter of the law?"

Stanley Glassey, chairman of the New Jersey DOT , told Tim Madigan in 2000, that the state planned to remove shrines after ten days. Glassey said, "Look at this 10 years from now. If you lost only two people a year, this could get really out of hand." In contrast, T. Madigan notes that Arlington, Virginia DOT officials negotiated with a father about a shrine in the median of busy I-20: as long as the area around the newly planted tree was well-maintained, then maintenance workers would mow around it.

Randall Dillard, spokesperson for the Texas DOT, also spoke with T. Madigan and said that he was "sure there are memorials out there that don't follow the guidelines, but as long as they're not causing a safety problem, we really have higher priorities with the pavement."

Linda Dougherty, acting roads division manager in King County, Washington, spoke to Andrew DeMillo for his 2000 story for the *Seattle Times*. Dougherty discussed one

problematic shrine that will be left alone, “with the hopes that a compromise can be worked out with the family.” She quipped, "We're not the memorial police, so to speak.”

Bob Parsons, spokesperson for the Michigan DOT , told Ann Arbor News reporter Susan Oppat in 2002, that “Federal law prohibits anyone from stopping along an interstate except for emergencies” but that Michigan workers do their best to work around roadside shrines unless the markers are too large or too sturdy.

Colleen LoVette, another spokesperson for the Michigan DOT, told me in a 2003 email exchange that while the DOT “discourages people from erecting such memorials whenever we have the chance. . . . we sympathize with those who grieve over the loss of someone close [. . . therefore] we do not commit staff resources to specifically removing these items” unless they pose a threat to the safety of other drivers.

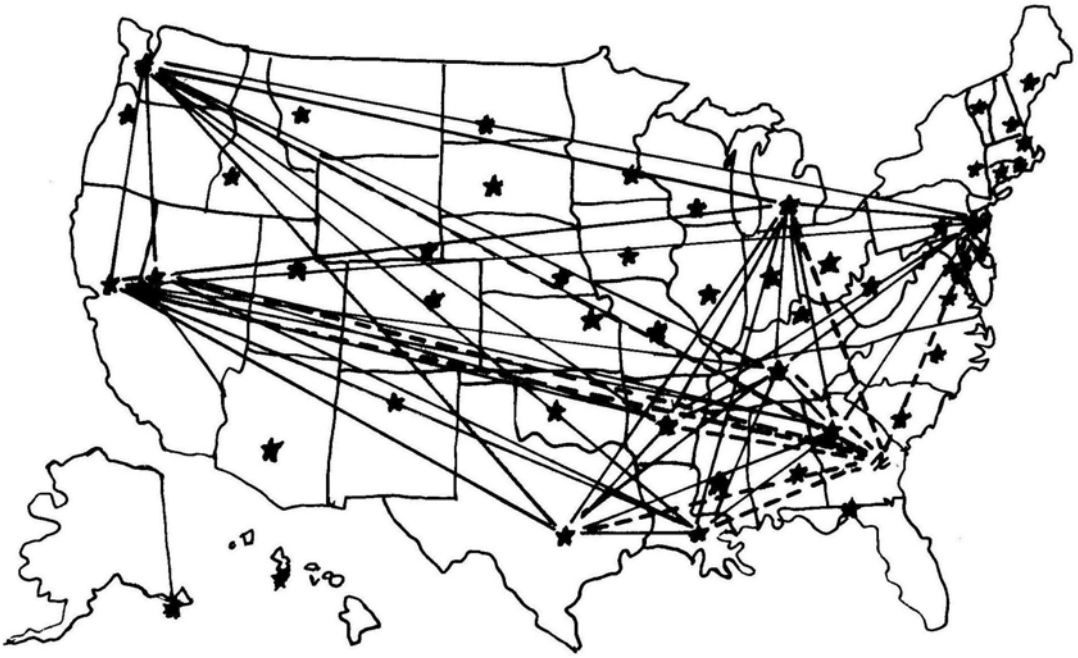


Figure 3.4.1: Map: US: Official “Look-the-Other-Way” Policy: Protective Grid

As a result of this unofficial stance acknowledging the need for individuals to grieve, most roadside shrines, regardless of their legality, stand undisturbed (Figure 3.4.1).

3.4.1: Resistance to the Practice of Roadside Shrines

Larger, more active roadside shrines may be the exception to the look-the-other-way practice. These sites—built and maintained by family members and friends, as well as members of the community less intimate with the deceased—often begin with a single wreath or cross but over time transform into mounds of accumulated items. These larger, more active sites often become the focal point not only for community mourning but also for community consternation. The ensuing controversy regarding the removal of shrines can be heated, particularly if the shrines mark the site of gruesome incidents involving children and/or multiple deaths.

In "Roads Become Paved with Loss as Shrines Proliferate, " John Lang, writing in the wake of the 1998 school shootings at Jonesboro, Arkansas, quotes an anonymous Federal Highway Administration official who says, referring to roadside shrines, "[w]e don't like them out there." Lang also cites an unnamed source at the American Automobile Association who said "[w]e understand the grief a family feels but that needs to be balanced with road safety. You could do something else, like pay for a section of road cleanup." In addition, Jim Drago of the California DOT, told Lang "While we agree with the sentiment expressed by the memorials, the fact of the matter is anything you put along the highway becomes a potential target for something to hit it. It distracts the driver. There's an inclination for people to stop and get out of the car and look. Now you've got pedestrians on the highway who also become a target. What we're doing is not cold-hearted, we're trying to prevent another tragedy."

Andrew DeMillo writes that "[t]he problem, officials say, is not memorials themselves but the crowds drawn to them. Lloyd Ensleu, traffic regulations specialist for the Washington DOT said, "Oftentimes, these memorials turn into a shrine sort of thing. . . . That can turn into a dangerous situation" (in DeMillo). County officials in Seattle received "dozens" of complaints about a shrine for young man killed by a drunk driver "and the numbers of people gathering at the site" (DeMillo). In a similar case in western Michigan, teens built a shrine on and around the tree where their friend Scott was killed (Figure 3.4.2), in the cemetery where Scott's body is buried, and on the bulletin board in the hall at school.

Figure 3.4.2: Drawing: MI "Road of the Seven Curves": Scott's Tree Shrine, 2001

The students' high school principal me that the gathering of so many teenagers in one place upset the townspeople as much, if not more, than the material at the sites did. Eventually the shrine-building activities became such an issue that a town meeting was held to discuss these matters. "Now, they plow the cemetery in the winter so the kids can get in there" (Dave). Indeed, when mourners begin to park on the side of the highway or cross into the median on

foot to visit these sites, complaints such as "it looks like a three-ring circus out there!" in response to an elaborate shrine in the median on US 50 north of St. Petersburg, Florida (June), can stimulate controversy. Institutions seeking to quell complaints may attempt to remove the shrines, which can stimulate counter-response. For example, when one active shrine site was scheduled for removal in Kentucky, a local radio talk show host raged for days at the highway official in charge (McCarthy A1).

As the practice of marking the site of death on the road proliferates, officials responsible for safety and maintenance of the public right-of-way also express concerns for look-the-other-way practices. For example, James Keaton, chairman of the National Alliance for Traffic Safety, said that roadside memorials pose a hazard, after all, "If we put memorials up at every location on our highways and byways where a fatality or serious injury occurred, are we potentially obstructing the clear view and right-of-way of motorists and road users?" (in "Could Permanent Roadside Memorials Curb—or Cause—More Vehicle Crashes?"). However, while some organizations would have law enforcement officers curtail the practice of marking the site of death, officers in Mobile, Alabama, have created their own alternative form of temporary shrine.

Eddie, a local tow-truck driver in Mobile who has "been at the scene of more bad crashes than you want to hear about," told me that state troopers there place the remnants of cars, "some so twisted they had to be hauled rather than towed," near entrance and exits along I-10 during long holiday weekends. "They think they are more effective than crosses, speed limit signs, or anything else. Nothing says slow down or don't drive drunk like a bloody wreck on the side of the road" (Eddie).

Roadway officials, however, are not the only individuals who express concern over the proliferation of roadside shrines, remove roadside shrines, or erect counter-shrines. So too do representatives of other institutions and private citizens, although the reasons they object to the shrines, the way they act on those objections, and the consequences of those actions vary widely. For example, the editor of the *Sun-Sentinel*, a Fort Lauderdale, Florida paper writes, "If the site of every tragic accidental death (traffic or otherwise) were to be turned into a memorial, with markers, flowers and what-else-have-you, there would be barely a square foot of public property to walk upon" ("Cross Controversy" 22A).

Disputes where parties disagree about who "deserves" a roadside shrine, where, when, what, and who has the right to place shrines at death sites, and who has the right to remove and/or refresh roadside shrines may also arise between private citizens. Take, for example, the story of one father in Georgia whose son was killed in a car crash, who told me that he deeply resents that a passenger, who also died, has a roadside shrine at the site because he blames the passenger for the crash (Carey). Take, for another instance, a woman in Michigan who told me that although she was not technically at fault for the two-car crash that killed the driver of the other car, she was wary to approach the family of the deceased with her request to erect a shrine at the site to honor driver's death. Eventually the family of the deceased agreed to meet with her, but they preferred that the site remain unmarked. The surviving driver said she respects the family's decision, however she continues to visit the site to pray and leave small offerings of tobacco and other fresh herbs like lavender, sage, and sweetgrass (Elinore). Sensitivity regarding the issues of blame, responsibility, anonymity, and mystery were also at issue with other conversants. A long-time resident and local business man in a small town in Georgia told me that one of his employees regularly

removes the oversized fabric floral arrangements that someone insists on placing at the site where the employee's father died. No one in the family is erecting the shrine, and the widow of the deceased is deeply vexed by the activities of the anonymous mourner (Pearce). This particular site also drew the attention of a passing jogger, who, unaware that the plastic flowers marked the site of an individual's death, pulled them from the ground, took them home, washed them off, and placed them in a pot by her door. When the jogger's housemate heard the amazing story about the pretty flowers on the side of the road, and informed her friend of their probable origins, the errant jogger quickly returned to the site and placed the cleaned and refreshed flowers back in the ground from whence they came (Jogger). Not only does this story contribute to the mystery of the appearance and disappearance of this particular shrine in Georgia, but the instance reinvigorates the mystery of shrine-building itself and points to the messiness of the investigation of shrine-building: the case illustrated above calls into question every assumption made about who builds roadside shrines in the first place, why roadside shrines appear and dissappear, how it is that roadside shrines are cleaned and refreshed, and/or maintained, and by whom.

Roadside shrines can also become a messy issue when placed on private property, not only for shrine-builders and property owners, but for the entire community. Take, for example, Jessica Gardner's story about a roadside shrine in Pennsylvania. Gardner writes that, although a property owner had given permission for the erection of a shrine on her front lawn, she asked an Adopt-A-Highway road clean-up crew to bag up "the stuff," but to leave the cross, mounted in the tree, in place. Gardner, apparently sympathetic to the mourners' complaints about the "clean up," wrote that "[f]lowers, hand-made pictures, hand-made crosses and cards, teddy bears and balloons—now all thrown away, . . . the white bags that

held the memorial items appeared identical to the other bags lining the roadway." The property owner told Gardner that "I didn't do it to hurt anyone, . . . it was starting to look bad and I thought it had been there long enough." Gardner places a shrine-builder in conversation--at least on paper--with the property owner by countering with "How dare anyone throw away those things! . . . It wasn't hurting anyone and it definitely was not garbage." Gardner extends the conversation with a spokesperson for the association, whose members allegedly disposed of the mementos: "Our people didn't touch it. [. . . the memorial was still there] when I drove by after the cleanup." Furthering the mystery, Gardner writes that, according to the township supervisor, "property owners have the right to do what they want" although, as Gardner concludes, there is no official policy for or against roadside shrines. Similarly, McCarthy writes that when Texas resident Gail Shinn tried to have a state-sanctioned MADD cross placed at the suburban site where her husband was killed by a drunk driver, the neighborhood association protested, and officials removed the cross a week later. Residents said because they didn't want a constant reminder of death so close to home, and because, according to Shinn, they feared such markers would decrease the value of their property (in McCarthy). Owens cites a similar instance in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where, according to Owens' informant, teens built a shrine and held nightly vigils on a man's front lawn. Eventually the property owner asked the mourners to leave and cleaned up the site, leaving the cross and the personal notes. Owens' informant reported that the property owner later "felt that leaving the cross might affect his property value. Also he did not want the reminder that this death occurred in front of his property" (Roberts in Owens, "Louisiana Roadside Memorials").

Public use of private property is not the only issue at work in community-wide resistance to the practice of marking the site of death on the road. Increasingly, the controversy centers around issues of private use of public property and the separation of Church and State. Framing this controversy as national discourse, Robert Rabinowitz interrogates the political ramifications of placing what he refers to as baroque-style "Catholic" shrines on the public thoroughfare across a largely Protestant US landscape. Roadside shrines incite controversy when states become explicitly involved in the practice of marking the site of death in the public right-of-way with symbols perceived as religious. The 1997 case in Florida--the first in which a state attempted to regulate and standardize the practice--provides a primary example: McCarthy notes in the *Wall Street Journal* that Jewish groups and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) were involved in the fight to stop the state from using the cross as the symbol in the state-sanctioned standardized marker. Eventually, the standard marker was re-designed to incorporate the name of the deceased in a round silver disk mounted on a tall metal pole. Other regional controversies erupted in protest against a range of symbols perceived to be religious appearing in public space. For example, Stevens, writing for a Texas paper, the *Amarillo Globe*, picked up an AP story about the contentious situation in Oregon. Stevens begins his story with the description of several roadside shrines in the Texas Panhandle, where officials often allow illegal roadside shrines to stand, and then quotes the AP story:

> Foes of roadside memorials for car-crash victims are waging an ideological war with Christian believers by posting signs bearing black crosses with a red slash through them--some with the Satanic mark '666.' The anonymous placards are part of an escalating public debate . . . over whether crosses and other memorials familiar in states across the country should be allowed at crash sites (n. pag).

The same AP story was picked up and used by at least one other writer. Tim Madigan, writing for a New Jersey paper, wrangled with a local issue of shrine removal along the Atlantic City Expressway in New Jersey. In his story, Madigan cites the Oregon controversy as an example of extremist reactions to roadside shrines.

Oregon is not the only state where roadside shrines have elicited counter performances on the side of the road by private citizens. In Seattle, when someone vandalized and set afire the wooden cross Tony Blount placed on the side of the road to mark the site where his son died, the shrine-builder replaced the wood cross with a two-foot steel cross (DeMillo). According to Demillo, the following day, police informed Blount that "roadside memorials like theirs are illegal" and so must be removed. Using steel in a similar albeit more elaborate way, a Tennessee father whose son was killed by a driver who had "too many drinks under his belt, . . . had several badly wrecked cars brought to the site [where his son died] and piled them up to focus attention on the problem of drunk drivers." Although an official for the Tennessee DOT told Galletta that they usually ignore roadside shrines, the "don't-ask, don't-tell policy [doesn't] cover every roadside shrine situation."

3.4.2: Institutional Attempts to Recuperate Control

Ross Chambers, drawing on Victor Turner's social dramaturgy, contends that "room for maneuver" exists in the "betwixt and between" spaces opened between the dominant system's power structure, a disturbance, and the system's power to recuperate after the disturbance has occurred (xi). To date, institutional strategies aimed at recuperating control in the wake of roadside shrine controversies have varied widely, from employing a range of laws regulating the use of the public right-of-way that indirectly address roadside shrines as well as explicit laws prohibiting them. For example, George Miller, a state official in

Oakland County, Michigan, told *Detroit Free Press* writer Bill Laitner in 1998 that "[t]here has been a problem with roadside shrines. . . . You hear about cities removing memorials and then people getting upset," so the county hopes to replace more than two dozen "makeshift" shrines with standardized markers because, according to Miller, "the signs fill a need to remember victims while avoiding litter problems when memorials are damaged by weather and vandals." Similarly, when Colorado prosecuted a motorist in 2001 for "desecration of a religious symbol" after he removed a roadside shrine, the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation represented the defendant because, according to the president of the foundation, the organization was offended by the public display of religious symbols at roadside shrines. In this case, the judge found "room for maneuver" by skirting the religious issue altogether, acquitting the defendant on the grounds that "it was the state's responsibility to remove roadside hazards" (in Barrett). The Colorado decision drew on extant laws that regulate adverse possession of state land, commercial and non-commercial speech, and litter ("The People of the State of Colorado v. Rodney Lyle Scott" in Bolton).

Government agencies in several states also recuperate control by pushing for the enforcement of laws banning shrines, citing safety concerns for motorists and ease of road maintenance (Lang; Ross). Take, for example, news reporter Denise LaVoie's story about the efforts of the Connecticut DOT (CTDOT) to remove the "touching tributes" to crash victims from the public right-of-way. While the CTDOT's 1994 policy on removal of shrines had previously been sporadically enforced, the shrines had recently become "more prevalent" and had to go. Michael Turano, CTDOT maintenance director, told LaVoie, "We're very, very sympathetic. We know it's a very sensitive issue, but (we) don't want to see another tragedy take place. . . . Today, there are just too many distractions – car phones

and whatever else – and now you're in a situation where people should be focusing on the highway and not along the roadside where an accident has previously taken place." Turano noted that it was one large memorial in particular that caught the CTDOT's attention and urged them to act (in LaVoie). It seems that the site where a policeman was killed when his car crashed during the pursuit of a suspected burglar, marked with wreaths, flowers and cards, was particularly troubling. CTDOT officials gave the shrine materials back to the police department and requested that they give them to the family of the deceased (in LaVoie). In this case, it may have been the specific incident and not the actual shrine that drew the attention of authorities. Police chases resulting in death and property damage may be controversial and so authorities might, perhaps, prefer that the incident remain low-profile and unmarked. In this case, enforcing the ban on roadside shrines may have recuperated control on multiple fronts.

Other states attempt to recuperate control and discover "room for maneuver" by developing non-religious, secular markers for which individuals can apply. The design, construction, and cost to mourners of state sanctioned markers vary from state to state. In Washington and Idaho, the symbol is a five-pointed star (DeMilIo; Ross). In Wyoming, mourners can apply for a free "broken heart" memorial ("Wyoming"). In Florida and Boulder County, Colorado, mourners can apply for a free, personalized aluminum disk that is left up for only one year unless renewed annually (Arndorfer). In Washington, mourners can apply for a variety of state-sanctioned markers for fees which range from $200 to $600. Permanent markers read "Please Don't Drink and Drive" above a plaque that reads, "In Memory of [the name of the deceased]." Mourners there can also apply for a memorial tree planting or a personalized temporary marker (DeMilIo). In Connecticut, mourners are

encouraged to apply to the state's "Adopt a Highway" program "to get an appropriate highway sign for their loved ones in exchange for picking up litter along a stretch of roadway" (LaVoie). In West Virginia, mourners are allowed to erect their own markers, but must register to do so ("Rules"). In New Jersey, DOT officials there have allowed shrine-builders to place their own shrine along the Atlantic City Expressway for up to ten days, but need a permit and a police escort to do so (T. Madigan). In South Carolina, mourners may apply for an encroachment permit but mourners are rarely granted permission to erect a roadside shrine. However, the Aiken County, South Carolina Coroner has been painting white crosses on the pavement at death sites, and according to a spokesperson for the SCDOT in an email to me, since crosses painted on the pavement do not fall into any existing category of prohibited use of the public right-of-way, they are not removed by highway officials (Turbeville). In Missouri and North Carolina, mourners can apply for a set of "Adopt-A-Highway" signs that also bears the words "In Memory Of" and the name(s) of the deceased in exchange for cleaning up that stretch of road for a period of three years (Hampton; Whitacre). However, borrowing from the South Carolina practice, mourners have begun to request permission to paint a white cross on the pavement where their loved one died (Whitacre), or ask the county coroner to do so ("North Carolina Bans") however, "once it's worn off, it cannot be replaced" ("What Some Other States Do"). In Georgia, the Richmond County Coroner's Office has recently instituted the practice of painting the pavement with a white cross at the site where a fatality has occurred (Sparks, "Cross Marks"). While standardization may seem to solve problems of traveler safety and road maintenance expediency, state efforts at recuperating control have been problematic.

Developing and deploying state-sanctioned markers such as those described above sometimes proves as contentious as the non-sanctioned shrines they seek to replace. In Florida, for example, the first state sanctioned marker was a white cross similar to the Red Cross symbol of safety (Chardy, "New Markers"; "Cross Controversy"); however, when some Floridians argued that the cross too closely resembled a religious symbol, the marker was changed to a circle (Ross). In Texas, mourners whose loved ones died in a traffic incident *not* related to alcohol consumption "take offense" (in Verhovek) and "feel discriminated against" because policies there only sanction MADD crosses (Harris in Rodriguez). On the other hand, when Texas legislators made a move to allow all sites of road death to be marked with a proposed state marker, representatives of MADD objected because they want "distinct markers for DWI-related fatalities" ("Some Texans Balk"). Taken from the national edition of the *New York Times,* Verhovek reported that Oregon lawmakers "shelved the discussion of legalizing small roadside memorials, after it was pointed out that so-called hate groups or fringe religious sects could assert their right to erect memorials" because now, it seemed, the symbol of the cross can be used by anybody. Other state-sponsored signage related to group membership also proved problematic. The Adopt-A-Highway option has stirred up controversy in some communities largely because authorities realized that they could not control which groups could post their names on the markers, and may attempt to do so stimulated yet more controversy. Take, for instance, the gay and lesbian group in South Dakota which was not allowed to post their name on the sign: the group subsequently sued the state ("Gay Group Sues"). In Missouri and Alabama, the questionable group was the KKK ("Gay Group Sues"; "Supreme Court Rules"). Furthermore, while states attempt to keep the boundary between Church and State intact

regarding the use of symbols, when the Virginia legislature debated about removing private citizen shrines and replacing them with secular standardized markers, delegate Richard Black argued that the proposed policy "restricts the religious freedom" of mourners' expressions of grief ("Roadside Memorials Banned"). The Virginia DOT ban and standardization policies were later reversed (Matrinez). However, Wyoming found "room for maneuver" and successfully (perhaps) circumvented controversy associated with imposing a design on the populace, as well as keeping the sign limited to naming specific deceased individuals rather than group membership, by conducting a widely publicized roadside memorial contest among grade-school children in the state. A Wyoming DOT news release states that "[m]any students participated, and the final sign is a combination of the two best and most compatible efforts. The broken heart has been effectively combined with the dove. The heart symbolizes grief and sorrow, while the dove flying upward suggest hope, peace and healing" (Wyoming). The relative success and political force of efforts to allow certain roadside markers and disallow others, may also be seen in the *Detroit Free Press* headlines, such as the 1999 article, "Engler and Judge Martone Honored for Their Efforts to Reduce Drunk Driving in State" (J. Chambers), and the 2001 article, "Creators of Foundation to Fight Drunken Driving Honored" (Schaller). The "creators" were private citizens whose political connections with Judge Martone and Governor Engler helped get approval of a plan to mark death sites related to drunk driving with officially sanctioned standardized markers. It seems that George Miller, the Oakland County official discussed earlier who claimed to have first brought the practice of standardizing the markers to the state (Laitner), has been left out of the bright light of recognition.

Generally, states fail in their attempts to recuperate control over roadside shrines. McCarthy maintains that both state laws banning shrines and the development of state-sanctioned, non-religious' markers are ineffective (A1). The plant-a-tree option in Washington had minimal success because few people apply for it, preferring instead to have at least a modicum of personalization (DeMillo). Personalization may be at issue in other specific instances as well. Indeed, when state officials remove illegal roadside shrines, friends and family members of the deceased often quickly replace the shrines. Barrera, in his 1991 journal article about roadside shrines in Texas, notes that "[t]he Highway Department reserves the right to remove any cross, and does so from time to time. It is not uncommon in such instances, however, for the family to erect another cross in the same place" (279-80). One young man's experience in Oregon provides another example. In 1999, after the state DOT removed a large cross from the side of the road, Jeremy Haddock replaced the cross at the site where his two friends died, albeit farther back from the road. He did so in the hopes that it might receive the grace afforded other more out-of-the-way shrines ("State Gets Serious"). A family's experience in Spokane, Washington provides another example. In 2000, when the state DOT removed a large cross, confetti, pinwheels and other shrine materials from the highway, the deceased's family members were irate, and two moths later they put the cross back up, a little farther from the pavement and without the mementos. The deceased's sister told a reporter "If they try to take it down, we'll put it back up. She's not going to go away" (Hartman).

Even when mourners apply for and erect state-sanctioned markers, they often also erect non-sanctioned shrines nearby. I have has encountered numerous small shrines at the base of, or attached to, state-sanctioned markers. On the 1999 road trip from Louisiana to

Utah described in the previous chapter, the “Please Don’t Drink and Drive” state sign on NM-104 in Tucumcari, the legs of which were decorated with flowers, is one example. While roadside shrines are not illegal on state roads in New Mexico, this is not the case in Florida and North Carolina where similar shrine complexes have been observed. On a 2001 road trip between Louisiana and the Georgia coast, I encountered, on the grassy embankment in front of a service station/convenience store at an I-10 interchange in the Florida Panhandle, a small wood cross, painted white and decorated with a small multi-colored wreath and a tiny US flag, planted in the ground at the base of an officially sanctioned “Drive Safely” state death marker. In the summers of 2002 and 2003, during road trips through North Carolina--where private citizen shrines have been banned since late 2001--I encountered state-sanctioned “Adopt-A-Highway” markers dedicated to persons who died on the road that were also decorated with crosses, wreaths, ribbons, bows, and US flags. In the same state, several “Adopt-A-Highway” memorials were accompanied by non-sanctioned roadside shrines placed in the ground nearby. Further evidence of the practice of these sanctioned/non-sanctioned memorial complexes are evident in the Midwest as well. A website dedicated to roadside shrines in Kansas and neighboring states features images of several shrines in the ground next to standardized markers, one of which is at the base of an “Adopt-A-Highway” sign, both bearing the same name (“Brett” and “Brett” in Curless). Similarly, while Texas law allows MADD crosses to be erected at the sites of drunk driving deaths, the wreaths, candles, and other personal items that I have seen decorating and supplementing these legal markers render them illegal shrines.

Cresswell avers that intentional transgression represents a form of resistance that creates a response from the establishment and thereby "draws the lines on a battlefield and

defines the terrain on which contestation occurs" (23). On the one hand, the proliferation of illegal roadside shrines appears to mark a failure on the part of dominant forces seeking to incorporate fully--or to control completely--the practice. A primary example is the case in Florida: even after the issues seemed to be settled in Florida (private citizen shrines outlawed and the official design for state-sanctioned markers approved), stories lauding private "makeshift" shrines continued to find their way into the news, like Andorfer's "Roadside Memorials Help Survivors Cope" in the *SunOne: The Gainesville Sun*. On the other hand cultural performances at roadside shrines also fail in their attempt to circumvent hegemonic forces to the extent that, when state officials exercise the prerogative to allow the performance to "go on," usually in the guise of goodwill, this exercise ultimately represents a re-assertion of their power. Furthermore, the efforts by the state to recuperate control of the practice of marking the site of death on the road, rather than incorporating and normalizing the practice, serves to open up a range of other issues, only some of which have been highlighted above.

3.5: Roadside Shrines as Resistant Performance: Protest and Warning

Soja maintains that there is no "innocent spatiality of social life," that "human geographies become filled with politics and ideology" (Fuoss, "Performance" 109), and Folch-Serra asserts that the landscape is not only graphically visible in space but also "narratively visible" in time through a dialogue "whose outcome is never a neutral exchange" (255). Furthermore, according to MacCannel, places marked in the landscape by a sign to indicate significance are "touristic representations" (110-11) that are bound up in a social processes of differentiation. At best, "touristic" refers to "the circulation of the gift of shared notice" (193)--but also and often points to a social economy that elevates preferred histories

and obscures others, including places of death (71-73)--by markers placed at specific sites, as well as texts written about these sites--including dissertations (110).

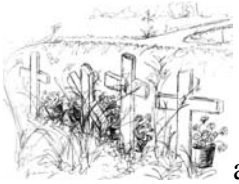
Indeed, depending on one's point of view, traveling down almost any road in the United States, particularly on the 42,795 miles of interstate highway crisscrossing the nation, one could bear witness to modern technology, transportation, and travel (McNicol), and/or the paving over of the pathways (and perhaps erasure of the lifeways) of indigenous and other peoples whose trials, tribulations, and *trails* are often the foundation of the very road one rolls along.

McNichol notes in *The Roads That Built America*, that a year after the end of the Revolutionary War, President George Washington rode on horseback from Virginia to the Ohio territory to find "a smooth way" to connect the people and the trade routes of the young nation. "The best route [was] a network of old Indian hunting paths" which later became the National Road, "America's first interstate" (14). As described in the previous chapter, Indian trails not only provided the foundation for later roads but also provide contemporary tourist attractions as well. Take, for example, US-12 on which one can travel from Detroit to Chicago and west all the way to the Pacific coast: US-12 is also the "Old Sauk [Indian]Trail," the first high-ground foot path. In Michigan, from Detroit to the Irish Hills, US-12 is now a designated National Historic Route commemorating America's automotive history, the western end of which is marked by the re-burial site of a Potowatami man's bones (Budurow). A local paper notes that those bones, unearthed when the road was paved in the 1920s, were displayed at the local liquor store, became "the area's first tourist attraction," and only later were reburied at an inn farther down the road (Cherry). Another poignant example is the "Natchez Trace" which runs south by southwest from Tennessee

across Mississippi. Once the main foot path for several indigenous tribes, park officials have dubbed it, "The All American Road," in promotional material. There, roadside markers extol the virtues of colonial development and the excitement of pioneering, elevate the death sites of important trail-blazers and Civil War heroes, and pay homage to "historical" ceremonial and village sites where indigenous people "used to live." Unmarked in the brochures and on the trail itself are small reservations nearby where contemporary Native Americans continue to live. Furthermore, the beautifully manicured and limited access trail travels through rural Mississippi where people, primarily African-Americans, live in desperate poverty.

Other "historical" trails remain unpaved, the sites apparently unremarkable until Arellano stumbled upon them, although the histories of the individual and collective struggle for freedom, liberty, and territory are etched in stone. Arellano writes:

> I ran across an old journal in Las Vegas [New Mexico] that had an article about the 1847 Taos Rebellion. There, to my surprise, was a map of the Battle of Embudo that took place [in] back of the mesita, about a mile from the house. . . . that spring my wife and I walked the Old Apodaca Trail . . . and soon we came upon the battle site. It was unbelievable. There were crosses, or descansos, carved into the rocks everywhere we looked. Some had only one, others two or three; on one we found sixteen, and the one with the most had twenty one cruzitas. . . . Descansos then became a reality that refuted New Mexico's myth about the bloodless conquest of New Mexico by the americans. Inscribed in stone, these descansos opened a completely new dimension to New Mexico's history for me, that part of history lived not by the victors of war but by the villagers who fought against great odds to retain what they cherished most—their freedom" (*Descansos* 91-95).

The side of the road is not a neutral space: it is clear that on some roads, certain historical deaths are noted, and made noteworthy, by institutional road markers and in brochures and other promotional materials, while other deaths  and other

histories are not. Whereas Senie advocates that shrine-building in general is "democracy in action," whether private and "spontaneous" or by institutional design, Everett notes that the practice of marking the site of death on the road by mourners with their own roadside shrine instantiated an "economic integration and social leveling" (*Roadside Crosses* 108). The efforts by certain states to institutionalize the practice by marking certain auto-related death sites with markers sacralizes some deaths and not others, and serves to forestall whatever democratic action or "extemporaneous speech" (Everett, *Roadside Crosses* 2) individual shrines--collectively, in conversation-- might offer. In addition, the fees charged to mourners for state-sanctioned death markers make that option economically unfeasible to some mourners and is seen as "offensive" by others ("Some Texans Balk"). Furthermore, a family member who lost a loved one in a traffic fatality would have to register with the state in order to comply with some state regulations, an option many non-citizens traveling the US would stridently seek to avoid.

However, field interviews, informal conversations, and newspaper accounts reveal a form of everyday talk or "vernacular rhetoric" (Hauser 83) that both expresses and shapes public opinion regarding roadways, the deaths that occur there, and the shrines that mark these sites of death. Highway deaths are generally perceived to be "meaningless," "senseless," and "unnecessary." However, many mourners who have lost loved ones in a car crash actively strive to make sense of the circumstances surrounding these events and seek to change those circumstances in order to prevent further "unnecessary" deaths. Few, if any, of the many people who build roadside shrines do so primarily to protest the laws that render the building of roadside shrines illegal, however many people do so to protest factors surrounding the deaths of loved ones, thereby acting out a refusal to accept the deaths as an

“accident” or a “natural” consequence of driving. People who build roadside shrines frequently report that their initial impulse was to mark the spot where a loved one died, to make a "silent shout of misery to get the attention of everybody passing by" (Lang). However, people also offer other reasons for building and maintaining roadside shrines.

Renda Wilson of Orange County, California told one reporter, "I wanted to see the skid marks, the trees, I wanted it to be real." (in Kramer).

Diana Inocencio, also of Orange County, California, said “It was [my friend’s] last place—We feel like he’s still here” (in Kramer).

George Miller of Arlington, Texas stated, "It's something I had to do. . . . That's the only link I have to my son. It's the way we live with him" (in Minutaglio). Miller also recounts the heart-felt notes left at the shrine by passers-by.

Kathryn Bridges of Orange County, California, told a reporter that she wanted to help other visitors who visit the shrine, so she included a packet of “take one” type of handwritten messages. “People took the cards” (in Hardesty).

Cindy Bender of Orange County, California, said “Maybe if that cross had been put up sooner, more people would have thought twice about what they were doing” (in Kramer).

Diane Burke of Louisville, Kentucky hopes the shrine she built is taken as a warning and wants to "keep the risks of driving in your face" (in McCarthy A1).

Karolyn Nunnallee of Ft. Meade, Florida, one of the first MADD organizers and 1998 National President of the organization, states that she continues to maintain a shrine at the site where her daughter was killed in 1988 in order "to catch the eyes of every passer-by [so they know] someone died there, so they think, slow down, maybe buckle up—maybe even decide not to drink and drive" (in Lang).

Jeremy Haddock of Oregon says that the actual site where his friends died in a car wreck must be marked. "I believe that having it along the side of the road is most important because it tells people, 'Look, this is a dangerous highway. There's only death on Highway 22" (in "State Gets Serious").

Rhonda Leffew of Georgia told Jan Galletta that the site of her son's death was first marked by a crumpled car "as a silent pleas for safe driving over the 4th of July holiday."

Robert and Virginia Benedit, who live outside of Atlanta, Georgia, say that anger plays a part in their on going maintenance of their daughter's shrine because the road is confusing and poorly marked. They want to remind road officials of her death in the "hopes [that the shrine] will prompt a change in design" (in Emerson).

Owens offers that in southern Louisiana, the increasing popularity of marking the site of death on the road is being reinforced by local newspapers *using* crosses in articles *about* dangerous road conditions ("Louisiana Roadside Memorials"). An example in a Georgia paper supports and extends Owens's suggestion.

Figure 3.5.1: Map: US: Gathering Force

In 2003, the *Augusta Chronicle* ran a series of articles about roadside shrines, local coroners' recent practice of painting crosses on the pavement at accident sites, and three locations in Richmond County noted for high rates of accidents and fatalities (Sparks, "Cross Marks Road Death" and "Street Hazards Studied"). These high accident and death sites were being studied by DOT engineers in order to make them safer.

3.5.1: Effectivity of the Cultural Performance of Roadside Shrines "On the Road"

Shrine builders appear, at least in part, to be realizing their stated goals. During numerous discussions, people have told me that, upon encountering a roadside shrine, they look at their speedometers and check to see that they are wearing their seatbelts. Moreover, newspaper accounts report that the shrines have had the effect of making some people more conscious of safety precautions, including the need to appoint a designated driver when anticipating a night of heavy alcohol consumption (Merzer; Twomey). John Smithee, a Texas State Representative, told one reporter, "In some cases, I think they have a good effect. . . . When

I see one of those crosses beside the road, I come to terms with my own mortality. It makes me drive a little safer" (in Stevens). And, in an unusual twist, some judges are now making building and maintaining shrines lessons in its own right. Ted Poe, a Texas judge, requires persons convicted of vehicular homicide involving drunk driving to erect and maintain, for the duration of their sentences, shrines at the site where the victims died. Poe stated, "I've had a defendant tell me, when he dug the hole he realized he killed a real person, not a statistic" (in Lang). Similarly, a Georgia judge has made maintenance of a roadside shrine part of the sentence for a man convicted of car theft that ultimately resulted in several deaths (Galletta). This punitive gesture is not necessarily an ahistorical practice. Rajkovic notes that, in Europe from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, it was customary for murderers to erect and maintain a monument at the site where they killed the person or persons--both the monuments and the documentation marking the agreements between the murderers and the families of the victims still exist (170-71). Moreover, roadside shrines may also have positively affected road conditions in Louisiana, Georgia, and Massachusetts. Chris Orillio of the Louisiana DOT reported in a 1998 phone interview that the rise in popularity of the shrines did, in some measure, contribute to marking roads more clearly. Furthermore, the LADOT participated in a “cone memorial” program--which places black mourning “arm bands” about orange traffic cones and places them under the lights near the Capitol building in Baton Rouge--similar to the United States department of Transportation’s “cone memorial” in DC at the Washington Monument (Fed. Hwy. Admin, *Louisiana*). The display at the Louisiana State Capitol is highly visible from the freeway, and features a billboard that, in the spring of 2001, said that 1868 Highway Workers died on the road (Owens, Email exchange). In an email exchange, Ann Walls of the Federal Highway Administration also

noted that the annual "cone memorial" program also includes a "traveling wall (similar to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial) with the names of those who have died in work zone related crashes."

Recent stories in Georgia newspapers indicate that the Benedit family's anger with officials over the road conditions on US-78 that contributed to their daughter's death (as well as the deaths of many others on that route) may have had some effect: US-78 between Athens and Atlanta is scheduled for major overhaul (Emerson). In Massachusetts, legislator Parente says crosses serve rather than threaten public safety: "The way I look at it is, if it's a 20-cross highway, shouldn't we fix the highway?" ("Roadside Memorials: Are Crosses").

Furthermore, grassroots efforts to curtail state practices of banning and/or standardizing the practice have been moderately successful. For example, the Virginia DOT backed down on enforcing shrine removal policy after pressure from the community. However, a VDOT spokesperson wrote to a constituent that "the agency will continue its current practice" to remove memorials . . . when they have deteriorated or pose a safety hazard" (in Martinez). Not only did the VDOT reverse the decision to summarily remove private shrines and replace them with permanent state markers, the General Assembly passed an amendment that "prohibits funds from being used "for the design, production, installation or maintenance of roadside memorials, plaques and other devices" in memory of people who have died in car accidents" (in Martinez). Ellen Qualls, spokesperson for the governor, said that the roadside shrine policy was a case of legislation gone awry, and wonders why the state would spend thousands of dollars "to do what families want to do for themselves?" (in Martinez). Similarly, when the Texas legislature considered banning "homemade

memorials" legislators "deferred to public protest and backed away" from the issue (in "North Carolina Bans"). In addition, private citizens are gathering petitions in several states to reverse the ban on roadside shrines, like Tony Blount in Washington (DeMillo), Jeremy Haddock in Oregon ("State Gets Serious"), and Susie Boyer, who is "going to bat" against the state policy banning roadside shrines in Colorado ("Roadside Memorials at Issue").

Roadside shrines function as resistant performances, first, because they are, in most states, illegal, and second, because they often protest against factors surrounding the deaths of loved ones. In addition, the states' attempt to rectify these sites of death—to "put to right" a site of seemingly senseless death by reintegrating the site into the activities of everyday life by either removing the shrines or replacing them with official markers—fails. Many shrine-builders and other persons in their communities not only support the practice but protest attempts to outlaw or regulate the practice. Unlike the sites of violent death that have been marked with official monuments like the stone chairs at the site of the Oklahoma City bombing and the "Wall of Trees" mural in the old library where so many students died at Littleton High School, the side of the road resists playing the role of what Foote calls the "innocent bystander" (in Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti 163). However, roadside shrines' status as resistant performances is an uneasy one, first, because the messages "slow down," "wear your seat belts," and "don't drink and drive" are messages sanctioned by the state and, second, because the building and maintenance of roadside shrines sometimes functions as a punitive tool of the state.

The Subject Escapes, Defies Location

More than a sensitive issue for public policy makers.
More than an increased road maintenance budget because it takes time to mow
around
These crosses planted in the dirt.

These places pose a danger to more than just the people who stop their cars
On the side of the road, get out, and *commune.*

More than dots on my map,
More than structure, more than artifact,
More than crosses and things and stuff that people leave there,
they may be all of that but . . .

These shrines, there and there and there, on the side of the road, beg my attention,
Sometimes whispering sweetly from a ditch
    a small white cross overgrown with vines and wild flowers,
Sometimes screaming insistently,
    LOOK AT *THIS.*
    GET OUT OF YOUR CAR AND COME *HERE*
    a cluster of wreaths on stands
    potted flowers
    a sculpture of mangled car parts
    a broken rearview mirror
    soggy teddy bears, candles and rosaries
    Mardi Gras beads, a mandala
    an *Ojo,* tiny prayer flags
    poems and notes and plaques
    "PALS FOREVER"

When I reach you, I reach for you with words (and a few maps and sketches). I attempt to gather together what I have gathered along the way, coaxing meaning out of an exquisite, oft interrupted, journey. And after/words? I return to the road again and again, seeking something, desiring something, something *else*, something of and beyond both shrine and archive, something there and there and there, on the side of the road--"an intensity, which passes without regret," (Barthes in Dollimore 314).

CHAPTER FOUR
LOCATING ROADSIDE SHRINES IN/AS RITUAL

> And what forms of displacement, closely associated with women's lives, do *not* count as proper "travel"? Visiting? Pilgrimage? (Clifford, "Traveling Cultures" 105).

> . . . plastic garbage bags that time cannot decay, and here I still am, standing, with this little wild bouquet (Leonard Cohen, "Democracy is Coming").

4.1: Engaging the Embodied Text

Here I turn back, turn around, return to the road and return to specific sites intent on stopping for a *visit.* In Chapter Four, the narrator/researcher fully embraces the participant-observer stance--as performed in the later sections of the narrated tour in Chapter Two--began to emerge as the field research progressed. This stance and narrator position shifts in Chapter Four in order to more fully investigate roadside shrines from a grounded perspective, from on the ground, in-scene, interacting with various and specific shrine sites in further attempts, and failures, to come to terms with roadside shrines in contemporary and historical cultural moments. Furthermore, the text is constructed in such a way as to demonstrate the failed attempt of the researcher to hold the split position of participant-observer as the investigation of ritual progresses. The narrator/researcher becomes more fully engaged/ enmeshed in the cultural performance(s) of and on the side of the road as the images evoked during the investigation gather force. The chapter concludes by resisting resolution, enacts a resistance to the process of ritual reintegration.

During my later fieldwork I began to interact with roadside shrines *in situ*, on the side of the road, as *some kind* of ritual space. This move was called for in that others writing about shrines and shrine-building behavior, in both the contemporary popular and academic press, discussed the practices at the sites in terms of ritual, specifically as a mourning ritual. Therefore, as befits poststructural ethnographic practices, the sites must be investigated as

such. However, in that this study also attempts to unsettle taken-for-granted meanings of the sites, the *a priori* interpretive frame of mourning was at least temporarily suspended--the type and function of ritual was left open.

Intent on meeting and understanding these sites on their own terms, and wishing to make apparent my own, perhaps unconscious, frames of interpretation, I took behavioral and imaginative cues from the sites themselves. I viscerally, sensually, and imaginatively step into the ritual space of selected sites, *seeking* the vortices, likened in this chapter to the ritual threshold or gateway into the unknown and/or the unstoried--that which has been written out of, or is sitting underneath, other accounts. These visits and interpretive frames are contexted, as they were in Chapter Two, in the material and socio-cultural contemporary moment, and thus further enact the narratively visible poesis of cultural invention (Ulmer) in the narratively visible landscape (Folch-Serra).

Art historian David Prown explicates a process of investigating material artifacts--via the senses--that is particularly useful to this experiment. Prown suggests the process of sensual engagement in order to "aspire to the objectivity of scientific method" (21) by making apparent and thus overcoming unconscious biases (and other interpretive frames) embedded in the researcher's cultural perspective. However, I followed Prown's method not to *overcome* subjectivity but rather to engage it, thus simultaneously employing and querying this experimental method. This "excess," or subjectivity, often guided the next step in the research process and stimulated field experiences and various other interpretive writing spaces, some of which are included in this chapter. At times I also take instruction from experimental theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski regarding the illuminating power of repetitive ritual action. I do so, however, *not* in order to move toward a Grotowski-esque

universal understanding of some essentially human experience, but toward what philosopher and experimental/feminist theorist Elspeth Probyn calls an exploration of singularity as a negotiated performance of complex belongings; Grotowski-esque exercises help identify what some of those belongings might be. This negotiation via the repetition of ritual at specific sites, and ritually revisiting certain sites, was conducted, and is re-presented here, in order to disrupt notions of the generalizable other, is enacted to interrupt the discourses of "sameness."

The in-field experiment of sustained inquiry was an attempt to query, and unsettle, notions of what social ritual is purported to recuperate, contain, and resolve--the messy business of life and death. Drawing support from Rimmon-Kenan's work, in this chapter I seek to forestall, at least temporarily, the potentially destructive force of the kind of repetition that advances an overwhelming, numbing, sameness (in Bronfen 104), in favor of onethat privileges difference. Furthermore, through the representation of my sustained inquiry, and through performance of repeated encounters with different shrines, I attempt to enact difference *differently*. This defamiliarization hopes to keep open the gateway, or threshold, of meaning, and works to enact and query the generative possibilities of death-related and other-related rituals.

Chapter Four continues to employ and query the performance of the narrated road tour between, and on the way to, each face-to-face interaction, as well as when a new geographic survey area is introduced, therefore the inclusion of maps will continue as needed. In addition, this chapter continues to experiment with issues of visual representation of the shrine sites. Whereas the inclusion of a photograph is rare in scholarly publications about roadside shrines, most newspaper stories do feature photographs of shrines, as a

number of roadside shrine-related web sites. In these photographs the shrines usually fill the frame--the photographer "faces" the shrine, takes a picture. People are rarely included, but when they are present in the frame, they are either crying off to the side and seemingly oblivious to the photographer, or, as in the case of Jason Curless' web site, they are standing behind the shrine, facing the photographer, posing. In order to further the experiment--to simultaneously employ and unsettle contemporary method and mediated form--this

Figure 4.1.1: Photo: LA-42: Winter Only in Tree: With Camera, 2002
(Photo courtesy of Timothy Berla)

chapter will include select photos that do not perform in the way that most photographs of roadside do in newspapers, what Roland Barthes might call "portrait-photographs" which are a "closed field of forces" (*Camera Lucida* 13), but photographs that (hopefully) remain

open, suggestive, metonymic, or are at least different due to an unusual or previously unrepresented perspective.

4.2: Postures and Peripheral Vision: Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Montgomery, Alabama, September 11-14, 2001

On September 11, 2001, at 1:27 in the afternoon, I flee the television screen (the repeated images of New York City's World Trade Center collapsing in on itself, clouds of crushed gray-green concrete billowing). I fly to school to be with *my people,* and drive by (once again) the "Lonesome on Burbank" shrine site. Sometime between the day before and this day, two tiny US flags have been added to the very top of the large white-painted wood cross. The flapping of the fabric catches my attention. The shrine site will remain for another six months--the tiny flags flapping, fading--and then the whole thing will disappear approximately one year from its first appearance. An anniversary? On this day the shrine points me (sends me spinning) in other directions.

On Friday, September 14, 2001, this "National Day of Prayer and Remembrance," I flee (once again) the repetition of televised images: clouds clouds clouds of crushed concrete, passenger planes crashing crashing crashing into the side of a buidling, firestorms blooming billowing belching smoke and debris, photos plastered everywhere of people people people people people people people people people *missing* in the rubble, and every place, every *where*, becoming a shrine--flowers, candles, notes, stuffed animals, flags flags flags flags flags growing, mounding, spreading out in New York, in Washington DC, all across the United States, and around the (Western) world. People build a place to visit, *need* something to *do*--still not sure what to make of it all. Travel writer Gene Sloan's article "Attack Site is Top Draw, to City's Dismay" won't appear in *USA Today*, dateline New York, for several weeks.

On Friday, September 14, 2001, I drive to Montgomery, Alabama to meet *my love*, who says to take care, to take my time. However, time has ceased to follow an everyday pattern--I have no everyday care nor time to take in this blessed gap, this liminal state of *bewilderment* and *wonder*. I drive the radio down the road, am accompanied by the live coverage on National Public Radio of the ritual enacted at St. Alban's National Cathedral in Washington DC.

On Friday, September 14, 2001, the (myths of) sacred and the secular meet as the procession advances, closes the gap (in meaning, in time), as national leaders, both religious and elected, follow a shining steel cross, the US flag, and the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" ("Mine eye have seen the Glory of the coming of the Lord, His Truth is marching on"), out the Cathedral doors and into the World. Immediately following--the iconography shining in the sun, flapping in the breeze, and reverberating in the air—George W. Bush, President of the United States, crosses the threshold between church and state and names the transition from one state of affairs to another, from this "National Day of Prayer and Remembrance" to one of "National Solidarity and Remembrance"; with the pounding of chests (of fists on the podium) the drums of war begin to beat--the consequences of the conjunction of these myths (soon to be) made manifest in sacrifice. *Now* I am terrified.

My personal investment in, and the priveges made possible by, what Hartnett will later call the "cultural fictions" of freedom and liberty (of the road--*my road*), of education (*my eduacation*), of national identity (*my identity*), are IN MY FACE. I am, in some measure, responsible to, and for, the infrastructure of the USA on which I am motoring, to the subjects who have passed this way before, with, and after me, and to other (motor oil producing) nations on which I depend--to whom I am indeed deeply indebted. I make these

connections, have this ephiphany, but keep silent (for a time). I clutch. I seize. I choke on the clouds of cement and shining steel, my ears bleed with the sound of fluttering flags and Battle Hymn(s), my heart bangs a Saidian contrapunctal beat (*Culture and Imperialism*) against the pounding of fists and the beating of drums.

Driving the radio down the road on Friday, September 14, 2001, I am ostensibly keeping track of roadside shrines on the interstate highways: on I-12 east through Louisiana; on I-10 east through Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama; and on I-65 north from Mobile to Montgomery. However, the singular shrines escape even my peripheral vision. I know they are there, but I cannot see them, so intent am I on my roiling guts, my visceral reaction to this social drama in which I play a part. I choke (down), bleed (from), beat (against) my (impotent) rage, scream *NO!"* to no one--the roar of the wind rushing by my open car window sucks my voice away.

It will be a year before Robert Lowell's poem "For the Union Dead" helps me *out*, frees me from the images on my television set, from my frozen, crouched, neutral(ized) position, and from the choking terror that seeped from my car radio and down my throat. It will be even longer before I map and document the location of roadside shrines on this soon-to-be-familiar series of routes between Louisiana and Alabama, and beyond to Georgia. However, on this trip to Montgomery, Alabama, my love and I do visit the Civil Rights Memorial, and through the water rolling down the black granite, touch the names of Dr. Martin Luther King and other (murdered) civil rights workers engraved there. We seek reflection, perhaps communion. We find Montgomery virtually abandoned on this particular weekend. Men in uniform, weapons slung over their shoulders, keep us company.

According to designer Maya Lin, “This is not a monument to suffering; it is a memorial to hope” (*Civil Rights*).

4.3: Ritually Revisiting Roadside Shrines: Baton Rouge to Mandeville, 2001-2002

All of the shrine sites noted below, first spotted in the fall of 1998 (see Figure 2.4.2) and in the spring of 1999 (see Figure 2.4.3), remain as of February 2002--changed but present on the side of the road--unless otherwise noted. The map below (Figure 4.3.1) indicates the total shrine sites on the survey (tourist/pilgrimage) route from Baton Rouge to Mandeville between 1998 and 2002, and the entire route from Mandeville across the causeway and west/northwest on the Blues Highway (US-61) back to Baton Rouge.

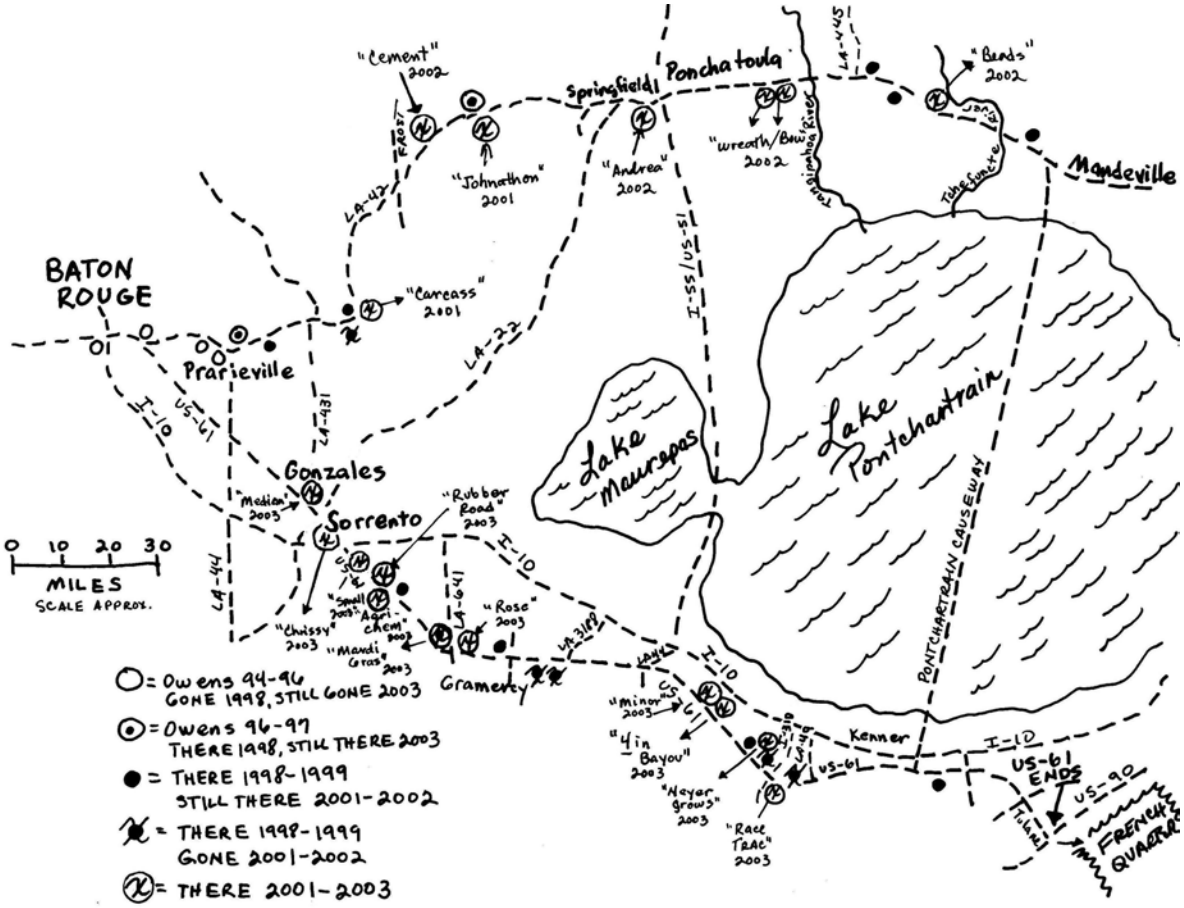


Figure 4.3.1: Map: LA: Circuitous Blues Revisited, 1998-2003

4.3.1: Postulance: Remembering Failure: World Trade Center to "Matthew's Cross," September 22, 2001

In the Fall of 2001, grappling with the immediate (and seemingly eminent) repercussions generated by the events of September 14, needing something to *do*, I revisit my Louisiana back road route (again), seeking *something*, hoping for that vital "hit" of that *something else*. Five months later in February of 2002, with the help of a friend who traveled from Michigan to visit me during Mardi Gras week, my surveyor, tourist, guide, and pilgrim postures rolled (on) together while I conducted a Louisiana back roads tour of roadside shrines. My friend, with some direction from me, took several digital photographs--souvenirs of our trip. Upon his return to Michigan he emailed the images to me, several of which appear in this chapter.

On September 22, 2001, I search (once again) for "Matthew's Cross" on my back road route between Baton Rouge and Mandeville, Louisiana. "Winter Only in Tree," the weathered cross in the tree on LA-42 at the "T" intersection with LA-44, first documented by Maida Owens in 1995 ("Field Notes"), is so entwined with vines and layers of memory that the shrine, although presently hidden from view, is present, nearly indistinguishable from the tangles (of memory) that support and protect it. Later, laid bare by some seasonal trigger, the site will take me by surprise, again (and again) (see Figure 4.1.1).

"Galvez Sentinel," first spotted in 1998, and drawn in 1999 (see Figure 2.4.4a and b), still stands, replaced, refurbished. "Bayview Curve Shrine," first spotted in 1998, keeps company with a "Real Estate For Sale" sign (see Figure 2.4.5). A territory in transition, the site will soon change hands--someone, something *else* will soon take possession of the ground. In February 2002, the site will be paved (over) with asphalt, a driveway winding its way into the woods.

"Mariner's Shrine," first spotted in 1998, is still there, in the tree, in the water: the gaping hole has grown wider as the broken teeth of the wood hull rots away. In February 2002, five months from now, a carcass marks the place where I stand (Figure 4.3.2).

Figure 4.3.2: Photo: LA-42 Mariner's Shrine Carcass, 2002

Traveling three miles farther east on LA-42, on a relatively straight stretch of pavement on the north side of the road, at the tree line, well back from the ditch near a dirt driveway, is a "new" previously undocumented shrine. I park the car and approach the site. The tall grass is parted from the edge of the road to the site, what could be the trail of some four-legged animal attempting to cross the road (Clifton; United States, Dept. of Trans., FHA, *Critter Crossing*), or a biped's path to the site. I follow the path in the grass across the ditch. I encounter no animals. The trail leads me to a clearing, leaves me standing on the edge of the taller grass and the oval of shorter grass, face-to-face with the five foot tall wood cross made of four-by-four inch lumber, painted white, the ends mitered. The cross is nearly my own height, is of human proportion: the skeletal remains of an upright figure, arms

outstretched at hard right angles to the vertical body. The stance keeps a certain balance, maintains a perpendicular and parallel relationship to the horizontal earth. Still facing the shrine, my back to the road, I take this position, mirror the thing on the side of the road. How hard could it be to maintain this position in an upright living body?

I place my feet firmly together, tightly clasp my thighs and knees together, stomach muscles contracted, gluteus down, spine elongated, chin up, jaw relaxed, shoulders rolled to the back, the chest open (inhale, exhale and open, inhale, exhale and open), arms extended (inhale, exhale and extend, extend) out to the sides. The position is familiar, comfortable at first--except for the lower half of my body. *Jesus!* Even ballerinas and modern dancers in a similar position maintain a *turn-out* of the pelvis, thighs, and knees, heels and balls of the feet pushed into the ground, toes pointed *out* toward the shoulders. Holding, holding this lock-kneed, thighs pressed together, feet pointing forward stance is just not *right*! Holding, holding this cross position (the "center" of the cross located where the horizontal and the vertical pieces meet), brings the center of gravity, the center of energy, up to the chest, the heart: an open gushing center? Hold, hold the position, heart gushing sobbing emptying out onto the ground--no tears just this gushing glut of I don't know what.

Attempt the reverse, reverse the energy flow, pull, pull from that center, the heart, draw *in* to maintain the cross position. Hold, hold, hold upright drawing energy in through the heart from all around, a sucking sensation, a long continuous breath in, a last gasp, drawing breath, a sucking hole, the maw drawing in energy trying to stay upright?

Locked knees--with closed thighs and pelvis--closes off *chi* in ones' body. *Chi*, the dancers' (and other disciplined performers') center of energy and gravity, is located in the lower torso (behind the belly button, what the Navajo call the "marriage basket"). *Chi* is the

center of both give and take, inhale and exhale: maintains balance but also always already positions the body to *move*. Hold, hold, shoulders strain, arms ache (inhale, exhale, open and extend), knees weak, lower body becoming numb fucking numb. This deadly immovable cross position, the center of energy in the chest, hold, hold, hold, open, open, open, draws no energy from the earth but strains impossibly to be away, away, away. Hold, hold, hold the position, *this is not working*! This stance, this mirror, is not vital, not *for* me. Traffic rushes by. An occasional visitor mows the grass, picks up trash. Flesh falls away. The skeleton just wants to fall down.

On my knees, facing the base of the cross, facing a coffee can submerged in the ground. For alms? alms for the poor? A carnival of images parades through my mind:

A blind crippled beggar wrapped in dirty blankets;
A war veteran with no legs on a rolling cart;
A veteran street performer tap dancing in a doorway;
A tin can on the curb, a few coins in the bottom.

Dark wood and stained glass windows;
The Stations of the Cross;
A plate passing through the pews put your dues,
Your alms, in the collection plate.

Be embarrassed at the heavy clank,
The sound of coins not paper,
Let the plate go by.
Put coins in the can.

No. This coffee can is not for collection, not a place for visitors to offer a coin, a stone, a flower, a gob of spit or drop of sweat to say "I hope this helps" or "Please" or "Thank you" or "I was here." This can is filled with cement, permanently fixing the feet of the cross in stone. This cross is not meant to fall down. One day, however, the cement will crumble, become sand and grit and dust.

I collapse, chest and face in the grass, smelling, breathing glorious dirt, my arms outstretched, hands clutching, crushing blades of grass. Having fallen down, have I failed? Or am I now some sort of supplicant, an initiate? Certainly a postulant, a petitioner, a probationary candidate. Now what? When is this visit over? When am I dismissed? And to where? I crawl to edge of the path, stand with difficulty, turn my back to the site, and walk away. Behind me, the grass in front of the cross is deeply matted, torn up in places: I have left an impression, but do not take this into account for some time.

I do wonder, however, what it is that makes me so intensely interested in this site, feel called by it and willing to engage this cross, and yet feel so "foreign" to it, and so reluctant to touch it. How is it that, in acknowledging its presence by way of attempting to socially interact with it, I feel I have violated some code, feel as if I am "trespassing" by being in the shrine's space? Beyond recognizing that it is not *for* me, have I also been rebuked? Yet again, how is it that I feel as if I *have* adhered to yet another code (a code partially embedded in the first?) by not actually touching the shrine itself: I did not feel *called* to touch it. I remember that I am in a primarily Catholic region of southeast Louisiana, a region surrounded by an otherwise largely Protestant nation: because the cross is "plain," i.e. without an inscription and with minimal "adornment?" (and so neatly trim), am I pragmatically picking up what Lozano calls an Anglo American Protestant code that guarantees the "cultural right to be 'left alone,' . . . in a private niche, a personal bubble, even when being in a public place" (277)? Perhaps the groomed ground surrounding the cross was a "no trespassing" zone—like a mowed lawn on private property? If so, well then, "excuse me," I am not certain I received explicit permission to enter "the spatial barriers that protect the perimeter of that physical property" (Lozano 277). I have, perhaps, misread the

rules of interaction. I may have also broken through the portiere, the veil of grace that shields the sites from the *hard* look, have perhaps begun to make visible the codes that make possible the *officially sanctioned* (Anglo-American Protestant) policy of "look the other way."

In September of 2001, "Enshrined in Cement" is decorated with a bright pink bow and pink plastic flowers. Five months later, the cross will be decorated with a multicolored plastic floral bouquet, the ground around the shrine mowed again, the encroaching foliage neatly trimmed back for several feet. I do not cross the ditch again, path in the grass or no: I leave the invisible fourth wall in place.

On September 22, 2001, I am relieved to be back in the car--secure in my own protective (air conditioned, bug-free, out-of-the-sun) bubble--I drive on. Just a few miles east of Springfield on LA-22, I realize I have either passed "Matthew's Cross" or it is gone. There is, however, another "new" previously undocumented shrine, there on the south side of the road about ten feet from the road and the ditch. Standing again on the edge of the road, I see no path, no mowed area around the assemblage of stuff on the ground and in the trees. I pick my way through the grass, an arbitrary diagonal walk from the road to the site.

There, screwed into a tree, are two hand-made signs, one above the other. The twelve-inch square plywood sign, inscribed in black hand-painted script, reads (pleads? commands?) "O Lord Receive My Soul." Above this is a larger gray metal sign; scratched into the metal is something I cannot read: an empty sign? Next to this, wired to another tree about twelve inches from the ground, is a medium sized wood cross. The cross is painted white and inscribed with what looks like thin black magic marker. The inscription is partially covered by a huge red velvet bow: "… NOT FORGOTTEN." This partiality draws

me in, draws me to my knees. I read "ANDREA PRICE" and "3/82 - 6/01." A small brown-toned plastic-covered image of a long-haired, white robed, olive-skinned Jesus is wedged between the cross and the bow: a holy card the like of which I have not seen since my days trolling the Catholic Store with my milk money, searching for pretty pictures of Mary to trade during Daily Mass and in the parking lot during recess. Jesus' head and shoulders are at a 3/4 turn, his gaze directed at something up the road, beyond the frame. Attached to the tree above the cross is a large yellow and purple flower arrangement mounted on what might be florist foam. Was Andrea a student at LSU? The school colors *are* yellow and purple. The bottom of the vertical cross-piece is carved into a point, pointing down, suspended over the roots of the tree.

I run my hands over the blades of grass around the base of the tree, parting them and looking for a hole in the ground; perhaps the cross was moved from the ground to the tree. No hole. Perhaps the ground was too hard, or too knurled with roots, to pierce the ground, to mark the desired spot. My hands caress the roots of the tree, find the trunk: the signs and the cross partially cover large gashes in the trunks of the trees. I reach my hand into the wound, my fingers come away tipped with black and amber sap. I do not doubt that sometime during the month of June, 2001, Andrea Price was in the vehicle that created these wounds. I believe that it was here that Andrea Price met the circumstances of her death. I pull the sap from my fingers, roll it in a ball, and leave it at the base of the shrine: an offering.

On this trip to Andrea Price's shrine, still caught up in a complex of codes, I do not push aside the red velvet bow to read the hidden inscription. Five months later, I will; my friend catches me paradoxically "unaware" (Figure 4.3.3).

On September 22, 2001, kneeling at the base of Andrea Price's shrine, I receive a gift, an exchange of offering for insight: when I stand up, I see that my knees have left a deep impression in the dirt, have left rounded, flattened places in the grass. A phrase from my days as a Brownie and a Girl Scout drifts through my mind--something about "leaving only footprints?" ("Eight Basic Skills")--or maybe something more recent, a phrase inscribed into memory from treks to various protected wildlife areas and the signs along the trails, "Take only memories, leave only footprints" (Leyden), or was it "Take only *photographs*, leave only footprints" (Environmental Planning)?

Figure 4.3.3: Photo: LA-42: Andrea Price: "Gone But . . .," 2002
(Photo courtesy of Timothy Berla)

In a flash I realize that this "leave no trace" philosophy and "sight-seeing" mandate has guided much of my previous behavior at the shrines, has framed my reluctance to touch or disturb the sites in any way--as if the side of the road is some natural environment, as if these places are some "thing" occurring in nature? Shrine-builders have said otherwise, refuse to accept death on the road as a "natural" consequence of driving, so the Code of the Conscientious Ecotourist does not apply. An alternative perspective, on the ground in direct relationship with certain specific sites, allows me to "see" and "receive" differently, to give and take *something*: a reciprocity that makes it impossible for me to *leave no trace*. The Brownie and Girl Scout Code loosens its hold, loses its force.

Continuing east on LA-22 through Pontchatoula, east of the main channel of the Tangipohoa River, I cross an old cement bridge. On this day in September, 2001, there are no shrines here. However, in February 2002, there will be two "new," previously undocumented shrines on this bridge. There and there, in the middle of the old cement guardrail, will be a large wreath of plain white Styrofoam attached to the railing with a thin-gauge craft-type wire. The wreath will be decorated with a single long strand of large white beads draped over the top and one large artificial sunflower. Approximately fifteen feet farther east will be a huge (two feet across) red, white, and blue bow attached to the railing with barbed wire.

On a windy day in February, 2002, the four-foot long ribbons blow across the road. My friend takes a picture. The, image, first popping open on my computer screen from an emailed file attachment**,** startled me, has left an impression on me: his "XX" *(dos Equis)* T-shirt is reflected in the side mirror, performs for me a punctum--a doubling of *chi*? My friend captures an image of the shrines, catches both of us (all of us?) by surprise (Figure 4.3.4):

Figure 4.3.4: Photo: LA-22: Double on Bridge, 2002
(Photo courtesy of Timothy Berla)

Traveling on toward Mandeville, just east of the "T" intersection with LA-445, the "Don Reynolds" shrine site, first spotted in the Fall of 1998, has (been) moved. The cross, once planted in the dirt on the far slope of the ditch, has been wired to a chain-link fence between the ditch and the woods: the bottom of the vertical is ragged and broken, rotted. The inscription, "DON," once completely filled in with black magic marker, is barely visible. "REYNOLDS," once outlined in black, has faded away, is only readable from memory (and field notes and drawings, see Figure 2.4.7). The little winged cherub, once dangling from a hole drilled into one of the arms of the cross, is gone.

Driving about a mile farther (1/4 mile east of the Mandeville City Limit sign), across the street from a new shopping complex, there soon will be a new shrine site. The medium-sized white-painted wood cross will stand in a swath of tall grasses in the middle of a sloping ditch near the tree-line on the north side of the road. In February of 2002, the cross will be

decorated with faded silk purple flowers and red roses, straw baby's breath, and a white satin ribbon. The center of the floral arrangement will be draped with bright and shiny blue, green, and purple (Mardi-Gras?) beads.

Just a quarter mile to the east in the ditch close to the road, the "Melvin Jones" shrine, first documented in 1999--"In Loving Memory," "1963 TO 11/27/1998"--has been recently visited. On this day in September, 2001, a large spray of white fabric daisies and small plastic purple flowers have been attached to the center of the cross. Five months from now, the flowers will remain, faded, the paint will be peeling, and the inscription will be partially chipped away.

Just down the road, the "Louis McBride" shrine site, first spotted in 1998, and drawn in 1999 (see Figure 2.4.8), continues to monitor traffic. However, the grass is tall, and the cross and inscription are dulled and faded. In February, 2002, the grass around the base of the cross will be cut short, the cross and inscription will have been recently repainted, and the cross will sport a large red velvet bow.

I turn around, intent on driving back to Baton Rouge. Exhausted, I let the shrines slide by in my peripheral vision. No longer seeking "Matthew's Cross," his shrine catches me by surprise: I catch a glimpse of it in the passenger side mirror, behind the guardrail on the north side of the road just the other side of one of the Tickfaw River bridges. I turn around (once again) and return to the shrine site.

The pretty plants that had grown around the cross, the vines entwined and climbing the base that I had so enjoyed drawing in the spring of 1999 (see Figure 2.4.6), are dead. Beer cans and fast food wrappers are strewn around the cross and down the embankment toward the river. The once-blue rosary is a study in decay: the plastic beads are yellowing,

the blackened rotting string ready(ing) to break. The cherub head burned into the wood at the top of the vertical cross-piece maintains a watchful eye. I find the site interesting, but feel slightly disappointed. I turn my back to the site and half sit on the edge of the steel guardrail.

The angel's stare burns two holes in the back of my skull, opens my eyes. There, directly across from Matthew's shrine, is yet another "new," previously undocumented shrine. The large grapevine wreath is decorated with dark blue ribbon, red fabric roses, white plastic daisies, and deep green faux foliage. Tucked into the wreath is a very small (18 inch tall) wood cross, inscribed in black magic marker: on the horizontal is "3-13-2001," and on the vertical is "6/1/1992" and "JONATHON PURYLE." The occasional vehicle crossing the bridge passes between the guardrails--now obscuring, now revealing--the shrine, leaving the ribbons fluttering in its wake.

The angel's stare burns two holes in the back of my skull, opens my ears. Growing and fading sounds (the whine of an engine, the hum of tires on pavement, the belch of exhaust), interrupt the sound of children screaming with laughter ("Hey Butthead" and "You Goofball! Stop it!"), playing in the river, passing under the bridge, fading away. I imagine two boys (and maybe a girl) floating down the river in giant black inner tubes--giant truck tire inner tubes. Have I stumbled upon *chi* in the external world? The "Jonathon Puryle" shrine assemblage is wired to the guardrail facing the road. The shrine's direct address to passers-by may make "Matthew" *(my Matthew)* easier to find.

Weathering, Difference

Some stuff "weathers" better than others.
Some stuff *means* to "weather."
Take, for instance,
The shell of an armadillo or turtle,

The bones, feathers, fur of some delicate other,
The skull atop the skeletal remains of some biped.
    The hard white bones hold flesh and sinew,
    Organs and rivers of blood,
    In various, pose-able positions.

Some stuff, the little detailed stuff,
Weathers differrently.
Take, for instance,
The irreplaceable particulars.
Rain-washed and sun-soaked,
They are washed away or left to rot, rust, or dry up and blow away.
Weathering difference differently,
Leaving what, where?
    A cross guarded by steel
        Accumulating
        Companions, images, sounds.
    A cross planted in cement
        Resisting
        Gravity, removal, resurrection.
    A cross nailed to a tree
        Weathering

Sap seeps from the wound.
The tree attempts to heal itself.

4.4: Transitions and Thresholds: Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Statesboro, Georgia, March 2001 - April 2003

On my first road trip from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to Statesboro, Georgia, in March of 2001, I noted the palm trees edging the interstate (I-10) along the southern coast, the rolling hills of lush foliage (kudzu will climb over almost *everything* in the summer) as the road wended north (I-65) to higher elevations, wide rivers and slow-moving streams, and east (I-85, US-80) across and through acres and acres of new-growth pine forest and wood-processing plants (paper and lumber), and acres and acres of rural commercial agricultural land (corn, cotton, tobacco, peaches, pecans). I also noted along interstate and US highways, and state and local roads (as you might suspect), evidence of animals trying to cross the road (both domestic and wild), and roadside shrines. Thus began my third regional exploration of

roadside shrines in the United States, and my third (radically) extended commute: in June of 2002 I packed up and moved from Baton Rouge to Statesboro, reversing my commute and (radically) de-centering my route (once again) (Figure 4.4.1).

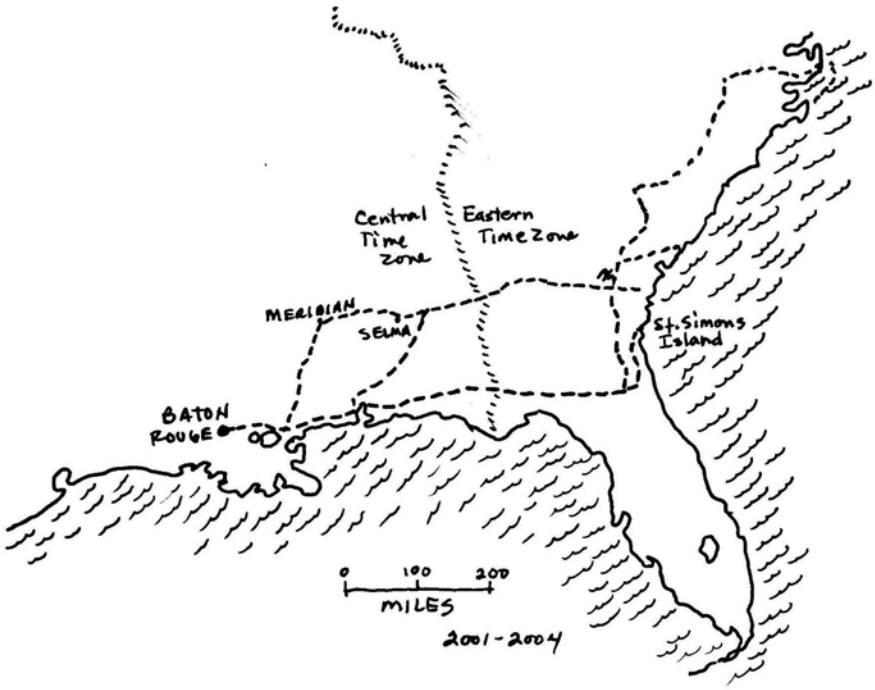


Figure 4.4.1: Map: Southern United States Survey Routes, 2001-2003

Early on during these transitions I also began to experiment with various techniques of visual documentation, first with the use of (many, many) "disposable" cameras and then with the use of a Sony Cyber-shot digital camera. Some of those images are represented on the following pages. Later, during yet another road trip (commute/pilgrimage), I begin to experiment with vocal/aural documentation. In February of 2003 there happened to be sitting in the passenger seat, along with my road maps, field journals, and my prospectus, a small hand-held tape recorder. After leaving a particularly unsettling scene, I decided to tape record rather than write my field notes. Thus began an "accidental" field experiment. I narrated my "shrine-spotting" and "ritual visitation" activities during an entire fifteen-

thousand mile, week-long round trip from Statesboro to Baton Rouge, some of which appears later in this chapter.

4.4.1: Posterns: Statesboro, Georgia to Montgomery, Alabama, October 14, 2001

On Sunday, October 14, 2001, I left Georgia early in the morning for my return trip to Baton Rouge and LSU, retracing my route on this, my third, road trip to visit the small university town of Statesboro, home of Georgia Southern University and *my love*. Along the way, I stopped and introduced myself to the roadside shrines I had passed previously, and began to make my acquaintance with certain service station/convenience store clerks along the way. While the following narrative begins and returns to October 14, 2001, the narrator/researcher travels back and forth in time, describing what *is* there, what *was* there, and what *will be* there on this segment of the route. The map below (Figure 4.4.2) indicates the entire US-80/GA-96 survey route from the eastern terminus of US-80 at the Georgia coast to Montgomery, Alabama, including several connectors between US-80 and I-16, and the location of all roadside shrines on that route visited and/or otherwise documented between the spring of 2001 to the summer of 2003.

Statesboro, known affectionately as "The 'Boro" by some contemporary residents ("Best Bank"), was made infamous in 1904 by a particularly brutal mob lynching, and burning, of two black men (Finkleman), and again in the 1930s and 40s by the song "Statesboro Blues," written in 1928 by singer-songwriter Blind Willie McTell ("Blind Willie"). Statesboro was also famous during the 1950s and 60s as a prime tourist destination due to its unique location at the crossroads of two major US highways: US-301 and US-80 (Martin). US-301 connected the north Atlantic coast in Maine with the south Atlantic coast in Florida, and US-80 connected the east Atlantic coast in Georgia with the west Pacific coast

in California (Figure 4.4.3). Indeed, US-80 continues to exist primarily in its original contiguous form, although it begins to break up somewhat as it crosses Texas.

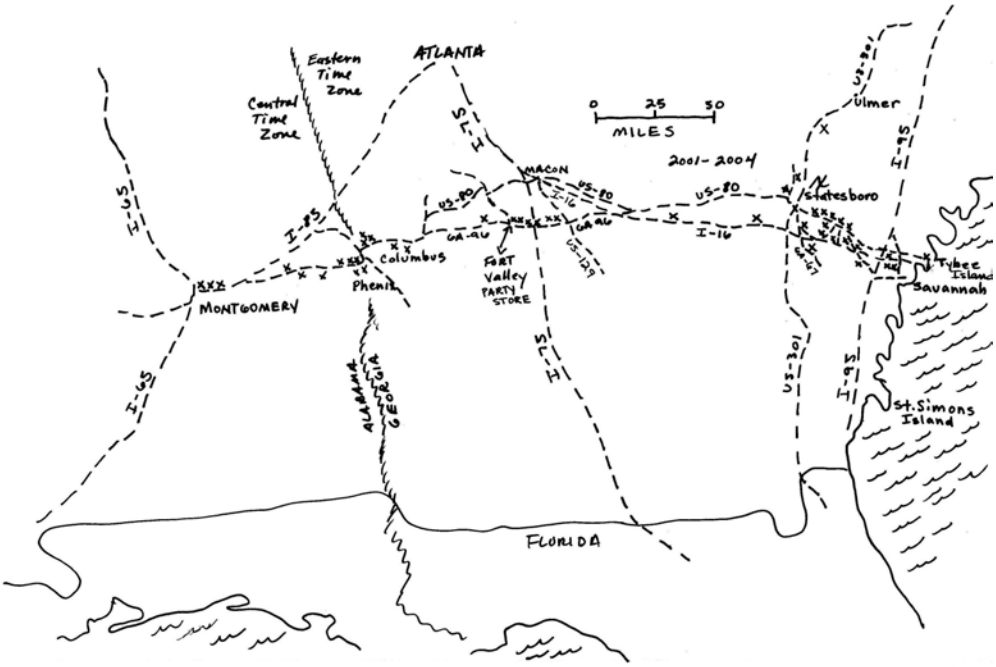


Figure 4.4.2: Map: US-80: Tybee Island, Georgia to Montgomery, Alabama Survey Routes with Shrine Sites, 2001-2003

Figure 4.4.3: Photo: GA US-80: Terminus at Tybee Island, Georgia 2004

US-80 travels west by northwest from Statesboro through to the state capitol of Macon, then takes a slight southwest turn before it meets up with GA-96 west of Butler in "Peach County." During previous and subsequent surveys of that route, there are no roadside shrines between Statesboro and Macon. However, the alternate and recommended route between Statesboro and Montgomery, Alabama, according to MapQuest.com, is I-16 west by northwest to GA-96, then due west along GA-96 until it meets up with US-80 just west of Peach County, Georgia. This is the route I usually take.

On Sunday, October 14, 2001, traveling west on I-16, I *see* no roadside shrines. However, later on April 7, 2002, I will spot a shrine (which seems to have been there all along) on a service drive parallel with the westbound lane of the interstate, and make a detour from *my route.* I will take the Dudley exit and make the first left onto Whipple Crossing (the I-16 service drive). There, facing the piney woods, located on the wide grassy ditch of the service drive--and on the wire fence separating the I-16 public right-of-way--is what I have come to call the "In the Line of Duty" shrine. The tall heavy iron cross is painted white and finished at the top with a decorative iron finial. At the base of the cross is a "garden" of faded fabric flowers: a red (Christmas?) poinsettia and a white (Easter?) lily in a green cone with lavender curly ribbon. Wired to the fence is a brass plaque etched in black:

Killed in the Line of Duty
Kyle W. Dinkheller
June 18, 1975 - January 12, 1998

Above the plaque, attached to the fence post with a green pipe-cleaner, is a small US flag. On June 11, 2003, the finial top of the cross will be broken off, gone. A wide area around the site will be mowed and new, living, blooming plants will be planted in the ground around the base of the cross. The brass plaque will be nearly impossible to read, the flag in

tatters. Wedged between the fence pole and the flag will be a business card, "Clayton County Sheriff, Deputy Patrick McClellan." In the margins of my field notes are hasty scribbles about dragonflies fluttering around the site as I visit.

Figure 4.4.4: Photo: GA Whipple Crossing: Killed in the Line of Duty: Business Card

On October 14, 2001, I do not detour, but make the ninety-mile drive through the gently rolling hills of central Georgia to the GA-96 exit. Traveling west, GA-96 is a two-lane stretch of gently curving road lined alternately by trees (both straight rows of newly planted pine and old-growth woods) and crop land. The rural landscape is interrupted now and then by small towns and the occasional service station/convenience store. Ten miles or

so from the I-16 interchange, GA-96 intersects with Old Hawkinsville Road, which is also US-129 and US-23. US-23 was the "old" Michigan to Florida route before the advent of I-75, both of which connect the southern Atlantic coast with the Straight of Mackinaw where two of the Great Lakes, Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, meet. In the Spring of 2001, the Georgia intersection was a four-way stop, and on the northwest corner had a been a single medium-sized cross, painted white, with multi-colored plastic flowers hung from the center. On this day in the Fall of 2001, the same intersection sports a new traffic light and two medium-sized crosses on the northwest corner. One cross had a straw wreath hanging from the center, the other a small bouquet of daisies. In January 2002, both crosses will be gone.

Traveling another fifteen miles west, the two-lane road becomes an overpass as it crosses over I-75. I briefly consider (every time I pass this way) turning onto the I-75 north entrance ramp: traveling at a fast clip, only making necessary "pit stops," I could be back in Michigan in twelve hours. Instead, I continue west on GA-96 through the cluster of fast food restaurants, hotel/motels, and service stations, the type of complexes which have cropped up around these interchanges since the construction of the interstate system began (Lewis). Free of the congestion and just east of the small town of Reynolds, at the bottom of a dip in the road, is the "Tiny in Culvert" shine. The tiny plastic lattice cross is placed in the dirt just above a corrugated metal culvert that crosses a dirt two-track lane running into the dense woods. The cross is decorated at the center with a cluster of tiny, faded red flowers. My mental archive calls me back to Louisiana: I am reminded of the "OUR FRIEND" and "WE LOVE YOU" crosses at the weigh station shrine on LA US-61 (see section 2.4.3), and I wonder if that site is still there. Later, in 2003 when the road construction crew widens this stretch of GA-96 in Peach County, the "Tiny in Culvert" shrine will be gone.

Traveling a few miles farther west, at the "T" intersection with an unmarked two-lane road, there, there, there, and there on the far side of the ditch, are four white crosses lined up in a row, facing the intersection, their backs to the tree line. The crosses are surrounded by various and sundry signs: a red and white "Stop" sign, a black and brass historic marker, and a huge black and yellow two-way arrow flanked by two black and yellow striped "Danger" signs (Figure 4.4.5).

Figure 4.4.5: Photo: GA-96: End of the Road? 2001

Despite these signs, or perhaps to spite them, I dare to park the car on the side of the road to visit the site. All the other roadside signs direct me elsewhere, however I take my cue from the oppositional positioning of the crosses directly behind the two way arrow and "Danger" signs, positioned as if the road at the "T" intersection continued on across GA-96 to the sites. I step around the two-way arrows and see yet another sign nailed to a tree just east of the crosses. Two red arrows on a white background point in the same direction,

toward the shrines. Approaching the sign, I read: "This Way to the Corn Maze." This sign points both to the shrines and elsewhere, well beyond this site (Figure 4.4.6).

Figure 4.4.6: Photo: GA-96: This Way to the Corn Maze, 2001

The four crosses are well back from the edge of the pavement and up the far embankment of the wide, grassy ditch near a utility pole. They are similar in size, approximately two feet tall and made of two-by-fours. The horizontal and vertical pieces have been carved to fit snug together (I think, like Lincoln Logs). They are painted white, the paint is peeling, and at the base of each cross is a fabric and plastic bouquet of once-yellow daisies, faded to a bluish (almost white) light gray. Each cross is inscribed in a language I have not yet learned. I do, however, recognize it as a Romance language.

Although all four crosses share similar characteristics, one stands out. The anomalous cross has additional fabric flowers stuck in the ground at the base--roses and peonies bunched next to the (many many bouquets of) daisies, which are organized in a

circular pattern in front of the cross. A pink bouquet is stuck in the ground approximately two feet in front of the cross. The newest addition to the site, a large circle of flowers with the pink bunch, are much less faded than the flowers at the base of the other crosses. Additional inscriptions on the cross also make it stand out from the others, as well as the tin strip of metal which is screwed into the top of the vertical cross-piece. Scratched into the surface of the metal plate is *"INRI."* The tin strip makes the cross taller than its companions.

On October 14, 2001, I kneel in front of each cross, taking note of the inscriptions, writing down the letters of this language that I think I cannot read. The inscriptions have been driven into the wood with a pointed instrument (a Philips-head screwdriver?); a series of star-shaped indents have pierced through the painted surface. This detail, the immediacy of these tiny wounds, do not make me dream but keep me intensely focused there, right there. Only later, in the writing (this writing), will the tiny star-shaped indents remind me of the tiny embers still burning on the panes of Barthes's text (*Camera Lucida* 49)--the two (the many) images never fully develop, but are now forever in conversation.

On October 14, 2001, I transcribe each cross from west to east, or left to right if facing the crosses, or from stage right to stage left if crouching behind the crosses facing the road, trying to see from "their" point of view (Figure 4.4.7). The inscriptions, having migrated from each cross to a yellow pad of paper (which rode around in my passenger seat for another two years and thousands of miles), to my typed-up and translated field notes (which live on my hard drive, on disk, and on a page in a binder for another year), are represented here (beginning yet another staging, another ritual, another journey, another translation). The following are from transcribed field notes:

Figure 4.4.7: Photo: GA-96: Migrant Worker Shrines: From Their Point of View, 2001

Cross #1: western-most, up-stage right

INRI
Serado
Fallecio EL 1[10] DeMarzo Del 94
Desca
nseen
Paz

Cross #2: up-stage right of center

I'm still not sure if the inscription is for "Lula" or "Luis": I apologize if I have made a mistake, for I mean no disrespect.

INRI
Lula
Fallecio EL 1[10] DeMarzo
Del 94
Desca
nseen
Paz

Cross #3: up-stage left of center

Something, perhaps the additional weight of the metal plate, has hastened the fall of this cross (I think "Fallecio" means "fallen"); it is tilting toward the ground, leaning into its stage left mate "Davidia." I reach out for the cross, stand it upright in order to read it. There is a thin wood stick tied to the back of the vertical: someone has previously done the same, has tried to keep the figure upright. I leave the cross standing as a gesture of communal respect.

(on the metal plate screwed to the top) INRI

J Luis
Castro
Juares
Fallecio el dig 1 de Mar Del 94
ala edud de 18 Anos
Recue
rda de
su her
manoy
amigo
descan

Cross #4: eastern-most, stage left

The paint has so peeled away that I cannot make out the inscription with my eyes, but must read it some other way: an indented, reverse Braille? I choose Blind Willie McTell, who could read and write music in Braille, as my guide, my postillion. I reach out for the cross, run my fingers along the surface. More paint falls away: a gentle wind picks up, scatters the chips. A ladybug lands on my fingers: I take this as a blessing.

INRI
Davidia
Fallec EL 1^{10} Mar Del 94
Desca
nseen
Paz

Later, with the help of a friend (*my love*) and the *Spanish*/English dictionary, my field notes are translated into English:

Fallecido / deceased
Fallecio EL 1^{10} De Marzo Del 94 / Deceased on 1 March 1994
Fallecio el dig 1 de Mar Del 94 / Deceased on the first of March 1994

Desca nseen Paz / Rest in Peace
The longer inscription on Cross #3:
ala edud de 18 Anos / at the age of 18 Years
Recuerda de su her man oy amigo / Remembered by his brother and friend

I will remember you. I promise.

On April 7, 2002, I stop for another visit. J. Luis's cross has toppled over, an "X" shape in relation to the earth, *chi* in relationship with time and gravity? (Figure 4.4.8)

Figure 4.4.8: Photo: GA-96: Migrant Worker Shrines: *Chi,* 2002

On this visit, I leave the site as is, that is except for the photograph I take and my own footprints, which leave temporary impressions in the tall grass. As I leave the scene and begin to revisit the site in my mind, and later reconstruct the rituals enacted there, here in my writing, I become aware that I am learning some *other* language. I am being made aware of

the various languages (translations, travels, migrations, performances, rituals, photographs) I have gathered along the way. I also wonder where these workers "hailed" from: are J. Luis Castro and his brother *from* Juarez?

In the Fall of 2001, Ronnie #1 at the Citgo/Fort Valley Party Store just down the road (I later find out that there are three Ronnies working there), says it was "four Mexicans who got killed [there] all at the same time . . . a pick-up crash . . . they used to live around here, but they moved [on]. . . . They used to work for the big peach farmer near here." Ronnie also said that there used to be a lot of them (roadside crosses) all up and down the road, but she didn't know where they had gone (Ronnie #1).

Ronnie's account reminds me of a story I heard about roadside shrines from Dave, long-time resident of a small (agricultural) town in western Michigan: "Oh, those little crosses on the side of the road? Yeah, we've seen them forever. . . . just figured it was migrant workers. We're used to that, don't take much notice."

In November of 2002, I pass by the site again, this time in a rush to get to New Orleans for the National Communication Association's Annual Convention, and note that in front of each cross is a large bunch of bright yellow flowers. I stop at the store (once again) on my return trip to inquire about the site, and the clerk--a young man who didn't want to give me his name--told me that the migrant workers were back, that they had "been away" for a few years, but that "at least one of them" must have come back because somebody he knew, who worked at the peach farm, had mentioned the workers' return and the changes at the shrine (Clerk).

In February 2003, on the way to Baton Rouge and LSU to defend my dissertation prospectus, I do stop and stay awhile. I can see, from the edge of the road, new living plants

in the ground between each of the crosses, and two more plants farther down stage, closer to the road--the bright yellow mums I had seen the year before survived the winter and will bloom again. In front of J. Luis' toppled cross, sharing the same (widened) hole in the ground, is another new cross, taller than the rest. A layering of signs mark and re-mark *other* times, *many* places (a brother's death and a brother's return):

Figure 4.4.9: Photo: GA-96: Migrant Worker Shrine: *Chi* in Time and Gravity, Place and Memory, 2003

At the base of Jose Luis's cross is a pot of white poinsettias with red centers flanked on either side by large bunches of pink-tipped white peonies. I cross the ditch, approach the site and encounter a previously lighted red candle in a tall glass jar, the kind of "saint" candle I have seen in grocery stores in Louisiana and Georgia. The candle is centered in front of the four crosses and seems to mark the threshold of the ritual space I desire to enter. What to do? I light the candle. I cross the threshold. However, once "inside" the space, I become

confused. Several yards to the east and just behind the row of crosses, piled in front of the utility pole, are the faded bunches of daisies, roses, the pink bouquet, and several large empty black plastic plant containers. I am no longer sure where "center" is, no longer certain where the shrine (the ritual space/stage) begins or ends. Later, I buy a "saint" candle of my own and situate it in my writing space, both of which shift from time to time.

On October 14, 2001, on the short drive between the "Migrant Worker Shrine" and the Citgo/Fort Valley Party Store, there are no other roadside shrines. However, in February of 2003, there will be. I will pull out onto GA-96 after visiting with the four crosses at the "T" intersection and almost immediately encounter, on the same side (the north side) of the road, a large Styrofoam cross completely covered with white fabric flowers. I will turn around and park the car on the side of the road, get out, and investigate the scene.

In February 2003 I stop yet again at the Party Store to inquire about the "Migrant Worker Shrine." Ronnie #3 said she didn't want to talk about *that*, and to come back when one of the other Ronnies were there. She will, however, offer some insight regarding the "new" shrine. Just west of the "Migrant Worker" shrine, a surveyor, a member of the Robinson Paving crew, was killed. His co-workers, who were "real upset," put up the first cross (Ronnie #3).

On that road trip in February, after leaving the scene of the "Surveyor Shrine" I decide to tape record, rather than write down, the details of my visit. The following is an abbreviated transcript of the beginning of that vocal/aural experiment:

> Monday, February 24, on my way to Baton Rouge from Statesboro . . . some new crosses that I want to document (pause, deep sigh, pause) *Jeeze* (pause) well (pause) I stopped at the Mexican Shrines, the four crosses that are migrant workers . . . Just as I was pulling away from there, not even a half mile later, saw a big cross on side of the road and turned around and went back. There were little tiny orange flags all over, placed in the ground, [and] orange marks on . . . the pavement, and it just

> looked so *odd* (pause) it looked *recent* (pause) A great big piece of rubber there from a big tire, I thought it might be from the accident. I went up to the cross, took pictures. [On the cross is a] big wide ribbon, professionally done, red ribbon with gold cursive lettering, said "February 4th." Roses and white satin ribbon and lace [at the center]. A ripped shirt off to the side. And as I was coming back down into the ditch I almost stumbled upon--screamed and got away from it--an Honest-to-God rearview mirror, broken and cracked, which I went back and took pictures of, with me reflected in there (nervous laugh, snort, snort). [stop].
>
> I went to that same party store, the Fort [Valley] Party Store. [The clerk] told me it was a surveyor that got hit by a car. . . . she told me her name was [Ronnie], then she told me that there were three [Ronnies] that worked there--earlier I had talked to another [Ronnie]. I just thought that was pretty creepy (pause) [stop].

What I don't describe on tape are additional details that did "make it" into later write-ups, details that were "captured" in photographs and other meaning-making attempts:

> The original surveyor shrine "scene" (I think "scene of the crime," feel like a crime-scene photographer) was spread out--from *behind* the cross at the tree-line, through the grassy ditch, and all the way *into* the road--in an area approximately twenty to twenty-five feet wide. Slightly behind the cross was a Styrofoam food container, to the east, or stage left, was a tattered blue and creamy-gray plaid shirt. In front of the cross there was a pair of white rubber/latex gloves turned slightly inside-out as if someone had pulled them from their hands and flung them away (coroner or EMT medical equipment?), broken glass and bits and pieces of black plastic (car parts?), a shattered side/rearview mirror (which scared me when I came upon it and saw myself--I shrieked and backed away from it like it was a snake-in-the-grass (a portent?). There was also a wide scattering of tiny orange surveyor flags (placed there in tribute by other members of the survey crew?), and several orange markings (arrows, numbers) on the pavement (police or forensics team marking the scene of the incident?) (Figure 4.4.10).

Two months later, in April of 2003, on yet another road trip to Baton Rouge, I stop at the "Surveyor Shrine" (once again). The original Styrofoam "florist" cross covered in white flowers and lace with the wide red satin ribbon will still be there. Next to it planted in the ground will be a new tall wood cross, painted white, inscribed in large black stenciled letters "PRESTON MONTALVO," on the horizontal and "FEB 4 03" on the vertical. The tiny flags, broken glass and black bits of car parts, the shattered mirror, the rubber tire strip, the

Figure 4.4.10: Photo: GA-96: Surveyor Shrine: Road Markings, 2003

rubber gloves, and the Styrofoam food container will be gone, the ripped shirt, moved to hang on a nearby bush, and the marks on the pavement will remain.

The surveyor team, just a few miles west of where their comrade had died, were mapping the two-lane road in preparation for the construction of the four-lane divided highway (Figure 4.4.11).

A few miles farther west, the road crew, the heavy equipment, and the road construction moves east toward the surveyors, toward the shrines. Now, I am *really* lost: I can no longer figure out where "ritual space" or "ritual time," and my place in it, begins or ends (Figure 4.4.12).

I wonder what will become of the "Surveyor Shrine" when the heavy equipment and the four-lane divided highway comes through, wonder if Preston Montalvo's negotiated

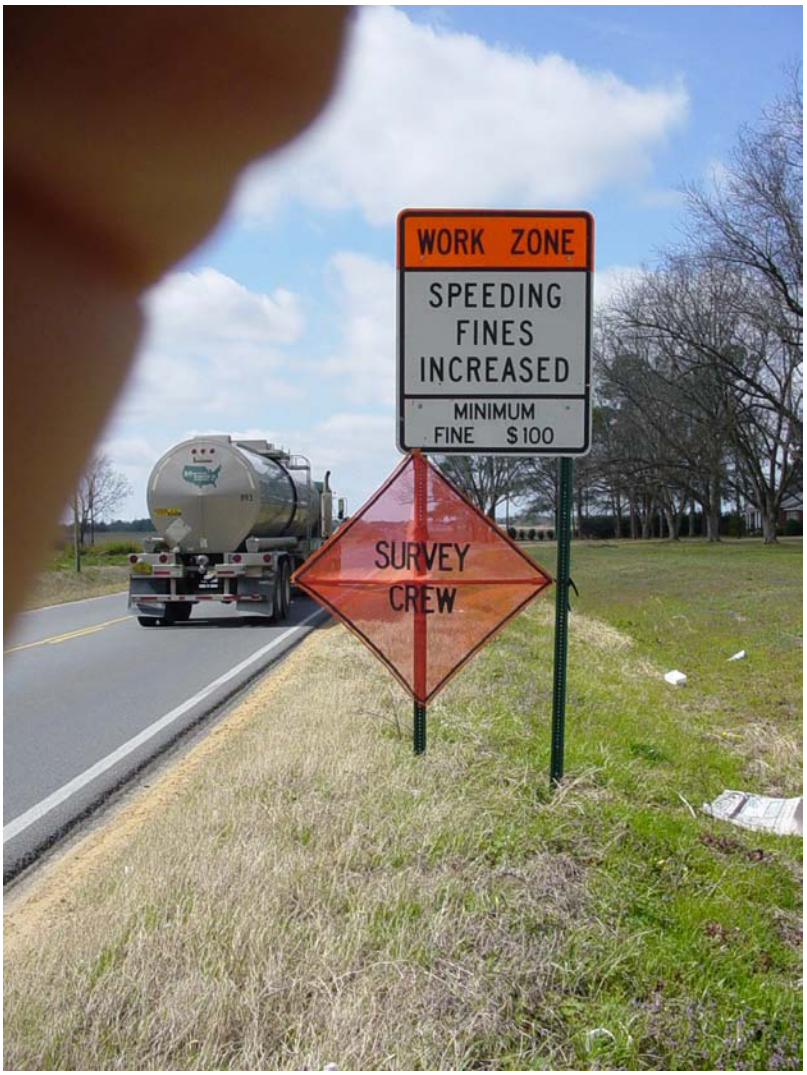


Figure 4.4.11: Photo: GA-96: Surveyor Sign with Tanker, 2003

belongings will still carry weight, if his shrine will be paved over or "spared," and if spared, how far that grace, *that* ritual space will extend: in other words, I wonder what will become of the "Migrant Workers Shrine." Will those crosses share a similar fate to those once scattered along a certain stretch of rural back road in western Michigan?

Dave, who mentioned the "migrant worker crosses" in western Michigan, was talking about the "first" roadside shrine in the area: "Scott's Tree" on the rural tree-lined "Road of the Seven Curves" between Decatur and Lawrence, Michigan, where the popular teen lost his

Figure 4.4.12: Photo: GA-96: Robinson Paving Crew: *Chi* on the Move? 2003

life on July 5, 2000. "Scott's Tree" shrine site, documented in June of 2001, will accumulate flowers, candles, fast food wrappers and "pop" cans (piled behind the tree), holiday wreaths, poems, photos, and two crosses (one just above the large gash on the trunk and another high up in the branches of the tree). In September 2002, Dave's spouse Chriss reports that all the trees [and other markers] along the road except "Scott's" have been torn down to make room for more crops.

On Sunday, October 14, the road construction on GA-96 is much farther west, and the surveyors and construction crew have left their heavy equipment to rest. I continue my travels west past the small town of Butler, where I will encounter no roadside shrines as I travel around Columbus, Georgia, cross over the Chatahoochee River and west into Phenix City, Alabama. However, three months into the future, on another Sunday in April of 2002, I

will encounter two shrines on this long stretch of highway where GA-96 has merged with US-80, and the old two-lane road has been widened to a four-lane divided thoroughfare.

One shrine will be located near Box Springs, Georgia: the small wood cross, painted white, will have a large pine wreath with fabric holly leaves, red and white poinsettias, and a large white bow. It will be located in the median in front of the Box Springs Volunteer Fire Department and a non-denominational Christian church--the only two building for miles and miles. In June 2002, the "Christmas at Box Springs" shrine will be gone.

Another shrine will be located on the east-bound side of the newly-opened four-lane divided highway. Situated approximately fifty feet from the edge of the pavement, "facing" east-bound traffic, the large wood cross will be painted white and inscribed in black stenciled letters, "HANK." Each end of the horizontal "arms" will be black-stenciled, matching images of a flying eagle. The eagles' claws extend as if ready to land on a tree limb, or as if prepared to grab up (perhaps) unsuspecting prey. The area around the cross will be manicured and surrounded by an uncultivated field that stretches to the horizon--something scurries in the scrub. As of April 2003, "Hank's Shrine" still stands.

Just west of "Hank's Shrine," US-80 dumps onto the US-280 bypass which skirts north of Columbus, Georgia, and crosses the Chatahoochee River. Just west of the river, the by pass jogs throgh an interesection and meets US-80 at the Alabama border in Phenix City.

On October 14, 2001, there will be no roadside shrines until much farther west and outside of the Phenix City limits (this is the correct spelling of "Phenix" in Phenix City). However, during the tape-recorded road trip in February 2003, I will be surprised by several shrine sites within the city limits. Below is an edited version of a 2003 tape recorded encounter with one of those shrines. The transcript includes an earlier encounter:

Ambulance Story #1: "Being Chased"

. . . I slowed down cuz I heard--it's a nice day out (meaning my window is rolled down)--and I heard an ambulance come up behind me, and we all pulled over to let the ambulance go around, and sure enough a little while later we were stopped in traffic on the two-lane, they [police officers] routed us around and they [ambulance crew] were just loading people into the ambulances [and I thought of that crash on US-12 in Michigan in '98, with the wreaths on wire stands and the ruts in the grass], and I had the weird impulse to stop and take a picture, which is so (pause) *weird* (pause) sort of (pause) but I also just felt sort of, I just felt (pause) *bad*. I've seen some dead dogs on the side of the road, and . . .

Ambulance Story #2: "Being Caught"

. . . and THEN, in Alabama, right after I do the little jog from 280 onto 80 again going west [through Phenix City], there was *another* ambulance coming up behind me, and as I was pulling over to get out of the way, I'm looking [in the rearview mirror] to make sure that I can get over if I need to, and I'm slowing down and I have my blinkers on, my flashers on, and (pause) there (long pause) two big crosses (pause) like *right* in my face on the side of the road, and it's (pause) *weird* (pause)

Figure 4.4.13: Photo: AL US-80: Two Teens: In My Face, 2003

. . . underneath a Dominos Pizza sign right by Winn Dixie, and that's where I am RIGHT *now* (throat clear), and I'm gonna go take some pictures (sound of car door slamming, then gravel).

. . . It looks like teenagers, it looks (long pause)

. . . At first I thought (long pause, sigh)

. . . At first I thought that the crosses were old but recently decorated, but I don't think that's what it is, I think that they're *recent*, and (long pause)

. . . the crosses look old [because] even though they're painted white (pause)

. . . they have black magic marker all over them, and I think that kids have signed them. I don't know, but I'm assuming they're kids. I've heard that this is [a] kind of (pause) teenage behavior, this practice [of] signing the cross itself [Oppat; Owens] (long pause) [stop].

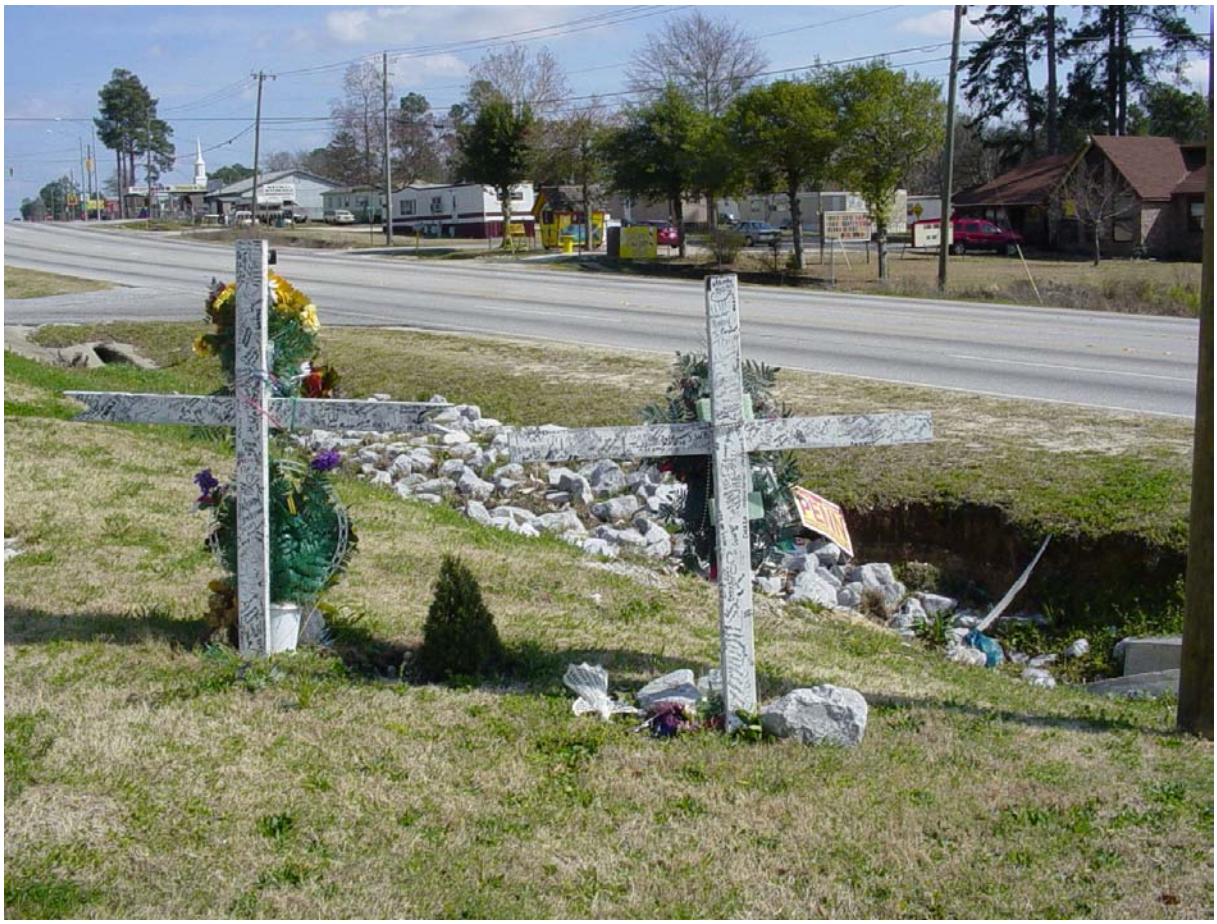


Figure 4.4.14: Photo: AL US-80: Two Teens: Backstage Approach, 2003

I just finished taking pictures of these two crosses, they're made of two-by-fours, they're (pause, inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale, pause, sigh)

. . . the arms are almost as long or as widespread as the vertical is tall

. . . can't tell how much is actually in the ground. One is a girl and one is a boy, as far as I can tell from the names. The [ends of the] boy's (pause)

. . . cross are spiked--not spiked, carved--you'll see from the picture (loud traffic noises). The guy's name is Keith McConnel, the girl's name was Amanda Taylor - [on] one side is her name "Amanda Taylor" and the other side says (sigh)

. . . "Tator Bug" (long pause)

. . . Lots of names, people, [lots of] "I love you." (long pause). [Crouching between the crosses, looking at the ground]. . . a rock and in between they've planted a little tree and [to the side of the tree closer to Amanda's cross] a little angel figure and two tiny bird houses with deer in the sculpture (big sigh) . . . looks like the big rocks came from the rocks at the bottom of the culvert here--not *culvert* but big ditch --and they've picked up those rocks to put at the bases of the crosses so they won't fall over (long pause)

. . . Just every inch of wood on both of these has been signed--mostly in black magic marker - there's one little - Steve's name is in red (pause), hmmmmmmm (pause) [stop].

The boy's has a black rosary hanging from it, which I couldn't see at first from the flowers and the little thing (pause) oh *Jesus*, a little [yellow and black] smiling face--"*Happy Face*" thing-- ughh--(pause) "Premium Balloons. " Oh!! It was an anchor for a [helium] balloon that's (pause, looking up) gone. And the girl's (pause) it doesn't have a rosary it has a some silver Mardi Gras-like beads [and a] little angel [stop].

Figure 4.4.15: Photo: AL US-80: Two Teens: "Tater Bug," 2003

Figure 4.4.16: Photo: AL US-80: Two Teens: "McConnel," 2003

Transcription Notes on Content 5/22/2003
Both crosses have been "autographed" by lots of people, like signing a high school yearbook? The signings "over-write," are written over, the names of the deceased, an assertion of something? a symbiosis of something? The tiny evergreen and the little angel figure and bird houses with the deer figure, painted to look like cottages with a little yard, a rural-domestic magical-realism scene, what Suchy might call a staged side-shadowing of a once-possible future?

Margin Note on Process 5/23/2003
These crosses are *hard.* Traveling back and forth in time and space, here and now, then and then, traveling between dates of death looking for *home?*--on the *road?*--what does *that* mean? Getting close to landing, to "coming home" (to where?), to changing, to leaving something behind, writing myself into something, some *where* (else).

On October 14, 2001, I drive through Phenix, Alabama, enjoying the warm "Indian Summer" day, blessedly oblivious to the future appearance of both the "Surveyor Shrine" site in Georgia and what I have come to call the "Two Teens" shrine in Phenix. Then I come upon a curious site--affectionately called--the "What IS That?" shrine (Figure 4.4.17). Located on US-80 at the intersection with US-27 and AL-169, the curious shape of the signage insisted I stop.

Figure 4.4.17: Photo: AL US-80: What IS That?: Signage, 2001

On one corner of this intersection is a tiny abandoned store-front post office, on another is a sign pointing toward a "U-Cut" Christmas Tree farm, on another is a small field of flowering wild grasses traversed overhead by utility wires, and on the shoulder of the northwest corner of the west-bound lane, is what appears to be, from almost all angles, a Latin cross (with a tin "INRI" sign?) attached to a utility pole (Figure 4.4.18). However, the shrine is actually a "T" cross; the "tin topper" is attached to the utility pole, inscribed with a locator number for the pole itself. The bare wood vertical cross-piece is attached to a rusted iron pipe driven into the ground in front of the utility pole, and the wood cross-bar is nailed

Figure 4.4.18: Photo: AL US-80: What IS That?: With Tin Topper, 2001

to the top of the vertical. On the cross-bar are the remnants of (layers and layers) of paper flyers, pressed together and clinging to the wood underneath steel staples (Figure 4.4.19).

The layered remnants (revenants of past events) invite me to imagine a wide variety announcements, claims, invitations, queries, comments, pleas, and directions: "Garage Sale," "Yard Sale," "Fire Sale," "Estate Sale," "Free Kittens," "Free Puppies," "Fresh Produce,"

“Ice Cream Social,” “It’s a Boy!,” “It’s a Girl!,” “(Smith) Family Reunion,” “Labor Day Picnic,” “Lost Dog,” “Lost Cat,” “Have You Seen Me?,” “Missing Since…,” “Huge Reward,” “Found,” “Looking for a Home,” “Welcome Home (Johnnie),” “Looking for Work?,” “Earn $$$ In Your Spare Time,” “Miracle Weight Loss Program,” “Free Make-Over,” “Apt. for Rent,” ‘Real Estate For Sale,” “The Time is Near,” “Have You Been Saved?,” “Peace,” “Love is the Answer,” “KKK,” “Jesus Saves,” “VOTE Today,” “Are You Insured?,” “Call Today!,” “Lordy, Lordy, Suzie’s Forty!” “Bridal Shower,” “TGIF: BYOB.”

Figure 4.4.19: Photo: AL US-80: What IS That?”: Community Social, 2001

Surely this place is a site of communal interaction, is (as I have imagined it) a negotiable rhetorical space, announcing, contesting, celebrating, enacting the rituals of everyday life, a testament to community, to coming together, to coming apart, getting along, getting by, getting the job done, going on with a wide variety of social goings-on. *Surely*, the “What IS That?” site is (also) a shrine.

On October 14, 2001, there won't be another roadside shrine for twenty miles. However, in April of 2002, there will be. At County Junction 94, just a few miles east of the "What IS That?" on the shoulder of the west-bound lane and parallel with the road, will be a medium-sized wood cross approximately five feet from the pavement on an embankment overlooking a rather steep cattle-grazing hillside. The inscription will read "Rayburn Guy" and "01 16 02." At the base of the cross will be a cluster of pink plastic flowers. In February of 2003, the faded flowers will keep company with a small US flag.

On October 14, approximately twenty-five miles west of Phenix City, is a roadside shrine on the southeast corner of a disjunctive intersection with two rural roads, one coming into US-80 at a 45 degree angle from the southwest, the other a "T" intersection approximately 20 yards east. The cross shares the intersection with a cluster of confusing signs. Behind the cross in the trees are several "Real Estate" signs with arrows pointing in several different directions. Across the street, in the ground and in the trees, are four signs for four different churches, each with arrows pointing in different directions (Figure 4.4.20).

The large, white-painted wood cross, well back from the pavement, "faces" all the intersections. Taking my cues from the cross, I park the car in the grassy ditch well away from the intersection, put on the flashers, and make sure to look all six ways before crossing the road to the shrine. A large wreath of white and purple plastic flowers with a large purple bow hangs at the center of the cross, partially concealing the inscription--only "FRANK," written in black magic marker, is legible. As of April 2003, "Frank's Shrine" is still there, weathered and leaning a bit, but still there. So are all the other signs.

On October 14, 2001, approximately 20 miles west of "Frank's Shrine" just east of Tuskgegee, Alabama, there, on the west-bound shoulder of the tree-lined two-lane highway,

Figure 4.4.20: Photo: "AL US-80: Frank's Shrine: Church Directions"

at the bottom of a deep dip in the road crossing over a small narrow bridge (crossing over a trickle of a stream that is often dry), is another roadside shrine. The shrine is behind the steel guardrail on the grassy bank of the sloping ditch. The cross with its plaque reminds me of the several Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) crosses I have seen on the side of the road in Texas, and of two sites I have encountered in Baton Rouge: I wonder what has become of the "Brother and Sister" shrine on US-61 between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, and the shrine in front of the East Baton Rouge Parish Community Center on Druscilla Lane. This medium-sized cross on US-80 in Alabama is made of heavy two-by-fours and is painted white (figure 4.4.21a). The ends have been carved into mitered points and all the edges of the wood have been sanded into a smooth, rounded edge. A metal plaque is screwed into the cross where the horizontal and vertical cross-pieces meet. The inscription has nearly worn off, is illegible. I feel in danger as I photograph what I have come to call the "MADD at Dry Gulch" shrine (Figure 4.4.21b) as cars and (big) trucks *whoosh* by at 75+

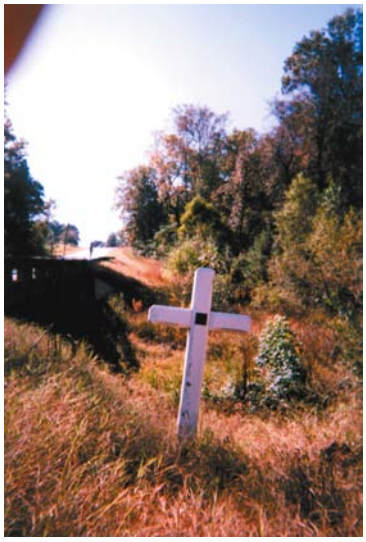


Figure 4.4.21a: Photo: AL US-80: MADD at Dry Gulch: In Ditch, 2001

Figure 4.4.21b: Photo: AL US-80: MADD at Dry Gulch: In Traffic, 2001

miles an hour. As of April 2003, the shrine is still there. I will not stop there again. I will, however, make a ritual revisit to the "Baton Rouge Community Center" shrine: the brass plaque *there* reads:

In
Loving
Memory
of
MICKEY CSTILLO BORN AUGUST 15, 1973
SCOTT URHBACH BORN DECEMBER 5, 1969
ERICA KING BORN MAY 2, 1972
MARK EIRICK BORN MARCH 23, 1969
KILLED AT
THIS LOCATION
BY A
NEGLIGENT
DRINKING
DRIVER MAY 22, 1988

The "Baton Rouge Community Center Shrine" was first documented by Maida Owens, however, being unfamiliar with what was then "new" territory, I simply couldn't find it. I forgot all about this failure until I heard a story from a colleague at LSU who said that

she passes this site almost every day, and bursts into tears when she sees that the site has been newly decorated (Wanda). When I finally find the shrine, seasonal flowers--both fresh and fabricated--new paint, and a singular ritual offerings has been left at the site. Singular ritual offerings--a touch, a tear, a bit of chewed gum, a wad of tree sap, a coin, a stone--are an intimate "give-away" of whatever happens to be at hand (Figure 4.4.22).

Figure 4.4.22: Photo: Baton Rouge, Druscilla Lane: Four at Community Center: Stone Offering, 2002

On October 14, 2001, I know that I will arrive in Baton Rouge well after dark. I have added four hours to an eleven hour drive by stopping to visit the "Two at Hawkinsville Road," "Tiny in Culvert," "Migrant Workers," "What IS That?" "Frank's," and "MADD at Dry Gulch" shrine sites. Thirty miles west of "MADD at Dry Gulch," still on US-80 in Alabama, I will hop on I-85 northeast of Montgomery, take I-65 south all the way to Mobile, take I-10 west through Mississippi into Louisiana, then take I-12 into Baton Rouge. Along the way I will take note of roadside shrines, but I will let them "slide," and will not document them until my tape-recorded roadtrip to Baton Rouge in late February of 2003.

4.4.2: Transcripted: Montgomery, Alabama to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, February 24, 2003

The following is a transcript of my tape recorded field notes, part of the vocal/aural experiment in documentation. I have put the basic description of the roadside shrines in bold type. The double space between sections indicates where I turned the tape recorder on and off. The map below (Figure 4.4.23) is of the survey route and the location of roadside shrines noted in the narrative.

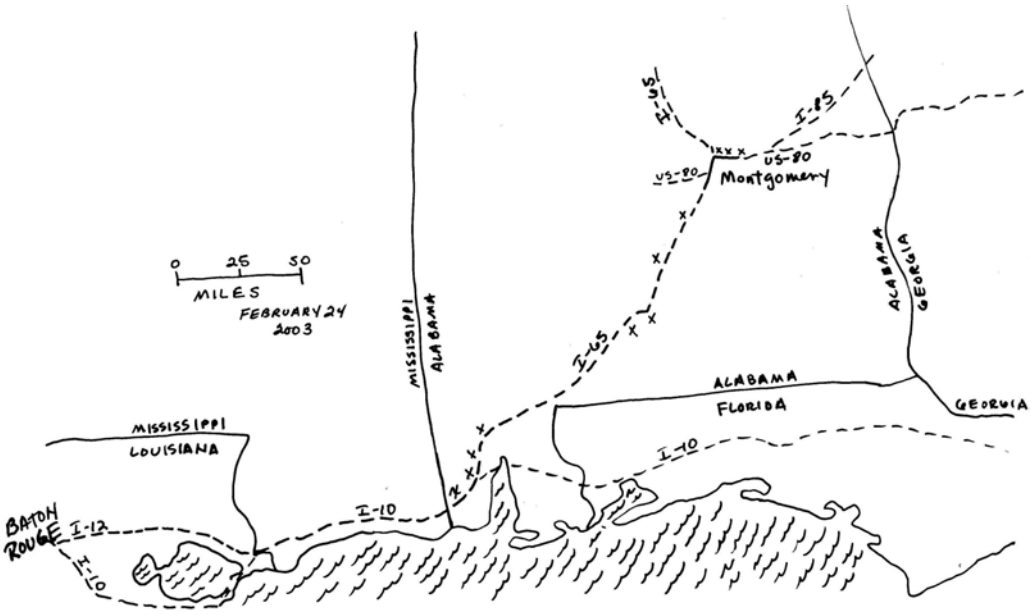


Figure 4.4.23: Map: Montgomery, Alabama to Baton Rouge, Louisiana Survey Route with Shrine Sites, February 24, 2003

On highway I-85 traveling west into Montgomery, just before one of the US-80 cutoffs to Shorter. **Large black cross with white inscription "Rosanne & Allen" and a little tiny white cross further into the ditch.** I've seen those before but don't know if I've ever noted them. While I'm listening to Tommie Bolan, sings in the background "Half way gone and half way back, you're always dreamin' of what you lack" (Montgomery is half way between Statesboro and Baton Rouge and Freud and his theories based on LACK are EVERYWHERE!)

Ten miles from last one, still on I-85 heading west into Montgomery, off to the right, pretty well back from the road at the tree line, a new cross I don't think I've ever seen before, a **really big 4 1/2 - 5 feet tall, white cross,** big fluffy yellow package-type ribbon on it, no inscription.

Still on I-85 in Alabama coming in to Montgomery from the east going west. In the median, road crews around, cleaning **two really big crosses,** white maybe five feet tall and heavy. One is sort of tilting. One a little bit behind the other, paint is peeling. Those two crosses I've seen before too, they've been there a couple of years, at least, that's how long I've been seeing them.

Heading south on I-65 out of Montgomery--a ways--in the median down in ditch by tree line, angled so that it's lookin' at my rear as I pass. **A wreath on a stand.** All that's left of it is the green florist foam, a little tattered remnant of ribbon of unknown color--it's so discolored.

Just to the right of and under an overpass--never seen it before, but it looked older. **A cross, 4 - 4 1/2 feet tall, white** with black on the ends. Inscription on the middle, large black lettering, I just saw "LOVE" on one of the arms.

Close to above site, to my left--facing on north bound traffic--right before an exit, between Montgomery and Mobile. **Another big white cross**, two-by-four inch wood. Inscription--JMM--like big press-on letters, looked really uniform, placed in middle.

Not far from above site, on the same side of the road (northbound shoulder) *not* in tree line--**another cross,** much smaller, maybe 2 1/2 feet tall? painted white. Inscription was faded, black, couldn't read, too small, and of course I'm going eighty miles an hour--faded plastic or fabric flowers stuck in the ground.

> Note: Last couple of crosses are in places where they have to be mowed around. The only exception [all the way across Georgia] would be that really big one of the survey worker--it was behind the mow line.

There's another one. In the median, still going south, 30 miles north of Mobile. **A heart on a wire stand** close to ground, a bunch of plastic or silk flowers, purple and green, real pretty -- on the ground another bouquet of flowers, fresh or real? bright colored - same as wreath.

Closer to Mobile, still on I-65, neari I-10. **Medium-sized cross, white,** thinner wood. Inscription, JILL? It's getting dark out but it was white and I could see it pretty good.

Okay. Now on I-10, fifteen-twenty miles west of Mobile and I-65, near exit four, near tree line, facing on-coming traffic. **Another cross,** 3 1/2 feet high with little balloons, **little tiny balloons on sticks**? stuck out of top of shrine/cross, with other little flowers. Inscription but couldn't read.

There's the spot where I lost "Belle" and lived to tell about it. Okay.
Now in Louisiana on I-12, near tree line, a **cross looming out of the darkness,** 3 to 3 1/2 feet, painted white, much shorter than those five foot tall Alabama ones.
Then, not far from last one, a **cross, near reflector, small**, might have had some writing on it, don't know.

Now **another little roadside shrine**, really close to the paved apron, deep ditch--I'm in Louisiana, "Land of Deep Ditches"--just east of the US-51 Pontchatoula exit, little, two-by-one inch plain brown wood, some flowers, looked faded ('course it's dark), and there was an inscription but the cross was unpainted, it's only maybe 2 feet tall.

4.5: Blues Highway Revisited: Baton Rouge to New Orleans, February 26, 2003

Wednesday, February 26 was cold and rainy, but I took to the road regardless of the weather to re-visit the roadside shrines I had become familiar with over the years. I did this in order to double check the accuracy of my previous notes, and to note any changes to the sites and to the road itself. While the narration below describes a few select roadside shrines, the map below (Figure 4.5.1) indicates the location of all roadside shrines near the campus of Louisiana State University and the Greater Baton Rouge area. I began my pilgrimage from the place I used to live, tracing my route from my old apartment, to school,

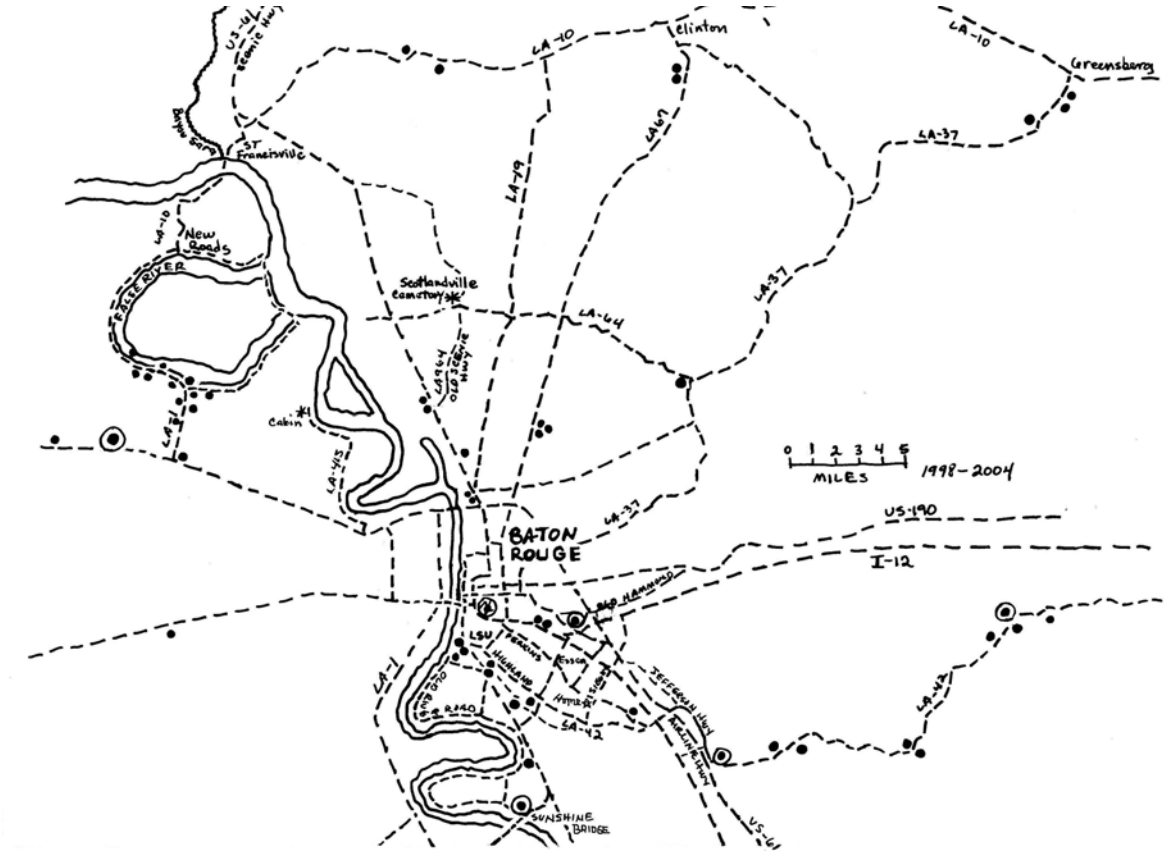


Figure 4.5.1: Map: Louisiana State University and the Greater Baton Rouge Area Survey Route with Shrine Sites, 1998-2003

and then out onto Old River Road--the back road route I used to take when traffic was backed up around campus.

4.5.1: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: LSU Campus Area, February 26, 2003

The "John Puosson" shrine, on the corner of Bluebonnet and Burbank next to the parking lot of the Winn Dixie grocery store where I used to shop on the way home from school, was first spotted late January or early February of 2002 (Figure 4.5.2). At that time, the medium- sized white-painted wood cross had flowers, notes, a stuffed animal and a hubcap at its base, and tacked to the arms of the cross are photos of household members who "Miss You": a small black-and-white dog and a chubby little yellow dog look back, are captured in a moment of attending, ears perked up, head to one side, waiting for release: "Good dog." I imagine they are both good dogs.

Other objects are placed on and around the cross, however it is this detail--the little dogs' faces--that captures my attention, that haunts my memory. Over time, flags will be added, the hubcap will be replaced with hand-painted rocks ("Beauty," "Love," "Peace," and "Joy"), and the grass will be cut and strewn with straw. During Mardi Gras 2002, the cross will be decorated with colored beads and shiny plastic coins, as if thrown from passing parade floats. During Mardi Gras of 2003, the site will be decorated with sequined Christmas ornaments, the ground strewn with swaths of colored beads and a bright yellow pair of ladies underpants. The photos of the little dogs will curl, fade, be taken away. I will miss them. I continue to ache in the place where the little yellow dog looked in/at me.

"John Puosson's Shrine" is situated close to the road on Burbank between the "T" intersection with Bluebonnet and the "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" resale shop. The shop --a shrine in its own right--is dedicated to the venerated deceased (Figure 4.5.3).

Figure 4.5.2: Photo: LA Burbank: John Puosson: Good Dogs, 2002

Farther down Burbank, between Gardere and Ben Hur, the "Lonesome on Burbank" shrine site is still gone. Farther still, in the ditch at the railroad crossing and the road into the student (ghetto) area called "Tiger Land," which is across the street from a party store and

Figure 4.5.3: Photo: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow, 2002

row of bars is (was?) the roadside shrine that was brought to my attention by a classmate. The shrine is either gone or it has fallen into the ditch. I do not stop to investigate--the intersection is *way* too dangerous for foot traffic. To be honest, I have never stopped there.

I round the curve, turn right into campus, and make my way to Highland Road. Then I turn right onto Dalrymple Avenue, and travel away from campus and toward the "Garden District." The two crosses mounted on the cement railroad abutment in the median on Dalrymple Avenue, that have been there "since I was a kid," according to man who grew up in the neighborhood, (Buddy), are still there (Figures 4.5.4a, 4.5.4b, and 4.5.4c).

Figure 4.5.4a: Photo: "LA Dalrymple: Two on Railroad Abutment: Car"

Figure 4.5.4b: Photo: "LA Dalrymple: Two on Railroad Abutment: Bike"

Figure 4.5.4c: Photo: "LA Dalrymple: Two on Railroad Abutment: Van"

I imagine my friends and colleagues, my professors and mentors, passing these shrines as they leave campus. I wonder if they "see" the crosses anymore. I wonder if they noticed the graffiti that appeared (when? *After* the 9/11?): "BEWARE!! CONSTITUTIONAL TERRORISM!" (Figure 4.5.5) As of February 2003, the alert was beginning to fade.

Figure 4.5.5: Photo: LA Dalrymple: Two On Railroad Abutment: Companion: Beware! 2002

I make my way to my favorite coffee shop, “Perks” on Perkins, get a large cup to go, and make my way back across campus to River Road (Figure 4.5.6). The “LSU Cyclist Shrine” on River Road is across from the LSU Dump: one dirty white running shoe is tied by its laces to the wood post of the barbed wire fence. The fence separates the road from the grass-covered, cattle-grazing levee. Tangled in the wire is a yellow and purple, LSU cheerleader-type pompom. In the ditch at the base of the post, a tiny white cross covered with dirty fabric roses and remnants of faded plastic yellow flowers is surrounded by tin corrugated garden edging. The man who works at the dump, who did not want to be identified, says two student bicyclists were killed there by a drunk driver in July 2002. He also said that if I took LA-71 to Brewer I’d see maybe a dozen crosses, and if I took US-49 north I’d see at least fifteen.

Figure 4.5.6: Photo: LA River Road: LSU Bikers’ Shrine: Share the Road, 2003

While I am crouched in the wet, narrow ditch investigating the "LA River Road: LSU Bikers Shrine," I will see markings on the pavement (Figure 4.5.7) that remind me of similar markings on the pavement at the "Surveyor Shrine" in Georgia on GA-96, just down the road from the "Migrant Workers" shrine.

Crouching--no, squatting--in the ditch, I will recall an interview with a student from LSU who built a roadside shrine in his home town just east of New Orleans, Louisiana, at the site where his best friend was killed in a car crash. The day after his friend was killed, he volunteered to accompany his policeman-father to the site--it was his father's job to mark off the dynamics of the incident on the pavement. That is when he got the idea to build the shrine for his boyhood friend (LSU student shrine-builder).

Figure 4.5.7: Photo: LA River Road: LSU Bikers' Shrine: Road Marks, 2003

In a flash, I recall a photograph in a North Carolina newspaper--the coroner crouches on the pavement, hovers over a cross he has painted on the pavement at the scene of a fatal

car crash. The coroner poses for the photographer, is quoted as saying he advocates that mourners, rather than erect a shrine on the side of the road, apply for permission to paint their own cross on the pavement--the caveat--"once it's worn off, it cannot be replaced" ("What").

I will later come to understand these signs, these markings, these various places and times, as a broad web of singularly negotiated social ritual space in which I have been playing a part all along, whether or not I "stop by" for a visit. Even as I drive by the sites--marked with a "roadside shrine" or not--and roll along the pavement, I am rolling over (and helping to erase) the dynamics of the incident marked on the pavement.

4.6: Amazing Graces: Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Statesboro, Georgia, March 3, 2003

On Sunday, March 3, 2003, I travel and document yet another trip from Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Statesboro, Georgia. However, on this (return) trip I take an alternate route (Figure 4.6.1), traveling north by way of US-59 to Meridian, Mississippi and across Alabama

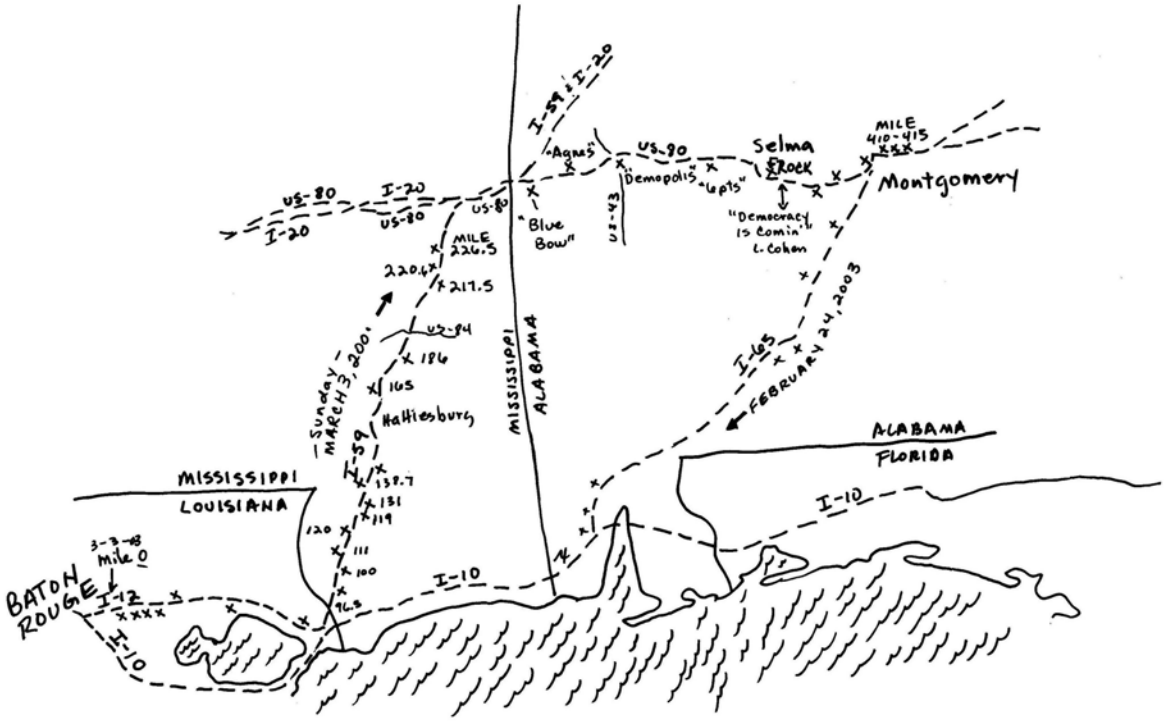


Figure 4.6.1: Map: Alternate Louisiana to Georgia Survey Route with Shrine Sites, March 2003

on US-80, part of which has been designated the "Civil Rights Movement National Historic Trail" between Selma and Montgomery. The following narrative is a further experiment in documentation. On that day in March, 2003, I recorded on tape all that caught my attention: mileage on the trip odometer, time, shrine sites, and more. The transcript of that tape recording has been abridged and [annotated]. The spaces between "sites" indicate where I turned the tape on and off.

Mile 1: 8:30 am. Leaving Baton Rouge. At Jefferson Highway and I-12 east.

Mile 8: **Cross on side of road** mounted in tree, ***OH! there's another one,*** a little tiny cross, inscription, can't read. Speed limit 70, driving 75.

Mile 28: **Another cross, and another,** both painted white . . . the area has been recently mowed, large **black plastic trash bags** lined up on both sides of highway -
So here in Louisiana - roadside shrines are <u>not</u> trash?

Mile 39.3: **Cross, faded, white, really, really close to road** . . .
. . . a big dog in ditch, in rigor, legs in the air like it was still running

Mile 45.9: **Another white wood cross in grass** near tree line . . .
. . . a crow pickin' at somethin' dead

Mile 59: Rising above ditch: **a series of helium balloons** -- waving…
. . . dead possum--mangled.

Mile 84: Radio announcer says "It's ten o'clock in the Crescent City." At the bottom of the ramp connecting I-12 for I-59 north, **big-rig wrecker, cop cars, and cargo** all over the road, a semi on its side…
. . . white birds--cranes--fishing in the ditches –

Mile 96.5: Entering Mississippi. **"Buckle Up, It's the Law."**

Mile 100: **Graffiti on adjoining abutments**--cylinder stanchions that hold up an overpass. "Trust Jesus" in blue paint. "KKK" in red . . .
[. . . by whose grace does (this) graffiti remain?]

Mile 101: **Here comes… an installation.** One big white cross. And a *something else*? on wire stand, tufted white flower-like things . . . *Another something* on a wire stand, an oblong of bright red tufts . . . *I'm traveling too fast to read it*. In the ground there was a white *something else* with a big bow.

Mile 104.8: Another *something* in the ditch--passing a truck so couldn't get good look at it,

down deep in a ditch, white and red . . .

. . . a proliferation of white and red because Valentines Day just passed?

Mile 111: Large white cross in median on tree**. "Joe Smith" . . .**

. . . thought "cliched anonymity": Joe Smith, John Smith, John Q [Public]

Mile 119: In median **hanging in tree, a tiny US flag,** trying to mark *something.*

Mile 120: 10:33 am. Coming up on **a whole complex in the median, *oh jeez***--next to the road on a wire stand--a **small red and white wreath**, some kind of little *something* with **a square *something*** *else* in the center. **Another cross** farther in the ditch. Even deeper in the ditch, **another wreath,** yellow with blue ribbons, tipping over . . .

*. . . on the ground **garbage bags** full of stuff--bags are all the same orange color, placed at regular intervals along road near shoulder, a road crew wearing matching orange jumpsuits, working their way in the other direction picking up trash.* **So, here in Mississippi, roadside shrines are not *trash*?**

Mile 131: Another roadside shrine--**a golden crucifix in the middle of large wreath** on a permanent-looking stand near tree line. Sun glinting off the gold, wreath a creamy white . . .

. . . mangled raccoon

Mile 138.7: **Another cross** mounted in tree in median, inscribed.

Mile? Big **hunk of silver beads** hanging from tree limb--varying sizes, some stands long with beads an inch around…

. . . marking Mardi Gras? It's Fat Tuesday in three days . . .

. . . another small raccoon, dead

Mile 158: 11:04 am, Hattiesburg. Another **cross, in median**.

Mile 165: In median, at base of tree, **two small crosses nestled together** . . .

. . . people [in a car] in front of me moving very slowly--took me by surprise [could have rear-ended them at high speed]--*were they looking at the crosses? like me?*

Mile 186: 11:27 am. **Large white cross on side of road up in tree**. . .

. . . dead possum… more big orange garbage bags stuffed full of road trash

[. . . by whose grace does the gore remain?]

Mile 210: I-59 close to Meridian. **More graffiti** on similar abutment

"Trust Jesus" in blue--size, angle to passer-by, and handwriting, similar.

No reference in red to KKK.

Mile 217.5: On other side of road, **small white cross. . . forged iron pipe**?

Mile 220.6: Close to noon. **White cross in median on tree, large cascade of faded orange-ish flowers.**

Mile 226.5: In median, **faded bouquet of plastic flowers laying on ground** - area recently mowed . . .

. . . so, whoever mowed the grass picked it up, mowed, and laid it back down?
. . . small dead deer, one of many

Mile 252: Now on US-80 traveling east, two lanes, just outside of Meridian. "Land for Lease or Sale" in front of recently painted white cement brick roofless structure **[like a life-sized roofless nicho open to the passer-by],** three walls, on the back wall facing away from the road, **a great big bright red door** . . . and nothing else . . .

. . . a ruin, a roadside attraction?

Mile? A little farther down the road, another "Land for Sale or Lease" sign next to **ruins of a gas station** with attached maintenance garage - abandoned - long abandoned -- partly fenced in. Remnants of **an old motel**, refurbished, for sale . . .

. . . dead skunk, stinkin'

Mile? In Toomsuba. A trashy little town--oh, that's not fair. What *is* here? A couple of **churches, a graveyard** with flowers, **abandoned** gas station, **abandoned** garage, **abandoned** *something*--maybe a motel. **Dilapidated** trailers falling apart . . . Now huge beautiful homes**.**

Mile 269: 1:00, crossing Alabama state line. . .

[. . . no roadside shrines marking the site of death on US 80 on the seventeen miles between Meridian, Mississippi and the Alabama state line]

Mile 277: **Reflector pole on side of road tied with little blue bow**, **tied like you would a shoe.** No houses or industry or farming for ten miles. Now passing "State Line Land and Timber," a "new" forest, good pavement, speed posted fifty-five, driving seventy-five, [other cars] gaining on me . . .

Mile 286: **Cross. "Agnes Zeringe"?** at metal guard rail going over culvert.

Mile 300: US 80 now four-lane divided highway. In front of a Chevron gas station, close to road, tall flag pole with **American flag and huge fluffy yellow ribbon**. . .
What's up with that? the yellow ribbon?

Mile 311: Close to edge of road, **a cross.** Had inscription, couldn't read.
To stand in front of cross you'd have to stand in the road, on the pavement . . .

[. . . what kind of ritual might that entail?]
. . . small unidentifiable bloody guts in middle of the road
. . . a brown patch of fur
*. . . another brown furry bloody mess on side of road**--a family member**?*

. . . there up in the tree is a birdie's nest--something happier
. . . an appliance in the ditch.

Mile 322.5*:*
. . . dead animal on side of road, light brown creamy-color fur

Mile 324: Junction US-80, AL-61, Perry County Road 53. **A shrine complex.** A huge **cross,** "We Miss You" in black. On wire stand, **large cascade of flowers and ribbon**--area recently mowed, recently visited. [. . . Now] lots of empty houses, falling apart, [falling] down, across street [is a] relatively new brick housing [project]. Now [edge of town?] a big **catfish** feed mill. [Passing] Irony? Harmony Hill trucking - at top of hill, all kinds of big trucks –

Mile 328: Still on US-80. Two lanes changes to four.
State sign **"Unlawful to Advertise** . . . something, something.
. . . In Selma, an intersection, at base of highway signs – **a set of hubcaps.**

Mile? Junction of US-80 and US-41, at abandoned restaurant truck-stop in the middle of parking lot, **a small car upside down**, its hatch and doors open.

. . . A bit farther down the road, a **school bus rotted out just sitting there** in the middle of the field *l**ike a dead dog on the side of the road . . .***

Mile 359: Highway 80 [now] skirts <u>around</u> Selma proper...
. . . **Abandoned gas station** and **abandoned little cement block motel-cottages** in circle court - doors open, everything that's wood rotted out
. . . by whose grace do (these) ruins remain?

Mile 360: US-80 still four-lane divided. Rural. **Big white rock in the middle of nowhere.**

Stop. A farm house way back behind the rock, a field across the [road], a small building, a flag, a sign for fire trucks, and only woods farther down the road . . . *Rock is obviously a monument or memorial of some kind*; pull off spot, railroad ties surrounding a grassy mound, perennials planted around.

And this big white piece of granite [inscribed in brass]:

"Five miles north of this spot was TALISI visited by DeSoto, Sept 18, 1540

This stone erected by the

National Society of Colonial Dames of America in Alabama, 1936."

[Take picture] (Figure 4.6.2). . .

Figure 4.6.2: Photo: AL US-80: Historic Route: Historic Rock, 2003

... dead fox. Living cattle, lots and lots of them
... Leonard Cohen's ***"Democracy is Coming"*** [marks my day]

Mile 380: Top of hill on side of road. Fenced-in area, a big stone, **a funereal wreath** – private property. Blue road sign: "Historic Route"

[Civil Rights National Historic Trail
I unwittingly pass by the small memorial on the south side of the road between Petronia and Lowdensboro dedicated to Viola Gregg Liuzzo, a "white housewife" (Jensen 817) and mother from Detroit, Michigan who, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Civil Rights Memorial* brochure:

> drove alone to Alabama to help with the Selma march after seeing televised reports of the attack [of Selma marchers by state troopers] at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. She was driving marchers back to Selma from Montgomery when she was shot and killed by a Klansman in a passing car.

Here, now, I vow to one day retrace my route, to find Viola's site of death].

Mile 390: Junction US-80 & AL-21. **Little cross with silver flowers** right on edge of pavement. Had inscription, couldn't read.

Mile 397.9: Across street from Montgomery airport. **White pipe cross,** only the second cross I've ever seen like that [like LA US-61 "White Pipe" shrine, Figure 2.4.12]. Except this one had black writing, couldn't read.

Mile 410-415: Now on I-85 east of Montgomery--back on familiar route. **Double Crosses** [in the median] I've seen before. [Pass **another big white cross** on the shoulder.]

Mile 430: **Another set of [familiar] double crosses in median;**
the **black cross** says **"Rosanne & Allen,"**
the white cross had inscription, couldn't read…

… large carcass--either a German Shepherd or--looked too big to be a fox.
*… **a little black dog trotting along side of freeway**, sure hope he makes it home…*

Mile 461: Back on US 80, rural two-lane. Little tiny cross, **new since last week,** just east from "MADD at Dry Gulch" cross [(Figures 4.4.21a and 4.4.21b).
Pass "Frank's Cross" (Figure 4.4.20).
Pass **"What is That?"** (Figures 4.4.19 and 4.4.20).
Pass "Rayburn Guy" shrine.]

Mile 478: **Another new site since last week**; **a plain wood cross** on the side of the westbound lane, cursive writing, really close to road next to metal guard rail.

Mile 481: Now traveling through Phenix. **Another new roadside shrine in front of church**, a cross covered with white flowers--***oh shit*--to my left there are two more!** new crosses, one is plain wood with big letters painted in red **"MIKE"** and the other one white. These last three [immediately] west of the **two big "Teen" crosses** that I saw for the first time (Figures 4.4.13 - 4.4.16) while traveling in the other direction just last week…

… so many new shrines?
… so many new sites at one time

Mile 485: On US-280. **There's that little cross** on the other side of the road **with two flags in the ground**, documented last week.

Mile 490: Just west of Columbia River Bridge, after crossing into Georgia and Eastern Standard time: **Another shrine, familiar,** a tiny white cross in the median, plastic flowers, flanked by metal guardrails. Then **another new white cross in median** facing on-coming traffic going the other way. . .

. . . loud radio
*. . . **they're making fun? of movies from Iran, Iraq, and Korea…***

. . . smeared possum in the road, and black birds on the side waitin' to pounce
. . . another big, dead, smished, something in the middle of the lane -
. . . NPR's "Car Talk" on the radio.

Mile 507: The **giant graffiti rock** way up on the side of the hill, reminds me of the giant graffiti rock in Michigan on US-12 outside of Saline. [Pass construction area where **cross with two US flags placed right beside the pavement -- now gone.** Pass the **little wooden cross** decorated with another **blue-flowered cross**, attached to the guardrail crossing the bridge. Pass the **huge white cross** planted in the dirt under the overpass. Leave the Bypass, back on two-lane US-80]…

... another dead--something--a little mammal with a pinkish-orange snout
... oh god!! Oh god!!! [Oh No!!] A whole bunch of ***pink pigs with their babies****, [oh…] little tiny pink piggies on the side of the road*
... another dead little animal, over on the side of the road

[Pass **"Hank's Cross"** in the field to the south on US-80. Pass the spot in the median where **"Box Springs Cross"** used to be. Keep driving due east on GA-96 at the intersection where US-80 makes a northern lurch to Macon.]

... east of Reynolds, another pig on the side of the road--a black pig, weird!
… Entering "Peach County."

On that day, I find myself once again in Peach County, Georgia. As I pass the "Survey Worker" shrine on GA-96 (Figures 4.4.10 - 4.4.12), the host on a call-in show on NPR out of Macon questions a psychiatrist about the psychological affects of terror alerts on the general public. The respondent talks about how we, as citizens of the United States, have gotten used to knowing that terrorism has the potential to happen, and that we cannot prepare for it. The psychiatrist likens it to how we have learned to manage getting in our cars without being anxious, knowing that an accident could happen anytime--that we take it for granted to the point of forgetting. The talk show went on a little bit more about that, talking about terror and the "Run Up to War," as I drive my radio down the road.

I wonder if I have sufficiently scrambled *that* Code.

I pass the "Migrant worker" shrine (Figure 4.4.5 - 4.4.9). I pass the place where the "Tiny Cross in Culvert" shrine and the "Two at Old Hawkinsville Road" shrines used to be. I get on I-16 south and pass the "Killed in the Line of Duty" shrine, which is, as far as I can

tell in the dark, still there (Figure 4.4.4). I make it to Statesboro with energy to spare. I find myself asking, where is the gap between grace and terror? I write:

Resisting Postulation: The Union Dead
September 14, 2001
(with all due respect to Robert Lowell)

Driving the radio down the road
A Yankee in the New South spotting roadside shrines
    Little plots of death and grief and little lonely crosses
    Little plots of life and love and things that people leave there
One my way to meet my lover in MLK's Montgomery
We'll visit *that* memorial
    That lonely round table of rolling righteous water
Place our hand in the stream, our fingers on the wall
Laugh at our need to connect in this way
Cry for our contemporary national calamity.

Driving the radio down the road
NPR at the National Cathedral
    Battle Hymn of the Republic (for which it stands)
    Shining steel cross (for which it wields)
    Processional (for which it mobilizes)

People people people people people people people people people people people
People people people people people people people people people people people
People people people people people people people people people people people
    Pictures plasterd on the walls
Some still dying, dying now for a cause
Trans/formed (collapsed) into a single sacrificial body
    Swallowed up in the yawning black hole, a parking lot
    Swallowed up in the grinding maw of war, a memorial.

Driving the radio down the road
Spotting roadside shrines
Complicit in this savage servility
Pull over and puke
    A bubble splats on the pavement
    The coroner paints a cross
    It's your turn to drive

Erase me.

CHAPTER FIVE
CHOREOGRAPHING CONTEMPORARY DEATH-RELATED AND OTHER-RELATED RITUAL

> "So you ended up all the way up here, too?" she asked the Virgen de Guadalupe out loud, hoping she'd hear her voice in spite of the freeway noises. "It's amazing what one will do for one's children, right?" (Maria Amparo Escandon, *Esperanza's Box of Saints* 188).

5.1: Dancing with the Dead, Revisited

Roadside shrines seek our attention, not only as we pass them--some of us routinely--on our way from one place to another, and not only through print and electronic media, but through live and mediated (ritual) performances as well. These sites, the materials that mark them, how people come to build them, the messages that those who build them hope to convey, and the specific and accumulative force that these sites bring to bear in various contexts, may offer unique insight into our complex, fragmented, and often agonistic cultural relationships with life and death on the road, in the media, and with/in various death-related social rituals.

This chapter first revisits shrines and shrine-making at high-profile sites of death--and the links that have been made between these sites and the more homely sites of death on the road--in relationship to the events of September 2001,

> when planes crashed (crashed crashed crashed),
> towers crumbled (crumbled crumbled crumbled),
> drums beat (fists pounded on chests),
> and people (people people people people people people people people) died
> in the rubble (under the weight of the towers) and continue to
> die (under the weight of retribution, counter-retribution and roadside bombs).

This broad overview of shrines and shrine-building will be followed by a section that historicizes the interpretive frames used in popular and academic discourse to describe shrines, shrine-building, and shrine-builders in relationship to death-related ritual, followed

by a discussion of the relationship between these various and specific histories and the inter/cultural performance(s) of grief, mourning, and the mourning arts. The penultimate section discusses the contemporary cultural performance of/at/with roadside shrines as a strategic deployment of grief and grace, followed by an arrested attempt to conclude.

Of interest to this study is the measure to which scholars and others speculate on the relationship between roadside shrines as a mourning ritual and other institutionally-sanctioned funereal rites. Take, for example, Rajkovic's study of roadside shrines in (the former) Yugoslavia, which compares and contrasts Eastern and Western relationships with "modern" death and death-related rituals, car culture, and roadside shrines--where roadside shrines in the East are evidence of coming-to-terms with modern death, while the West (drawing from Phillip Aries' work) is in denial of death. Take, for example, Saccopoulos's essay on roadside shrines in Greece, which offers evidence of the ancient "pagan ritual" practices used to ward off evil and other "primitive beliefs" (146) as a cultural response to modern automotive technology (148). Take, for example, Henzel's study of roadside shrines in Northwest Mexico, which compares the historical practice of marking the site of death with the contemporary ritual, relegating the former to the realm of the spiritual, and the latter to the realm of "purely human grief" (100). Take, for example, Haney et. al's study of the contemporary shrine-building in the US, which offers that shrines are an emergent vernacular death ritual as opposed to traditional institutionalized death rituals. Taking these instances into account, I complicate various binary distinctions by bringing these and other scholars' work into conversation with various and specific inter/cultural practices in hopes of offering a more complex, perhaps ambiguous, conversation about rituals of/at roadside shrines in contemporary US. In this chapter, I will attempt to keep open--at least partially, temporarily-

-the relationship between ritual performances at roadside shrines and institutionally-sanctioned funeral rites and ritual norms, as well as the gap created by labeling mourning processes as normative and/or pathological and the various labels placed upon mourners and shrine-builders themselves.

5.2: Locating Roadside Shrines in/as Social Ritual in Popular and Academic Arts

Where in cultural memory do we place the social rituals enacted at roadside shrines? Accounts of public acts of grief and the "spontaneous" building of shrines at the site of sudden and violent death have, at times, permeated the media. Some of the more spectacular sites have been along the fence surrounding the bombed-out federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, at the site of the car crash where Princess Diana and her companion died in Paris in 1997, at the site of the shootings of school children and teachers in Jonesboro, Arkansas in 1998, at the site of the shootings of school children and teachers at Columbine High School in 1999, and at the site of the plane crash that killed John Kennedy, Jr., and his traveling companions, also in 1999. Indeed, the televised play-by-play of the search effort to find Kennedy, which continued for the better part of a week, included frequent pan shots of what commentators referred to as the growing "Wall of Memory," recalling shrine-building behaviors by visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial ("Public Grief"). News crews asked people why they were there. Commentators shook their heads in wonder.

More recently, the building of shrines and the attendant media coverage occurred at the sites where, on September 11, 2001, passenger planes crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania. In the complex and often ambiguous process of grief and mourning, acts of making and visiting shrines do seem to satisfy the individual and communal need to do *something* in response to seemingly

senseless events. However, the complexities of the practice itself may be obscured as media attention moves rapidly to issues of sense-making, memorialization, and the creation of permanent monuments. In terms of this most recent shrine-building phenomenon, speculation about shrines in the media seems oddly hushed. Indeed, it seems that shrines are, perhaps, expected. Take, for example, the September 25, 2001, *Chicago Tribune* feature story: "The Ways We Grieve: Impromptu New York City Shrines Illustrate Cultural Shift in America" (Hevrdejas and Mills), which foregrounds the shrines--and other funereal rites--as an illustration of "American" national identity and unity. Months later, an article commenting on the way "Americans" grieve appeared in the April 29, 2002, Monday "Local" section of the *Ann Arbor News.* In the article "More Cities Honoring Slain Police Officers," it is noted that interest in building memorials to officers killed in the line of duty ". . . has intensified since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks," because "law enforcement officers put their lives on the line every day" (McQuade in "More Cities"), because, according to one mourner, "[s]urvivors had nowhere to go and grieve," and because the memorials were "signs of respect" (Philpot in "More Cities"). Another article, which appeared on the same day in the same section of the newspaper, complicates the way--and for whom--"Americans" grieve. In "Couple Ties on Black Ribbons for Victims," the author focuses on counter-memorializing, pacifist acts of resistance, and a couple in Ypsilanti, Michigan who tied black ribbons on the pillars of their porch, in protest against the proliferation of American flags flown in their neighborhood, following the US bombings in Afghanistan (Mathis).

On another front, roadside shrines at sites of death on the nation's highways, state roads, and neighborhood streets continue to attract attention and stimulate controversy. Newspapers continue to feature local site coverage, in-depth investigative reports, accounts

of legislative attempts to outlaw or regulate the practice, and editorials debating the merits of such attempts. Tom Kochanski, maintenance engineer for the Wisconsin DOT, is quoted as saying that "up to half of Wisconsin's highway deaths each year result in a roadside memorial. That's as many as four hundred memorials each year" (in Barrett). Road officials are not the only ones taking note of the proliferation of the practice. Rene Denfeld's 2002 "In-Depth Report" in *The Oregonian*, entitled "Oregon City Murders: A Tsunami of Sorrow," takes to task shrine-building of various kinds, including roadside shrines, as the "relentless, even trivializing, . . . sentimentalization of grief." Other reporters offer a different interpretation of the meaning of the shrines. Susan Oppat attempts to present multiple perspectives in her 2002 story in the *Ann Arbor News*, "Memorials Ease Aching Hearts." Oppat's feature included a select list of recent roadside shrines, their locations, and the circumstances of each of the deaths marked there, and it included several photographs. The article was accompanied by the sidebar story, "What Some Other States Do About Roadside Memorials," which detailed institutional attempts to control or curtail roadside shrines. Although I had heard from friends living in the area that the practice of marking the site of death on the road had "really taken off" since I had last visited, I was surprised by the detail provided in Oppat's coverage, and curious about the circumstances that led to the publication of the stories.

In a March, 2003, telephone interview, Oppat said that although she had noticed more and more road deaths marked with a shrine of some kind--like the "RIP Matt" on a utility pole in her own neighborhood--she was assigned the story by her editor in response to a series of stories in another newspaper about a roadside shrine controversy in a neighboring community. Oppat remarked that, indeed, while the shrines are "popping up like Burma-

Shave signs," she was surprised at the immediate and varied response to her sympathetic human interest story. According to the reporter, after the story ran, the newspaper received not only many letters to the editor, but several telephone calls as well, which, she commented, is unusual in this day and age of email when people can express their feelings in a relatively anonymous fashion. Some people called to thank Oppat personally for writing the story, others were angry. One particularly memorable caller was not only furious, but "offended," thought that he "shouldn't have to share in someone's grief," felt that the story encouraged the practice of roadside shrine-building, and opined that a responsible story would be one that included the fact that shrines pose a danger to passers-by. Oppat agreed with the caller that newspaper coverage may facilitate the practice, but she surmised that proliferation is due primarily to seeing them on the road and then, when they lose a loved one in a car crash, they remember what they have seen and so put up a shrine of their own: "They [the shrines] are their own ad." When I expressed to Oppat my preliminary "take" on how shrine stories may also function in contemporary culture as a selective performance of democratic dialogue, the reporter asked "So, how do we [newspapers] stack up?" I offered that roadside shrines and the responses to them (in the newspapers as well as in everyday conversation) seem to open up a dialogue about issues others want to talk about but have limited venues in which to do so. In other words, the shrines themselves and the subsequent stories about them are points of departure that allow for the expression of public opinion in an attempt, perhaps, to shape public policy--at which point Oppat herself took the conversation in another direction, and expressed frustration at the restraints imposed on "embedded news reporters in 'America's New War.'" According to Oppat, compared to reports coming out of Iraq, local reporting of death and memorials allows reporters to talk to

those really involved--and rely on the authorities only for concrete facts and not the "spin": local reporters are "not fed the same degree of pap," and expected to "regurgitate" it.

5.2.1: Media Arts: Popular/Culture

Recently, roadside shrines have (re)inspired choreographers, dancers, and photographers, have been featured "players" on primetime television shows, and have been the muse for singer-songwriters and movie producers. Julia Ritter's dance project "Love After Death," inspired by roadside shrines in her home-state of New Jersey (Le Quesne), was originally presented there in the summer of 2000. "Love" was reinvigorated in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001 (McCormick), was performed in New York in March of 2002 ("Love After Death"), and went on tour in Prague in the summer of 2003 (Le Quesne).

Although Ritter's entire show is based on roadside shrines, it is not the first performance to feature them. Director Patricia Pace, in her staging of William Faulkner's *The Grapes of Wrath,* chose to mark the site of Grandfather's death and burial, whereas in the novel the travelers purposefully seek to hide both the event and the site from the authorities. Apparently, Pace attached a wood cross to the grill of the 'car' and placed the installation on stage: the text and the performance moved on, but the shrine remained, evoking the presence and the absence of a beloved family member. This roadside shrine/set piece continues to live in my own backyard. According to James Griffith (*Shared Beliefs*), when Indo-Hispanos leave their home-place, they often adopt and care for the resting places of others in their new community (Figure 5.2.1).

Shrine photography has also been increasingly popular. Photographer Bill Sampson received a FY2000 ArtServe Michigan Creative Arts Grant for "Hallowed Ground,"

Figure 5.2.1: Photo: Adaptation/Adoption, *Chi* in Bloom, 2002.

a photographic documentary that, as of January 17, 2005, is displayed on his web site. His photographs also appeared in a 2002 PBS *Life 360* interactive internet "show" entitled, "Life 360: Locations: *Descansos*: Roadside Memorials," which "reveals the human stories behind roadside memorials from Florida to Michigan." Sampson currently accepts engagements to lecture and display his work. Roadside shrines have also been featured "players" on an increasing number of television shows since September 2001, although the first show noted by the researcher which did so, originally aired in August of that year, was HBO's *Six Feet Under*. In the episode "Private Lives," one of the main characters, struggling with his public identity, repeatedly drives by an urban community shrine dedicated to a young man killed in an alleged incident of gay-bashing. Shows featuring roadside shrines to air since September 2001 include *Judging Amy,* which aired in November 2001 ("Surprised by Gravity"), and *Boston Public* ("Chapter Thirty Four") and *Crossing Jordan* ("Lost & Found"), both of

which aired in February 2002. Sites of death marked with a shrine are also featured players in road songs. Indeed, at least two singer-song writers have written about roadside shrines, each from a different point of view. Don Morell's 1999 song "Roadside Cross," which is also a link on photographer Bill Sampson's web site, features the thoughts of a man dying on the side of the road as a result of a car crash. Randy Travis' 2004 song "Those Wooden Crosses," is about a roadside shrine that marks the site where four people (a farmer, a school teacher, a preacher, and a prostitute)--only three of whom die--are involved in a bus-commercial truck collision, has evidently "stuck a nerve with record buyers across America, making it a number-one song" (Becton). "Those Wooden Crosses" has been nominated by the 39th Academy of Country Music for the Best Single Record of the Year award (39th Academy). According to a Country Music Television interview with Travis, "there are three different groups--independent filmmakers to major companies--interested in doing a film" based on the song (Jackson and Griffith).

Internet interest, too, has increased phenomenally, with sites ranging from cyber-shrines for a specific person to satirical ethnography, from solemn to playful mourning arts, and from commercialism to scholarship. Indeed, the activity with and between these (web) sites of performance begins to blur and challenge their categorical distinctions. For example, members of the National Communication Association, who subscribe to the association's Communication Research and Theory Network listserv, were invited to participate in an interactive cybershrine, or "web altar," posted for scholar and cultural critic Gloria Anzaldua upon the event of her death in May 2004 (Calafell)--as of January 2005, the print-out of the responses, now living on my bookcase with other shrine/research materials, is forty-one pages long and contains the expressions of honor and grief (poems, stories, scripts) of a

community of mourners from all over the world ("Rest in Peace Gloria"). For an example of a web site with an open invitation to take offense, visit Jason Curless's "They Would Have Wanted It That Way" web site. Curless's site is an online action-packed ethnographic satire featuring roadside shrines throughout the Midwest US, offering an exciting and complex twist to the subject(s) of roadside shrines, shrine-makers, and documentation of the practice: the researcher taunts us to "keep on dying, . . . [and] keep on building these [shrines]," and promises to " trample" through them, pose, take a picture, and post it on the Internet. Also worth the trip are thriving web sites dedicated to solemn and playful mourning arts: RoadsideMarkers.com carves an inscription into the cross of your choice at a cost of $129.50, plus shipping and handling, and Ralph Wilson (a.k.a. "Mr. Shrine") at Artislife.com's "Shrine Factory & Outlet Store" sells roadside shrine art and do-it-yourself shrine kits. One particularly interesting kit depicted on Wilson's site is that of a photograph of a roadside shrine scene laquered onto the shell of a small hard-bodied suitcase.

Buried somewhere behind my *Life On the Shelf* shrine (Figure 5.2.2 and 5.2.3) is my archive of web search printouts--the results of Google "roadside shrine, memorial, cross, and marker" keyword searches over the years. I made note that, after Google put out a call for a protégé responsible to monitor those specific terms in the summer of 2001, the number of hits jumped from 750 (plus or minus twenty-five on any given day) - to over twenty thousand. Later, in the summer of 2003, the same keyword search began to be "contaminated" with an increasing number of sites about roadside bombs. As of January 21, 2005, the Google editors seem to have fine-tuned the categories, in that the search results are more contained: "roadside shrine" elicited 959 hits; "roadside memorial" elicited 5,340 hits; "roadside cross" elicited 4,810 hits; "roadside marker" elicited 676 hits, only a few of

Figure 5.2.2: Photograph: Shrine Art: *Life On the Shelf*: Treasure Hunt, 2005

Figure 5.2.3: Photograph: Shrine Art: *Life on the Shelf*: Treasured, 2005

which--in the first thirty or so sites--seem to relate to marking sites of death in vehicle-related incidents; and "roadside bomb" elicited 278,000 "hits."

5.2.2: Performance of Roadside Memorials in the Academy

I wrote in my October 2002 essay "Getting Messy: In the Field and at the Crossroads with Roadside Shrines," that:

> In the wake of September 11, 2001, research into the building of shrines is more likely to burgeon than abate. Indeed, in "Preliminary Observations Regarding the Spontaneous Shrines Following the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," Grider, an anthropologist, asserts that "[s]ystematic research into the phenomenon . . . is the only way we will come to fully understand and appreciate this new grieving ritual." Grider views material and cybershrines as "not only an appropriate, but expected response to disaster," describing roadside shrines as smaller, more personal manifestations of the phenomenon (236-37).

Admittedly, this dissertation is an extension of my own previously published work, albeit in an attempt to spin (unsettle) the emerging patterns that the discussions about shrines and shrine-building seem to be taking in this so-called "Post 9/11" world. Other scholars who had previously written about high-profile and other shrines are adding to their body of work in the wake of 9/11. For example, Kenneth Foote's *Shadowed Ground: America's*

Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy, first published in 1997, was reissued--revised and updated--in 2003. The recent edition of *Shadowed Ground* includes a new concluding chapter, "Afterword: Recent Traumas, Changing Memories, Continuing Tensions," and the new cover features a photograph of the New York skyline and the beams of light projecting into space from the place where the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center used to be. However, Foote's brief discussion about roadside memorials, wherein it is noted that crosses marking the site of death on the road "were once fixtures of American roads" have "disappeared" (172-73), remains unchanged. Harriet Senie's 2003 article "A Difference in Kind: Spontaneous Memorials after 9/11," published in *Sculpture: Web Special Online Version*, continues to draw similarities between various cultural rituals of mourning, types of shrines, and shrine-building behavior. Sylvia Grider, according to *The Oregonian* reporter noted earlier, is working on a book about "spontaneous shrines," including roadside shrines in the Southwest which are "some of the nation's earliest examples" of the practice (Denfeld). Indeed, the links that most scholars are making between roadside shrines and high-profile shrine-building in the aftermath of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the field in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, are no longer tentative or tenuous. For example, the Summer of 2004 heralded the *First International Symposium on Roadside Memorials*, hosted by the School of Classics, History and Religion at the University of New England in northern New South Wales, New Zealand. The promotional material frames the conference in terms of high profile shrines, the high profile death toll on 9/11, and individual expressions of grief of "ordinary people" at sites of death on the road around the world:

> The outpouring of grief at the death of [Diana] the Princess of Wales produced an unparalleled response. . . . people felt moved to write messages

> and leave flowers at the scene of her death. The extent of the public response may have been unique but the form was not. Everyday ordinary people who die tragically are remembered in similar ways.
> . . . Research into the phenomenon is taking place around the world. . . . This symposium focuses especially on roadside memorials to road crash victims. Road death regularly claims thousands of lives around the world--a "9/11 tragedy every day" reports *World Highways* (April 2003). Of all tragic death, road trauma is likely to affect us all, in some way, at some time (Roadside Memorials: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach).

As previously noted in Chapter Three, the interdisciplinary scholarship regarding the building of shrines should be of particular interest to performance studies scholars insofar as it frames the practice in terms of culture, cultural performance, and death-related ritual performance. Scholars and journalists draw links between sites at which shrines are built, and offer significant insight into the increasingly popular cultural practice. However, many studies focus on emerging patterns of memorializing, and privilege fixed meanings which potentially obscure the dynamics of living memory. Because these studies tend to focus on the building of shrines as a ritual response to grief and loss, they bring into clear focus the relatively stable patterns that codify and normalize the practice. In the process of doing so, however, they may also obscure the politics of death-related and other-related ritual practices that simultaneously seek to story and *un*story both the events being memorialized and the efforts being made to police the mourning process itself.

5.3: Side-stepping Enshrinement: Historicizing Interpretive Frames

Of interest to this study are several terms used in both popular and academic discourse to describe shrines, shrine-building, and shrine-builders. One of the terms in question is "spontaneous." While the term "spontaneous" has often been used by both scholars and members of the media to describe ritual actions, the term "spontaneous shrine" seems to have accumulated a certain amount of cultural currency. Indeed, Sylvia Grider

provides an “Update” link from her post 9/11 article about shrine-building in which she offers a short treatise regarding who first “coined” the phrase --it seems that, according to Grider, the term “spontaneous shrine” was used by folklorist Jack Santino as early as 1992 in his article about shrines and shrine-building in Northern Ireland, and as further noted by Grider, was used and further explored in Santino’s 2001 book *Signs of War and Peace: Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland* (“Preliminary Observations”). Like Grider, I too was made aware, following the publication of my own work, of Santino’s claim of origination, and promised to duly note as such in the future (Santino). Now I would like to retreat from the discussion of origins and turn instead to the underpinnings of the term “spontaneous” in order to interrogate its use as a Eurocentric framing device, particularly when employed to make meaning of mourning rituals.

“Spontaneous” is used frequently to make a distinction between vernacular and institutional ritual responses to death, where spontaneity is a “pure” emotive (vernacular) response rather than a prescribed rational (institutional) patterns of behavior. Thus, framing shrine-building activities as a spontaneous ritual may be viewed as a response lacking in cognitive processing--a notion already unsettled in Chapter Three, where it was noted that shrine-builders often create and maintain roadside shrines to protest the circumstances that led to the death of their loved one. It follows then that the term “spontaneous,” along with other terms that are closely related to it, when applied to ritual activity--particularly mourning rituals--are equally problematic.

Catherine Bell writes that, in contemporary scholarship, "the positive and integrative aspects of ritual action are so taken for granted that no effort is made to substantiate them," and that ritual is "overly romanticized" (258). The ritual complex as laid out by Van Gennep,

and taken up by nearly every scholar using the ritual framework (Bell 100-103, 263), is often "cast . . . as independent of any socio-cultural context" (258), including rite-of-passage processes, also referred to as "life-crisis" or "life-cycle" rites (94). Bell goes on to note that this may result in "a blindness to how contemporary ritual practices are part and parcel of the modern world, often effectively promoting the very forces of modernity that such perspectives implicitly condemn" (259).

Victor Turner discusses several levels of Euro-modern catharsis in social ritual, categorizing one form of "*un*mediated communication" or "communitas" as "*spontaneous*," which is "existential [in nature] . . . which *defies* deliberate cognitive and volitional construction" ("Variations" 46, emphasis mine). Joseph Roach illustrates the potential of misunderstanding and misrepresentation of certain social practices when Euro-modern labels are applied to ritual behavior, particularly in relationship with funereal rites and mourning behavior. Roach offers, for example, Latrobe's journal records describing an early nineteenth-century Afro-Catholic burial.

> [Latrobe's] understanding of memory favored monuments wherein ancestors could be safely confined rather than noisy behaviors . . . what he [Latrobe] calls "excessive distress" and the revelries that he apparently thought of as merely excessive reflects the pronounced tendency of the literate observer to mis-recognize incorporated memory as spontaneous emotion ("Slave" 62).

Here, Roach calls to task not only the issues associated with applying *a priori* interpretive frames to ritual behavior, he also foregrounds several of the underlying issues associated with structuralist ethnographic description: Euro-modern, Enlightenment, rationalist discourse favors the Cartesian mind/body split which delegates superior functioning to conscious thought, and relegates "spontaneous" emotive responses to the body, both of which should be "confined" or contained. Roach's example also illustrates how the Cartesian split is further

embedded in Euro-modern discourse by his use of terms associated with Walter Ong's literate/oral dichotomy. Roach himself labels Latrobe as a "literate observer" who mis-recognized the ritual behavior of a "noisy," uncontained, vocal/oral other. Roach challenges not only the Euro-modern mind/body split but the literate/oral split by introducing the notion of "embodied memory," a combined function of both the mind and the emotive body engaged in the construction and enactment of socio-historical memory--a process of selective remembering and forgetting--often acted-out in various types of social ritual. However, while remembering and forgetting may at first flush strike us as a function of the mind, employment of specific and various embodied practices carry, in the performances of these social rituals, traces of what has not so much been forgotten but re-functioned.

Both Victor Turner and Joseph Roach, albeit each writing from different perspectives about different historical moments, point to the role social ritual, and writing about social ritual, plays with/within the creation *and contestation* of cultural norms and values (Turner 1977, 1990; Roach 1998). I offer that an over-simplified use of the term "spontaneous" to describe the various and specific activities of shrine-building may effectively dismiss not only the cognitive, volitional, and strategic aspects of these behaviors, but may serve to dismiss the complex and often contestatory aspects of death-related social rituals.

Marking the site of death in particular, as seen in Chapter Two and discussed in Chapter Three, can serve to not only incorporate, but contest and usurp institutional discourses and practices. This is evident on the side of the road where one's attention is drawn to various shrines, signs, and markers; where we are called upon to wonder: whose death is important to mark and whose death, and history, is unremarkable? For example, take the trails that were once the footpaths of indigenous people, like US-12 in Michigan, which

was once called the "Old Detroit to Chicago Road" and is now also a National Historic Auto Route (Budurow). Take the Natchez Trace in Mississippi, once an inter-tribal trail, now a part of the US Department of the Interior National Park System, and referred to by some as an "All-American Road." Take US-80 in Alabama, for example, the road that was once part of the Euro-explorer's trail to Talisi, the "last capitol of the Creek Nation" ("Heritage"); was later part of the road to the only Confederate Armory to survive the Civil War ("53rd Alabama Calvary"), and is now part of the "National Historic Civil Rights Trail." Footpaths, trails, routes, and roads are paved over with asphalt, renamed, and remarked, and certain histories are elevated, while others are rewritten and/or (nearly) eradicated, and in which certain rituals of the road, and those who travel and write about the road, certainly play a part--either by accident, design, or some combination of both.

5.3.1: Of Spontaneity, Convention, and Authenticity

Many scholars, with the exception of Holly Everett who aptly uses the term "extemporaneous" to describe various "memorial assemblages" (*Roadside Crosses* 2), tend to construe shrine-building practices as "spontaneous," as unconventional, and culturally conservative. For example, Haney, Leimer, and Lowrey advance that shrine-building practices are understood as unconventional, first, because they occur at or close to the site of the tragic event rather than, or in addition to, the funeral home, cemetery, and/or religious services and, second, because these rituals "extend the opportunity for mourning to individuals not conventionally included in traditional rites" (161). However, shrine-building practices are generally understood as a culturally conservative ritual. Haney et al., assert that when strangers gather to build shrines, these activities assist in restoring, if only temporarily, a sense of community in which disparate individuals gather together to grieve,

to mourn, and to collectively come to terms with the tragic event. Thus, communal shrine-building is a process that parallels Victor Turner's social dramaturgy, "*communitas*," and catharsis, and as such diminishes the perceived "social and cultural threat" (Haney et al. 161), restores social stability, and reifies the status quo. Furthermore, while Haney, Leimer, and Lowery maintain that "spontaneous memorialization" functions as a response to contemporary US culture "where ritual, ceremony, and community have given way to bureaucracy and medical control" of death (167), they also suggest that the political power of such activity lies in its *status* as institutionally-sanctioned mourning ritual, thus substantiating Bell's cautionary tale.

Bereavement, in particular, is a complex experience, expression, and social performance that needs to be historically situated. Halttunen advances that authenticity and spontaneity are correlates to expression of grief and "right feeling," and they draw on mid-nineteenth century performances of sincerity and the "sentimental cult of mourning" (124) that assigned grief to the domestic private sphere and mourning to specific public performances. Since the Victorian era, dominant social groups in the US have valorized bereavement as an expression of an "authentic," naturalized, psycho-emotional state of grief--as an expression of the "purest . . . of all sentiments" (124), an emotion too raw to be "put on," faked, or otherwise "performed." Compelling images of "authentic" expressions of grief were sometimes literally carved in stone (Halttunen 127), some of which are still extant according to June Hadden Hobbs' 2001 photo essay "Tombstone Erotics and Gender in the Graveyards of the South." Similar images are captured in David Robinson's eloquent photo-essay of European cemetery art in *Saving Graces*, described by Joyce carol Oates's "Forward as a form of "idealized, etherealized, and in some cases eroticized [female] embodiments of

ritual mourning." The notion of what constituted authentic expression and social performance in the US was shaped by the (then new) socio-economic mobility of the primarily white middle class who were worried about being duped by socially adept "performers." According to Halttunen, adept male social performers later came to be known as "con artists" (xv), or "the modern industrial version of the trickster" (25). According to Halttunen, adept female social performers came to be known as "painted [masked] women" (xv). The painted woman was "sometimes a prostitute but more often a woman of fashion, who poisoned polite society with deception and betrayal by dressing extravagantly and practicing the empty forms of false etiquette" (Halttunen xv). Con artists, tricksters, and painted women were not only socially mobile, they were also, often, on the road, traveling from place to place, each an itinerant "wanderer" (Halttunen 25).

5.3.2: Cultural Hussies and Weeping Women: In the Field and Out of Place

I dig in the dirt at the base of a roadside shrine, get bitten by fire ants and let loose a string of vulgarity. I crawl in the foliage behind a group of crosses at an intersection to see from "their" point of view, and get poison something-or-other. This elicits yet more rude behavior. I approach one particularly elaborate shrine and, inspired, strike a pose, composing my body with the shrine in a *tableau vivant* of *Saving Graces* (Robinson), molding my body in the shape of the concrete figures of the mid-nineteenth-century "life-sized statues, . . . representations of living [female] mourners [who] leaned and wept over . . . urns, crosses, and caskets . . . with the [weeping] willow's drooping posture" (Halttunen 125). In response to my performance, I hear wolf whistles and lewd invitations from passers-by. I am chastised--disciplined--reminded that my own body is out of place, open to comment and criticism. I experience a falling from grace as I "hit the streets," a cultural "hussy" risking

what Paul Edwards calls the "consequences of a bad reputation" ("Unstoried" 16-17) historically (sometimes, still) attributed to women in the performing arts (Figure 5.3.1)

Figure 5.3.1: Photo: Shrine Performance: Georgia Southern University, 2004

5.3.3: Slow Dancing: "R.I.P," "Rest in Peace," and *Chi*

The inscription "R.I.P." or "Rest In Peace" is not necessarily a descriptive statement—does not constitute a state of affairs—whether it is etched in stone on a marker in a graveyard, or carved, pounded into, painted, or in some other fashion marked on a cross or wreath on the side of the road. However, "Rest in Peace" may refer to a wish or prayer that the soul or spirit of the deceased might *one day* rest. According to Barerra, some persons who build roadside shrines, particularly Mexican-American border-town residents in Texas, "say the spot where you are killed is where the soul leaves the body. . . . But sometimes the soul doesn't run away. Sometimes it's waiting for you to visit . . . those restless souls who

died in some unnatural way" (in Minutaglio). As previously discussed, whereas some indigenous people believe that the spirits of the dead can bring sickness or bad luck to the living (Cunkle and Jacquemain), other indigenous people have a more kindly, personal relationship with the spirits of the dead, particularly those of relatives. The notion of the restless soul is linked to a combination of indigenous belief in an ephemeral spirit world (which is integral to the material world), the Catholic belief in a soul whose reward is in heaven, and the Catholic series of rituals and rites of passage that must be completed in order for the soul to get there. In the Catholic belief system, if a person dies ritually unprepared, the soul must spend time in purgatory, an "in-between" or liminal place (Everett *Roadside Crosses* 111): it is only through the intercession of prayer, often to specific saints and/or the Virgin Mary, that the soul can be released from the "in-between" into heaven (Griffith *Beliefs* 100). Traditional Catholic doctrine worked to contain these prayer sessions to church, especially during Masses for the Dead, while the actual practice of mourners combined visits to the church with pilgrimages to the sites of death and other sites on the road dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Indeed, "church authorities in the 17th and 18th centuries placed restrictions on pilgrimage, sometimes even closing shrines which were associated with fraudulent practices. . . . [However], in academic theology, shrines were never given recognition, and their existence hardly acknowledged" (Marian Library). In recent years, however, Pope John Paul II has not only acknowledged shrines, Marian shrines in particular, but has relaxed the Catholic Church's restrictions on shrine practices as well. According the Spring 1996 *Marion Library Newsletter*, " [a] new role for shrines was highlighted in the First World Congress on Shrines and Pilgrimages (1992) sponsored by the Pontifical Council on Migrants and Itinerant People": the Pope has himself visited several Marian shrines, and

has encouraged the aesthetic enhancement of, and pilgrimage to, certain shrines (Marian Library). While this shift in Roman Catholic doctrine is welcome by many shrine-builders, it is hotly contested by Protestant "Scriptualists" who call the veneration of Mary "heretical and blasphemous" ("Mariology").

An "unnatural death," as indicated by Barerra, is an unexpected one, and according to Anaya, often happens when traveling from one place to another: a literal journey is interrupted by death. An "unnatural death" is also one in which a person dies ritually unprepared, for example when a child dies *before* certain rituals, or an adult dies *without* "last rites": then the person's spiritual and ritual journey is thought to be interrupted (*Beliefs* 100), and therefore the soul is "restless," "in-between," and *mobile*. The *time* of death is fixed in the past, and unchangeable. The *site* of death is also fixed, is often on the road, and is also a powerful place where, following some indigenous and other beliefs, it is believed that the soul/spirit of the dead may return. The site of death is then a gateway or vortex between the material and the ephemeral, a "Crack Between the Worlds" (Swiftdeer) which, when marked, may be kept at least partially open, affording a place where the living, the dead, and other-worlds might coexist, and a place where prayers for the dead may most directly reach specific spiritual intercessors on the behalf of the deceased (Everett, *Roadside Crosses* 111). In traditional and modern indigenous belief systems which understand the spirits of the dead to bring sickness, only the shaman (priest, medicine woman/man) acts as intercessor, communing with and dispatching the spirits of the dead through ceremony (Cunkle and Jaquemine 72, 63). This shamanic practice is more akin to the prescribed role of the priest in Roman Catholicism than the more direct relationship between all community

members and the dead in what Barerra and others call Mexican-American, and what Arellano calls Indo-Hispano, practices at roadside shrines and other death-related sites.

Regardless of one's belief in the hereafter (or not), the site where blood has been spilled is no longer mundane, ordinary space. These sites can be understood as gateways or thresholds to something wholly "other" and therefore what Eliade understood as "holy." This notion is supported by Joseph Campbell's explication of the cross as an intercultural master symbol--a "telling metaphor"--marking an opening or "way" between the physical and the ethereal world (260), understood as such by the Greeks, Goths, Celts, and Aztecs (356-58). For the Aztecs in particular, the cross was a presentational symbol that manifested the "sun door," and facilitated the journey back to the original home of the soul (Campbell 260): when ceremonially placed at the site of death, the cross marks the passageway between the worlds. Whereas Ulmer explores *chi* as flashes of insight produced upon the conjunction of cognitive/imaginative images, and I have located these conjunctions with and within my own body, Eliade, Campbell, and others suggest that these sites of death, marked with a cross (or stones or a pile of sticks) suggest *chi* may also be located, literally, between this world and elswhere.

In sum, today, in some parts of the southwest US and Mexico, crosses and *nichos*, referred to as *descansos,* or "resting places," continue to mark the site where a person died suddenly (J. Griffith, *Shared* 16-17). While *descansos* may bear some form of the inscription "Rest In Peace," the use of the term *descansos* does not indicate a belief that the deceased is "resting in peace" or merely sleeping. These last sentiments, as suggested by Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti, are more closely related to northern European Protestant or non-Catholic

Christian notions. The inscription "Rest In Peace" does, however, play a role in marking the "interrupted journey," especially for the Indo-Hispano (Arellano, *Descansos* 98).

5.3.4: Cutting In: Interrupting the "Interrupted Journey"

The now popular phrase "an interrupted journey" used in conjunction with roadside shrines, was used in 1986 by award-winning novelist and photographer Juan Estavan Arellano in his essay about *descansos* in Old/New Mexico, published in *New Mexico Magazine*. Lay ethnographer Alberto Barerra, citing Arellano, repeated the phrase in his 1991 essay "Mexican-American Roadside Crosses in Starr County [Texas]," in the journal *Hench en Tejas: Texas-Mexican Folk Arts and Crafts*, published by the Texas Folklore Society. In 1995, Arellano's essay was republished, accompanied by the work of novelist Denise Chaves and scholar Rudolfo Anaya, in *Descansos: An Interrupted Journey: Tres Voces*, published by Academia, Inc./El Norte Publications, funded by the University of New Mexico. Journalist Bill Minutaglio, writing for the *Dallas Morning News*, interviewed Barerra extensively in his 1996 investigative report about the increasing popularity of marking various sites of death. Barerra's essay is also featured in Minutaglio's article, which was then archived in the Lexis-Nexis electronic data bank. Subsequent articles about roadside shrines draw from Minutagio's work and Barerra's essay, all borrowing and benefiting from Arellano's use of the phrase "interrupted journey." The phrase "takes off" as a metaphor--is picked up and repeated as feature stories in newspapers across the country draw from each other--while Arellano's grounded use of the phrase to describe *descansos* as "*the mark* of an interrupted journey" (emphasis mine) is left behind.

The complete phrase "the mark of an interrupted journey" is employed by Arellano to describe the specific practice of pall bearers who put down the heavy coffin--or the even

heavier casket--while it was being carried from the church to the graveyard, so that the pall bearers could catch their breath--could *rest*--thus further complicating the term *descansos*, or resting place, as well. The translation of *descansos* as a resting place is often thought to refer only to the place where a body (or a body in a container) was resting--either temporarily or permanently--"In Peace." According to Arellano, the time of rest for the pall bearers was used by the entire entourage of mourners to contemplate the mystery of death, to reflect on the meaning of life, to remember, to grieve, and to pray not only for the deceased person in the coffin, but for others "taken" by death who had taken the same specific journey from church to grave. At each place where the coffin rested on the earth, and where pall bearers and mourners *took* a rest, a *descanso*--a cross made of sticks lashed together, or "X" made of stones--was placed on the ground to mark the spot. Arellano writes that sites of violent and/or unexpected death were *also* marked with *decansos* as a prayer site, a site where prayers are said in order to assist the soul of the dead on its journey to heaven. Here, the "journey" is both specific and allegorical, and it relates to the soul's spiritual journey through the gateways of life. These gateways are marked by specific rituals that facilitate social and spiritual transition and transformation. The last ritual in the journey of life anoints the body and cleanses the dying person's soul, readies the person for the last transition from life on earth to another life elsewhere. If the person dies without the benefit of these last rites--without this final ritual--then the spiritual and ritual journey of life are interrupted. If the person dies "on the road," then a literal, an ephemeral, and the ritual journey of life is interrupted. Consequently, when someone dies, literally on the road, the site is marked with a *descanso*, which becomes the central stage for a life and death ritual--to help both the living

and the dead to transition from one state of affairs to another, to usher into that liminal space between life and death the vital state of grace--one not afforded to all who die "on the road."

The "catchy" phrase and telling metaphor of the "interrupted journey" was used strategically by Patricia Gonzales and Roberto Rodriguez in their 1998 essay, "Public Shrines are Reminders of Interrupted Journey," published in the *Column of the Americas.* Gonzales and Rodriguez deployed "interrupted journey" to "take back" and politicize the phrase both as a rhetorical figure and as a living practice. The authors, citing and extending Arellano's use of the term, write about "illegal" Mexican immigrants who die while trying to cross the border into the US. The essay asks something like, "Where is the marker for *their* death?" The story was picked up by the Universal Press (UP) syndicate, later appeared in the "Comments and Connections: Latino News" section of the *Julian Samora Research Institute Latin Research Center* newsletter, and even later was posted, in all three formats, on the web.

While I have encountered scant reference to the Gonzales and Rodriguez essay, or their query regarding their question "Where?" this relative absence does not indicate that both the phrase, and the practices discussed in their essay, have not been repeated. Anaya, Arellano, and Chavez, in *Descansos: An Interrupted Journey*: *Tres Voces* attempt their own reckoning with marking the site of death on the side of the road--on either side of the Mexican-US border. Chavez writes that the "descanso strengthens the ties between those who have set out and those who stay, between the dead, and the living who travel along that very same road" (146). Rudolfo Anaya expresses concern for the erasure of the culture of the "mexicanos" in the US, a fear tinged with hope, in that, in the form of *descansos*, "it surfaces again and again, bringing back from its wealth of history the old customs, the old traditions" (24). In the words of his grandfather, Anaya writes "[v]iolent death had come

with the new age. Yes, there was utility, the ease of transportation, but at a price" (31). Anaya explains further that, as mexicanos migrated, "the descansos became urban descansos, graffiti crosses painted on walls" (67), intimating, perhaps, that the practice of marking death on the road traveled with Mexican migrant agricultural workers as well, throughout the US. This community, both bound to the earth and imagined, marginalized as well as mobilized, marks the social and cultural landscape with their passing, leaving ghosted traces of their passing from one world to the next, from one community to the next. Marking the site of death on the road is then an inherently political act in its everyday form of resistance to the erasure articulated and feared by Anaya, one that insistently speaks. Grandfather says, "Pause and look at the cross on the side of the road, dear traveler, and remember the price we pay" (31). Indeed, in the hot summer of 2002, the *New York Times* ran a story about the increase of illegal immigrant deaths on the border between the United States and Mexico. The story was accompanied by a photograph of a "potter's field" of sorts--a graveyard in California for unidentified migrant dead, each marked with a white-painted wood cross bearing the inscription "*No Olividado*," or Not Forgotten ("Illegal Immigrant Death"). So, as many scholars mentioned previously note, while some indigenous and post-colonial practices have, perhaps, syncretically evolved over time and/or transferred from one type of practice (or location of a practice) to another, this confluence of cultures is not inclusive, nor is it without contest.

5.3.5: Dirty Dancing: Doin' the Grind with Death and Taboo

It is now a common assumption, based largely on the work of scholars like Philip Aires, that death is a taboo in modern Western culture (xvi, 560). This assumption was fortified by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's extensive attempts to unsettle the taboo (*Death is a Vital*

Importance; “Preface: A Journey”), and widely circulated the by journalist Jessica Mitford’s expose of the death trade in *The American Way of Death*, first published in 1963, and again in 1978, and yet again, revised and updated, in 2000. Many of the assumptions underlying the notion that shrine-building is a new, emergent (read unconventional) mourning ritual, are based on the acceptance of the premise that modern society is dominated by institutionalized death and death-related practices (read traditional and conventional mourning rituals), which have, in turn, created a radical and unhealthy split from the “realities” of death. However, Dollimore questions whether the "denial of death" has ever really existed to the extent that some scholars have previously surmised, noting that "in philosophical and literary terms there has never been a denial of death" (126). Similarly, Ramazani asserts that "astonishing innovations" in contemporary mourning arts, as well as inventive forms of mourning practice, seek to slip the bounds of this "taboo" and make visible the ambiguity of contemporary death and grief (361). Stallybrass and White provide a useful framework to understand how people are in negotiation with notions of the ‘taboo’ of death. Drawing on Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and the carnivalesque, the authors contend that cultural categories of high and low, aesthetic (elite) and social (vernacular or popular), as well as the physical body and geographical space, are always “in conversation,” and never entirely separate (20). Thus, it is perhaps more reflective of lived culture to say that death practices are social and cultural inventions designed to contend with changing social conditions.

Scholarship that frames roadside shrines using the secular/sacred binary and framing the shrines as secular ritual obscures the meaning-making processes of those who construct and maintain roadside shrines. While the activities engaged in, and objects left at the sites do not necessarily represent what is commonly understood as distinctly religious, the

experiences that people report and the meanings that the objects have for them often bespeak the holy insofar as they are extra-ordinary and decidedly not mundane. Eliade reminds us that the building of a shrine or altar effectively acts to take "possession of a new territory" (in Livingston 60-61). Eliade broadens this to "everyday life practices" when he writes that "[t]here are, for example, privileged places, qualitatively different from all others—birthplace, or the scenes of first-love. . . . Even for the most frankly nonreligious, . . . these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality [because in these places one has] received that revelation of a reality *other* than . . . ordinary daily life" (24). Here, I am both replacing Eliade's (male) gendered references and attempting to subvert his point of view. Eliade views the experience of the extraordinary in "everyday life practices" as an example of "degradation and desacralization of religious values and forms of behavior" (24), a position I am urgently straining against.

Persons who build and visit roadside shrines report that the space is special to them and express an urgent need to connect with the place where their son, daughter, wife, husband, father, mother, or friend was last alive (McCarthy). For example, Jeremy Haddock states, "That place right there affects my life. It's always going to affect my life" (in "State Gets Serious"). Chaz exclaimed in a personal interview, "It's something we had to do . . . it could have been any one of us!" Regardless of whether one believes in a hereafter or however one imagines it, sites of violent death irrevocably transform everyday spaces in what Eliade might refer to as "new territories" or "privileged places, qualitatively different from all others" (24).

Self-consciously protesting normative behaviors contradicts the view that modern societies make the move away from mythic, oral traditions to discourse, which, according to

Livingston, is steeped in fixed meaning by way of religious propositions, doctrine, and dogma. I would offer that human beings do not so much "move away" from one set of discourses to another, but that relatively fixed meanings embedded with/in social roles, rituals, and relationships are fore-grounded under relatively stable times in order to maintain the status-quo, and that under extremely uncertain times, social stress stimulates a conscious search for something else. Consequently, when institutionally-sanctioned meaning-making practices--in this case institutionally-sanctioned funeral rites--do not adequately address basic existential questions which arise after unexpected, tragic death, the illusion that there is a separation between first and secondary order discourse is--at least temporarily--exposed in the emergence of seemingly uncontained behavior. It is this exposure--this lifting of the veil--that creates the "gap" in time, in place, and in meaning, and is a fertile and dangerous "crack between the worlds" that is always already present. This apparent foregrounding of symbolic discourse and practice provides scholars an opportunity to further query the relationship between literacy and orality--just as the boundaries between public and private space, public and private grief, and barriers between the sacred and the secular are permeable, so too are the dynamic relationships between vernacular and institutional, and popular and academic discourse and practice, permeable, malleable, interactive, and ever-present.

Postillion
December 14, 2001/March 29, 2004/Today

On my way from school to here, dog tired needing a day to recoup but didn't take it. Light a cigarette to keep a wake, the car packed with Christmas crap--with family heirloom decorations and presents for my new love ready to wrap--wrapped in the familiar surrounds of Burgundy Belle. 240 some thousand miles on her and still purring down the road. My car-guy in Baton Rouge promised we'd all get through grad school together and wouldn't Dad be proud, glad I'd found a surrogate of sorts, and so far south too. She burns a little oil now, sure, but wouldn't you, won't you, don't you? after so many miles? Aren't we all? burning a little oil and blowing a little smoke?

Good tires, good brakes, make sure she can come and go and stop as necessary and *check the oil dammit*! I used to drive Spgs up to the service station two quarts low knowing my dad would "fill 'er up," and he'd get so pissed. I'd drive away full though, filled, and with a few bucks folded into my pocket too, and on back to school I'd go (or wherever).

On my way from school to here, two (plus) years ago at Christmas break, the car stuffed with crap for the holidays--the box of books and notes I've been carrying back and forth (and back and forth) piled on the passenger seat and stuffed in the trunk (again) too. Love cuts into school *hard*, carving it up into strange tracts and voids of time. An abyss.

Cruising down the road, busy traffic traveling east following the Gulf of Mexico coming into Mobile. The sun shining, a relief after all the rain here in the South, this season still strange to me, no ice and snow, light another cigarette and *Holy Fuck*! What's

THAT

right there in the middle of *my lane*? A shiny round steel spool-shaped something-or-other that's too big to roll over,

man-oh-man, lots of traffic and I'm in the left lane passing some slow poke truck. I'm going 85 miles an hour (think I'd know better, all the shrine-spotting I've done for the last how many years) and there in the road, a thing I can't predict, control, or go around. Just didn't see it comin'…

I maneuver a bit to the right,
clasping the wheel, miss hitting it head-on with the front tires, and
clang clang *so fast* and
POP Bang KERPLOW,
the back right tire blows to hell
and I'm
swerving (only a bit). Don't panic, hold the wheel, don't slam on the breaks, get to the
median.

The left side tires meet grass, mud, slide and
spin around *jessus fucking christ* I'm going *backwards*

fast fast down in the median click clikityclick
bam bam bam mow down the little steel rods in the center,
no guide-wire yet stringing them together,
and my life doesn't flash
in front of my eyes, no sir! Just
my body is going to get hurt, very hurt, steel cutting flesh
still speeding. Belle mows down
the poles in the center,

side swiping, and her
front end swings around
in
a seemingly
slow
arc and
I don't
know *how*
but
we're heading forward up and
OUT
of the center ditch and *into*
oncoming traffic--
traffic coming at me traveling west--
I'll bet somebody saw us comin' and pissed their pants.

Well, I had one clear thought then, more like a voice calm in my head, a command:

"Brake Now."

And so I did, and the car lurched and, still in the mud, went backward, slid back into the (deeper now) ditch and
Stopped.
Hit a pole that held.
Something in the center that held!

Hit that pole hard enough to send my body forward into the steering wheel, not too hard though, blown air bag in my face. Coughing.
Get out, dazed and amazed
to be in one piece,
no blood, no bruising.
Squatting
in the ditch away from the car, in a birthing position like the dark naked women in the bush on the pages of National Geographic.

Squatting in the ditch away from the car, traffic whizzing by, naked and vulnerable.

Visions of a ruptured gas tank, some big fireball that never came.

Poor Belle! Banged up passenger side folded in at four places, paint and steel folded in, took the blows mowing down the blessed poles that slowed us down, rear end caved in. Miraculously still running, purring. "NPR's "Car Talk" still on the radio!

A couple of guys in a pick up truck, older, one of the survivors heading west (who pissed their pants?) pulled over way down the road and walked back. Said "Ma'am,

> that was a fancy bit of driving! Where'd you learn to drive like that?" North, ice, I said. And my mom. My mom and the road taught me to drive like that. My father(s) told me how to care for my car, my mom taught me how to move, how to go, how to *go on*. And, I guess, when to stop.

I didn't know it then, but as I rode with the tow truck driver, towing Belle, we were headed for the bone yard.

5.4: Resisting "Healthy" Mourning: Performing Melancholic Mourning

In "Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual," Haney, Leimer, and Lowery voice a widely shared indictment of modern society's relationship with death, suggesting that other societies had a "healthier" relationship with death. Literary critic Jahan Ramazani maintains that the healthy/unhealthy binary constructs a polarized psychology of grief that equates "traditional" Victorian expressions of grief and "timely" consolation with "health" and all other forms of grief with pathological melancholia (29-30). Ramazani argues that popular psychologies of grief view mourning as "healthy" and "successful" when it results in an acceptance of the death and comes, within a circumscribed time frame, to peaceful terms with that death, putting it in the past "where it belongs" so that one can "move on with the business of life." The Freudian antithesis to successful mourning is melancholia, a refusal of solace. Ramazani contends that while the romantic poetics of consolation and compensation enacted "healthy" mourning, modern elegists tend to enact "melancholic mourning" (4), a process that conforms neither to normative mourning nor to Freudian melancholia. Unlike Freudian melancholia, which is characterized by a pathological *resistance to* solace, Ramazani's "melancholic mourning" is characterized by mourning that is *in process* and therefore unresolved, and like the modern eligist, may scorn "recovery and transcendence"--melancholic mourning practices "neither abandon the dead nor [necessarily attempt to] heal the living" (Ramazani 4), and as such is

unfinalizable. Thus, modern elegists and melancholic mourners not only resist inherited conservative forms, they also resist certain social codes of containment and refuse to participate in conventional social rituals (Figure 5.4.1).

Figure 5.4.1: Photo: "Theatron," and Roadside Shrine Art in the Hotel Lobby, 2001.

Melancholic mourning resists inherited forms of grieving that restrict grief to an increasingly shortened time frame and resist the social rituals which attempt to confine grief to increasingly institutionalized places (Ramazani 10-15). Ramazani's assertion corresponds and supports Haney et al.'s claim that people who refuse to contain their grief within established social frameworks, particularly in the corporate world, are often recommended for psychiatric care, which may or may not include a prescribed drug regimen (169). Indeed, melancholic mourning may not only resist inherited conventional forms of grieving, but may propel the mourner elsewhere. Building and maintaining roadside shrines, I argue, often function as a public performance of melancholic mourning.

Persons who build and visit roadside shrines, for example, frequently speak out in protest of culturally sanctioned norms of grieving, decrying existing funereal practices that do not adequately serve their needs. Some shrine builders complain that church services were conducted by clerics who did not have a personal relationship with the deceased or the family, noting that the liturgy and ritual were devoid of meaning in the face of their sudden and traumatic loss. In a personal interview, Patsy stated, "We put a cross and flowers on the side of the road where my brother-in-law died and had our own little prayer service. He didn't go to church, . . . and the funeral parlor and the church and all, it just didn't seem to make sense. It would have been too impersonal and cold."

Whereas many shrine-builders create ritual spaces on the side of the road as an act of resistance to institutionally-sanctioned death-related rituals, other mourners insert their own eclectic rituals into more traditional settings. Indeed, cross-cultural and inter-religious death practices may also find their way "back" into institutional funereal rites, much to the dismay of officiates, as noted in Henzel's and in my own field and personal experience. Henzel notes that while "the Catholic Church has no official position related to the placement of *cruces,*" she was told "unofficially" by a spokesperson for the Diocese of Tucson that Indian and Hispanic populations do "not always follow strict Catholic doctrine" (95). To illustrate and expand on Henzel's work, I offer for example the series of events which were interjected into my friend Dan's High Funeral Mass at the Catholic Cathedral in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Without forewarning to the Cardinal, Dan's family and friends put together a constellation of performative "readings" that reflected several of his many group memberships. Some of these groups were entered into "by accident," others were freely chosen, others were familial Christian traditions of Dan's "blood" family, what Dan's

adopted Navajo family would call his “born to” affiliations, others were “borrowed” from his adopted Navajo family traditions, and yet other group affiliations were borrowed from his extended family ties--the Navajo, African-American, and Hispanic traditions that his brothers and sisters had “married into.” This eclectic mix also included other group affiliations that Dan identified himself with/as: HIV/AIDS Survivor, Gay-Rights Activist, Forensics Champion, Solo Performance Artist, and other memberships that can loosely be called, for want of a better term, “New Age.”

Throughout the funereal celebration, the Cardinal was nonplussed--visibly frowning and looking away, and after Mass he refused an invitation to the ceremonial feast. Indeed, the complex mix of practices unsettled other attendees as well. While it was for some people a welcome celebration of life (a far cry from the Catholic canon of amending the soul of the dead to God), it was an uncomfortable experience for some mourners, and an uneasy compromise for others, particularly for family members who practice a more traditional Navajo way of life, and whose beliefs and practices actively avoid close contact with the dead, sometimes even to the point of no longer speaking the name of the deceased.

Other ceremonial insurgents and shrine-builders find that, after cremating the remains of their loved ones, they need someplace to go. Jennifer Hennessy Parker told a reporter, "[My brother] was cremated. . . . This way offers us someplace to visit" (in Arndorfer). Still other shrine builders complain that cemeteries are cold, lonely, and forbidding (Jones), or that they are over-regulated, uninviting, and don't allow for the practice of leaving meaningful items at the grave (Sefton). Rhonda Leffew, for example, noted that "because all we can have at the cemetery where they're buried is a flat headstone, a lot of kids put stuff [at the roadside shrine], . . . not just on holidays but all the time" (in Galletta).

5.4.1: Resistance to the Performances of Mourning of/at Roadside Shrines

Assisted by the interpretive frames proposed by Fuoss, I argued in Chapter Three that the competing discourses and practices surrounding roadside shrines operate at the textual and intertextual spheres of contestation. Here, I argue that the agonistic cultural performance of roadside shrines also operates with/in the conceptual sphere (Fuoss, "Performance" 112) where performance is a contested concept and is often met with suspicion. Roadside shrines often become the site of intense debates regarding what constitutes "proper," "natural," and "normal" mourning behaviors, with behaviors deemed "improper" sometimes construed as "disingenuous performances" and "personal propaganda" in an effort to demean them. For example, when Florida attempted to regulate shrine-building practices between 1996 and 1998, public debate was intense. When an Orlando, Florida, talk radio host Jim Phillips of WTKS gave away a free T-shirt to anyone who brought a roadside cross into the station, listeners brought in enough crosses to fill a storeroom. Speaking to a reporter, Phillips commented, "It started to look like Mexico. It was macabre and disingenuous" (in Lang). An editorial in one Florida newspaper made a plea for "common sense":

> Once upon a time, we faced our family tragedies, mourned our tragic losses, and got on with our lives. These ad hoc roadside shrines are nothing more than pious forms of littering, the product of the 'me generation' taking a long soak in Rikki Lake with Oprah on the tube. Instead of legitimizing the co-opting of public property for personal propaganda, the department of transportation should be handing out summonses to anyone depositing refuse on any so-called memorial. Is defacing public property considered proper in any other context? ("Cross Controversy").

In the agonistic cultural performance surrounding roadside shrines, some who resist the practice state that there is a time and place for everything, contending that the side of the road is not the proper place and that the time for grieving is best spent at the funeral home, the cemetery, and the church (June). Still others maintain that those who engage in "non-

normative" displays of grief are either faking it for attention, mimicking another culture's practice, or just plain rude (Yalenzian). Ross Chambers, drawing on Victor Turner's social dramaturgy, contends that "room for maneuver" exists in the "betwixt and between" spaces opened between the dominant system's power structure, a disturbance, and the system's power to recuperate after the disturbance has occurred (xi). To date, institutional strategies aimed at recuperating control in the wake of roadside shrine controversies have varied widely. To reiterate and pick up where Chapter Three left off, the relationship between roadside shrines and cemetery practices is a messy one, where once common regional practices, particularly in the Mississippi Delta region of the US, of visiting cemeteries to reminisce, clean and refresh the site, leave meaningful items, and mark the site with stones (Jeanne; Milbauer)--once thought to have died out (Milbauer)--are remarkably persistent on the side of the road *and* in certain cemeteries, as illustrated by the work of Everett, Owens, Sefton, and my own research.

5.4.2: "Cemetery-day" and Other Practices at the Scotlandville "Public" Cemetery, Spring 1999

Located at the corner of Old Scenic Highway and Mt. Pleasant Road, north of Baton Rouge, is the Scotlandville Cemetery. Many of the graves and grave markers were half-sunken into the ground, many of them were broken, and many dirt mounds were either unmarked or marked with weathered wood crosses tilting toward the earth, tall grass and wild flowers covered the yard. While driving by on several "shrine-spotting" junkets, I had at first thought by the looks of it that the cemetery was abandoned, an observation that would confirm Milbauer's and Jeanne's accounts of fading interest in rural cemeteries. Further supporting my supposition was the fact that the graveyard was marked on my old 1980

Greater Baton Rouge Area Chamber of Commerce road map but was absent on more recently issued guides to the area.

On a certain Sunday morning in May of 1999, I determined to stop and visit the site. I parked across the street in front of a dilapidated wood-front "Party Store" (and other roadside attractions) and crossed to the graveyard. The corner of the graveyard closest to the intersection was marked with two signposts. One signpost was chest-high and seemed to be very old--the fancy iron scrollwork tripped along the top edge of the horizontal arm, and from it swung two rusted metal hooks--whatever sign that once hung there was long gone. The other was a tall iron post bearing a black and brass historic marker:

Port Hudson Siege
Seven miles west is the site of anchor fort controlling Mississippi.
Here 6500 Confederates held 30,000 Union troops May 21 until July 8, 1863.
Fall of Port Hudson opened river, hastening fall of Confederacy.

ERECTED BY THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY 1955

As the morning progressed, several cars pulled into the deeply rutted two-track drive that wound between the graves. Entire families, many dressed in their "Sunday clothes" (men in collared shirts and pressed trousers, ladies and girls in dresses, the older women in hats), climbed out of their cars and into the heat. The men pushed up their sleeves and commenced painting gravestones and cutting the grass, some on their knees with garden shears, others with gas or battery-powered weed-whackers. The women changed their shoes, donned garden gloves, and planted flowers. One family brought a picnic lunch, and after a time of working in the hot sun, they gathered under the only tree in the yard and stopped to eat, drink a cold soda, and talk quietly. Throughout their time in the graveyard the younger children ducked behind and ran between the crypts and markers, laughing, playing hide-and-seek--they were only occasionally (and gently) admonished to "hush now."

I slipped my notebook discreetly into my pocket and wandered around the edges of the yard in the tall, tall grass--over my head in some places. In the farthest corner behind the tallest weeds I stumbled upon a huge pile of empty black plastic flower pots, rotting cut flowers, and broken Styrofoam wreaths and their wire stands--I was curiously embarrassed by my inadvertent discovery of what I thought was an area Erving Goffman might call a "backstage." Later, while visiting roadside shrines in Georgia, Goffman's interpretive frame will twist, break, and fall away (Figure 5.4.2).

Figure 5.4.2: Photo: GA-96: Migrant Worker Shrine: Open Staging, 2003

In the Spring of 1999, I hurried away from the pile of refuse in the Scotlandville Cemetery, and as I did, looking over my shoulder at the trash, I nearly collided with a man approaching me. He asked if I was looking for someone--asked if he could help me. I told him, "No, thank you, my people are elsewhere."

Lonnie White nods, smiles, introduces himself as the local funeral home director, which, he says, explains why he would know where most folks are buried, even if they are

unmarked. "Not everyone can afford a crypt or a stone," he says. Then he shows me his mothers' grave marker, an above-ground cement crypt he had freshly painted white the day before. This day, he has come to place a wreath of fresh flowers there. He tells me a story about how his brothers have left the care of their mother's grave up to him and expresses some dis-ease about this, not because of the burden of the work, but because he feels his brothers are not connected to their shared past. He tells me more of his mother's struggle, and how she raised her family. He remembered what I had (accidentally-on-purpose) forgotten. It is Mother's Day, and as we walk and talk I realize I have become, in some small way, part of this "cemetery day" community, am becoming something other than a stranger, perhaps less of an outsider. Then Mr. White tells me a story about the cemetery.

The Scotlandville Cemetery, he says, is a "Black Cemetery" that has been there for almost 150 years. It is a "Public Cemetery" which, he explains, explains why there is no fence, few trees, and no upkeep except for what the individual families choose (or can afford) to do. It is the "Poor Cemetery." Down the road, he tells me, is the "Private Cemetery," the "White Cemetery" that went up sometime in the early to mid '50s (about the time of the historical marker). He tells me I should go there and have a look-see, so I do.

To the north and just down the road a bit, behind iron gates and a tall iron fence, the graves are shaded by trees, the grass is uniformly mowed, and there are fresh and fabricated flowers placed in cement urns. Some graves have fresh flowers placed upon the ground. While I am there a car pulls in, and a man and woman with a young child--a pre-teenage girl--arrive and walk solemnly to a gravestone. They too are dressed in "Sunday" clothes (but without the hat). The woman is carrying a large bunch of flowers in her arms. She hands a few stems to the girl, then they both bend to place their offerings, which I imagine will be

removed by a hired custodian before they wither and rot, near the stone. They all stand closely together, heads bowed for a moment talking quietly, then they lift their heads, turn, and head toward their car, talking in their "normal" voices. I think I should feel more "at home" here--this place and this behavior are familiar to me--but I do not. I do not re-member here. On my way back to Baton Rouge I stop at the corner party store for a cold "coke," return to the Scotlandville Cemetery, and sit for a while under the big tree--it will not be the last time I visit here--a temporary respite from spotting, and visiting, roadside shrines.

In the summer of 2002 I revisited both the "Private" and the "Public" cemeteries. In the "Private Cemetery" several graves were decorated with new and weathered flags, toys, ceramic angles, fresh and fabricated flowers, sports trophies, notes, poems and other mementos, evidence of a practice I had not seen previously here. At the Scotlandville Cemetery the historical marker remained, however the old iron scrolled signpost with its rusted hooks was gone. Catty-corner from the graveyard is a new gas station-convenience store and a billboard announcing a new subdivision ()Figure 5.4.3).

Many of the graves had sunk further into the ground (Figure 5.4.4). Other cement grave tops remained broken, and another crypt is both broken and empty (Figure 5.4.5). Many of the graves, both new and old, are either unmarked or their markers are too weathered to read: the temporary identification provided by the funeral home, like tiny death certificates filled in with typed or handwritten information, faded with the sun and rain (see Sports Trophy and Traffic Cone below). Other graves and sections of the graveyard continued to display recent "cemetery-day" practices, both traditional and, perhaps, emergent.

Figure 5.4.3: Photo: LA Scotlandville Cemetery: New Building, 2002

Figure 5.4.4: Photo: Scotlandville Cemetery Broken Crypt, 2002

Figure 5.4.5: Photo: Scotlandville Cemetery Empty Crypt, 2002

In the section of the yard where infants and stillborn babies are buried--near the big tree and the road--the tiny graves are marked with white picket and small wire garden fences, soggy teddy bears, plastic rattles, and other toys. Several other crypts sported fresh paint, others were marked with assorted new and weathering mementos (Figure 5.4.6) .

Figure 5.4.6: Photo: LA Scotlandville Cemetery: Trophy with Funeral Home Marker, 2002

Several adult-sized graves are marked with various car parts placed on top of or near the site (Figure 5.4.7), a practice not noted during previous visits. Likewise in another corner, several newer graves where young men are buried are marked with large orange traffic cones, the type used at road construction sites to warn drivers of the presence of road workers and at other sites where drivers are encouraged to slow down (Figures 5.4.8 and 5.4.9).

Figure 5.4.7: Photo: LA Scotlandville Cemetery: Exhaust Pipe, 2002

Figure 5.4.8: Photo: LA Scotlandville Cemetery: Traffic Cone w/ Funeral Home Marker, 2002

Figure 5.4.9: Photo: LA Scotlandville Cemetery: Toppled Traffic Cone and Floating Angel, 2002

It seems that in southern Louisiana, particularly in areas north of Baton Rouge, contemporary cemetery-day practices of the African-American community may have influenced shrine-building activities on the road, and that other road-related practices have been introduced into the Scotlandville Cemetery where contemporary road-related shrine-

building was not earlier in evidence. Furthermore, it seems that various markers found at sites of danger on the road itself have found their way into the Scotlandville Cemetery.

On a later trip to the cemetery, I followed the directions on the historic marker, driving the seven miles west to the river, which ended at a blocked back gate to a chemical plant. I am told later that I did not properly follow the directions; the historic site is actually seven miles "as the crow flies" to the northwest, much closer to St. Francisville. The site of the battlefield is on the tourist map to local attractions.

5.5: Roadside Shrines and the Trickster: The Strategic Deployment of Grief and Grace

In "The Gift of Presence," Miles Richardson, writing with Jacques Derrida, Hank Williams, and many others, explores the paradox that artifacts left at shrines, memorials, and the sites of other tragedies, by their very presence, *announce absence*. Borrowing from Karen Mills-Court, Richardson construes the objects left at shrines as "epitaphic," noting that like epitaphs on tombstones, the objects announce "here is what is no longer here" (266). Marita Sturken applies this concept in her essay, "Memorializing Absence," to post 9/11 memorialization efforts:

> . . . the shock of the spectacular image of the plane's impact was replaced by an equally unbelievable image--the absence of the twin towers in the skyline.
> ……
> In the face of absence, especially an absence so violently and tragically wrought at the cost of so many lives, people feel a need to create a presence of some kind, and it may be for this reason that questions of memorialization have moved so quickly following this event (n. page).

However, unlike tombstones that mark the site where a body is buried, or public memorials which mark the site where bodies where re-covered, roadside shrines mark liminal spaces *between* life and death, sites where loved ones died *and* sites where loved ones, therefore, were also last alive (Burke in McCarthy A1). Roadside shrines and the artifacts that adorn

them cleave open a gap, exposing the raw, excessive, messy body, pulsing with life, not yet dead, not yet to blame, not yet made heroic. The burning rubble of the World Trade Center functioned in this way, for me, until September 14, 2001.

I maintain that the side of the road is a highly contested space and that roadside shrines can--from one perspective--be understood in terms of what Scott calls "everyday forms of . . . resistance [that] nibble away at . . . policies by noncompliance, foot-dragging, [and] deception" (xvi). These everyday forms of resistance usually fall "well short of collective defiance" in order to defend "against both conservative and progressive orders" of the state (xvi). Scott contends that these acts of resistance often center not only on access to and distribution of life-sustaining resources, but also on the "appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labeled, [and] a struggle to identify causes and assess blame," and "a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history" (xvii). Following Scott, I construe that the side of the road is a site of multiple struggles including: a struggle over symbols, the cross in particular; a struggle over what constitutes a roadway "accident"; a struggle over appropriate and inappropriate means (and ends) of re-membering and forgetting; a struggle over what constitutes healthy and unhealthy forms of grieving; and a deeper ideological struggle regarding the cultural fictions of freedom, liberty, and justice--iconography flapping in the breeze, shining in the sun, and reverberating in the air--and the infrastructure of the United States, of which "the road," it's attendant energy grid, and it's verdant agricultural fields, are materially, symbolically, and discursively keyed (Figure 5.5.1).

Figure 5.5.1: Photo: LA US-61: “Highway 61 Revisited” (Dylan), 2003

Illegal roadside shrines are usually granted a certain “grace” insofar as they are considered spontaneous expressions of grief and therefore authentic and above reproach. This grace and “look-the-other-way” policy effectively circumvents prosecution by the state. Illegal roadside shrines are usually left in place "out of respect" (Raschal in Galletta). On the rare occasion when a roadside shrine is removed, it is often replaced quickly ("State Gets Serious"), and even when a state-sanctioned marker is in place, an illegal shrine often stands nearby. These sites of cultural performance frequently deploy “sacred” discourses, express “right” feeling, and draw on mid-nineteenth-century performances of sincerity (Halttunen 124), adopting, perhaps, the stance of the double-voiced trickster figure who deploys dominant discourses in order to subvert them (Halttunen 24; Crapanzano 53).

However, no matter the ambiguity of meanings and the contentiousness of arguments about various aspects of the practice of building, maintaining, and visiting roadside shrines, there prevails a discourse of *sameness* that collapses and (nearly) erases the specificities of artifact, symbol, language, and code of behavior that designate certain group belongings, an essentializing which works to *miss* certain and specific bodies at the sites. The repetition of news stories about the types of crosses that are "left alone," and the repetition of images of the "simple" white crosses (with a few flowers or a ribbon attached) on the side of the road, work together to discipline (contain) the practice. Preferred crosses, those that are graced with the "look the other way" policy by road officials, are set back from the road beyond the mow-line for the economy of road maintenance crews, are made of wood because they collapse if hit by the mower or are mowed down by a run-away motor vehicle, and are relatively unadorned (not messy, and not baroque). If the installations on the side of the road break with the preferred (dominant) aesthetic, these performances--and the objects that mark these sites of death--are opened up to be classed as "low," as trash, as an "other" within, and shrine-builders' performances of mourning, measured by Victorian codes of behavior, fail. The "messy" or "elaborate" installations on the side of the road are at best marginalized as kitsch, are more often labeled as trash, and shrine-builders' performances of mourning are labeled as self-centered, insincere, or rude. Indeed, I have had more than one confidant confess as much to such stereotypes, going as far as referring to shrines on the side of the road as "White Trash."

From another perspective, the Mexican/Mexican-American, or Indo-Hispanic practice of placing a *descanso* at the site of death on the road, often discussed as one possible history of roadside shrines, is often discussed *as* history rather than a current, living practice. Staged

there, there, there, and there, in what Schneider calls the "blind spot" (184), are players who have a stake in the democratic process but have limited access to the public forum--performers whose labor helps to make the machinery of democracy and capitalism possible.

Roadside shrines call attention to themselves and trouble "business as usual." Roadside shrines insist on a performative engagement with them: from those who mourn; from those who pass by, visit, or choose to ignore the shrines; from those who would have them removed; and from those who write, read, and perform with them. There, and there, and there, and here, absent bodies silently but insistently speak, inviting response.

Conclusion: Resisting Arrest

between
literacy
and
orality,
between
human nature and cultural determinations
of the
natural,
between
authentic
expression
and
performance,
between
grief
and
memory,
between
life and death,
and between research, writing, the page, and the stage.

CHAPTER SIX
LOCATING ROADSIDE SHRINES IN/AS GRACE

> Consequently, although humbug has often been interpreted as exploiting and undermining social confidence, it may be interpreted at another level as helping to restore social confidence by trusting the spectator to render a competent judgment of the truth or falsity, the value or worth, of objects or products displayed in the cultural marketplace (Ruth Laurion Bowman, "Performing Social Rubbish" 138)

6.1: Independence Day

I woke up that morning and knew it was time to go. Well rested, fasting, my site previously scouted, I packed the car and left. It was the 4th of July--a time out of time--a National Holiday.

I sat on the northeast corner of an intersection where two relatively busy rural two-lane roads met (Figure 6.1). I sat on my lawn chair, up to my knees in tall grass and wild

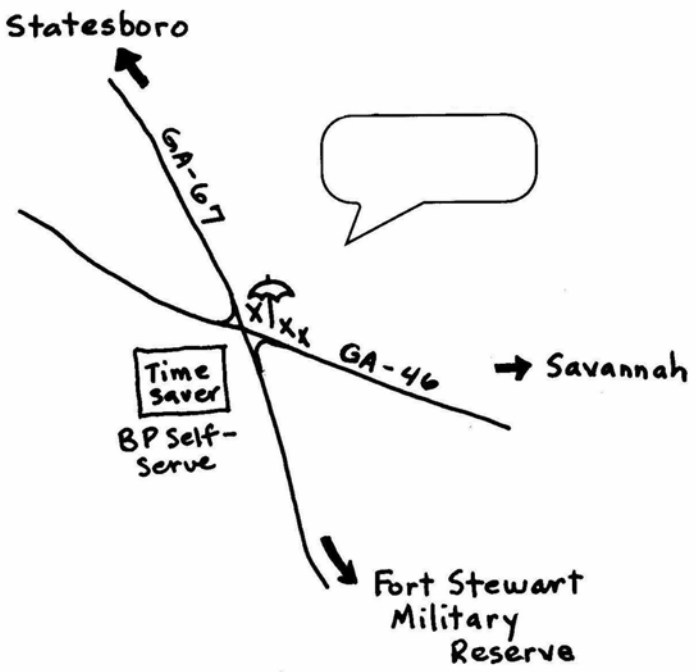


Figure 6.1.1: Map: GA-67 and GA-46: Converging at the BP, 2003

flowers, covered in bug spray, covered with a "ban du soliel" umbrella. I sat between three white crosses adorned with faded flowers but no names, up on a little hillock well behind the

road maintenance mow line, and taking my cues from the crosses, faced the intersection (Figure 6.2).

Other road signs direct, advise, and point the way to here and there--billboards enticing passers-by to spend time and money on this and that, all arrows point which way to go to get it. The only commercial building for miles, a British Petroleum (BP) self serve gas station and "TimeSaver" convenience store, is catty-corner to the shrines.

Figure 6.1.2: Photo: GA-67: Three with Billboards: Just Sitting, 2003

There I was, not sure what would happen, open to just about anything. I picked the site for lots of reasons, one of which was relative safety for me and for anyone who might choose to stop and look, wave, talk, walk up. Being in a living body, *sitting* with the shrines, interrupted the "drive by" of others. My body orientation broke the codes of "ritual" by facing the road rather than kneeling, facing the shrine--a posture which is relatively "closed" and coded as "private." Being a live body sitting facing traffic, I interrupted the site

which marks the presence of what is absent. I was sitting with, and standing in for, ephemeral others.

Everyone who drove by had to make a choice regarding how to interact with me, with the site, with "us." The people who drove by without looking were in the minority, maybe ten out of several hundred; those people had a set and locked jaw, and looked straight ahead, purposefully *not* looking. This was especially evident in the folks who had to stop at the "STOP" sign in front of me - with that orange and yellow sun umbrella you just couldn't miss me (us). Most people drove by more than once, mostly running errands or going visiting it seemed--I began to recognize cars, people--locals aware of these crosses on the corner, perhaps to the point of not really seeing them anymore, because they drive by them probably every day. Most folks did look, and the look included a gesture (a wave, a smile, a nod, a slight bow of the head, an open palm on the steering wheel with fingers spread barely raised). I reciprocated with a similar gesture. A gestural language developed. An oft repeated gesture was the open palm pressed against the chest, softly patted, twice.

Eight cars stopped, people of different ages, skin colors, sexes, driving beat up junkers or brand new luxury sedans or hard working pickup trucks. Each person had a different reason to stop, a different story to tell, wanted something from me (us), and assigned varied levels of meaning as to why I might be there. All assumed I was keeping some kind of vigil, and that I had some relationship to one of the deceased marked there. Those who asked about my relationship to the people whose death was marked there did not seem upset when I told them that I didn't know who the deceased were. It seemed to open them up to think, to talk. I let the people tell *me* what I was doing there, tell me what was going on there. I never got out of my chair, so folks had to decide how close to get to me.

Are These Your People?

In the early afternoon, a woman with her grown daughter got out and came right up and we talked awhile. She asked, "Are these your people?" gesturing with her open hand and a nod toward stage left to the two smaller crosses, one with purple plastic tulips, one with yellow fabric daisies at the center, sitting side by side outstretched arms nearly touching. No, my people are elsewhere. "So, you're. ..... just ..... sittin'." Yes. She and her daughter were on their way to meet family members at the local hospital to make a decision about taking her mother off life support. "It's hard, very hard. We can't agree." Yes. It's hard. We all have our own timing. Yes, it'll be alright. She blessed me, took my hand, said "No matter what color we are, we all need more love in the world. Right?" Yes. Yes, that's right. The woman's daughter cocked her head, smiled, shy, skeptical. Small children in the back waved as they drove away. Traces of their presence, the matted grass where they stood, remained, kept me company, until later when the rain came down and the grass perked up.

You Think So*?*

Chuck, a gray-haired and grizzled man, said from an open driver's side window, "I support you - this is good work you're doing here today" You think so? "Yes, I do," he said, nodding his head. I took him to mean, perhaps, that my presence at the shrines reminded others about the risks of driving during this weekend when "holiday" traffic fatalities especially high. The folks at the newspaper, on the radio and the television had been telling us the last several days to expect as much. That's what I thought Chuck meant.

Two, Sense

With one woman I had a good hearty laugh. "Well, it doesn't make much sense to me, whatchyer doin' here," she said. Sometimes, it doesn't make much sense to me either.

We laughed and laughed - she leaning out from the passenger side window of an old red jeep, me from the side of the road in my chair.

Running, Late

Earlier, a woman and her teenage daughter stopped, got out of their car. The young girl asked if I wanted water, and I understood later that I should have accepted rather than say, No thanks, I'm alright. But it was awkward; she seemed reluctant to leave the side of the car. Her mother wanted to talk, stood leaning on, hanging on to, the STOP sign. "Are you here for that person? an anniversary?" she said, pointing to the larger white cross to my right, at stage right, the one with faded red poinsettia and rotting ribbon at the center, the one with the tiny dark and weathered wooden cross wedged at the base. No, I don't know who this is. I have asked, but no one seems to know. "I saw that happen, almost. We were first on the scene, the smoke, everything. We were running late, we ran back in the house to get . . . something . . ." She paused and looked at her daughter, face scrunched, then urgently, to me. "It could have been me, us. About a year ago. I've always wondered. Papers said it was, I don't know, someone from out of town." Yes, we do that, don't we? It could have been me. Yes . . . well . . . you take care, now, too.

Beer Barrel Polka, Afraid to Dance

A man alone in a beat up-pick up truck with a big beer barrel and tap bouncing around near the tail gate stopped at the STOP sign and asked if I needed anything. He'd be happy to get me a drink. No. No, thank you, I am alright. "You sure, Ma'am? I'm just goin' right there to the TimeSaver. Be happy to get you somethin'." I regretted later my impulse to caution, must note now my suspicion, and wonder what that exchange might entail.

The Gift of Water

Late in the (hot and breezy after-the-rain) afternoon, another woman crossed the ditch, marched right up determined-like and handed me a bottle of water in a white plastic TimeSaver bag. "Here, this is for you, you're thirsty." Yes, I am, thank you. Thank you so much. Then she turned and left. She had pulled over in front of a stop sign on the wrong side of the road, and a commercial truck, one of the few on the road that day, pulled up to the stop sign nose to nose with the woman's car. The septic tank vacuum truck, emblazoned with "Honey Wagon: We're # 1 at the #2 Job," had to back up before she could cross the road and drive away.

Are You Writing a Paper?

Two young college students, Chip and Ann Katherine, pulled over and we talked over the traffic noise through their open car windows. They had lots of questions: "What are you *doing* here?" and "Are you a believer?" and "You probably heard about it, those three girls that got killed on I-95 a few weeks ago? Two of my friends. There's one of those there for them." Later: "Are you writing a paper?" and "How *long* are you going to be here--you've been here *all day*!" Finally, "I hope you find what you're searching for." Sitting. Visiting. Believe what? No, I hadn't heard, I'm so sorry. Yes, I've been researching these things for the last five years and still can't figure it out, exactly. I don't know, but I promised I'd be home for dinner. Me, too. I learned a lot from *you.* Thank you, you too. Drive safely.

Chip and Ann Katherine told me, "Well," (like *duh!),* "the shrines make people feel better."

6.2: Touching, Mavor

A few of my visitors and I exchanged names, others wanted to remain anonymous. Everyone wanted to know if I was alright. Yes. I am alright, thank you so much. Over and over again to say I'm alright and mean it, this was a gift to me. And if I was "speaking for" the absent others at the site I don't know, but Carol Mavor, based on her essay, "Touching Netherplaces," might say that I did, perhaps, "touch upon" a key to the sites, and that those absent others represented there touched me, and through me opened a conversation with those who passed by, stopped, talked, and gave me water.

To hear myself say "I promised to be home for dinner" separated me from the site and from the absent others, foreshadowed my exit from this stage, and gave me permission to get up and move, to come home, and, drawing strength from Rebecca Schneider's conclusion in *The Explicit Body in Performance*, graced me with the permission, the privilege, and the drive to write.

I have, however, returned to the site several times, and have seen my own wavering image there, and can feel in my body the ghosting traces of what is now gone. The small patch of deeply matted grass where my feet played that day, the mark of my presence, slowly disappeared. I continue to wonder how long the image of me *just* sitting there will remain in those folks' memory--folks who passed, looked, not looked, looked away, folks who stopped, talked, touched, felt, imagined. I wonder what memory they will construct, what meanings they will assign to that performance, our performance. I imagine there was talk across the intersection that day in the BP Self Serve Gas Station and TimeSaver Convenience Store about the woman sitting there with those crosses. Perhaps later I'll return, buy gas and a bottle of water, and see what happens.

Figure 6.2.1: Photo: After/words

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