NEW AMERICAN WAYS OF DEATH: ANXIETY, MOURNING, AND COMMEMORATION IN AMERICAN CULTURE

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The experiences of grief and mourning in response to loss are fundamentally transformative to the self-identity of the mourner, necessitating an array of ritualized behaviors at the communal and individual levels. These rituals of mourning both create a space in which this transformation may take place and provide the structure that can direct that transformation. My focus is on historical and emerging forms of vernacular commemoration, by which I refer to material forms that are created by, acted upon, or in other ways utilized by a person experiencing grief in the service of regaining a sense of stability in the aftermath of loss. The re-integration of the bereaved, through mourning, back into society in new relation with the departed is often assisted by these vernacular memorial forms. My analysis focuses on three specific forms of commemoration: spirit photographs, ghost bikes, and memorial tattoos. These are vernacular forms of expression in the sense that they have emerged from and cater to individual needs and desires that are not satisfied by the more official and uniform materials and processes of mourning, such as the funeral service and subsequent visits to a gravesite or contemplation of an ash-filled urn. The power of these memorial forms rests in the adaptive and restorative

abilities of memory to retain the lost relationship and to pull it forward and reconstitute it in a changed state as enduring and continuing into the future.

When faced with the sudden death of a loved one, the traditional rituals that surround modern death may seem too rigid and homogenized to satisfy the wide array of emotions demanding attention in the bereaved. This is where the vernacular rituals and new forms of commemoration discussed in this dissertation spring up and make themselves known. Highly individual, yet often publicly and politically motivated, these new American ways of interpreting death and performing mourning represent the changing needs of contemporary mourners. As death has become increasingly hidden away and discussion of it rendered taboo, the need for personal and direct interaction with the processes of grief and mourning have become more and more important.

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CHAPTER I

MOURNING, ANXIETY, AND RITUAL

This project is predicated on the idea that the experiences of grief and mourning in response to loss are fundamentally transformative to the self-identity of the mourner, necessitating an array of ritualized behaviors at the communal and individual level. These rituals of mourning both create a space in which this transformation may take place and provide the structure that can direct that transformation. My focus is on historical and emerging forms of vernacular commemoration, by which I refer to material forms that are created by, acted upon, or in other ways utilized by a person experiencing grief in the service of regaining a sense of stability in the aftermath of loss. The re-integration of the bereaved, through the process of mourning, back into society in new relation with the departed is often assisted by these vernacular memorial forms. My analysis focuses on three specific forms of commemoration: spirit photographs, ghost bikes, and memorial tattoos. These are vernacular forms of expression in the sense that they have emerged from and cater to individual needs and desires that are not satisfied by the more official and uniform materials and processes of mourning, such as the funeral service and subsequent visits to a gravesite or contemplation of an ash-filled urn. The power of these memorial forms rests in the adaptive and restorative abilities of memory to retain the lost living relationship and to pull it forward and reconstitute it in a changed state as enduring and continuing into the future.

I refer to these memorial forms as "new American ways of death" both as an acknowledgment of Jessica Mitford's highly influential *The American Way of Death* and

to highlight the immediate sense of novelty that an encounter with these memorial forms can produce. As grassroots and innovative ways of coping with death, these types of memorialization speak to a variety of private and public motivations in contexts that are inextricably tied to prevailing cultural, technological, and historical trends. Each is or was new and novel to its time--spirit photography being the notable historical example, as the phenomenon was almost as new as the invention of photography itself--while the appearance of ghost bikes and the increasing popularity of memorial tattooing are products of changing values at the turn of the twenty-first century. While such practices may appear to be new, they bear all the markings of deep-rooted traditional behavior to meet a universal need adapted to suit new surroundings but fundamentally unaltered in terms of their broader meaning. People die; people grieve, mourn, and continue to live. People find value in ritual structure and the manipulation of material objects (or, with tattooing, the flesh itself). People continue.

This dissertation represents the culmination of my research into the areas of folk belief and the forms and processes of vernacular commemoration. The discipline of folklore is always concerned with unofficial, non-institutionalized forms of expression communicated across generations. Barre Toelken defines the materials of folklore as "culturally constructed communicative traditions informally exchanged in dynamic variation through space and time" (1996: 37). He emphasizes the twin forces of dynamism and conservatism at play in the traditions and adaptations that characterize folklore study, the constantly oscillating laws of variation and constancy, innovation and continuity, which characterize human behavior and allow for the study and delineation of practices, beliefs, customs, and other forms of expressive culture through attention to

recurring motifs, genres, and themes, while providing a framework for acknowledging and responding to the ways in which traditions continue to be meaningful to people across shifting spatial and temporal contexts. The discipline of Folklore Studies is uniquely situated to the study of deathways and commemorative forms because death, grief, and mourning are universals of human existence and demand attention on the levels of the community and the individual. Like birth, death is a preeminent stage of life, ontologically transformative in its effects on subjectivity--both creating and destroying the subject. Like birth and other stages on life's way, such as marriage, graduation, or retirement, death is marked by rituals that mark the importance of transition.

While the passage of life into death may be monumental, the subject of that change is no longer present to experience or mitigate its ramifications upon others. The transition of the survivors from normal existence through the shattering experience of grief into the liminal state of mourning and finally to emerge somehow changed, the same but different, is the transitional phenomenon and experience at the center of this project. What becomes of those left behind? What are they expected to do? What do they want to do? These are questions that plague the living and the dead. Historian Arnold Toynbee refers to this as the "two-sidedness of death," explaining that "there are always two parties to a death: the person who dies and the survivors who are bereaved" (1984: 10). He writes: "This is, as I see it, the capital fact about the relation between living and dying. There are two parties to the suffering that death inflicts; and, in the apportionment of this suffering; the survivor takes the brunt" (14). The bereaved is left with absence and pain; vernacular memorials provide individuals and communities with possible ways to begin to make sense of the pieces of a life shattered by loss, especially in cases of

traumatic and unexpected death, the horror of which often demands more specific attention than what may be available through the official channels of the funerary industry or institutionalized religion.

In the United States, a period of intense evaluation of the meanings and motivations behind the treatment of death and the customs and rituals which surround it occurred in the early 1960s with the publication of British investigative journalist Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death* (1963), a fascinating and at times scathing critique of the largely unregulated funeral industry. Mitford found that due to the taboo status of death in American society, the bereaved were largely uninformed or misinformed about such issues as embalming practices, casket selection, and the handling of the funeral service itself, a condition which left them vulnerable to whims of unscrupulous and enterprising undertakers and morticians. Although written fifteen years after fellow Brit Evelyn Waugh's novel *The Loved One* (1948) satirized the establishment of exclusive, amusement park-like cemeteries like Forest Lawn in Los Angeles, Mitford's work was aimed at discovery and reform and is generally the point of reference at which discussions of American deathways originate. Two years after Mitford's book, British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer published his examination of his own country's attitudes toward death, *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (1965), in which he explores the nature of the taboo surrounding discussions of death and mourning. In particular, Gorer's chapter, "The Pornography of Death," in which he claims that the Victorian repression of sex which both masked and increased Victorian fascination with sex and sexuality has now switched places in contemporary society with death. Gorer's insight that death is now whispered about and considered "improper" to discuss in

general company, though secretly found titillating and thrilling, has been influential to nearly all studies of social conceptions of death that have followed.

Perhaps most influential to the study of death in Western culture is the work of French historian Philippe Ariès, whose monumental volume *The Hour of Our Death* (1981) traces out large cultural shifts behind changing conceptions of the place of death in the Western world from the Middle Ages to twentieth century Europe and the United States. Ariès argues that the general tenor of the change has been from the view of death as natural and omnipresent to one in which death is increasingly a source of individual horror too unbearable to face. Increases in medical technology and knowledge of health and the body dramatically lengthened life spans over the centuries to such an extent that, in contemporary society, there is now a widespread expectation that death can be controlled and dealt with in an out-of-sight and tidy manner. In the process, death has become denaturalized, occurring in secret, out of the public view, which in turn makes the sudden eruption of traumatic and unexpected death that much more shattering to those who encounter it. The hiding away of death and the idea that it has become more controllable has actually made it that much more terrible in the contemporary Western world. Comparing older worldviews to new attitudes, Ariès writes:

> The traditional attitude toward death is like a bulwark of inertia and continuity. It has by now been so obliterated from our culture that it is hard for us to imagine or understand it. The ancient attitude in which death is close and familiar yet diminished and desensitized is too different from our own view, which is so terrifying that we no longer dare say its name. Thus, when we call this familiar death the tame death, we do not mean that

> it was once wild and that it was later domesticated. On the contrary, we mean that it has become wild today when it used to be tame. The tame death is the oldest death there is. (1981: 28)

We would expect the "tame death" to be the modern conception of death as locked away, institutionalized, and controlled; yet, arguably, this has made its potential power over us more terrifying and traumatic.

The existential paralysis that can result from too much contemplation of death must be avoided so that life, in all times, can be lived productively. Ariès claims that "There are two ways of not thinking about death: the way of our technological civilization, which denies death and refuses to talk about it; and the way of traditional civilizations, which is not a denial but a recognition of the *impossibility of thinking about it directly or for very long* because death is too close and too much a part of daily life" (1981:22). In this regard, death must be forced to the margins, hidden in hospitals and funeral parlors, so that individuals can avoid any presence of the imminence of death and continue to function as if though it were not waiting just around every corner.

Along similar lines of inquiry, the work of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker contributed much to the popular understanding of Western avoidance of death with the publication in 1973 of his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*. In an ambitious synthesis of the thought of psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank and proto-psychoanalyst Soren Kierkegaard, Becker claims that the fear of death is the primary motivator for nearly all human endeavor. The fear of death "haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity--activity designed mainly to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final

destiny of man" (1997: xvii). For Becker, the central irony of human existence is that we fear death's power to undermine any meaning we find in life while understanding that it is this fear of death that drives us to such heights of creativity and meaning-making. By denying death its place in what it means to exist as a human being, we risk severing ourselves from the wellspring of authentic lived experience.

Death, however, like most things repressed, returns, bubbling up and erupting into public view in a variety of ways. Death often peeks in to our lives in the relatively innocuous forms of horror movies, true crime novels, obituaries, news reports, dark tourist attractions, and museum displays ranging from the death mask of King Tutankhamen to the Body Worlds exhibits; all of these allow for a contained experience of death defanged and represented as entertainment, education, or pure titillation.[1] These popular and mass-mediated representations of death are small pathways through which the reality of death reaches us through the shield of the mundane; death recurs in our entertainment and everyday perception much the way that repressed fears and desires appear in our dreams: between familiar and strange, uncannily persistent. When the reality of death does break through, when we are shocked from our stupor into the stark light of existence through an encounter with traumatic death, we feel unprepared in a way that Ariès might say our ancestors could never truly be.

The relatively recent research of sociologist Tony Walter finds evidence that contemporary practices and performances of bereavement and mourning may indicate an increasing desire among some to be more familiar with death (1999a). He cites a

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[1] See Foley and Lennon's *Dark Tourism* (2000), as well as Mellor and Schilling (1993) for discussion of the "sequestration of death" in contemporary society and the subsequent effects on tourism and popular entertainments.

heightened focus on representations of individuality that is becoming apparent in the generally more standardized official means of dealing with death. Funeral services are beginning to break away from older structures in order to provide mourners with more individualized and satisfying celebrations of the personality and essence of the departed. Restrictive adherence to outmoded standards of decorum and implicit correlations between the amount of money spent on funerals and memorials and intensity of love and grief are loosening, making way for more idiosyncratic and personalized forms of commemoration. These forms range from individualized caskets, such as a casket decked out in the logo of a football fan's favorite team, to creative means of disposing of the ashes of a cremated body, such as having them shot into space or sunk into the ocean to become part of eco-friendly artificial reefs. Walter also connects this shift to the rise in visibility and popularity of makeshift memorials and spontaneous shrines, exemplified by those that arose in the immediate aftermath of the sudden death of Princess Diana in 1997 (Walter 1999b).

The greater attention paid to individual needs in official funerary procedures and the increased presence of vernacular forms of commemoration in public and personal spaces suggests the importance of effective ritual and practice to the bereaved. The shock of unexpected death in the United States demands specific responses. The sudden loss of a loved one can be existentially devastating to the survivor, leaving him or her feeling isolated, angry, and alone in a world that no longer makes sense. The disorienting and utterly emptying feelings of grief create a space in which dissolution of the self, abandonment, and disconnection from the larger community seem entirely possible. It is through the processes of mourning, and in many cases, specific vernacular forms of

commemoration, that the survivor of traumatic loss can begin to reconstruct and re-stabilize self-identity such that continuance and re-entry into the world are made possible.

The first chapter of this project focuses on the phenomenon of spirit photography in Victorian America. As an historical outcropping of the Spiritualist movement, spirit photography was an attempt to capture the image of a departed loved one as a transparent ghostly entity in a photograph, often posed with the mourner for whom the photo was taken. As a popular practice it was at its peak during years of great social upheaval: the sudden rise of an industrial middle class created tensions about appearance and class mobility, while the unprecedented death and devastation of the Civil War and World War I provided ample mourners for enterprising photographers who promised to capture traces of the spirits of loved ones. In this chapter I explore the formation of a middle class subjectivity within the context of grief and mourning in Spiritualist tenets, the egalitarian ideals of cemetery reform, and the popularity of Sentimentalism as a middle-class genre of writing. This context provides the backdrop against which I read the ontological ambiguity of the photograph as peculiarly suited both to picturing the dead and to commemorative function.

Chapter Two in this study moves forward in time to the appearance of ghost bike memorials in American cities as a contemporary phenomenon, occurring within the last decade. Notions of the ghostly as a marginalized status connect spirit photography to these memorials, which consist of bicycles painted white and affixed to utility poles and streetlamps near the scenes of fatal collisions between bicyclists and automobiles. Ghost bike memorials function much like roadside crosses and other spontaneous memorials but often become involved in grassroots activism for increased awareness of the rights of

cyclists on city streets. Existing at the intersection of personal, private commemoration and public advocacy, these memorials communicate different messages to different people, reconstructing the life of the departed for the mourners left behind but also catalyzing communities of bicycle enthusiasts to become more active and vocal. Location is extremely important in the determination of how the various messages of a ghost bike memorial are incorporated; as such, I focus on two case studies: a ghost bike left for a young man at a busy intersection in Eugene, Oregon, and a ghost bike that was removed from its place near the scene of a young woman's death and made a permanent fixture in the sanctuary of an Episcopalian church in Portland, Oregon.

My third chapter moves from the tensions between the uses of a ghost bike memorial to form community identity and represent personal grief to a study of a much more physically personal memorial form, the commemorative tattoo. In recent years, many people faced with grief have increasingly chosen to memorialize their lost loved ones with a tattoo. These memorial tattoos move the public/private discourse of the ghost bike memorial to the skin of the bereaved, where a permanent marking allows one to reclaim a sense of agency. By permanently signifying the skin with ink, the mourner is able to symbolize the pain of loss and find a visual representation of the continued bonds shared between the survivor and the departed. The act of getting a tattoo provides the mourner with a ritualesque structure that may provide a sense of grounding and meaning at a time when everything else may feel chaotic, insubstantial, and fleeting. The subsequent display of the tattoo and narration of its meaning to others helps the mourner continually invest the tattoo and the experience which led to the acquisition of the tattoo with powerful meaning.

Due to the intensely personal nature of those who have graciously shared with me their experiences with loss, grief, mourning, and commemoration, I am compelled to open this dissertation with a confession: I have never lost anyone truly close to me. All of my close friends and relatives live. This is maybe not that unusual, but as I approach my mid-thirties I find the blessing of that fact turning to a darker portent. I deleted the line of this confession/statement three times before I could finish typing it out, so powerful is the presentiment of future anguish that lies beneath those words. Someday I will re-read that statement, "I have never lost anyone," and I will remember when it was true. I have never lost anyone; but I will, and they will lose me, too. The topic of death and commemoration was never my first choice as a subject of focus as a folklorist, although it seems unavoidable and inevitable in hindsight. Somewhat neurotic and anxious by nature, I have always been terrified of death, both my own and that of my loved ones. My research on this topic has both increased my morbid anxiety so far as it has required an unusual amount of death-dwelling for me, yet it has given me a better understanding of the strength and creativity of people in the face of grief and mourning, and the transformative power of vernacular responses to death and tragedy. In truth, I have struggled with the feeling that my research was ghoulish or too intrusive at times, as it explores devastating expressions of grief, yet I have also been inspired and moved to tears by the personal accounts and willingness of these generous individuals to share their suffering and memories of loved ones, and their deeply meaningful memorial practices with me. I hope that my description and analysis provides insights into the nature and meaning of emergent death rituals and commemoration, and the profound ritual and creative responses to death and issues of ultimate concern in contemporary society.

CHAPTER II

SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY

This chapter focuses on the relation of Spiritualism to the process of mourning and its function as a consoling set of beliefs and performances settled between a structure of ritual and an atmosphere of liminality and the carnivalesque. The development of photography dramatically transformed mourning practices and deathways in America, creating new memorial forms in answer to the changing needs of the bereaved. Specifically, it is the role of the invention of the photographic process that is of interest here, joined to Spiritualism through the brief but popular practice of spirit photography. As a non-dogmatic vernacular religion,[2] Spiritualism accorded its followers a greater level of personal access to the otherworldly, encouraging a wide variety of beliefs held to be compatible with the most basic, and perhaps only, tenet of the religion: that the dead continued to exist in an afterlife permeable enough to allow channels of communication between the living and the dead. The development of photography--from the involved and limited procedures of daguerreotypy to the negative/positive reproducibility of the quickly fading calotype, to the refinement of wet and dry collodion processes of development, to the snapshot aesthetic of the handheld Kodak camera and the birth of the shutterbug--follows a narrative course of increasing ease of access to the growing middle class and the corresponding heightened valuation of the experimenting amateur. The move toward individual access, reproducible results achieved through experimentation,

[2] See Wojcik (2009) for a discussion of Spiritualism as vernacular religion from a folkloric perspective.

and the desire for mobility are shared attributes of the early days of both Spiritualism and photography.

The period of active industrialization that characterized much of the last half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth spurred the growth of the middle class and the importance of individual mobility. This newfound social mobility was a source of much anxiety in the Victorian era, and the ability to delineate and maintain class distinctions became an ongoing concern of the middle class. This chapter examines the ways in which the anxieties of stability and identity became caught up in the combination of photography, mourning culture, and the creation of a new American middle class subjectivity.[3] Spirit photography provides a fascinating case study of the struggle for coherency in destabilized middle class life, properly acknowledging individual agency and permitting continued contact with the dead while restoring the bounds between life and death through its peculiar aesthetic (fig. A-1). It prioritized emotion and affect as the most important factors, as well, frequently focusing on young girls and old men as the combination of innocent vitality and the feminine impulse toward intuition, and the guileless wisdom of the aged as verification, legitimization, and authenticity[4].

[3] The relation of photography to the middle class is taken up in Bourdieu (1996), Tagg (1988), Burns (1990) and Ruby (1995); the relation of mourning culture to middle class values is in Halttunen (1982) and Douglas (1975); the class meanings of Spiritualism are taken up in Cox (2003) and Nelson (1969).

[4] The high prevalence of young women as mediums, due to their perceived natural innocence and ability to birth life has been discussed by Braude (1989) and Owen (1990). The repeated persecutions of spirit photographer William Hope led his supporters, who included Arthur Conan Doyle, to defend Hope's veracity in terms of his sincerity, claiming that, at worst, he was an inept and clumsy photographer who happened upon his gift despite numerous mistakes made while developing the negatives (Jolly 2006: 90-110; Fischer 2004: 72-6).

Spiritualism, in its most basic and all-encompassing definition, is the belief that the spirit persists after the death of the body and that it is able to enter into communication with the living.[5] That the existence of this afterlife filled with the souls of departed loved ones could be proven empirically was equally important to the cultivation of inner spirituality. Since the telegraphic rapping language used by the Fox sisters, Spiritualism presented itself to the American public through the language and metaphors of contemporary scientific and technological discovery. The phenomena of the séance (fig. A-2), the tilting tables, automatic writing, trance speaking, and materializations were so intertwined with the increasing movement of the sciences into the realm of the invisible, that to many Americans proof of invisible communicating spirits seemed not significantly less likely than the implementation of the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable, or the discovery of X-ray technology. Many famous scientific minds of the day were interested in Spiritualism, from the career-imperiling devotion of Alfred Russel Wallace, one of the founders of evolutionary science, and Sir William Crookes[6] (fig. A-3), whose experiments with vacuum tubes made much of modern atomic science possible, to the skeptical explorations conducted by psychologist William James and his Society for Psychical Research. Many notable literary figures were similarly interested in the possibilities suggested by Spiritualism, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (fig. A-4), Victor Hugo, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Edgar Allan Poe, among others. The

[5] The literature on Spiritualism most helpful to this study includes: Pearsall (1973); Moore (1977); Brandon (1983); and Carroll (1997) for general histories of the movement; Braude (1989) and Owen (1990) for gendered readings; Kerr (1972) and Goldfarb (1977) for Spiritualism's influence on the literature of the time; and Cox (2003) and McGarry (2008) for recent reconceptualizations of the religion's influence and influences.

[6] See Slotten (2004) and Hall (1963), respectively, for Wallace and Crookes.

epistemologies of religion, science, and parapsychology had not yet been separated from one another, as would happen in the next century.

Spiritualism was a populist movement, in some ways a reaction to the perceived inadequacies of orthodox Christianity's handling of mourning and the assuaging of grief. It aimed to bridge the distance between life and death in a manner at times strikingly consistent with postmodern paradigms for the work of mourning. Recent theories of mourning eschew the structured stage models of working through and moving beyond the experience of loss in favor of continued relationships with the dead based and individualized integration of the mourning process dependent upon need and context. Spiritualism, in the words of religious historian R. Laurence Moore, "could claim to being the quintessential expression of the age of the common man" (1977: xiv). It was a sidestep around the rigid institutions of mediated channels--the church, the complex and constricting rituals surrounding mourning--through the introduction of a more intimate and natural contact with the other side. Personal communication with spirits of the dead was a keystone of Spiritualist belief and practice from the moment of its inception in Hydesville, New York, 1848.[7] The young Fox sisters, Margaret and Kate, began to "speak" to the invisible source of the mysterious rappings on the walls that had plagued the small cottage for years (fig. A-5). The sisters, their neighbors and, as public attention swirled around the family, some of the most prominent men and women of the times, through a system of numbered knocks similar to the coded communications of the

[7] March 31, 1848 is generally agreed upon as the initiating date of Spiritualism, though many mediums and historians within the movement point to a long tradition of communication with the dead going back to the biblical story of Saul and the Witch of Endor and pre-Christian practices. For roughly contemporaneous emic tellings of the Hydesville phenomena, see Doyle (1926: 56-85); Britten (1896:27-36) ; Capron (1855:33-6).

recently invented telegraph, were able to communicate with the spirit.[8] Called "Mr. Splitfoot" by the Fox sisters, the spirit revealed himself to have been a traveling salesman murdered and buried in the cottage some years before. The sisters, soon accompanied by their older, married sister Leah, quickly found that the rappings followed them wherever they went, suggesting that it was through some special sensitivity of the girls which enabled such clear communication with the deceased.

As the Fox sisters gained fame through touring performances, families all around the country began to form "home circles" and discover "mediums" within their midst, often in the form of young girls, whose innocence and femininity encouraged belief in the sincerity and authenticity of the phenomena within the context of the surrounding patriarchal society.[9] Spiritualism, hovering between empirical science and metaphysical religion, became a popular system for making sense of the various social and technological changes that were befalling the Victorian period, filtering the trauma of the Civil War and the confusion of the new disembodied technologies through a non-dogmatic, populist worldview. Significantly, the Fox sisters came from an area of New York infamously known as "the burned-over district" for the abundance of evangelical revivals and new religious movements that swept through the area in a relatively short period of time. Spiritualism emerged from the same zeal for personal religion that spawned Millerism, Mormonism, the "Manifestation Era" of the Shakers, and various utopian communal experiments.

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[8] Media scholar Jeffrey Sconce uses the story of the Fox sisters and the "spiritual telegraph" to begin his study of the entanglement of communication technologies and the supernatural (2000: 22-8).

[9] Insightful readings of assumptions and performances involving gender and Spiritualism in the U.S. and England can be found, respectively, in Braude (1989) and Owen (1990).

The fervor for personal contact with and interpretation of the spiritual is characteristic of what religious scholar Catherine Albanese has termed the "metaphysical strain" one of three major tendencies of American religious development.[10] Shaped by a long occult tradition that included mesmerism and Swedenborgianism, among others, Spiritualism was concerned with flows of energies that created sympathies among all things in existence, a form of what has been various described as "animal magnetism," "the ether," and "the odic force." Through a cultivation of this force, one could create interior harmony with external existence, transforming both into a progressive millennialist utopian ideal. Of particular influence to Spiritualist thought was the harmonial philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis, "the Poughkeepsie seer." Davis's explanation of universal sympathies was founded on a belief in the divinity in all men and women, which could be brought into alignment with the universe at large, including the spirits of the deceased existing in the Summerland, an idyllic dimension of spirit coexisting invisibly with the mundane world of matter and man. By following the teachings presented to humanity through mediumistic trance, one could move toward a spiritual enlightenment based in communion with all things and a consoling knowledge that death was not the end.[11]

As such, Spiritualist funerals celebrated the passing of the deceased from one realm to the next and comforted the bereaved with assurances of continued contact with

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[10] Albanese adds the category of metaphysical religion to William McCoughlin's "evangelical thesis" which posits the foundations of American religious ideologies in a series of Protestant revivals; and Jon Butler's "state-church/mainstream-denominational tradition," which argues for the foundational importance of Roman Catholicism to the formation of an American religion. Albanese persuasively argues that neither McCloughlin nor Butler appreciate the enduring, though often marginalized, existence of occult philosophies and practices in the American religious character. No conception of American religion is complete without attention to the importance of all three strains of religious thought.

[11] Davis (2012).

the departed. Funeral attendees frequently wore white, an especially pronounced departure from the prevailing blacks and grays of Victorian mourning. Mediums presided over funeral services, communicating messages from the deceased, and epitaphs emphasized the lack of death's finality, such as, "Entered the Summerland" and "Translated," instead of "Deceased" or "Rest in Peace" (Braude 1989: 215n58). The overall effect was that of "transforming interments into events that emphasized continuity rather than the finality of death" (Braude 1989: 54-5). Ann Braude connects the relative freedom and celebration of Spiritualist funerals to the larger mortuary reforms that had been growing in appeal over the previous decade, and which similarly stressed the virtues of continuing connections between the living and the dead, and the importance of granting the deceased a final resting place fitting for his or her individuality. She notes that, "Urbanization and industrialization transformed death from an event that deprived the community of a unique social actor into a personal loss felt only by family and friends. Individuals compensated for the 'callous indifference of the 'tearless throng" by intensifying private bereavement" (51). These changes were evident in the rural cemetery movement that began to change the perception of the place of the dead in modern society.

The decades leading up to the Victorian period in American history were marked by substantial reforms in the treatment of the dead and their place in society. Spurred in part by the increasing health concerns caused by poor maintenance in urban graveyards, the "rural cemetery" movement was inaugurated in 1831 with the creation of the Mount Auburn cemetery outside of Boston. Designed to be a place of moral instruction which shifted the gloomy atmosphere of the graveyard, still draped in Puritan Calvinist symbols of the repugnance and terror of death, to peaceful meditation on life, beauty, and the

natural world. Equal parts graveyard and garden, Mount Auburn featured landscaped walkways surrounded by flowers and trees among which the dead slept beneath monuments adorned in the symbols of ancient Egypt and the Christian cross. Importantly, this new "rural cemetery" was a non-profit endeavor, open to members of all social classes, provided they could afford the cost of burial plot. The movement caught on, and the example of Mount Auburn became the model for rural cemeteries across the country. As Stanley French notes, the rural cemetery came at a time when individual equality and anxieties concerning historical continuities in this new nation of individuals was at a height. Like later spirit photos, which afforded common people "access" to once class-based and institutionalized deathways, the rural cemetery assuaged these concerns by stressing the equality of the Jacksonian "common man" by ensuring burial spots next to higher social classes and through providing a sense of historical continuity linking the current sweep of progress into an unknown future with the strength and independent spirit of the earlier generation of Revolutionary forefathers.[12]In this way the rural cemetery movement created egalitarian access to larger narratives of nationhood, reclaiming the dead for a grander historical destiny.

As the nineteenth century wore on, death and mourning continued to play important roles in the formation of middle class American identity. The "cult of mourning" which has become so familiar in imagining Victorian America became a dominant mode of recreating and monitoring the emerging middle class. The focus on the correct navigation of the mores surrounding duration and intensity of appropriate displays

[12] Stanley French provides a detailed overview of the social and cultural meanings of the rural cemetery movement in his essay, "The Cemetery as Cultural Institution," in David E. Stannard's *Death in America* (1975). In particular, French's assertion that the rural cemetery could create community through by giving people "a sense of historical continuity, a feeling of social roots" and "remind them that the standard of living and the blessings of a republic they owed to those who have gone before" (80-1).

of mourning was also a mode of scrutiny which could mark middle class status and help to enforce the unstable boundaries between classes. The emphasis on external modalities of mourning--black clothing, veils, hair jewelry, funereal portraiture, etc.--created a "crisis of authenticity" (Halttunen 1982:xiv) and heightened the ambiguities surrounding image and its relation to knowledge which would reach fruition as photography found its genesis.

The culture of mourning suffused American culture and consciousness during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Much has been written of the intense and rigid rituals and social practices that regulated everything from the proper length of time to spend in mourning to the sanctioned dress that displayed whether one was in half- or full-mourning mode. Homes were decorated in the trappings of death as various *memento mori* from mourning rings to jewelry made from the hair of the deceased. Numerous guidebooks were printed detailing the rules of mourning etiquette and offering advice to fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters on how and when to conduct the work of mourning. High mortality rates augmented by the unprecedented and unexpectedly vast death toll of the Civil War ensured the need for consoling rituals and practices as the United States was transformed over the war's duration into what historian Drew Gilpin Faust has termed a "republic of suffering" (2008). A commercial industry for the production and sale of the various material artifacts of mourning developed accordingly.

As mourning culture became increasingly standardized and coded, however, the work of mourning was necessarily conducted in different spheres as individual needs became increasingly pronounced. As the importance of the individual continued to rise in the post-Industrial Revolution America, the corresponding capitalist economy responded

in kind, creating and nourishing the importance of individual subjectivity and furnishing it with a marketplace of goods through which to express that individuality, including rings, brooches, lockets, veils, etc.. The material culture of mourning in Victorian America was a means through which the dead were able to "circulate" in society, a means of keeping alive the presence of grief for the dual purposes of keeping the deceased alive in memory and aiding the work of mourning and recuperation.

This culture of mourning rose in part from the turn from Romanticism to Sentimentalism as evidenced in the popular literature of the time. Sentimental or domestic fiction is often viewed as a watered down, mass cultural form of American Romanticism, which dilutes the Romanticist ideals of individual subjectivities and the primacy of emotional response into enormously popular treacle, produced, as Nathaniel Hawthorne famously put it, by "a damned mob of scribbling women." Sentimentalist literature is often characterized as feminine and melodramatic, profitable but pandering and, ultimately, fleeting. All the same, it often featured progressive themes, allying itself to many of the era's reform movements. The most famous example of this is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which used sentimental attachments and excesses of feeling to denounce the practice of slavery in all its forms. Within the novel, the death of Little Eva, an innocent child who meets her death with angelic stoicism and good nature, surrounded by family who can learn from her death, is most often referred to as an exemplar of the form.

Literary scholar Mary Louise Kete takes a multidisciplinary approach to Sentimentalism, recouping it from its historical undervaluation and reframing it as a discursive mode which constructs a middle class American subjectivity. The rush of

modernization created anxieties of displacement and isolation, as the importance of the self-reliant, individually autonomous subject became dominant in American culture. The discourse of sentimentalism allowed for a reconstitution of fragmenting identity into a subjectivity expressed in a community connected through shared bonds of sympathy and memory. For Kete, mourning practice is a prime example of this type of formation of a subjectivity. The material culture of mourning, the *memento mori* that suffused home and fashion, allowed the dead to remain in circulation through an economy of shared and exchanged sympathies and affective bonds.

The commodification of mourning practice created an economy of material objects through which the bereaved could enter into a community of mourning. The materials of mourning became "not something *like* what is lost, but are actual vehicles or vessels of some essential quality of a person" (53), invested with the desire of the bereaved for the deceased, and which admitted the bereaved into a reconstituted identity as a middle class American, able to both afford and correctly display the trappings of grief. It would be easy to write this dependency on commoditized shows of loss as crudely manipulative attempts to profit from the loss of others, yet, as Kete observes, it is through this collaboration of sentiment that Americans were able to assuage anxieties of modernization and displacement through sympathetic bonds which "guaranteed a connection both to the past and to the future" (55). Remembrance of the dead grasps the past while anticipated reunions in the afterlife secure the future. The strength of emotion could circulate through society to create a subjectivity grounded in presence and fortified by sympathetic bonds displayed in the material artifacts of mourning.

However, because the outer appearance of mourning and middle class identity was not necessarily a corollary to the inner state of the mourner, and precisely because the sincere outpouring of emotion in culturally sanctioned expressive forms was *so* important, the desire to find ultimate proof of authenticity became central to the Victorian period. The linkage of codified modes of mourning with an increasingly capitalistic society resulted in a marketplace of mourning. Consequently, the trappings of Sentimentalism--the excess of emotion and broad reliance on pathos--came to be seen as formulaic manipulations of public affect under the guise of authentic, communal expression. Despite the tendency of many critics to focus on the hypocrisy of an era noted for both its rigid adherence to decorum and an overflow of emotion[13], a premium was placed on authentic experience and the boundaries between the authentic and the inauthentic, and the commodified experience became a central issue for Victorian Americans. For Spiritualism, this demand for verifiably authentic experience was epitomized by the legal proceedings against William Mumler, as the premises of the religion were brought before the court.

The invention of photography in the 1830s came to play an important role in the development of spiritualism. While not as pervasive a practice as Spiritualist séances, spirit photography became an iconic component of the movement and the controversy surrounding both the authenticity of spiritual phenomena and the widely assumed documentary factuality of the photographic image. The birth of spirit photography is generally traced to William Mumler (fig. A-6), a Boston jeweler who, while

[13] As Karen Halttunen has shown, the Victorian Americans were very much concerned with the "problem of hypocrisy" (1983: xiv). The "confidence men" and "painted ladies" referenced in the title of her book became primary examples for Victorians of the dangers implicit in assuming an alignment of inner and outer virtue. When character is looked for in adherence to class-based codes of dress and behavior, skilled manipulators profit.

experimenting with a camera after work one night in 1862, noticed the indistinct image of a young girl in the photo. He had been "whiling away an idle hour in taking a negative" (Kaplan 2008), and it was only upon development of the photographic plate that he became aware of the presence of a young girl, transparent in form, sitting on his lap. After showing the image to some of his Spiritualist friends, Mumler came to recognize the spirit extra as his cousin, who was deceased. Upon learning that the results could be duplicated, Mumler's spirit photography studio was soon in business.

Mumler's photographs can be viewed as representative of the general commercial practice and widespread popularity of spirit photography. His customers would come to the studio and attend sittings at which Mumler and his wife, noted medium Hannah Mumler, were present and could expect manifestations of spiritual presence in the form of the ubiquitous rappings of the movement and instances in which the camera itself would "dance" (Cloutier, 21). Crista Cloutier notes that "at a time when standard photographs were selling for about a quarter apiece, his [Mumler's] fee was ten dollars per sitting, with no guarantee of obtaining the desired image" (21). Mumler's photographs, like most spirit photographs, were in the form of *cartes-de-visite*, "small portraits glued to visiting cards that were popularly exchanged between friends and family" (Jolly, 15) (figs. A-7, A-8), which the mourner could then take home as a physical reminder that the separation of the worlds of the living and the dead could be, and had been, permeated. Although Spiritualist understanding of the exact process by which the spirits were manifested in the photograph, the most common belief, especially in the first decades of its popularity, was that the spirit was summoned through a confluence of mourner, medium (human) and apparatus (camera). The medium, sensitive

to the presence of the deceased, could channel the energies of desire and grief and the ethereal energies of spirit into a form captured on a photosensitive plate in the development process.

Of course modern viewers of Victorian spirit photographs can easily see evidence of double exposures or the sudden admittance of focused light during the development of the photos in the streaking, diaphanous forms and the blurred and barely substantial faces of the spirit extras (figs. A-9, A-10). And the practice of spirit photography was viewed by many contemporaneous writers as the work of unscrupulous charlatans preying upon the vulnerability of those in the throes of grief. When Mumler was eventually taken to court—and found not guilty—in 1869, P.T. Barnum, the master of humbug himself, was called as an expert witness against the authenticity of spirit photography. In an 1863 article on photography for *The Atlantic Monthly*, Oliver Wendell Holmes details a few of these manipulative techniques by which spirit photographs could be obtained; but he also seemed to acknowledge the futility of attempting to disprove the authenticity of spirit photography by revealing the methods of their spurious creation. He writes of a hypothetical "Mrs. Brown," seeking the appearance of her recently deceased child in a photograph and receiving an image of "the misty image of an infant in the background, or, it may be, across the mother's lap" (Holmes 1863: 14). The identity of the spirit infant is certainly not objectively verifiable, nearly washed out in the ghostly haze characteristic of these photos. Yet, as Holmes writes, "it is enough for the poor mother, whose eyes are blinded with tears, that she sees a print of drapery like an infant's dress, and a rounded something, like a foggy dumpling, which will stand for a face: she accepts the spirit-portrait as a revelation from the world of shadows" (14). In the history of the spirit

photography phenomenon, the yearning for confirmation in the continued existence of lost loved ones consistently overwhelms any and all appeal to logic and rational skepticism.

Brought up on charges of fraud after several of the spirit extras in his photographs were found to be likenesses of those still living, Mumler was made a figurehead for the invalidity of Spiritualism. Witness after witness was brought before Judge John D. Townsend, and believers and skeptics alike crowded the courtroom in anticipation of the ruling. P. T. Barnum produced his own spirit photograph to demonstrate to the jury that Mumler's results could be achieved through photographic trickery. The outcome of the case says much about the motivations behind belief in spirit photography, as well as the allure of these beliefs to those who might be looking to profit from them. Mumler was acquitted of all charges due to insufficient evidence, though Judge Townsend claimed to have been satisfied by what he had seen that Mumler was indeed a fraud. This mixed message regarding the authenticity of spirit photography, and by extension much of Spiritualist practice and belief did little to bridge the distance between believers and skeptics. It was popularly believed, even by the most ardent Spiritualists like Arthur Conan Doyle and the medium and early chronicler of the movement's history, Emma Hardinge Britten, that while certain instances of fraud were incontrovertibly faked, it in no way condemned spirit photography as a whole, most especially as the movement's steadily increasing popularity spurred a steady stream of skeptics and debunkers into studios like Mumler's, to such an extent that the pressure to produce results in every instance must have been great enough that *some* of the phenomena had been faked simply to avoid damning the movement due to the vagaries and inconstancies of the mediumistic

powers. Indeed, the ambivalence may have further fueled the Spiritualists in their beliefs. In both the Mumler case and in the similar case of Edouard Isidore Buguet (fig. A-11), a spirit photographer in Paris, many scholars have noted that even in specific instances of proven fakery, belief persisted. Buguet admitted that his photographs were fakes, yet many continued to believe, seemingly on the strength of their desire that the photos be authentic, that their dead parents, children, siblings and so on, really could return.

In this manner, authentic feeling, based in the strength of desire fanned by the pain of loss as much as the veneer of scientific inquiry, helped propagate Spiritualism and belief in spirit photography, in the form of sympathetic bonds among the bereaved citizens of the "republic of suffering." Spirit photography operated on a plane that incorporated scientific conceptions of authenticity, but to which it was not beholden. Cox and Kete both point to the power of affect to invest meaning into a material object and show the economy of sympathies that circulated through Victorian culture, fostering a new subjectivity that involved self-construction within the context of a community of shared ideology. Cox points out the "parallel economies" working in the popularity of spirit photography: the sympathetic and the commercial, leading to the "spiritualizing the market, sanctifying exchange" (135). The material culture of mourning and the growth of middle class subjectivity coincide--the flow of the economy of sympathies is connected by Kete to Sentimentalism and the economy of the gift. In this way, photography and Spiritualism together created a new memorial form which combined individual memory with a community of mourning in the decades before and after the Civil War.

Photography has been linked with death since its inception, in part because it came of age in a time so structured around and by the visual culture of mourning; but

there is something fundamental about the medium itself that has to do with mortality. To demonstrate some of the theoretical explorations of this association of photography and death, I will apply them in a close study of what is perhaps the most famous of Mumler's spirit photographs, the image of Mary Todd Lincoln embraced by the spirit of her husband Abraham. The photo was taken in 1872, seven years after President Lincoln's death, and additionally shows their dead son, Thaddeus, as a much less distinct figure standing over Mrs. Lincoln's right shoulder (fig. A-12).

In the picture Mrs. Lincoln sits in mourning dress, staring straight-ahead with her arms folded in her lap. Behind her and against the right edge of the image stands the white, translucent form of a man, recognizable as Abraham Lincoln. His face and hands are the most detailed aspects of the President, his torso visible mainly as an area of greater lightness than the photo's background. His hands are placed upon Mary Todd Lincoln's shoulders; the thick blackness of her clothing shows clearly through the hazy immateriality of the President's fingers and palms. The darkness of her mourning garb heightens the contrast with the ghostly whiteness of Lincoln's spirit, a whiteness shared by Thaddeus to the extent that he is nearly washed out of the image altogether, recognizable only through his inclusion in the photograph's caption. Mrs. Lincoln's expression is hard to read: it seems frozen in paradox, caught between sadness and hope, nervousness and confidence. Mr. Lincoln's head is tilted downward as he fixes his wife in his gaze, bodily enacting the part of the dead continuing to "look down on" and "watch over" the living from the spiritual realm.

How do we read an image like this? The strange relationship of photography to death and mourning has been theorized variously since the medium's inception. It has

been described as fetishistic in its power to signify as present to the viewer an object that is absent; the photographic image has been characterized as unsettling in its creation of an uncanny double of its subject. But photography overflows these attempts at theoretical containment. There seems to be something fundamentally ineffable at work in the way we understand the photograph, and it is quite possibly this indescribability of photography that has from the onset made it intuitively a site for wrestling with mortality. Roland Barthes, in his book-length struggle to come to terms with the medium—centered upon his search for the essence of his deceased mother in old photographs—concludes, "Photography evades us" (4). It has been the focus of a variety of hopes and anxieties, viewed alternately as an apparatus capable of subordinating all things to mechanical reproducibility and as a "pencil of nature" by which the Sun can inscribe itself upon the photosensitive plate. It exceeds all of these attempts at categorical theorization, making it an ambiguously constructed site ideal for the expression of the ineffable—doubly present in the spirit photograph as both the ineffable experience of ghostly encounters and the untranslatable experience of human loss. Spirit photography is constituted within this nexus of competing and overlapping—but ultimately unsatisfactory—attempts to understand, to truly *know* why photography affects us the way it does.

The very nature of the photographic medium is imbued with this conflict between inexpressible loss and the irrational hope of reclamation. Film theorist Christian Metz describes the character of the photograph as fetishistic in the Freudian sense, meaning that it works on a principle of disavowing the absence of the photograph's subject in favor of the feeling of presence engendered in the mind of the viewer of the photograph. Sigmund Freud, in his 1927 essay "Fetishism," rather provocatively states that the fetish

is “a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up” (152-153). Those reasons “familiar to us” are that the observation of the female lack of a penis forcefully suggests the possibility of castration to the male child. The child knows that the mother does not possess a penis, and yet “in his mind the woman *has* got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute …” (154). The horror of castration is too great for the child to fully acknowledge his mother’s missing penis, so he disavows his acceptance of the fact of its absence, transferring his fear of the lack and his desire for certainty onto a substitute, often metonymically attached to the moment *before* the traumatic vision of the female genitalia. Thus the common occurrence of fetishes centered upon fur, feet, or shoes, all things that the child’s gaze may have landed on immediately preceding the eye’s approach to and recognition (or misrecognition) of the vagina. The fetish then is a substitution, constructed in the frozen moment that immediately precedes the moment of trauma, which allows the fetishist to acknowledge the absence while protecting himself against it. The fetish can in this way be linked to death and mourning in the mental process of the mourner which allows him to both *know* that the deceased is irrevocably gone and to feel certain of the deceased’s continued presence. Freud points to this potential application of his theory of fetishism when he writes, “the horror of castration has set up a *memorial* to itself in the creation of this substitute” (154, italics mine), and when he tells of two young men who seemingly scotomized their father’s death without spiraling into psychosis through fetishistically holding the simultaneous beliefs that their father is both alive and dead. Metz describes this disavowal as a form of “compromise”

between two contradictory beliefs. For Metz the connection between photography and death hinges on three shared characteristics: immobility, silence, and "the snapshot," by which he means the "instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time" (84). He traces the frequent use of the photograph as a memorial form to these shared qualities, writing, "In all photographs we have this same act of cutting off a piece of space and time, of keeping it unchanged while the world around continues to change, of making a compromise between conservation and death" (85). This compromise between conservation and death, becomes more complexly realized in what Metz calls: "double, dialectically articulated signification: a remembering of the dead, but a remembering as well *that they are dead*, and that life continues for others" (85). Referring to anthropological and sociological work on funereal rites and to Freud's work in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Metz draws attention to the human need to mourn the dead and to keep up the distinction between the living and the dead. The continued presence of the dead is maintained as consistently absent or othered.

The photograph is uniquely suited to the function of memorializing the dead because it acts fetishistically as a physical substitution for its own subject, the absence of which is continually pointed to by the status of the image as a snapshot, as having been plucked from time and frozen. This frozen quality of the photograph again recalls Freud's description of the fetish as being constituted in the freezing of the look in the instant before the traumatic experience. The *cartes-de-visite*, the numinous souvenirs of Mumler's sitters can be thought of as fetishes preserving both the certainty of death and the certainty of continued existence through the commingling of the images of the living

mourner and the mourned dead. Mary Todd Lincoln must have taken consolation in the image of Abraham holding her still, a testament to the ability of love to surmount anything, even death; and yet every time she pulled the photograph out she was confronted with the face that she would never see again in her earthly existence. The trauma of his death and the sensation of his absence must have been recalled for her as she looked at the image. She is reunited with her husband within the frame of the photograph, but his absence is irrefutably maintained by the iconic spectrality of his body, immaterial and intangible. The boundary between the living and the dead is shown to be permeable even as it is reinstated in the Lincolns' almost-embrace. Look again at the expression on Mrs. Lincoln's face, hovering somewhere between sadness and consolation, between decorously restrained anticipation and the reality of years lived in mourning.

There is something uncanny in the photo, though, too. It is, after all, visual evidence of a haunting, recalling Freud's claim that "many people experience the feeling [of the uncanny] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts" (241). In his 1919 essay "The 'Uncanny,'" Freud traces the experience of the uncanny to the return of repressed fears or supposedly surmounted primitive beliefs, to the reappearance of "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (241). For example, the idea of premature burial gives rise to a feeling of uncanniness beyond simple fright or horror because it reminds us of the original desire to return to the womb. The Oedipal desire is so trenchantly repressed that when its urges are re-presented to us in distorted form, we experience it as uncanny. This gives rise to the characteristic of the uncanny as an eerie commingling of

the strangely familiar and the familiarly strange. The application of the uncanny label to spirit photography is suggested here in Freud's attention to the return of the dead and his description of things emerging from darkness into the light, which echoes the process of developing an image on a photographic plate.

Central to Freud's theory of the uncanny is the idea of "the double." Drawing on Otto Rank's influential essay, Freud finds the origin of the double in the narcissistic childhood desire for "insurance against the destruction of the ego" (235). As the belief that the ego can be preserved in a second, identical body is surmounted over the course of childhood development, the idea of the double lingers, taking on a sinister, haunting aspect as it draws the self-observation and self-criticism of the superego to itself, transforming from "having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (235). Thus the appearance of the double, or certain instances of repetition, causes that uncanny *frisson* of almost-recognition: the double is recognized as similar but misrecognized as a messenger of death, when it actually carries within it the memory of the childhood attempt at the preservation against extinction. Photography as a medium can be seen as engaging in this sort of doubling process in that it creates an identical image of the object of its gaze.

Tom Gunning writes of photography as an inherently uncanny medium because of this doubling function of the photograph. He writes of early unease about the camera, experienced "as an uncanny phenomenon, one which seemed to undermine the unique identity of objects and people, endlessly reproducing the appearances of objects, creating a parallel world of phantasmatic doubles alongside the concrete world of the senses verified by positivism" (43). Folklorist Daniel Wojcik similarly calls attention to the

entrance of photography into a long folk history of anxieties about the reproducibility of the self and the self-image, noting that, "photography and existing beliefs concerning spirits were completely compatible, a syncretism of science and the supernatural, invoking the uncanny visual experience of doubling and phantoms" (117). Gunning and Wojcik link photography to Spiritualist eschatology precisely through the uncanny qualities of the photograph and of photography as a medium. The doubling power of spirit photography is, aptly, two-fold. The sitter is confronted with his or her photographic double at the same time and in the same space he or she is confronted with the spiritual double of the physical body of the deceased. The spirit in the photograph can not be accurately thought of as the photographic double of a spirit body that exists in the reality of the sitter because the spirit's existence can only be visually confirmed for the sitter by its appearance within the frame of the resultant photograph.

The uncanniness of the spirit photograph is generated mainly in the visuality of the world within the frame. To the Victorian customer coming to a studio like Mumler's, the appearance of the ghost may not have been the uncanniest part of the experience. They went to spirit photographers precisely because they expected to see these images—they wagered a sizable amount of money on the prospect of obtaining a spirit photograph. Wojcik writes of the consolation offered by spirit photography as a counter-balance to the uncanniness of the process: "Although evoking the uncanny and summoning the dead, spirit photographs are rarely horrifying or abject. The phantoms have a friendly if eerie familiarity, with the dead and the living posed side-by-side, sometimes even cheek-to-cheek, bonded visually as one, and showing the continued communication and love between the living and the departed" (117). Apart from discussion of how these photos

work is the confirmation by mourners that, at least for some people, they did work. One of the more touching affirmations of the therapeutic power of the spirit photograph is documented by Arthur Conan Doyle in his *The Case for Spirit Photography* (1923), and referred to by Wojcik. It is a letter of thanks to spirit photographer William Hope written by a Mrs. E. Pickup:

> No words of mine can express my gratitude toward you. … The extra one is my dear husband, and just as I prayed he might come …. Every detail is so clear and correct, even to the dimple in the chin. What could be more convincing. … That visit will remain imprinted on my memory as one of the brightest days of my life. I am sure after such evidence as this and the way in which you carried out your work, I need never suffer the pangs of loneliness again, because I believe that God has taken him to a higher sphere. He will guide me and watch over me. … I don't know that I could ask for anything more. (106)

The juxtaposition of the living and the dead in these photographs, so uncanny to the modern viewer, may have actually worked to neutralized some of the uncanniness of both the photographic double and death itself. In Mumler's famous photograph it is Mrs. Lincoln's double that is haunted by the dead president. The real Mrs. Lincoln may have intuitively felt her husband's continued presence in her life (in fact, she is known to have been interested in Spiritualism), yet it is only through the medium of photography that she is able to have visual confirmation of her inner hopes and beliefs. And yet the appearance of the ghost itself is only manifested in the reality it shares with Mrs. Lincoln's double, which is, according to Freud, the harbinger of her own eventual death. Husband and wife appear to be reunited in the photo, but it is only a union of doubles—

Mrs. Lincoln's photographic representation and the materialized spiritual body of the president. It is a consolation that preserves the reality of the loss by only allowing the longed-for reunion to occur in the uncanny realm of the double.

At this point we come back around to Metz's assertion, drawn from Freud and various anthropological and sociological works on funerary custom, that mourning functions on the dual levels of remembering the dead and "remembering *that they are dead*" (85). The sitter and the spirit are joined in the photograph but visually coded to represent that the separation between their spheres of existence, although permeable, is not erasable. There exists "a visible separation marking the spirit as 'other' and belonging to a separate plane of existence, with the iconic suggestion of haloes, glowing auras, semi-transparent shrouds, luminous clouds, and bursts of divine light" (Wojcik, 114) (figs. A-13, A-14). Theories of photography (and by extension, spirit photography) as fetishistic and as uncanny, then, seem to lead to one another. This creates an apparent contradiction in our understanding of the photograph, however, because the fetish is supposed to preserve the ego against the experience of the uncanny. Freud writes that "the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish" (1927:155). The creation of a fetish is an act of disavowal: the subject simultaneously refuses and acknowledges the traumatic experience, projecting these dual feelings onto a physical substitution. The uncanny is experienced, on the other hand, when the traumatic moment is not accepted, when it is instead repressed into the unconscious where it lies in darkness until something triggers its reawakening through resemblance. The spirit photograph works as a fetish in that it enables the mourner to hold simultaneously the belief in the absence and presence of a deceased loved one. The spirit photograph is

uncanny in its performance of doubling and resurrection, signaling the return of the supposedly surmounted belief in the ego's omnipresence and omnipotence. The two theories are applicable to spirit photography and to photography in general, yet they suggest a potential Freudian paradox. Neither way of looking at a photograph is totally comprehensive, and it is precisely the junctures and disjunctures of the two ways of looking that constitute the photograph as an ideal site for the experience of the ineffable.

The ambiguous lure and repulsion of the photograph causes it to exceed attempts at totalizing categorization. As Barthes notices with a mixture of amusement and horror, the power of the photograph even seems to reach out from the flat surface of the image, causing the subject of the camera to become the object of a photograph even before it is taken. He writes:

> In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares) … I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. (13-14)

Barthes' comments here about the power of the camera to objectify its subject, affixing it to the still, frozen Hades of the space between the parentheses, between the edges of the Polaroid or the *carte-de-visite*, signify the strength and near incommunicability of the human response to the medium of photography. The photograph seems to actively affect

us and to be the passive recipient of our gaze. The spirit photograph becomes so charged because it lies at the nexus of these separate but overlapping binaries: active/passive, present/absent, living/dead. It overflows attempts at understanding, working because it cannot be explained away, working because of the absurdity inherent in using a medium that always has, as Barthes says, "something to do with resurrection" (82) as a means of mourning, of coming to terms with the finality of death.

The ineffability of the experience of loss is matched by the ontological instability of the ghost in the spirit photograph. Mary Todd Lincoln's mourning is doubled in the blackness of her dress and the whiteness of her immaterial husband. She, alive when the photograph was taken, is rendered dead by the immobility of the medium. President Lincoln, dead when the photograph was taken, is rendered present, if not alive, by the same immobility of the medium which was able to capture his essence as a barely substantial flicker of light; yet even as he is made present, his absence is reaffirmed through the spectrality of his form. Both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, the woman and the ghost, are forever frozen in a present which has been rendered dead beyond all resurrection by the forward march of time. In a sense, Mrs. Lincoln's fetish has outlived her, lingering on, accruing uncanny affect, to haunt future generations with an image of a prim, stern ghost haunted by the ghost of a ghost.

There is a vertiginous danger in thinking too long of photography, one that comes through powerfully in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. In his attempt to "find" his dead mother in the photographic detritus of her life, he begins to see death and ghosts in every image he comes across, from artistic portraits to tossed-off amateur snapshots. He eventually finds his mother as a young girl in "The Winter Photograph," a resurrection that

resembles that of Mumler's photographs, down to the initial appearance of a young girl in the original spirit photograph. "The Winter Photograph" is Barthes' spirit photograph, reuniting him with his deceased mother and in turn haunting the book by its absence in Barthes' refusal to reprint it. The numinous experience of death and loss overflows all theories of photography. It engulfs the Mary Todd Lincoln photo. It engulfs Barthes' book. The photograph, Barthes' "weightless transparent envelope" (5) always points to mortality, making specters of its subjects—doubly so in the case of the spirit photograph—functioning on many complex and overlapping levels to both preserve and signal its own transparency in a loop of self-reflexivity. It mourns and resurrects, it cuts off and reunites, it is uncanny and consoling, always overflowing.

In this chapter I have tried to trace out some of the contours of the complex relationship between photography and beliefs about the end of life. The spirit photograph can be viewed as operating fetishistically within a matrix of instability and anxiety that marked the emergence of the modern American middle class. Death, as the ultimate horizon against which all things in life must contend for meaning, provides a foundation upon which a cohesion and narrative structure can be based. As industrialization and the capabilities and potentialities inherent in the advent of a society suffused with the mass production of goods pushed issues of sentiment and authenticity of experience to the forefront of Victorian society, the uncanny interplay of stillness and motion, life and death, time and space, embodied in photography became paramount to navigating this new society and protecting oneself against the threat of dissolution within it. The spirit photograph, analyzed in this way, becomes the material embodiment of the desire for stillness and control. Within the frame of the photographic print, the past, present, and

future are brought together and crystallized in a single affective moment; the life shared with the deceased is evoked through the half-spectral union of bereaved and departed while the fact of the deceased's continued presence is guaranteed by what Barthes calls the photograph's "evidentiary force," and the anticipated reunion in the idyllic beyond of the Summerland is summoned and held.

The spirit photograph, as an article of belief made manifest, participates in the consoling function that is part of every religious system. The anthropological investigation of religious belief has long focused on the need for alleviation from the anxieties attendant upon being in the world. James Frazier traced the birth of religious belief to the existence of magicians and shamans in the dawn of civilization who operated on a system of sympathetic magic, which was not unlike the later theories of the magnetic, or vitiating force which invisibly connects desires and objects in such a way that the surrounding environment was believed to be controllable through the manipulation of like substances and actions (1979). Bronislaw Malinowski claimed that ritual magic, the narrower, applied practice of religious belief, functioned to fill the gaps left between the grasp of empirically based cause and effect and the hazards of happenstance; when faced with a situation in which the outcome cannot be guaranteed through man's agency, ritual steps in to assuage anxiety (1979). Religious belief, specifically belief in the existence of an immortal soul, arises out of definite needs that human beings have when confronted with the most upsetting of all uncontrollable factors of the natural world: death. Last rites, funerary rituals, mourning rituals: all of these things give comfort and prepare people for their own deaths, the anxiety produced by the uncertainty of which could be threatening to the cohesion and continuity of human

society. Also, the existence of strong emotional bonds with other humans, which persist beyond the death of the human object, necessitates religious belief as a social glue; the practice of spirit photography, resulting in a memento which collapses and ensures the linearity of life in a meaningful arc, provided middle class American mourners with a tangible, talismanic protection against disorder and chaos, redeeming death for its narrative value while promising something beyond which acts and looks much like the social and cultural world of their present existence.

More than the warding off of death anxieties, religious beliefs and practices also provide a symbolic system through which people can both make sense of and be made sense of by their constitution within the vicissitudes of earthly existence. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes, "For an anthropologist, the importance of religion lies in its capacity to serve, for an individual or for a group, as a source of general, yet distinctive conceptions of the world, the self and the relations between them on the one hand--its model *of* aspect--and of rooted, no less distinctive 'mental' dispositions--its model *for* aspect--on the other. From these cultural functions flow, in turn, its social and psychological ones" (1973: 88). Religious belief communicates man to his culture and culture back to man. Victorian Spiritualism, while never a "mainstream" or "official religion," functioned in just this way for its believers as a folk religious belief system.

Folk religion, in its simplest definition is the religious components of folklife and the folkloric aspects of religiosity[14]. Don Yoder defines folk religion as "the totality of views and religious practices that exist alongside of and apart from the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion" (1974: 14). For instance, Vodou can be

[14] For a thorough discussion of the concept of "folk religion" beyond Yoder and Primiano, see Brunvand (1968), Danielson (1986), Christian (1987), and Byrne (1988).

described as a folk religion under this definition because, as a syncretic combination of Catholicism and African religions, it sprang up in the Caribbean among slave populations who were stripped of everything having to do with their homeland and home beliefs. These things persisted underground, transmitted through word of mouth, and making use of appropriated rituals, phrases, images, and even saints, of the French Catholic colonists. It ends up being not African and not Catholic, but something new and in many ways subversive. Spiritualism is a folk religious movement because it satisfied certain spiritual needs--notably for this study, the need for a more satisfying schema for dealing with death and mourning--that were not being met by the Christian churches of the time. It sprang up through the cracks; very often spiritualists saw nothing in their belief that was contradictory to their Christian beliefs.

Leonard Primiano offers a further refinement on Yoder's definition, claiming that its two-tiered model of official and folk is residualistic and puts folklorists in the position of always treating the religious practices of the people they study as lesser, inferior, or marginalized because it is not part of "official religion" (1995: 40). It is always something other than official. According to Primiano, there is no official religion; rather, it is an abstract set of norms that describes an institutionalized set of guidelines for practice. It does not account for the personal, private, and individual ways that religious experience is negotiated in everyday life. He offers the term "vernacular religion" as an alternative to "folk religion" to avoid the pejorative connotations of the term and to capture the ultimately personal and private, individualistic ways in which religion is enacted. So while we can speak of Spiritualism as a folk religious movement, we need to remember and understand that in lumping a set of widely personal and varying beliefs

and practices under the heading of Spiritualism, we run the risk of leveling the invention and innovations of personal expression. Spiritualism could be more appropriately understood as the name given to a set of norms taken as an aggregate of all of these vernacular processes.

Spirit photography simultaneously ensured a subjective identity and projected the mourner beyond it. Photography participated in the formation of a new identity concretized in mourning practices which could seemingly reunite the living and the dead in a new ontology of the image. These changes paralleled other technological innovations which originated at the same moments and similarly blurred the distinctions between the living and the dead, between motion and stillness. The refinement of embalming practices and the birth of the railroad system together altered the presence of the dead in the lives of the living. The dead were preserved in ways that idealized a lifelike quality as the highest form and goal of the embalming arts, resulting in the formation of a "postmortem subject" (Troyer 2007). The formation of the postmortem subject, through which the corpse was preserved and made movable, marked the transformation of the corpse itself into a commodity. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the commodification of the corpse (in some ways the fruition of the continued presence sought in postmortem and even spirit photography) continued to develop into an American funeral industry which codified the ways in which Americans viewed and responded to the deaths of loved ones in an increasingly profitable marketplace of death and memory.

CHAPTER III

GHOST BIKE MEMORIALS

When a bicyclist is struck down in a collision with an automobile, a ghost bike is sometimes created and placed at the site of death (fig. B-1). The ghost bike, a bicycle painted white, then accrues flowers, notes, photographs, and various other personal artifacts until it resembles other spontaneous shrines or makeshift memorials, such as roadside crosses or the assemblages which spring up in the wake of notorious and heavily mediated death, such as when Princess Diana died or in the aftermath of tragedies like the Columbine shooting or the destruction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers. Because the victims of collisions between bicycles and automobiles are often young, and because the nature of these accidents are seemingly random and shockingly violent, ghost bike memorials become focal points for a wide range of emotional responses. To the creators of a ghost bike, who are often close friends of the deceased, they express powerful feelings of outrage, loss, and the desire to make sense of inexplicable catastrophe; to the parents and siblings of the deceased, the ghost bike is often avoided for a time, as the freshness of the trauma is still too much to directly confront in the form of a physical proof of the death. The public nature of the ghost bike memorial situates it within public discourse, as well. Previously fluid communities of bicyclists can solidify to rally around the fallen, linked through the shared threat of vehicular negligence, while others may dismiss them as monuments to carelessness and self-righteous attempts to spread a

"green" agenda. Others simply find them eerie, particularly in cases where they are underused and the explicit commemorative function of the bike is not immediately clear.

The ability of a public memorial to communicate an array of messages creates a particular complexity in attempting to "read" such sites within a specific context. Indeed, for a ghost bike, the context arises as much from physical location within an urban environment, as anything inherent in it as a commemorative form. A brief survey of the proposed terminology of vernacular memorials illustrates the slipperiness which resists a firm theoretical grasp[15]. They are often referred to as "makeshift memorials" or "spontaneous shrines" in news stories and the popular lexicon. Scholars have taken issue with these names, however, for certain connotations implied in them. "Makeshift" describes the "thrown together" quality of many of these memorials, a sort of haphazard messiness created as items of material memory are piled around the initial marker (fig. B-2); but, it also paints them as unplanned and defined by their impermanence, implying that they are placeholder memorials until a more lasting, official memorial can be created. This detracts from the long term uses some of these memorials attain, the aesthetics and thoughtfulness of the process, and the social and cultural contexts out of which they grow. "Spontaneous" as a modifier is plagued by these same concerns as "makeshift," although it has the ring of immediacy that characterizes memorials. "Shrine," while appropriately indicative of the religious intent behind the urge to memorialize, specifically in the sense of a shrine as a means of establishing communication with the departed across mortal bounds (Santino 2004: 369), is somewhat

[15] Excellent overviews of the issues involved in the terminology of these memorial forms can be found in Margry and Sanchez-Carretero (2007: 1-2) and Doss (2010: 64-68), in addition to those sources directly discussed in this chapter.

misleading in its potential to overemphasize the individual communicative uses of a memorial at the expense of its multivocality and communal construction.

Folklorist Jack Santino draws comparisons to linguist J. L. Austin's concept of the performative utterance--a statement which both represents and performs a proposed action, as in marriage vows or the placing of a bet, where the speech act *is* identical to the act itself--in his insight that these memorials both represent loss and *perform* resistance to the loss (Santino 2004: 366). He refers to makeshift memorials and spontaneous shrines as "performative commemoratives," a term that adequately, though perhaps a bit tongue-twistingly, represents the polysemous character of them, while resisting the pitfalls of previous terminology.

Following Santino's emphasis on the performativity of makeshift memorials, ethnologists Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero suggest "grassroots memorial" as a term in connection with the political discourses in which these memorials are frequently involved. While this term has its own set of limitations, not the least of which is its potential to underestimate the role of a memorial in personal mourning ritual and the implications of spiritual yearning and existential questioning that a memorial can have, it perhaps comes closest to aptly describing a major feature of ghost bike memorials. It should be noted that Margry and Sanchez-Carretero do not intend their term to be comprehensive; rather, it applies to a subset of public memorials with specific grassroots politicization aims. It is the authors' intention that "grassroots" as a term be "understood as the process by which groups of people, imagined communities, or specific individuals bring grievances into action by creating an improvised and temporary memorial with the aim of changing or ameliorating a particular situation" (2011: 2).

Ghost bike memorials straddle the bounds between these grassroots memorial and roadside memorials, which, as the authors indicate, share many similarities yet they maintain that roadside memorials do not necessarily have the attendant political aims of redressing grievances and raising awareness[16] (fig. B-3).

Margry and Sanchez-Carretero cite the difficulties in satisfactorily addressing the many facets of grassroots memorials, and vernacular memorials in general, offering up an analytical model they call a "Rubik's effect," to show the shifting and overlapping fields of discourse from which memorials draw their meaning. They visualize the study of memorials as a theoretical Rubik's Cube, with each of the six sides of the puzzle corresponding to a relatively distinct area of analysis:

> Applying the Rubik effect to our research topic, one of the sides of this "cube book" is formed by the discussion on the degree of the spontaneous, formal or informal qualities attached to the memorials. The second side includes the analytical stress in the temporality of the phenomena we study: In that part of the cube, the concept of being ephemeral is one of the rotating angles that produces the movement of the cube. Another side includes the places in which the memorials are placed. The fourth side consists of the motivation for depositing objects and/or visiting the sites, and the sacredness (or secularity) of the sites. The fifth side of the cube is formed by the material culture at the sites, the ways in which the materialization takes place. Finally, the sixth side is the role of the media

[16] The authors generally refer to non-politically motivated memorials as "improvised," although they do note a degree of overlap between improvised and grassroots memorials, as in the case of crosses placed by the group Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Roadside crosses are not usually explicitly aimed at redressing social issues in this way (Margry and Sanchez-Carretero 2011: 3-4).

> in the construction, dissemination, and reproduction of this social event. (10)

This chapter, with its focus on ghost bike memorials, will address each of these sides of this theoretical cube, with special attention to the sides which correspond to issues of form and spontaneity, dissemination of form, and location, as the frameworks which are most fundamental to the function of a ghost bike.

In June of 2008 a ghost bike was placed on the corner of 13th Street and Willamette Street in downtown Eugene, Oregon. It was created for a young man named David Minor who had been killed in a collision with an automobile just days before (fig. B-4 and B-5). David's mother, Susan Minor recalls finding out about the bike:

> David's accident occurred on Monday, June 2, and immediately his friends in town began getting together each night to support each other in their grief. Flowers, photos, and mementos were already piling up around the utility pole at the corner of 13th and Willamette, and Shannon [David's friend and one of the creators of his ghost bike] began planning the ghost bike within a few days. How I heard about it I can't remember, since that first week was really just a blur for me. . . . It didn't occur to me to go [to the gathering of friends to place the bike at the accident site], however, as I was barely functioning and I didn't really expect it to be a very large group.

When she did eventually go to see the ghost bike, her reaction was ambivalent at first:

> I had never heard of or seen a ghost bike before, and my first reaction when I heard that it was being organized was how kind it was that Dave's

> friends wanted to honor him in this way. When I first saw it, though, it was the sign that affected me the most, and I remember that moment with chilling clarity. It was resting on the bike seat, leaning against the pole, large red letters on a white background that read: IN MEMORY OF DAVID MINOR, 06-02-08 [fig. B-6]. It just looked like blood to me, and reminded me of the vision I was avoiding (and still am) of the accident scene. That was the hard part, but the flowers, candles, poems, stories, photos, and mementos were all remarkably comforting to our family. Even before the bike appeared, we had added our own photo, the last one taken of the four of us [David, Susan, and David's father and younger brother] together.

Particularly interesting to note here, beyond the heart-breaking words of a mother experiencing her worst nightmare, is the presence of a makeshift memorial at the site of David's accident before the ghost bike was added to it. The general form of the memorial assemblage is firmly enough established in the minds of the populace that the singular set of connotations a ghost bike brings could be added to a preexisting context for the expression of grief and outrage.

Shannon Sprouse, a close friend of David Minor's and one of the bike's creators, had not heard of ghost bike memorials until after the accident. She was told of their existence by a friend who lives in Portland, Oregon, where a number of the memorials already haunted the streets. Sprouse went online and found the website ghostbikes.org which details the process of creating a ghost bike memorial and explains the motivations behind them. Ghostbikes.org is an outcropping of a project begun by a collective of

artists based in Brooklyn, New York, with a shared commitment to using public street art to push for political change. This collective, called Visual Resistance, created the "Street Memorial Project" in 2005 in response to a fatal collision between a local bicyclist and an automobile. The "Street Memorial Project" in turn took its cue from a group known as Right of Way, a collective of activists dedicated to protecting the "fundamental right to move about in public space without being intimidated, injured, or worse" with a mission to "turn the streets into vibrant public space for all" (rightofway.org). One of the more striking campaigns of Right of Way to raise awareness to their mission is the creation of stenciled memorials at the sites of fatal collisions between automobiles and cyclists or pedestrians. It was this stenciling project which captured the attention of the Street Memorial Project, which, inspired by the stencils and by the first appearances of ghost bike memorials in Pittsburgh and St. Louis, decided to begin placing ghost bikes at the scenes of fatal crashes (ghostbikes.org).

Ghost bike memorials are primarily an urban phenomenon, where crowded streets make the dangers of bicycling particularly relevant. The first ghost bike is generally attributed to Patrick Van der Tuin, the owner of a bike shop in St. Louis, Missouri, who in either 2002 or 2003, after witnessing a hit-and-run that left a young girl seriously injured, channeled his outrage by taking a sledgehammer to a junk bike, painting it white, and padlocking it to a utility pole near the accident (ghostbikes.org). Ghost bikes soon began to appear all over St. Louis, then other cities across the United States, and finally, to countries throughout the world. Ghostbikes.org estimates the current number of ghost bike memorials to be over 600 in more than 210 locations globally. They were spread by word of mouth quickly, but soon the appearance of ghost bikes on Flickr pages and on

sites by organizations devoted to public activism and bicycle safety, most prominently on ghostbikes.org, led to the memorials' viral popularity.

The popularity of ghost bike memorials as platforms for communities of cyclers who feel marginalized by the centrality of the automobile to American culture creates tensions, however, between individual mourning and public claims on grief. This tension is apparent in Shannon Sprouse's description of her motivations in creating Eugene, Oregon's first ghost bike for David:

> And so I went on the website and sort of read about it, and decided we should do it a little bit differently for Dave; you know, we didn't want to do a ghost bike for everyone in Eugene. It's more like a personal thing with Dave. . . . The way they usually do the ghost bikes, you know, it seems like they have community thing where people just find out what cyclists were hit and where, and they have stencils that they use to make the signs, and it's more of like a . . . it's not as personal. With Dave it was more like, you know, more like we wanted to do something for *him*. And he was so into, you know, sustainability, and the environment, and making the world a better place, and it seemed fitting to raise awareness and sort of a nice way [to do it].

Sprouse's comments here draw attention to the basic split in ways that a ghost bike can *mean*: the division between personal and public ownership of grief. This perceived division is an issue with all public memorials, and one that is impossible to fully delineate as the needs of the individual and the needs of the community, when faced with violent, traumatic death in a public space, overlap in many ways. As a statement of both the life

that was lost and the cultural views and practices that conspired to take that life, grassroots memorials are sites of ambiguous conflict and shifting meanings.

In the case of David Minor's ghost bike these tensions came to the fore in media coverage of the accident and the installation of the bike. A few months after the accident, Latasha Williams, the driver of the car that hit and killed David Minor, appeared in the local news as part of a push to establish required helmet laws in the state of Oregon. Williams told a reporter for Eugene local news affiliate KVAL, that her involvement in the accident left her with nightmares and a newfound commitment to making the streets safer for bicyclists (Harrington 2008). No charges were pressed regarding the accident, it was deemed, in the words of Shannon Sprouse, "a moment of two people not really paying attention." While much has been made of the fact that David Minor was not wearing a helmet at the time of the accident, Susan Minor was told by the neurosurgeon who examined David that in his case, the severity of the injury was such that a helmet would not have saved him. Williams, however, has made the helmet central to her own drive to increase bicycle safety: "Williams says she feels sick every time she sees a cyclist not wearing a helmet. She said since she can't take back the life that was lost at least she can help save another" (Harrington 2008). Understandably, this focus has been difficult for Susan Minor and her husband, who upon hearing that Williams was advocating for a mandatory helmet law that would bear David's name, they wrote Williams to ask her to leave his name out of the issue. Minor told me:

> Initially, that didn't really matter so much to me. If his accident led to more people wearing helmets, I saw that as a good thing, but more recently, I changed my mind and wanted to separate David from that issue.

> I wanted his legacy to be more in line with his personal interests of helping the underserved and underrepresented.

To this end, the Minors created the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition's David Minor Memorial Fund to give money "to help strengthen projects and programs that increase access to healthy, locally-grown foods for low-income families in Lane County" (lanefood.org).

Shannon Sprouse shared similar concerns about preserving themes that were important to David in the construction of the memorial and keeping it in some way separate from the politicized responses to bicycle safety that formed a larger discourse around it:

> The bike was a friend's bike that he wasn't using anymore, and it didn't have a chain on it. And somebody else gave us a chain to lock it up with, and somebody else gave us a lock, so there were a lot of people involved in getting the supplies together. I didn't buy anything for that, which I also thought was fitting for Dave, being, you know, it's recycling and sustainability and all that. It was nice to not use anything new, to have it be a sort of recycled project. The original sign was made from a piece of somebody's basement that was falling apart. We just painted it white and then painted words on it.

In this way, both Susan Minor and Shannon Sprouse attempt to exert some control over the meaning of the memorial. Both are aware of the politicized nature of the specific memorial form itself, and to a large extent agree with both the cause of bicycle safety and the incorporation of the memorial into the cause, yet both remain understandably

defensive of the memorial's function as a personal commemorative which expresses something of who David Minor actually was in life.

Another, rather disturbing instance of personal infringement on ownership of grief and control of the ghost bike's meaning occurred in January, 2009, when local paper *Eugene Weekly* printed part of a mysterious email they received, signed by "David Minor's Ghost. It read in part:

> I'm touched at how much feeling was spurred by my death. The outpourings of love, the flowers, the theater (with beer!) named for me [a reference to the recent opening of The David Minor Theater, which plays second-run movies and offers beer and food to its patrons, a first for Eugene cinemas], these are all wonderful things! Thank you, it means a lot. But it's time to let me go. I'm stuck at the corner of 13th and Willamette. I want to get on with my afterlife. There's too much psychic energy holding me here. It's time to move on. You have no idea how boring it is hanging around Kinko's [the copy store at the corner where the accident occurred] all day. So please, dismantle the memorial and let me go. It's time.

This message indicates that some in the community may find the ghost bike memorial to David Minor to be indicative of a refusal to let go and "get on" with one's life in the face of death. The idea that David's spirit lingers is reminiscent of folk beliefs that improper mourning may keep the soul of the deceased trapped in the earthly realm, unable to move on to the afterlife. These beliefs are perhaps echoes in their own right of fears of pathological mourning, the lack of ability or the desire to sever ties with the deceased,

which keep the mourner trapped in grief and unable to move on with his or her present life. It also speaks to the visibility of a public memorial that makes it an effective form of grassroots protest--it is unavoidable if you are walking, biking, skating, or jogging through the area, and visually arresting to drivers passing by. What gives it its efficacy as a statement of anger and grief, at the same time marks it as macabre or obnoxious to those who feel disconnected to or dismissive of the message.

The appearance of a message from the "ghost" of their son prompted a response by the Minors, published the following week in the *Eugene Weekly*, in which they outline three major concerns they would like to address: the "inappropriateness and insensitivity of the person who wrote it as if he were David," the continued presence of the ghost bike memorial at the corner of a busy commercial section of town, and the focus on David's lack of helmet. The helmet was not mentioned in the original message, but the fact that the Minor's felt the need to address it as an issue in their response to the message underscores the desire to control the meanings given to their son's life and death by the public nature of the ghost bike. That it is in poor taste to impersonate someone who died tragically and violently is without question. The question of how long a ghost bike memorial should be allowed to remain on a city sidewalk is a bit more complicated and generally dealt with on an individual memorial level with consideration of community feeling and the legality of the placement. The Minors wrote in their response, after describing their continued interactions with the memorial and those who visit it:

> Representatives of the city have told us that as long as it is not an obstruction, the bike can remain in place. We have periodically asked employees of Kinko's if it is bothering them and have always been told

> that it does not. In fact, we have been at the bike corner when Kinko's employees have come out to talk to us, sharing that they also appreciate its presence. . . . That said, if we are asked by the city or by Kinko's to remove the ghost bike, it would not be a problem. We don't feel that David's spirit resides there. He is everywhere, especially in our hearts, and we will carry him there forever.

While in the nearly six years that have passed since David's death the ghost bike memorial has grown and shrunk and changed color as seasonally-appropriate flowers have been left and removed (figs. B-7-10), and the memorial itself has been moved a few feet around the corner to make it less obstructive, it still shows signs of use and maintenance and no plans are currently in the works to have it taken down.

The ghost bike created for Tracey Sparling (fig. B-11) was placed on the corner of West Burnside St. and 14th Avenue in downtown Portland, Oregon, just outside the popular concert venue The Crystal Ballroom, on October 11, 2007, just hours after Sparling was killed in a collision with a cement truck. Tracey Sparling was a 19-year-old student at the nearby Pacific Northwest College of Art, and an avid cyclist. Her death resulted from what the cycling community calls the "right hook," in which a bicycle and an automobile are paused at a red light, the automobile makes a right turn, crossing the path of the bike attempting to continue straight. Sparling's ghost bike, like David Minor's bike, was put up almost immediately at the scene of the accident. Over the days and weeks that followed, a memorial ride took place, in which the local cycling community rode with friends and family of Sparling to the site, and many flowers, notes, photographs, and various other personal objects accrued on and around the bike as

mourners both directly affected and those indirectly affected through the shared dangers of operating a bicycle through busy city streets, visited the ghost bike to express their connection to Sparling (fig. B-12).

After several months, however, something different happened. As with many ghost bikes, after a memorial has existed for a few months, or a few years, the maintenance of the memorial lessens as the frequency of visits by all but those most directly connected to the death drops off. At this point the local businesses begin to grow more concerned about the memorial's placement in front of their stores. McMennamin's, a restaurant and hotel chain in the Pacific Northwest, owns and operates the Crystal Ballroom and Ringler's Pizza, a small restaurant on the building's ground floor. As the Sparling ghost bike was stationed in an area of heavy foot traffic as concertgoers and patrons of the restaurant came and went, the staffs of Ringler's and The Crystal Ballroom contacted Sophie and Lee Sparling, the mother and father of Tracey, and inquired as to what to do about the bike.

While mourners were visiting less frequently, the ghost bike itself had taken on a political life of its own, becoming a centerpiece in the advocacy for increased driver awareness of cyclists and corresponding reforms from the legal system. In March of 2008 the City of Portland created its first "bike box," a green zone of pavement at particularly dangerous intersections that provides a space in which cyclists can wait for the light to change while remaining visible to automotive traffic also waiting at the light and in this way to protect against right hook collisions (Portland Bureau of Transportation). The ghost bike memorial for Tracey Sparling had generated sufficient attention in the local media to make it a rallying point in the fight to get these boxes created. In July of 2008,

nearly nine months after the accident, a bike box was created at the intersection in which Sparling lost her life (Mauss 2008) (figs. B-13, B-14). Due to its high visibility both as a striking memorial in a busy part of the city and as its status as instrumental in the passing of bike box legislation, the question of what to do with the bike loomed particularly large. While the bike was being maintained, McMenamin's staff felt unable to guarantee the memorial's protection from vandals or thieves.

Mr. and Mrs. Sparling, along with Tracey's aunt, Susie Kubota, decided to contact St. Stephen's Episcopal Parish in Portland to ask whether the parish would accept the ghost bike as part of its recently created Bicycle Shrine. The bike was accepted and made the core of the shrine, along with an informational plaque donated by the Sparlings and a painting created by a local artist (figs. B-15, B-16). The Portland Bicycle Shrine, possibly the first permanent shrine of this nature to exist in the United States, was dedicated on November 2, All Saint's Day, 2009, as a "place of prayer and memory in support of those in our community who travel by bicycle and in supplication for the safety of everyone on our streets." The establishment of the shrine was overseen by the Rev. Dennis Parker and came from his desire to increase the church's ties to the community. As Rev. Parker tells it, he and several members of the clergy were sitting in a cafe discussing plans for community outreach when someone noticed a bicycle go by the window and idly wondered if there was a patron saint for bicyclists. Parker Googled it and discovered that bicycle safety was indeed the provenance of a higher power, in this case the Madonna del Ghisallo (fig. B-17).

According to legend, a medieval count named Ghisallo was fleeing bandits in the mountain passes above Lake Como in Lombardy, Italy, when the Blessed Virgin Mary

appeared before him. He ran toward the Virgin and was saved; the Madonna that manifested in this apparition became the patroness of travelers. The site was later consecrated as a shrine to the Madonna del Ghisallo, and through the years, the hill upon which the shrine rests came to be known as the Madonna del Ghisallo as well. The roads leading up the hill twist and climb at steep angles, and have made it part of the Italian race the Giro di Lombardia since its beginning, and a frequent fixture in the Giro di Italia. Cyclists race every year from Milan, up the sharp ascent, past the Madonna del Ghisallo chapel and small Museo del Ciclismo (Museum of Cycling) on their way along the route (fig. B-18). In 1949, thanks mainly to the efforts of a local priest, Pope Pius XII admitted the Madonna del Ghisallo as the patroness of bicyclists. The chapel and museum are now a pilgrimage site for spiritually-inclined cyclists around the world. The museum itself houses the bicycles of famous past cyclists, including the mangled bike of local hero Fabio Cassartelli, an Olympic gold medalist who died in a crash during the 1995 Tour de France. Pennants, jerseys, and other memorabilia line the walls, and one entire wall is devoted to photographs of men and women who have died in cycling accidents (fig. B-19).

After learning of this shrine, Reverend Parker decided to dedicate the Portland shrine to the Madonna del Ghisallo. The event was marked by the first annual "Blessing of the Bikes," in which anyone who wished to participate could enter the church with a bike and have it blessed. After a prelude performed by Halley Weaver, Portland's "zero emissions harpist," so called because she hauls her harp to performances in a custom-made bike trailor, Parker and a pastor from a nearby Presbyterian church read a liturgy written specifically for the occasion and anointed the bike chains with grease:

Litany for Safe Journeys (All Standing)

Leader: May the spirit of the morning sun warm us

Response: Protect us, Holy Spirit, breath of God, as we ride in joy and safety

Leader: May the spirit of the rains cleanse us

Response: Protect us, Holy Spirit, comforter of souls, as we ride in joy and safety

Leader: May the spirit of the Douglas Firs enfold us

Response: Protect us, Holy Spirit, sustainer of hope, as we ride in joy and safety

Leader: May the spirit of this ancient land uphold us

Response: Protect us, Holy Spirit, fire of love, as we ride in joy and safety

Leader: May the rivers and valleys be our guide, and the mountains be our haven

> **Response**: Protect us, Holy Spirit, mother of our days, as we ride in joy and safety
>
> **Leader**: May those who have died continue in our hearts
>
> **Response**: Protect us, Holy Spirit, bearer of peace, as we ride in joy and safety

Tracey Sparling's ghost bike became a permanent fixture of the shrine on April 13, 2010, about three years after Sparling's death, and five months after the dedication of the shrine.

The liturgy, which I have reprinted in full, demonstrates the various aims and concerns most commonly associated with the construction and placement of ghost bike memorials: the desire for more visibility and protection for cyclists on city streets; and, the commitment to ideas of sustainability and ecological conscientiousness so seemingly at odds with American car-centric culture. Some of the comments made by Reverend Parker to local media outlets echo these concerns and speak to a widely perceived divisiveness among automobile drivers and those who choose and advocate for cycling as the more ethically responsible choice for commute. In a report by the *Episcopal News Service*, Parker recalls the service and how the "church rang out with the sounds of honking horns and ringing bells" (McCaughan 2010), and that:

> It was quite moving and then we did a litany of prayer asking for safety and protection for the bicyclists and for understanding and cooperation between motorists and bicyclers. . . . We are having some struggle in our city as people begin to become more and more aware of bicycles as a

> primary mode of transportation. We also said some prayers for reconciliation and healing among the two communities. (McCaughan 2010)

Reverend Parker's remarks shed light on an interesting direction for church outreach in the community. By taking up a cause close to the hearts of many Portlanders, inside and outside of the Episcopalian faith, St. Stephen's situates itself in the midst of a conversation recently begun in the city and not likely to end soon.

How does the relocation of a vernacular memorial away from the site of death to the sacred space of organized religion affect the meaning or experience of the memorial? In conversation with Reverend Parker, he interprets the ghost bike phenomenon as part of the secularization of America, saying that without the traditional rituals surrounding death and grief as offered by the church, people must develop their own. Bringing the bike into the church was an attempt to offer "something more" to those who might need it. However, people do not seem to be adding much to the memorial--when something new does appear on the shrine it is usually a symbol of alignment with a specific community rather than an individual offering--a ghost bike pin was left there, and cyclists participating in a ride for cancer awareness that ended at the shrine left a jersey. There seems to be something about the change of space that has made the nature of the memorial more official to those who visit it. Rather than marking ordinary space as different and sacred, the bike in the church participates in the experience one already has of the church as sacred space. The incorporation of the ghost bike memorial into a shrine devoted to the Madonna closes the bike's status as ruptured and disruptive. The ability of the memorial to hold multiple meanings is blocked in service to a higher power, which

offers a form of healing through the construction of a singular meaning. In other words, the meaning of the ghost bike in connection with an individual life lost and the various contexts in which Sparling's death can be interpreted is lifted into a larger and potentially more restrictive discourse of the power of God and the Blessed Virgin. But it is the unresolved emotion and the chaos of meaning held in tension through the form of the ghost bike memorial in an ordinary space that offers the catharsis on which some healing, if not complete resolution, may be possible.

The bike used for Tracey Sparling's memorial was *not* the bike she had been riding when hit. The actual bike is seldom, if ever, used in these memorials. This was a point that Reverend Parker stressed in conversation, telling me that if the actual bike had been used, its effect within the shrine might have been drastically different. "It would be too real--too personal," he said. Parker compared the difference to the meaning of a crucifix versus the meaning of a cross. The crucifix is a grisly symbol of a particular death and particular suffering; the cross without Christ is more often symbolic of faith, devotion, love, etc. Tracey Sparling's *actual* bike would have been too evocative of a particular death to have the kind of transcendent meaning endowed through its sacralization and placement in the shrine. And the idea of these two bikes--the mangled bike and the bike that is whole--seem to me indicative in general of the two primary ways in which a ghost bike memorial is read. They often become lightning rods for political advocacy; the anger and trauma associated with violent death becomes activated and funneled toward making political change. But they are also very private, personal testaments to the desire to mark and remember; to reconstruct through material artifacts some semblance of the life lost in the very space in which the loss occurred.

Ghost bikes can function to help the bereaved transition into life beyond loss; the whiteness of the bike mingles with the colors of the flowers and stuffed animals and bracelets and photographs to purify and cleanse the site of the trauma. This phenomenon has been remarked upon in studies of memorials by folklorists such as Jack Santino (2004), Daniel Wojcik (2008), Sylvia Grider (2001), and Holly Everett (2002). These two bikes, the mangled and the whole, are different sides of the same ghost bike memorial; yet, the mangled rarely exists as a memorial, though it is the violent image of this bike that is summoned in the minds of those who see ghost bikes in terms of the shock and anger they express. The specter of the actual bike involved in the accident in a sense haunts the ghost bike, gaining power from its absence, of which the memorial is a symbol. They exist at the same spot and in the same time, not even offering separate messages, but generally signaling the horrible knot of sickness, sadness, fear, and anger that is so common in the wake of sudden, traumatic death. Susan Minor, who has been a primary caretaker of the memorial in Eugene for her son David, told me of her conflicted feelings about the bike. As noted previously, she found it beautiful and moving, yet the red ink which proclaimed her son's death was unsettling, too bloody looking, suggesting the scene which she tries so hard to never imagine.

Folklorist Jack Santino has noted that the various meanings of a spontaneous memorial can be located in a "conceptual field," along a continuum "between commemoration and social activism" (2011: 97). This is roughly equivalent to the private, personal, individually therapeutic role of a memorial and the louder, angrier, performative aspect of a memorial, which often gains political meaning, calling attention to an injustice or social condition responsible for the traumatic death. Something of this

multifaceted nature of these memorials is captured in Margry and Sánchez-Carretero's description of the "Rubik's effect." These metaphors of the continuum and the Rubik's Cube point to a degree of indeterminacy at play. This complex interaction and "fuzziness" of different threads of meaning that are woven throughout a ghost bike memorial extends all the way down to its function on a personal level for individual mourners.

These memorials are used in multiple ways simultaneously, often by the same mourner. Multiple meanings are activated through the connection of each person to the ghost bike. Something analogous happens in the contemplation of a work of art. Art therapist Stephen Levine notes the particular quality of a work of art that it can hold various and often contradictory messages within itself, refusing the closure that narrativization risks imposing on the piece. In focusing on the idea of *poesis*, the transformation of the world through the creative imagination, Levine asks us to view existence as "contradictory to the core" (2009: 27). He comes to this realization through Nietzsche and Heidegger, understanding the fundamental contradiction of Being to be that of the inescapable temporality which encases man despite his deepest, almost instinctual yearnings for transcendence. This contradiction masks the absence of an underlying foundation, or ground, upon which to articulate meaning. Levine, again taking a cue from both Nietzsche and Heidegger, but also from the post-modern emphasis on story as foundation, posits that the best option available is to "plunge into the heart of Being," through *poesis*, through the imaginative transformation of existence into artistic expression. He writes that, "Post-modern philosophy looks to the image rather than the concept as the primary access to truth, since only the image can embody contradictions in

this way" (31). The image, then, as the expression of unresolved contradictions, is a way of accessing the reality of existence, of representing and holding contradictory impulses. In this sense, artistic creation is particularly suited to the act of mourning, in which many emotions and desires become bound up in one another. The ghost bike in particular is able to embody these contradictions in its status as a presence marking an absence; a rupture in both the psychic space and the physical world of the city street, a sign that points to what is not there.

Folklorists Daniel Wojcik (2008b) and Simon Bronner (1983), following the behavioral approach of Michael Owen Jones toward understanding "material behavior," have written of the therapeutic function of the creation of folk art and outsider art, and the ways artistic expression offers the creator a sense of purpose and wholeness in response to a need that is often difficult to express verbally. This is confirmed and supplemented by work in the fields of trauma studies and art therapy. It is not surprising that the construction of a memorial holds some therapeutic value; yet there is something to the idea that as a work of art, one of these memorials can hold multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings and purposes in mutual consideration. Unruly emotions can be held and given material distance through artistic creation, through poesis, the transformation of the world through aesthetic manipulation. The various meanings of the ghost bike--from personal commemoration, to vocalizing the needs of a marginalized community--can coexist in the form of the memorial and in the continued act of creation in which visitors may take part.

The act of visiting and placing an object at a ghost bike memorial can be similarly therapeutic for a mourner. Art therapist Maxine Borowsky Junge compares the actions of

visitors leaving material objects at the AIDS Quilt and the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, both in Washington, D.C., to art therapy, claiming that "memorials embody our deepest sufferings juxtaposed with an intrinsic impulse toward creativity, existing paradoxically and simultaneously within the bounded container of the therapeutic relationship" (2008: 6). This view suggests that the therapeutic process exists between the patient and the artistic creation as the core of therapy, with the therapist acting as a guide to healing rather than as a healer himself or herself. The act of leaving flowers or a note at a ghost bike memorial can be seen as therapeutic, not only through the bonds created through participation in a community of mourning, but through actually taking part in the physical creation of a memorial.

Although Junge is speaking primarily of the accumulations of mourning material on and around official memorials and monuments, she also notes that, "Creativity in the face of death offers a spectrum of life-enhancing possibilities. These possibilities can ward off a meaningless conclusion to a life, give meaning and hope to a life lived and to a future in which the dead, through memory, still exist" (2008: 18). This concept of memory projected forward as a means of assurance that something of the dead will remain with us in the future is quite beautiful and speaks to the importance of giving grief a material, aesthetically structured form in a memorial, as the presence of material memory creates a comforting space in proximity to the lingering presence of spirit. Folklorist Sylvia Grider similarly focuses attention on the meaning-making and reconstructive aspects of the materiality of these memorials: "Shrines express--metaphorically as well as literally--our attempts to come to grips with events that numb

our emotions and defy explanation. . . . Placing a memento at a shrine gives people a sense of purpose, making them feel less helpless and powerless" (Grider 2001).

And this is what is so interesting about the movement of Tracey Sparling's ghost bike into the shrine at St. Stephen's. Setting is important to these memorials; they represent the rupture that has occurred, the physical embodiment of the traumatic loss as experienced both by the individual and by the affected community. The bike on a city street stands as a wound which demands to be recognized as a wound. St. Stephens exerts its own aura which seems to freeze the field of meanings and offers a type of closure, giving the loss meaning through connection to a divine protector. Although things are occasionally added to the bicycle shrine--and Reverend Parker had hoped that the bike's status as a memorial would continue within the walls of the church--the ghost bike still has the decorations that were placed on it when it stood outside of the Crystal Ballroom.

In the ghost bike memorials for David Minor and Tracey Sparling, we can see the variety of tensions between the public and private, the political and the personal, played out through the attempts of family members and the personally bereft to control the memory of the deceased, and in the influence of physical placement and urban context on the shaping of the continued meanings of the bikes. Ghost bike memorials, like other spontaneous shrines and grassroots memorials, represent attempts to give voice to the marginalized or disenfranchised--whether we are speaking of the mourners left behind who deem the homogeneity of the funerary industry insufficient to deal with the immediate chaos following sudden, traumatic death; or of the cycling community which seeks to amplify its voice amidst changing conceptions of the city and the ecological impact of our transportation choices.

On the personal, private level, ghost bike memorials are evidence of a postmodern turn toward individuality in mourning practice described by Tony Walter (1999a). As figures in the urban landscape, each ghost bike is a pocket of resistance bubbling up through what Michel de Certeau calls "a crack in the system that saturates places with signification" (2011: 106). Making present what is absent, these memorials represent a form of "local authority" which creates a rupture that threatens the univocality of the city as concept. Margry and Sánchez-Carretero write that one of the characteristics of a grassroots memorial is that they "may become part of a movement to reclaim a public space and neighboring or other related buildings" (2007: 2). Erika Doss similarly notes that "grieving is thus a form of claiming, an insistence on belonging, too" (2010: 115). She writes of the "affective potential" of grief to "mobilize social and political action, and to orchestrate productive change" (2010: 115). Ghost bikes may be viewed in this light as attempts to reclaim public roadways and sidewalks for pedestrians and cyclists through the creation of spectral reminders of a marginalized community. As de Certeau writes, "There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in . . ." (2011: 108). They are signposts demarcating a lived experience of the city that cannot find adequate representation in a society that is still dominated by the culture of the automobile.

De Certeau's concept of public, state-controlled spaces as haunted by the ghosts of individual, lived experiences extended back and forth from past to future, makes city streets a sort of battleground upon which various meanings and uses meet and arrange themselves in a hierarchy dependent on the particular observer. The concept of

heterotopias, proposed by French philosopher Michel Foucault offers insights into the dynamics memorial spaces. Heterotopias are specific "emplacements," which are themselves spaces that are "defined by the relations of proximity between points or elements" (1998: 176), such that their uses and functions are created and sustained through networks of meaning, so that where one sleeps could be understood as "the emplacement of repose, closed or semiclosed, formed by the house, the room, the bed, and so on" (178). Heterotopias are:

> . . . real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias [Foucault uses this in its literal sense of being a space that is "nowhere," that is not physically locatable as an emplacement] in which the real emplacements, all other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. (178)

In this sense, the site of a ghost bike memorial represents a heterotopia. It is a real space that has been severed from the set of relations which constitute it as an emplacement and remade as a sacralized space, made ontologically other through a close association with death and transformation. It is a space in which the relations which previously created the site as an emplacement are "represented, contested, and reversed" such that the site is reconstituted as one of resistance and a reclamation from original intent. Heterotopias are, for Foucault, best analogized in the form of the mirror, which itself is a "placeless place" because, as he writes:

> The mirror functions as a heterotopia in sense that it makes this place I occupy at the moment I look at myself in the glass both utterly real, connected with the entire space surrounding it, and utterly unreal--since, to be perceived, it is obliged to go by way of that virtual point which is over there. (179)

A major function of a ghost bike memorial on a city street is that of a localized no-place which is created through the act of interpreting reflected meaning, "a kind of contestation, both mythical and real, of the space in which we live" (179).

Foucault further identifies two primary types of heterotopia: the "crisis heterotopia" and the "heterotopia of deviation" (179-80). The crisis heterotopia is the created space in which an individual going through a transformation is traditionally placed. This corresponds roughly to the liminal space described by Arnold Van Gennep and explored more fully by Victor Turner in their discussion of rites of passage, and would include "adolescents, menstruating women, women in labor, old people, and so on" (179). According to Foucault, however, these crisis heterotopias are being replaced by heterotopias of deviance--places of confinement and removal rather than of liminal transformation, which include "the rest homes, the psychiatric hospitals; they are also, of course, the prisons" (180). The ghost bike memorial, then, could be viewed as somewhere between these two types of heterotopia: it is one of crisis, in that the wrongfully deceased has an existence that is troubling--not quite dead and gone, the subject of a memorial regains a certain degree of vocality within the context of addressing the societal grievances which led to his or her death. The message written by "David Minor's ghost" is evidence of the peculiar status of the victim of random, traumatic death in our society.

The ghost bike memorial, however, gains some of its power through resisting forces which would situate it wholly as a heterotopia of deviance: there have been cases, more pronounced than that of Tracey Sparling's bike, in which commercial considerations have forced the obstructive memorials off the streets in the name of good business. Street cleaners are often unclear on how to deal with a memorial that impedes their duties to keep city streets clean. The placement of the Sparling bike in St. Stephen's represents a claim on the meaning of the bike through a relocation[17].

Location determines to a large degree the meaning and function of a all vernacular memorials. The spirit photos discussed in the previous chapter represented attempts at closing the ultimate distance between the living and the dead at a time when the world was expanding technologically and geographically, yet shrinking in terms of increased connectivity through advances in transportation like the steam engine and, eventually, the automobile, and in terms of ease of communication as with the invention of the telegraph. A spirit photograph suggested to its beholder a collapse of the space and time that separate the mourner and the departed and allowed for a visual aid in the representation of the continued presence of the dead in the mourner's life. In this chapter location of ghost bike memorials in city streets, and, in the case of the Sparling bike, in the shrine of a church, is fundamental to the negotiations of meaning that swirl around these memorials. Private and intensely personal, they commemorate individual lives through the reconstruction of life narrative in the form of the memorial assemblage. Public and politicized, ghost bike memorials also represent claims on the rights of public spaces and the presumed safety of all citizens, motivating community action. The next

[17] It is interesting to note that a church nave can itself be understood as a heterotopia, its meaning dependent upon the set of relations that situate it as an "other space," not quite in the same set of relations that determine the rest of the earthly world.

chapter explores the movement of a memorial onto the body of the mourner in the form of a commemorative tattoo. These tattoos operate similarly to the other memorial forms discussed in this project, but they allow for a great degree of control over their interpretation. They can be hidden behind clothing or incorporate designs and images not immediately recognizable as memorial in intent, but, like spirit photographs and ghost bike memorials, commemorative tattoos provide a means of grounding identity through ritualized action in the face of traumatic loss.

CHAPTER IV

MEMORIAL TATTOOS

> The continuity of a human body is a matter of appearance and behavior, not of substance. The same thing applies to the mind. We think and feel and act, but there is not, in addition to thoughts and feelings and actions, a bare entity, the mind or the soul, which does or suffers these occurrences. The mental continuity of a person is a continuity of habit and memory: there was yesterday one person whose feelings I can remember, and that person I regard as myself of yesterday; but, in fact, myself of yesterday was only certain mental occurrences which are now remembered and are regarded as part of the person who now recollects them. All that constitutes a person is a series of experiences connected by memory and by certain similarities of the sort we call habit.
>
> --Bertrand Russell

A memorial tattoo is a tattoo obtained as a marker of grief and commemoration of a life lost (figs. C-1-3). Any tattoo devoted to the preservation of memory could be broadly considered memorial, and indeed, the permanence of a tattoo situates it as a stabilizing element in preserving and maintaining multiple aspects of identity. While this chapter restricts its focus to those who become tattooed in the immediate wake of catastrophic loss, and selected specifically to commemorate the sudden death of a loved one, the general capacity of permanent ink on the skin to act as a vessel for memory is inescapable. As tattoo artist Chris51 told me:

> If you think about it, most [tattoos] are [memorials]. Someone could get Transformers tattooed on him and it's memorializing their childhood, you know? It's what they grew up with. It's what they loved. And they want to see that every time they look down because it makes them happy. In a way

> it's kind of like a memorial tattoo to their own childhood. You can argue that a lot of them, unless it's something going with a trend . . . most of them are something to memorialize something in somebody's life, you know?

Part of the increased acceptance of tattooing in mainstream culture over the past few decades, broadly referred to as a "tattoo renaissance" (Rubin 1988; Sanders 1989 18-20), has involved a shift from the tattoo as a marker of sub-cultural or occupational identity--as in prison tattoos and those associated with bikers and gangs, or the tattoos associated with carnival workers and performers, sailors, and so on --to an indication of individual identity and resistance to a perceived homogenizing effect of mass culture and modern society. The almost-paradoxical status of the tattoo as both a marker of group identity and an expression of individuality resistant to commodity culture creates a field of multivocality which allows the bearer of the tattoo to control his or her social persona dependent on what he or she is comfortable with in a given moment and context. The ambivalence of a tattoo across several discursive fields creates a cultural background hum that haunts the various perceptions of what and how a tattoo *means* to those viewing and those wearing a tattoo. As tattoos have moved from stigmatization and marginalization, to markers of sub-cultural style, to middle class identity movements, to modern primitivism, to symbols of spirituality, and beyond, the unique mingling of the personal and the private, the stigmatized and the politically resistant, have made tattoos capable of an astonishing variety of meaningful uses and functions. This chapter contextualizes tattoos that commemorate traumatic loss within the multiple meanings that have been foundational in forming the social and personal place of the tattoo in daily life, and which

continue to define the tattoo across cultural shifts, specifically by comparing scholarship on mourning, anthropological theories on modern primitivism, and ideas of contemporary ritual, supported throughout with data collected from ethnographic fieldwork.

The tattoo renaissance generally refers to the time period in America from 1950 to present, during which tattoos became more widespread and visible across traditional boundaries of race, class, and gender. Having long been associated with less desirable elements of American society, by the middle of the nineteenth century the common public conception of tattoo artists held them to be artless, crude, minimally trained, and unhygienic, while their clientele were regarded as working-class, shiftless, potential criminals (Sanders 1989: 18-19). The change in public opinion was slow, and certainly not banished even yet, and has been linked to the broader cultural changes evident in the popularity of the hippies in the 1960s and the punks in the late 1970s and early 1980s, including distrust of institutionalized authority, skepticism of conformist impulses, and emphasis on the value of individual expression as resistance to homogenizing consumer culture. Additionally, the influx of exoticized Eastern thought in the form of various New Age movements with a strong focus on personal and spiritual transformation, termed by Margo DeMello, "new class social movements" has influenced opinions and the acceptance of tattoos (2000: 143). According to DeMello, these social movements, which include a number of "self-help, New Age, women's spirituality, men's, and ecology movements," stress the development of the inner self in harmony with the body and place much weight in the efficacy of symbols in this regard (143-51). Tattoos have become one of many forms of directing and expressing the self and, as such, attained therapeutic value.

In 1989, V. Vale and Andrea Juno published the book *Modern Primitives*, a collection of interviews with men and women whose interest in tattooing, scarification, piercing, and other forms of body modification shared themes of opposition to modern life and re-discovery of a more "authentic," pre-Western civilization existence through a reclamation of the body. The term "modern primitive" is credited to one of the interviewees in the book, Fakir Musafar, whose pioneering interest in piercings and suspensions (in which a person is suspended on wires passed through a series of body piercings) have made his name almost synonymous with the movement. While the difficulties inherent in summing up an array of diverse and differently-inspired body modification practitioners into a single categorical group should not be overlooked, nor should the long and fraught history of "primitive" as a label for a constellation of ideas surrounding notions of the non-Western "other" be treated lightly, the modern primitive label has a certain utility in its application to a set of shared themes and values that appear again and again among the subjects of Vale and Juno's book.

These shared themes revolve around notions of body modification practices as expressions of a universal human need for ritual and disciplined pain as means of gaining access to spiritual knowledge and embodied experience free from the increasing alienation and homogenization of modern Western society. The association of tattooing and scarification with native and aboriginal tribal peoples, resonant with Rousseauvian Romanticist tones of the "noble savage," situated these practices as oppositional to the monolith of Western industrial impulse. Anthropologist Daniel Rosenblatt notes the place of tattooing in the modern primitive movement in his analysis of the cultural assumptions which structure "primitive" as authentic and anti-modern:

> Esoteric and intuitive knowledge, devalued by society, becomes a potential source of power for the individual who gains access to it through a tattoo--a source of power that does not depend on existing economic and political institutions. Other cultures are also seen as being in a more harmonious relationship with the natural world than ours. This too contributes to the way in which the tattoo marks and enables individuality, since differences between people are seen as natural and conformity is conceived of as socially imposed. (318)

Of course these associations are based in partially understood or wholly misunderstood notions of the roles and meanings to cultures that are imagined to still be in "primitive" states, as well as an example of "some sort of evolutionary mapping of human diversity onto a temporal scale" (Rosenblatt 303), echoing the cultural evolutionary theories promoted by early anthropologists like Edward Tylor and James Frazer. Ultimately, though, these broad and generally celebratory (though inherently racist) misperceptions contribute to a basic cultural association among Westerners of tattoos and tattooing with universal human needs, including a belief in the efficacy of ritual to revitalize the inner experience of authentic existence.

The associations of tattooing with notions of authenticity, ritual, and self-development, are evident, if not necessarily explicit, in the motivation to get a memorial tattoo in the face of loss. The decision to get a memorial tattoo seems to be motivated by the need to transform a death into something aesthetically meaningful without minimizing the pain of loss. Memorial tattoos are often a person's first tattoo, representing an experience whose significance will endure in the life of the mourner; they

are also often decided upon fairly quickly after the death, while the pain of loss is still at its greatest and most unmanageable. A memorial tattoo allows the mourner to symbolically incorporate something of the essence of the lost loved one, and in some instances literally do so, as when the ashes of the deceased are mixed with the ink. Whereas other vernacular memorial forms studied in this dissertation use material culture to retain both the memory and the feeling of loss, the tattoo transforms the body of the mourner itself into a commemorative text.

Memorial tattoos have some interesting points of overlap with memorial photography. Both are obviously visual signs which substitute for the changed relationship of the mourner to the deceased, one iconic, one indexical; yet they also share an underlying faith in the power of the image to reach beyond surface and provide an affective bridge to connect the mourner to the deceased. As in Barthes' poignant description (drawing from Susan Sontag) of the power of the photograph to surmount time and space to form "a sort of umbilical cord" of transmitted light from the body of the photographed to the eye of the beholder "like the delayed rays of a star" (1980: 80-1), so too can a memorial tattoo, as an inscription substituting for loss, carry on the connection that existed in life. This connection is twofold: first the bridge aspect, Barthes' umbilicus of light, which can be usefully thought of in terms of psychologist D.W. Winnicott's notion of the "transitional object"; second is the opening into futurity, the resistance of the time's erosion of pain and significance. This is represented in the tattoo's status as a rupture in the text of the body, as any adornment must be, yet one which blurs distinctions between inner and outer, self and other, beauty and scarring, and wound and healing.

A transitional object is one which is symbolic of the original loss and formation of the self enacted through the child weaned from the mother's breast, commonly in the form of a security blanket or a favorite stuffed animal (Winnicott 1971: 1-2). The transitional object provides an intermediate step in the separation of the infant from the mother, containing the anxieties that threaten to overwhelm the bourgeoning persona faced with the realization that reality, despite all of the infant's experience to that point, has objective existence and is not simply an extension of the infant's desire. This movement corresponds to Freud's conception of the transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle (1923), and creates a need for the transitional object, existing for the infant somewhere between his or her own internal wants subject to control and complete externality not subject to control (Winnicott 1971: 13-14). Successful development of the child depends upon the relinquishment of the transitional object and results in the child's newfound ability to internalize attachment to an object (or a loved one) whose existence is understood as being wholly and properly external and objective (1971: 13-14). Mourning, as a transitional phase, is prefigured in the original individuation from perceived unity with mother, and as such, can be considered foundational to the process of identity formation and continued development.

Winnicott's theory of the transitional object is central to his understanding of childhood development, but it has implications that resound through much of adult life as well. As the separation from the mother can be seen as the original loss which precipitates the threat of shattered identity and the consequent reformed understanding of the limits of self and identity, all subsequent loss encountered in adult life bears structural echoes. Thus, developmental psychiatrist Susan Kavaler-Adler finds in mourning the

necessary transformation of subjective relation to external realities that functions for adults in a way similar to the initial transition phase of the infant. She writes that "the mourning process has its own ongoing developmental role, because consciousness of grief and longing for the lost other will transform the symbolic internalization of the other into a resource for visualized memory that serves as links back to actual experiences with the loved and lost object" (80). When a loving connection is formed with one external to the lover, the connection becomes internalized, representing subjectively and experience that depends upon external reality. When a loved one dies, the internal representation of attachment loses its ground and grief erupts as the disconnect between lingering internalized attachment a reality that will no longer sustain it.

Sigmund Freud, in his influential essay, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), describes this transformation as the reconstitution of the self in the absence of the love object, achieved through the withdrawal of cathected energies from the departed love object and redistribution of those energies into a new love object. It is a painful and potentially shattering experience, one which could lead to the pathological state of melancholy if the energies are turned inward in lieu of a new object. It is a process that necessitates a new phase of reality testing on the part of the mourner as he or she attempts to understand a world in which the loved one is absent. The transitional object, in this context, would represent a halfway point between the internal love and the absent external love-object. This seems to be part of the function of a memorial tattoo, so much so that when Kavaler-Adler writes that the developmental role of mourning is to "transform the symbolic internalization of the other into a resource for visualized memory" (2003: 80), she could be speaking without much modification about memorial

tattoos. The skin of the mourner is an apt physical location for the halfway point between the internal and external confrontation between desire and death, and a tattoo becomes an almost pat referent for the phrase "resource for visualized memory that serves as links back to actual experiences with the loved and lost object." The tattoo helps to bear the weight of loss as a localized point to represent the tenuous link between living memory and absent physicality.

The permanence of a tattoo in the life of the mourner presents a slight obstacle to thinking of memorial tattoos as transitional objects. The work of Ryan LaMothe on the role of sacred objects in the structure and organization of identity argues for a reassessment of Winnicott's notion of transitional objects in the lives of adults with enduring commitments beyond the transitional. Concentrating on Winnicott's own insight that the existence of representations of God and religion in lives of men and women might be related to the need for transitional objects in infancy, LaMothe differentiates the sacred from the transitional and promotes the term vital object as a replacement for transitional when discussing the sacred (1998: 159). He writes:

> . . . sacred objects and practices in adult life may be conceptualized as vital objects or phenomena when they (a) furnish believers with an unconscious belief in omnipotence for the sake of the construction and organization of subjective and intersubjective experiences and reality; (b) provide a subjective and intersubjective sense of identity, continuity, and cohesion; (c) serve as opportunities for spontaneity and creativity; and (d) supply comfort and security for persons and communities during periods of anxiety. (1998: 167)

Memorial tattoos can be mapped onto this list with relative ease: they express desires for permanence and control over the divide between life and death, and they can help to reconstruct identity both individually in the absence of the loved one and communally in the dual sense of entering into a subculture and in the high prevalence of the informants I spoke with of becoming tattooed in groups of family members and close friends similarly moved by the loss. They are chosen in times of chaotic instability as meaningful attempts to act upon life as the familiar props of existential routine slowly reorganize and resettle.

The pain involved in getting a tattoo acts as a test of the resolve, deterring the timid and validating the brave in the eyes of the tattoo community. In the case of a memorial tattoo, the pain can be particularly important, possibly therapeutic. As a response to the numbness of overwhelming grief, it can help to make the inner hurt manifest, channeling violent emotional turmoil into one concentrated spot on the body. Commemorating a loss with a tattoo can be a very poignant experience for both the mourner and the tattoo artist. Asher and Scottie, inkers at a studio in Eugene, Oregon, told me of a particularly memorable experience in which Scottie gave a friend a memorial tattoo for her mother using ink mixed with some of the deceased's ashes:

> Scottie: It was a pretty emotional experience…she was crying the whole time I was tattooing her. It just meant a lot to her . . . a lot of closure…the pain thing. Suffering a little bit for that person you're doing that for. Very therapeutic.
>
> Asher: Just in general, getting tattooed is a physical experience.
>
> Scottie: It's necessary. if tattoos didn't hurt…
>
> Asher: Yeah, you earn it.

Scottie: You have to earn your tattoos.

The understanding of a tattoo as a badge that must be earned speaks to the transformative qualities of becoming tattooed. A change on the exterior of the body becomes a concentrated point upon which to focus the overwhelming emotions inside. The experience of physical pain in the context of mourning serves a cathartic purpose, transmuting the ineffable ache of loss into the more comprehensible context of physical sensation.

The transformative properties ascribed to becoming tattooed indicate a main reason behind the frequent incorporation of a tattoo into the personal mourning rituals of the bereaved after sudden loss. As Maurice Bloch points out in *On the Meaning of Death* (1987), a cross-cultural anthropological examination of various human understandings of death, Western civilization, in which individual selfhood is glorified, death becomes the utmost limit against which all imaginable degrees of being and non-being are split. By viewing life as linearly temporal, structured upon the metaphor of the "journey," death is contracted into an instantaneous moment, an ontological "on-off" switch (12-13). While many cultures conceive of death as a gradually occurring phase in a process of transformation that is fluid and continuous, Western views of death as "punctual" reinforce a sense of finality that is wholly of the body, which itself becomes that much more important as the vessel of a completely enclosed individual personality (15). As such, the encounter with death, most viscerally in the experience of the death of a loved one, since one cannot ever truly experience one's own death, can feel existentially shattering, threatening the very stability of the self.

The Bertrand Russell quote that is the epigraph to this chapter speaks to the illusion of permanence involved in identity. The personality is that which maintains, which is felt to persist in causal relation across moments of duration in time, but which has no verifiable continuity beyond what we experience as memory, the endless flow of past into present, and enact as habit. Part of what is so catastrophic about the experience of grief is the destruction of identity. Sociologist Anthony Giddens posits that in contemporary times, which he terms "late modernity," the increasing importance of the individual, centered in attention to the body, and the decline of traditional communities to which the individual was communicated by means of ritual, has led to a situation in which self-identity rests solely in notions of "ontological security" (1991). The continuance of self from day to day finds stabilization only through the act of repetition of the will through what Russell terms memory and habit and which Giddens finds in the increased propensity toward repeated self-narration, coursing along in ease only so far as the darker realities of existence are kept at bay. Through the propagation of self-narration and the achievement of goals and tasks which help to shape a life and endow it with "meaning"--acts like homeownership, the rearing of children, and the purchasing of insurance-- the individual manages the tightrope walk along the wire of a secure and meaningful life above the yawning abyss of dread, anxiety, and meaningless death.

According to Giddens, traditional communities and the observance of ritual used to be enough to give life meaning through cementing the connection of individual to society and society to individual:

> Traditional ritual, as well as religious belief, connected individual action to moral frameworks and to elemental questions about human existence.

> The loss of ritual is also a loss of involvement with such frameworks, however ambiguously they might have been experienced and however much they were bound up with traditional religious discourse. (qtd. in Mellor and Schilling 1993: 420-1)

The loss of meaning-making frameworks through which to understand existence leaves individuals vulnerable to the exposed wires of mortality: "Thus the existential contradiction of being aware of the inevitability of death, while being unable to have certain knowledge of what death will entail, remains a powerful threat to people's ontological security" (Mellor and Schilling 1993: 420). The breakdown of traditional means of relating to a wider community and the increased attention to the development of the individual has both necessitated and enabled the much-discussed "sequestration of death." Death needs to be kept to the margins of life in order for the modern self to create and preserve the autobiographical narrative. As sociologists Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling note:

> Death is so alarming in contemporary societies because modernity has deprived increasing numbers of people with the means of containing it in an overarching, existentially meaningful, ritual structure. The reflexive deconstruction of religious orders, that promised post-corporeal life after death, and the lack of stable replacement meaning systems, has tended to leave modern individuals exposed and unprotected in the face of their inevitable demise. (1993: 427)

The rise of the bounded, embodied individual and the sequestration of death are strains in a larger discourse of secularization, one which is considerably larger than the scope of

this chapter; yet, it is worth noting that the value of preserving ontological security and the corresponding threat that lurks behind it, seeping in through the cracks which inevitably appear through the course of a life, finds a foothold for these theorists in the decline of effective ritual. This may be precisely why the mourner who chooses to express grief and commemoration through a memorial tattoo seeks this form for its connections to the body, its permanence, and its transformative meanings which are culled from a background resonance of the inclusion of tattooing in a variety of modern primitivist and other late 20th century identity movements. In the face of vanishing ritual and threatened dissolution of the combination of attributes and reflexive narratives which form a continuous self, vernacular rituals spring up out of necessity--but to what end?

Ritual behavior can be understood as a means of mitigating anxiety in occasions of deep, even existential. For Sigmund Freud religious ritual operates existentially as obsessive actions function for the neurotic compulsive. In both cases, ritualized action creates situations in which anxiety may be controlled and alleviated, however temporarily, through repeated prohibitive action. Conscious meaning can be given to compulsive acts; however, the compulsive aspect of these behaviors generally derives from unconscious repression of taboo desires and aggressions. The satisfaction of compulsive urges, both in obsessive-compulsive behavior and in religious ritual, imparts a feeling of relief based in constructed cause and effect; however, as long as the true source of the compulsive urge remains in the unconscious, the anxious itch can never be fully alleviated and will continue to return (1959: 22). Bronislaw Malinowski suggests that religious ritual helped to restore a sense of agency to human action to alleviate anxieties which could otherwise become communally divisive (1979: 45). Clifford Geertz

modifies Malinowski's theory to correct for the presence of a great deal of potentially anxiety-inducing foci on death and misery in most religious teachings. He asserts that the value of ritual lies in its use of symbols to create and motivate a sense of underlying meaning to bridge the cause and effect of everyday trials and travails and to connect them to a larger mythological understanding of being. Because, as he notes, symbols shape and are shaped by the needs of the culture they serve, religious belief and ritual unite the believer to his culture and show him or her how to live within that culture (1973).

These theories share the basic dynamic of deep-rooted existential anxieties concerning man's place and power within the cosmos that demand attention and must be mitigated or warded off through small-scale behaviors which act upon larger elements of existence. Anxieties of death and meaning could be paralyzing and disruptive to human community and civilization and must be controlled, or imagined to be controlled, in order to preserve unity and connection through shared cultural goals and values. Ritual in this sense is akin to scratching an itch or applying balm to a burn, rather than letting it gain intensity and become overly distracting to daily life. There is perhaps no bigger threat to the cohesion and maintenance of human society than the knowledge of death. Scientific advancements may forestall death and religious belief may reframe it, but nothing can do away with the inevitability of human mortality completely. Whether confronting one's own mortality or experiencing the loss of those closest, death anxiety lurks behind the plain fabric of mundane existence, threatening to rend and tear it to pieces with the inescapable claws and teeth of oblivion. Death, as the secret chaos in the heart of human order, must be attended to in countless ways on the level of individual, community, and species.

The dependence of the modern individual on self-narration, the constant re-writing and re-telling of one's experience to fit a linear trajectory based upon the need for an underlying meaning, as Giddens describes, rests in the other as well, to the extent that relationships with others serve to anchor us to our meaning-making behaviors and practices. In the wake of the death of a loved one, ritual can provide a structured and symbolically-charged map for reconstruction and the reclamation of meaning. Anthropologist James Green notes the apparent desire for rituals which speak to individual needs among both the dying and those left behind, writing that, "ritual, in this sense is informative, corrective, and prophylactic; it is one thing survivors can do recreate order and find whatever meaning they can in something otherwise inexplicable" (2012: 32). A bit later in his book, *Beyond the Good Death*, Green describes the importance of memory to the stability of the self, in terms that recall Giddens' view of the late modern need for autobiographical narrative:

> Memory as narrative is a distillation of experience, in some sense its "purification." In the privacy of what is called mind, we constantly and skillfully censor and forget, embellish and enlarge, creating a particular version of the past that has usefulness in the present. Purification can make glorious an experience that was humbling, or mitigate some horror that was otherwise senseless. (157)

Memory, then, provides the string of contingency along which identity coheres. When tragedy strikes and the veneer of security which keeps death deferred is pierced, ritual offers a blueprint for the reassembly of fractured identity. This makes sense of the structural resemblance of ritual, with its progression through stages of separation,

transformation, and reintegration, to metaphors of life as a "journey" through a series of defining events (Van Gennep 1961).

A tattoo in the context of mourning operates in several ways: it is an attempt at permanence, an assertion of personal agency, a symbol of difference and of transformation, and an embodied memorial. These functions exist to differing extents in all tattoos; yet, they gain a particular affective charge when they are used as mourning ritual. The permanence of a tattoo endows it with a symbolic power to express and reaffirm the continuity of identity threatened by catastrophic loss. Such tattoos offer the bearer a way to claim a continued endurance and commitment to the lost loved one while moving the locus of memory and commemoration into the body where it can be personally maintained. The features that make tattooing central to the modern primitive movement and its notions of embodied authenticity and reclamation of individual experience through pain and art likewise make it prime for inclusion in mourning practices: "Not only are they a permanent commitment, they are something that cannot be taken away from the individual. This sense that the body is something the individual can assert control over even when they can control nothing else is one of the central themes in modern primitivism" (Rosenblatt 1997: 318). Feelings of loss of control and the threat of erasure of the self are common in the wake of traumatic death, and a memorial tattoo can provide a grounding experience through both its immediate embodied pain and the desire for futurity implied in its selection. It can become a form of empirical verification that attachment to the deceased did exist, and continues to exist, with such intensity that an alteration of the body was the only thing that could approach commensurability with the passing; and verification that, even if the intensity of grief is destined to fade and change

in temporal extension, even if the continuance of the physical body and intangible spirit of the bereaved cannot be guaranteed, then at least the mourner will bear that permanent mark of that transformative intensity until the end. The tattoo is an anchor hurled into the depths of loss against which the mourner vouchsafes his or her momentarily shattered but soon-to-be reconstituted identity.

The memorial tattoo partakes in the urge to self-narrate by turning the body into text that can be read and told. Folklorist Margo DeMello identifies the recurrence of certain motifs in "tattoo narrative," in her fieldwork among modern tattoo enthusiasts:

> These motifs typically include why the wearer decided to get tattooed, how he or she came up with the design, the meaning of the design, how long the individual had been thinking about getting one, the actual tattoo experience, and what it means to him or her now. . . . Tattoo stories centralize one experience--the tattoo--and relate what changes have occurred in the tattoo wearer's life since that central, defining point. Tattoo narratives, however, are different from other types of life-story narratives in that they do not rely so heavily on memory and are much more self-reflexive. (2000: 152)

According to DeMello, the tattoo narrative "does not rely so heavily on memory" as other life-narratives in that it involves the constant justification and explanation in order that it be properly interpreted to fit the specific context of teller and listener in a particular moment. In this way, a tattoo narrative supplements recollection as the past pulled into the present with creative re-evaluation and scene-setting, such that the original meaning

of the tattoo can be regenerated and reactivated to bring the initial context into relation with the current state of the individual and his or her needs.

A recent sociological study of tattoo narratives that accompany portraits in a recurring feature in *Tattoo*, a popular magazine devoted to tattoo culture, supports DeMello's observations about the role of these narratives in the lives of the tattooed:

> In tattoo narratives, individual tattoos are plotted into a life story. It is important to underline that in tattoo narratives, life gains a new coherence through the modified and tattooed body. Experiences and life events are seen in the skin, but also tattooed pictures seem to tell the stories of their carriers. Their relationship between tattoos and subject is dialogical. (Oskanen and Turtiainen 2005: 114)

The dialogic nature of the tattoo narrative displayed in the combinatory power of tattoo and subject each "telling" the other produces a sense of the tattooed body as existing in "multidimensionality: they bridge space, time, memory and affects together" (Oskanen and Turtiainen 2005: 114-15). One particular example of the way in which a tattoo narrative forms a discursive frame around life events, one that allows for control over interpretation as intervening years alter the meanings these events have in the lives of those who experience them, is discussed by Oskanen and Turtiainen. It concerns a man, Dan Massey, whose brief narrative in *Tattoo* describes the changing nature of a tattoo of fighting dragons he got on his shoulder while going through a divorce:

> I got into a whole bunch of trouble etc., etc., and the image represents my attitude at the time, me being the one kicking the other dragon's ass. Then I met my wife, Melanie, with whom I've been seven years now. After I

> met her I added the swords that represent me slaying the dragons and my internal dragons as well since she helped calm me down a lot. (qtd. in Oskanen and Turtiainen 2005: 121)

The meaning of the tattooed dragons changes for Massey as he continues with his life. The context in which they were originally selected remains a central experience for him, but his progression through subsequent events has changed his attitude toward them, which leads him in turn to alter the tattoo to reaffirm his new perspective.

A memorial tattoo transforms the body into text, highly personal, yet easily public. It can be read, but often not understood without the accompanying narrative of the person bearing the tattoo. The relationship of aesthetic creation to the healing of unseen wounds parallels the process of "working through" grief. While much remains misunderstood and hotly contested in the theoretical understanding of the traumatic experience, one of the most enduring definitions is given by Bessel Van der Kolk, who describes it as a "black hole," a void left in the conscious mind by the encounter with something too terrible and overwhelming to process (1998). In a desperate act of self-preservation, the traumatic experience is kept beyond consciousness.[18] From its extra-conscious vantage, the traumatic experience seems to haunt the survivor, repeating itself in intense emotional presence while remaining literally unspeakable. One of the foremost methods of healing trauma depends upon finding non-verbal means of representing experience, often through artistic creation. Drawing, painting, and sculpting have proven

[18] There is disagreement over how and where the experience is stored--and it seems to be stored somewhere as evidenced by the retrieval of traumatic memory in the hypnotic state, as well as the peculiar repetition of the traumatic incident, whether in the form of a flashback or in the more generalized tendency of the survivor of trauma to unconsciously repeat the scene of trauma in the form of self-destructive behavior later in life, as when the survivor of abuse repeatedly engages in activities which put him or her at risk for further abuse. See Herman (2007) and Leys (2000) for an overview of the discourse.

effective in this regard. The usefulness of an art therapy approach is perhaps easiest to understand in the context of children and trauma, where the inability to give words to experience is as much cognitive as symptomatic of trauma[19].

Folklorists have come to similar conclusions through application of the behavioral approach to material culture described by Michael Owen Jones. The behavioral perspective contextualizes human expressive creation in terms of the functional role it plays in the lives of its creators. The functionality of what Jones terms "material behavior" (2001: 59-60) can refer to the uses of material culture to solidify the individual's relation to the larger community through the expression of shared values and artistic sensibilities. It can also refer to the unique embellishments and innovations the individual, perhaps inevitably, brings to the creation of each artifact. Individual embellishment on traditional forms can speak to personal needs and the maintenance of identity in the face of tragedy, as Jones found in his classic folkloric study of Appalachian chairmaker Chester Cornett (1975), whose chairs often featured seemingly superfluous and yet meaningful ornamentation tailored to specific needs in the life of Chester and those for whom the chairs were made.

Folklorist Daniel Wojcik applies Jones's approach to the often misunderstood spontaneous art created by "outsider artists," self-taught and sometimes idiosyncratic artists, some of whom suffer from a variety of mental disorders, often stemming from traumatic experiences in their pasts. The work of outsider artists is often fetishized in the art world and the traditions and cultural contexts which often inspire the content of outsider creations are overlooked or misunderstood as merely symptomatic of unstable

[19] For an overview of the contributions of art therapy to the study of trauma see Bertman (1999) and Malchiodi (2011).

mental conditions. Wojcik argues that these traditions and cultural contexts offer important clues to understanding the conditions under which these artworks are created and the potential therapeutic functions of these works (2008b). The drawings of Henry Darger, Martin Ramirez, Sabato Rodia, or Ionel Talpazan might be attempts to regain a sense of wholeness and identity grounded in memory and community, rather than delirious and mystical emanations from the primitive depths of deranged minds. Careful attention to contextual references and cultural influences shows a deep-rooted functionality at work in art. Memorial tattoos, while seemingly worlds away from the spontaneous creations of outsider artists, quite possibly reflect similar needs common to humanity. They are often attempts to stabilize identities threatened with dissolution in the wake of overwhelming traumatic loss through symbolic representation and connection to a larger community, whether it be of other mourners, other bearers of memorial tattoos, or simply the world of tattoo enthusiasts.

Tattoos create links between the individual and the surrounding community that are built upon harnessing contradictory if not outright paradoxical qualities of the self. The often confusing impulses and desires, the shifting faces one adapts to particular situations in daily life which taken aggregately make up an individual persona, can be visually unified in a tattoo that holds these faces in arrest, waiting to be acted upon through reflection or narration to the self or others. It is a sort of focused ambiguity capable of multivocality in the service of a unified identity. The immediately recognizable duality of a tattoo is its position athwart the private/public boundary. Anthropologist Daniel Rosenblatt makes this function of the tattoo explicit:

> The duality in the way people understand and talk about tattoos reflects a similar duality in our notion of the self--on the one hand, it is something private, asocial, and individual, and on the other hand it is something public, a matter of other people's perceptions, and of a place in a collectivity. As expressed in the way people talk about their tattoos, these two aspects of the self are sometimes felt as contradictory, and at other times as complimentary. Indeed, one of the things tattoos seem to be "about" is reconciling and expressing these different aspects of the self. (306)

The perceived ability of a tattoo to stabilize and signify the self across the vicissitudes of individual persona, which is perhaps intrinsic to the tattoo renaissance, is often doubly inviting to the individual faced with shattering loss.

Among the people who shared with me their experience of getting a memorial tattoo, the primary motivator appears to have been a desire to find a suitable representation of what the deceased meant to them. John, whose son, Jason, was a police officer who died in an automobile accident while responding to a report of another accident, chose a blue deputy sheriff's star with a red rose on a green stem beneath it (fig. C-4). For John, the experience of getting the tattoo was accompanied by a mixture of intense emotions, as he "felt sorrow for my loss and pride in my son and in what the tattoo is commemorating." The star represents the importance of his occupation to Jason, who lost his life in the line of duty. The conflation of life and occupation in this example seems to reconcile a senseless loss--sliding off the road on a rainy night--with the greater purpose of protecting and serving the people. It reclaims the apparent randomness of the

son's death from the mass of automobile deaths which occur every day and reconstitutes the void left by the death as one of noble sacrifice in the line of duty.

The tattoo for Jason, which John chose from among several potential designs, was selected because it "seemed right," and is the first and only tattoo John got. It is placed on his left triceps, an area fairly common among those getting a first tattoo, possibly because of the ease of showing or hiding the tattoo beneath a shirt sleeve. In the experience of tattoo artist Chris51 memorial tattoos are commonly inked on places of the body which invite discussion and narration:

> Normally, memorial pieces, people like them where they can seem, so sides of the arms, ankles, feet, stuff like that. I rarely--a lot on the heart, of course--but I rarely do memorial pieces, you know, on the back or places where you can't see them. They want to be reminded of it frequently. . . . Almost all of them get them where it can be a topic of discussion where people can see it, because they're proud of it and they want to remember it; and I think by getting it in a location where it can be seen, it's like a piece of them is still living all the time because they can always see it and talk about it and stuff like that.

John's selection of his arm for his memorial tattoo also potentially allows for an accidental revealing of the tattoo, as the shirt sleeve pulls up when lifting the arm in the course of daily life, which speaks to the desire to display the tattoo in a non-ostentatious way, suggesting to the viewer of the tattoo both that it is a potentially personal and private marking while inviting interest in it.

Several members of Jason's family got tattoos to commemorate his death in the weeks that followed the accident. John's daughter, Kim, decided to get a memorial tattoo with her family, yet was hesitant in making a selection of the image. Part of her hesitation probably stems from the fact that she already has two tattoos, "one I like and one I dislike . . . a lot." Because it is not her first tattoo and because she is familiar with the feeling of tattoo regret, Kim is taking her time deciding on a design, telling me, "I want it to be perfect, so I am holding off." The desire for perfection indicates the supreme importance the memorial tattoo has for her. She continues: "I want to having something permanent that reminds me of him. Something that won't get lost or ruined, something that is always with me." Two and a half years after the accident, she has still not made up her mind:

> I wanted to get the tattoo at the same time as everyone else (most of them got them within months of his death), but it was such an emotional time--I didn't want to make any rash decisions and get something that I wasn't completely happy with. Plus, since it is in memory of my brother, I want it to be absolutely perfect. I have taken to protecting everything I have left of him, pictures, his old sweatshirt, etc. . . . My tattoo must embody everything I remember about him. I just can't narrow it down yet. I want it to be interesting and beautiful, but I don't want it to be too obvious to others . . . it's very personal. Oh decisions, decisions . . . .

Kim's words illustrate the intense value and deep meaning memorial tattoos can have for those who bear them. The emotional weight of these tattoos can lead to paralysis as one may spend a long time contemplating the various factors that play into such an important decision. This is perhaps why the majority of these tattoos are selected fairly soon after

the loss, while the sheer pain of loss and the desire to actively engage the ambiguous feelings still overwhelm more practical concerns. It will be interesting to compare Kim's thoughts on the tattoo after she finally decides on one to those of her relatives who got their tattoos in the immediate aftermath of the loss, particularly in terms of continuing connection to the deceased son and brother.

Permanence and perfect encapsulation of the essence of the deceased become more daunting as the time between the loss and the tattoo grows. The two goals of a memorial tattoo are certainly interconnected as an expression of an urge to protect and preserve the deceased against the steady effacement of time. It may very well be that there is something intrinsic to visual representations of a lost life that lend themselves particularly well to commemoration. As in postmortem and spirit photography, memorial tattoos collapse the drawn out linearity of time into a single moment that expresses all time and all memory. In some way, too, the memorial tattoo contains a potential for continued vitality in that it communicates loss and memory in a manner that calls for constant narration--tattoos often do not speak for themselves, as opposed to the veridical truth that seems to emanate from a photograph. Many memorial tattoos exist in symbolic relationship to the departed, eschewing indexical relation for active participation in the maintenance and continuation of the symbol, which is reinvigorated with each narration.

The yearning for complete and continued encapsulated memory is impossible to fully satisfy, and something of this crisis in recovering a lost life through image representation persists in all forms of commemoration. As death is something which can never be reversed, so too the emotional reclamation of the deceased's essence in memory and image can never be complete. As Roland Barthes' search for his departed mother in

photographs of her, dismissing photo after photo before finally finding her essence in a photograph taken of her as a little girl long before Barthes' was born, shows us, the relationship of essence to image is tricky, oscillating between the fleeting (a partial reclamation of essence through memory inspired by a particular photograph which flees when you attempt to pin it down) and the frustrating (as when Barthes looks at countless photographs and only finds false countenances of his mother in various staged poses and conscientiousness before the camera's eye) (1980). Of course, Barthes was only seeking his mother in photographs of her. Perhaps memorial tattoos elide this crisis, or at least mitigate its angst, because they capture and preserve memory rather than veridical image, a subjective force which exists only through the purposed internal action of the one who remembers. Here too we can think of DeMello's observation that a tattoo's meaning is expressed through continued narration based not so much on recitation of memory but through active adaptation of the motivations and meanings to meet the realities of the individual in the present. The elongation of Kim's decision about a memorial tattoo may very well significantly impact the eventual resonances of the tattoo she decides upon. Her emotional state more than two years later is certainly different than in the months immediately after her brother's death.

A young woman named Molly got her memorial tattoo to commemorate her younger brother, Kevin, who died at 17 in a car accident his senior year in high school. She went with her older brother, who also got a memorial tattoo, six days after the death:

> My older brother and I went together. We thought it would be a part of us that we would never lose. It was not even a week after my brother died,

> and I was still numb from the whole thing. I was angry for a very long time after.

Molly's tattoo is of her brother's name and the dates of his life surrounded by angel's wings on her back, about 7 inches wide and 4 inches high. Her brother's tattoo is of the younger brother's senior portrait accompanied by the word "Tragedy" written in Gaelic. Molly's decision to get the tattoo so soon after the accident, while she was still numb from shock, is common, and indicative of the need for decisive action and the reclamation of some sort of control. It was not her first tattoo--she has one other, a small butterfly--and while getting her brother's name and dates was and continues to be a meaningful act, she does have some regrets over its size, citing her emotional numbness soon to become anger for this part of the decision:

> I think I should have waited a little longer to get my tattoo. I do love it, but I think that if I was in my right mind I probably wouldn't have gotten it so big! It's part of my life as well as my brother's, so I'm glad I got it.

Molly's being in her "right mind" may have limited the size and reduced any tattoo regret, but the role it might have played in moving through numbness and shock should not be underestimated. Tattoo artist Chris51 explicitly connects the quickness in selection of a memorial tattoo with the pain involved in grieving a loss in what he calls "tattoo therapy," telling me:

> Surprisingly, a lot of people get them very quickly. I think it's almost before they change their mind and while they have the courage; or, they're feeling so much pain as it is now, that what's a little more pain gonna do, you know? And when that's the case, they're very tough and they're very

> courageous and they can handle it no problem. They've gone through enough that a little tattoo's not gonna hurt 'em.

The experience of physical pain may aid in the catharsis of deeper, emotional pain, leading those who may have played with the idea of becoming tattooed in the past to take the step both when the pain of the needle will be both grounding and minimal in relation to the experience of loss.

Another informant, a young woman named Angie, got a memorial tattoo for her husband, Patrick, whose sudden death as a result of a drug overdose left her alone with three small children. Patrick was tattooed himself, and had been learning to become a tattoo artist. Angie's tattoo is a 2" x 2" red and black Celtic knot between her shoulder blades (Fig. 5), which she chose because, "it symbolizes the memory of my husband. He had the same tattoo on his back, and that is why I got this one." Elaborating further, she says:

> I decided on this particular tattoo because this was one of the tattoos he had on him that I liked. He had just had a friend of ours fill it in with red ink. This was not too long before he died. My husband also had all of his own tattoo stuff as he used to give people tattoos. So I had the same friend that did his do mine, with my late husband's ink and tattoo gun. For some reason, having the same tattoo gun and the same ink he used made it feel special to me.

In choosing a copy of her husband's tattoo (fig. C-6), inked by their mutual friend with her husband's ink and gun, Angie sought an experience that was significant enough to be "special." The symbolism of her choices all point to a desire to affirm physical and

mental connections to her late husband at the moment those connections seemed most vulnerable to erasure.

While not her first tattoo, her memorial tattoo, inked three days after Patrick's death, entailed a much more intense experience. Angie described that experience in a scene that is evocative of the communal grief expressed in wakes:

> I was still pretty much a wreck and just wanted it done. I was crying through most of it but knew it was worth it. As I was getting it, many of my husband's friends were coming in to talk to me about my late husband, so it was hard.

Angie's commemorative tattoo also illustrates the enduring power of the symbol to keep Patrick's memory alive through narration. She told me that a primary reason for her decision to get the tattoo in the first place was, "because it will be with me forever. When I see it, or when someone asks what it is or why I got it, it reminds me of him." The tattoo further serves as a means of keeping Patrick's memory alive for their children:

> I guess I just feel as if I carry a piece of him everywhere I go. My kids will sometimes come up behind me while I'm doing something and trace the tattoo with their fingers and talk about their dad.

For Angie and her children, as well as for the Mooneys mourning their son and brother, the communal aspect of the grief is a fundamental part of the tattoo's value. In each of these cases, the tattoo symbolizes a maintained connection between the individual mourner and the departed, while also functioning as a centerpiece around which the individual mourners can maintain a shared space for the role of the departed in their lives as a familial unit.

Angie's description fits sociologist Clinton Sanders' findings that "the act of getting the tattoo is usually . . . a social event experienced with close friends" (1989: 42-3) who provide support to the one undergoing the inking. While Sanders observes that many people getting their first tattoo have thought about it for a while yet most often "drifted into the actual experience when they 'didn't have anything better to do'" (42), he also notes that "the tattoo event frequently involves a ritual commemoration of a significant transition in the life of a recipient" to symbolize change, such as "achieving maturity and symbolically separating the self from individuals or groups" (43).

A memorial tattoo can also commemorate a life lost before the mourner was able to really know the departed. In these cases, the tattoo symbolizes an absence of a connection that should have been. This sense of a life cut short, of the severing of futurity that can only exist as imagined potentiality, is part of every memorial to unexpected death; however, in situations like that of a young man named Vedran who lost his brother in 1992 to the Bosnian War while he himself was only six, the tattoo accrues its power mostly through the accumulation of missing future memories more than the remembrance of shared experience.

Vedran's tattoo is a black fleur-de-lis with his brother's initials (fig. C-7). It is his first and only tattoo, and he chose it because it aptly represents to him a combination of familial and cultural heritage:

> I chose the fleur-de-lis because it's an iconic European symbol, and it is featured on the Bosnian crest. It's both a symbol of a brother I didn't get to know and a war I was born and raised in for six years.

In this way Vedran's tattoo, although he got it to commemorate a brother he barely knew who died years before, acts as a focal point in his self-narration. It grounds him to his past and projects forward, transforming a reservoir of missed experience into a potent reminder of the fragility of identity:

> I wanted a daily reminder of how much my family means to me, a mark of the pain my mother experiences every day from the loss of her child. I also wanted a reminder to appreciate the days I have left to live.

The *memento mori* of the fleur-de-lis tattoo achieves for Vedran a level of resistance to becoming overly inured to the routine and mundane in daily life. Vedran's tattoo allows him to contemplate the vicissitudes of life in a way that is controlled and familiar while allowing just enough of the void to peak through the cracks of daily existence to remind him to savor the experiences.

The symbolic power of a tattoo as a modification of the body positions it as ritual-esque in the sense of its association with modern primitivism. Tattoos and body modification are not ritual only in reference to ritual as understood by modern primitives:

> The person receiving the tattoo or piercing and the person giving it, as well as any persons in a formal position as spectators, all have a particular part to play in the act. The heightened formality of the occasion marks it off as separate from everyday life and gives the acts more than ordinary significance. Because the rituals create relationships between people, they are seen to (and in fact do) help to constitute a community. Despite the emphasis placed on the discovery and reclamation of individuality through these practices, part of the power of body modifications (as both political

> statements and acts of self-definition) derives from their ability to constitute a collectivity separate from the recognized structures of society (Rosenblatt 1997: 321).

The use of tattooing in personal mourning ritual works because of its status as transformative and embodied, providing the thread with which one can re-sew the tattered seams of a life rent by death. A memorial tattoo can help one lost in grief to find a way forward, stabilized and motivated by the flow of the past into the future through the present rupture in the skin by needle and ink.

Rituals of death and mourning create structure out of chaos and restore feelings of agency and control to one facing the rupture of loss. They symbolically mark the transition of the deceased from life to death, and importantly, from the physical reality of the mourner to the internal constellation of memory and emotion that must now stand in for the departed. The mourner must essentially reintegrate himself or herself into society as a fundamentally altered individual: "An important aspect of mourning is the experience of disruption in self-organization due to the loss of the function of the relationship of the other in sustaining self-experience. Thus mourning involves a reorganization of the self as a key function of the process" (Hagman 2001: 24). Mourning is then an act of reconstruction of the self in the face of shattering catastrophe.

As a commemorative form carried on the body to connect the unraveling past to the unspooling future, memorial tattoos gain power through the symbolic connection of identity to all points in a life through localized memory. In discussing these ideas with Chris51, he suggested the importance of memorial tattoos in comparison to more official commemorative forms, such as tombstones and funerary services:

> I honestly think that the memorial tattoo is, and I don't want to offend anybody saying this, but I think it's more meaningful. Because it's something that you're. . . you know, you don't see a tombstone or remember a service every day, but this is something you see--you wash it in the shower, you touch, you feel, you have that physical contact with it every day of your life, you know? I think it's a lot more memorable than other experiences like that for sure. And a lot of people will add to them, too, once they get that memorial piece and it's beautiful then a lot people will add, either for the artistic element because it opened their mind and they like looking at it and it makes them happy, you know? In a sad situation it makes them happy to see this and so a lot of people will add to it.

A memorial tattoo can in this way become a source of happiness, the infrastructure for a larger aesthetic modification of the body thoughtfully added to throughout a life. In this way, too, as the absent loved one's role in a mourner's life can change through the forced perspectives of time, so can the tattoo itself change, symbolically incorporating the accruing years in a beautiful network of expanding self-narrative.

APPENDIX A

SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY

Figure A-1. William H. Mumler; *Moses A. Dow with the Spirit of His Assistant*; c.1871.

Figure A-2. William Crookes and "Katie King," the spirit familiar of medium Florence Cook; c.1874.

Figure A-3. A representation of a séance.

Figure A-4. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with spirit extra; circa 1922. The Barlow Collection; British Library; London.

Figure A-5. The Fox sisters, founders of modern Spiritualism.

Figure A-6. William H. Mumler, the "Father of Spirit Photography"; *Harper's Weekly*, May 4, 1869.

Figure A-7. William H. Mumler; *Mrs. Tinkman*; c.1861.

Figure A-8. William H. Mumler; *John J. Glover*; c.1861.

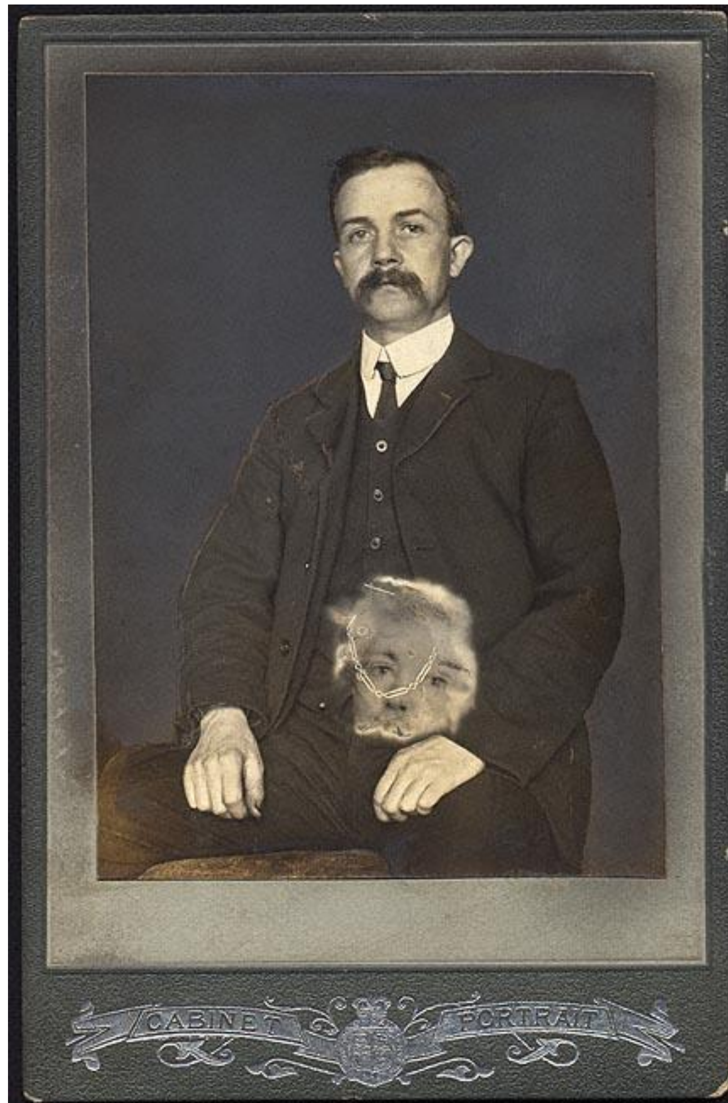

Figure A-9. Edward Wyllie; Mr. *Robert Whiteford, Professional Photographer of Rothesay, with "Extra";* October 7, 1909.

Figure A-10. William H. Mumler; *Unidentified Man with Two Spirits*; c.1870.

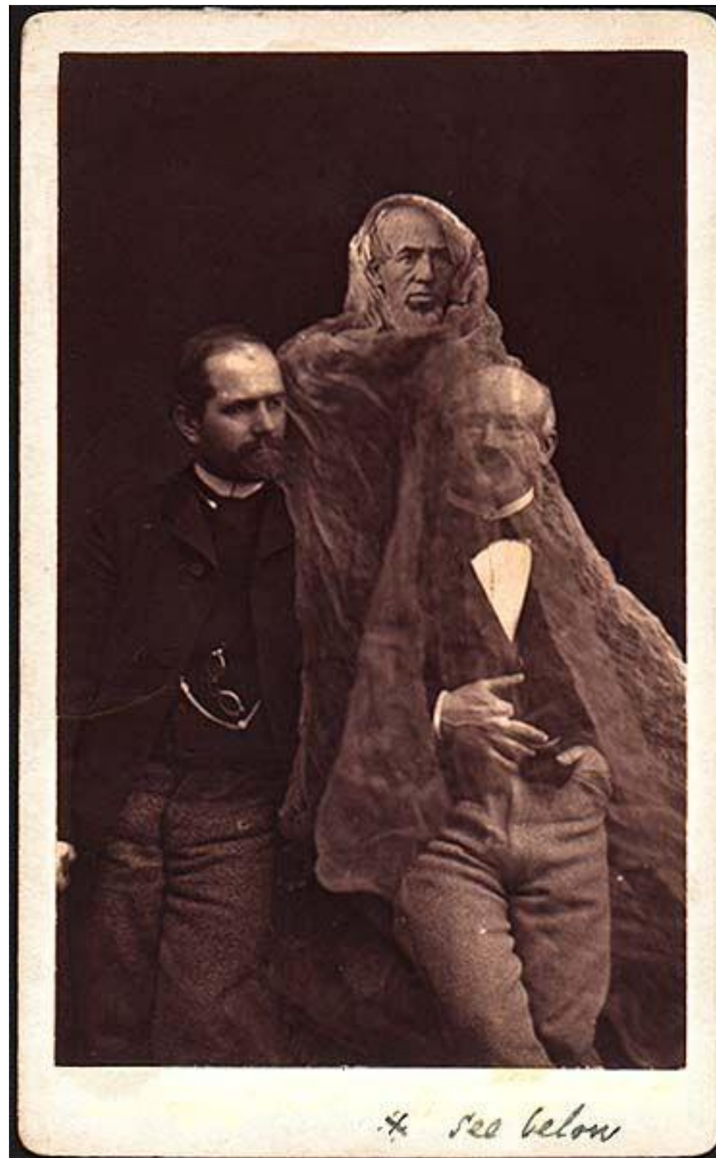

Figure A-11. Edouard Isidore Buguet; *Pierre-Gattan Leymarie and a Friend, with the Spirit of Edouard Poiret*; c.1873.

Figure A-12. William H. Mumler; *Mary Todd Lincoln with the Spirit of Her Husband, President Abraham Lincoln*; c.1870-75.

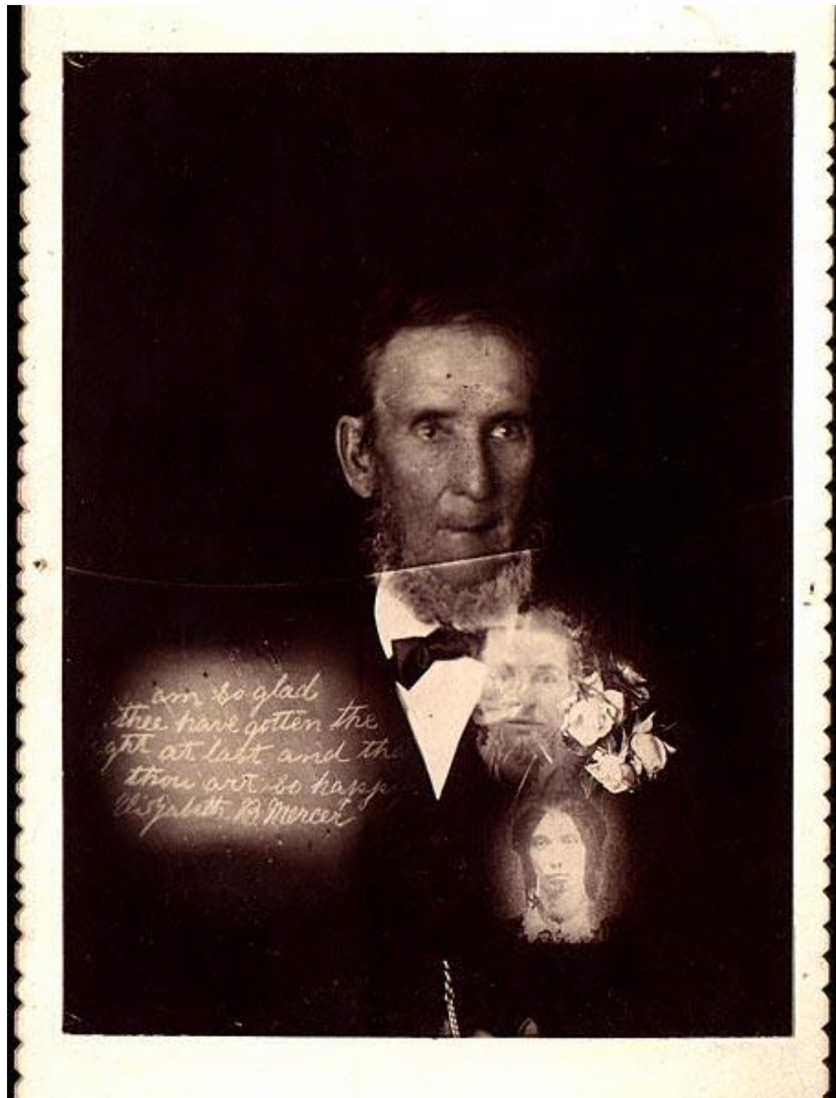

Figure A-13. Edward Wyllie*; J. R. Mercer with Spirits of His First Wife and Mother, a Spirit Message and Flowers from the Other Side*; c.1895.

Figure A-14. William Hope; *Rev. Charles L. Tweedale and Mrs. Tweedale with the Spirit Form of the Late F. Burnett*; September 5, 1919.

APPENDIX B

GHOST BIKE MEMORIALS

Figure B-1. Ghost bike memorial in Portland, Oregon; Photo by author.

Figure B-2. Ghost bike for David Minor in Eugene, Oregon; Photo by author.

Figure B-3. Ghost bike for Tracey Sparling; Portland, Oregon;

Figure B-4. Ghost bike for David Minor; Eugene, Oregon; photo by author.

Figure B-5. Ghost bike for David Minor; Eugene, Oregon; photo by author.

Figure B-6. Ghost bike for David Minor; Eugene, Oregon; photo by author.

Figure B-7. Minor's ghost bike in autumn; photo by author.

Figure B-8. Photograph of Minor and prayer card left at memorial; photo by author.

Figure B-9. Minor's bike in autumn; photo by author.

Figure B-10. Minor's bike in autumn; photo by author.

Figure B-11. Ghost bike memorial for Tracey Sparling; Portland, Oregon; photo by Joseph Rose for *The Oregonian*; 14 Apr. 2010.

Figure B-12. Friends and family at the placement of the Sparling bike; photo by Jamie Francis for *The Oregonian*; 13 Oct. 2007.

Figure B-13. Information on the creation of bike boxes in Portland, Oregon; portlandoregon.gov.

Figure B-14. A bike box is created in Portland, Oregon; photo from *The Oregonian*; 21 Mar. 2008.

Figure B-15. The Bicycle Shrine in St. Stephen's Episcopal Parish; Portland, Oregon; photo by author.

Figure B-16. Painting hanging in the Bicycle Shrine; photo by author.

Figure B-17. The Madonna del Ghisallo.

Figure B-18. Church of Madonna del Ghisallo; Magreglio, Italy; photo from wikipedia.org; 2 Mar. 2003

Figure B-19. Bikes of famous Italian cyclists line the top of the church; photo from barteau.blogspot.com; 11 Dec. 2012.

APPENDIX C

MEMORIAL TATTOOS

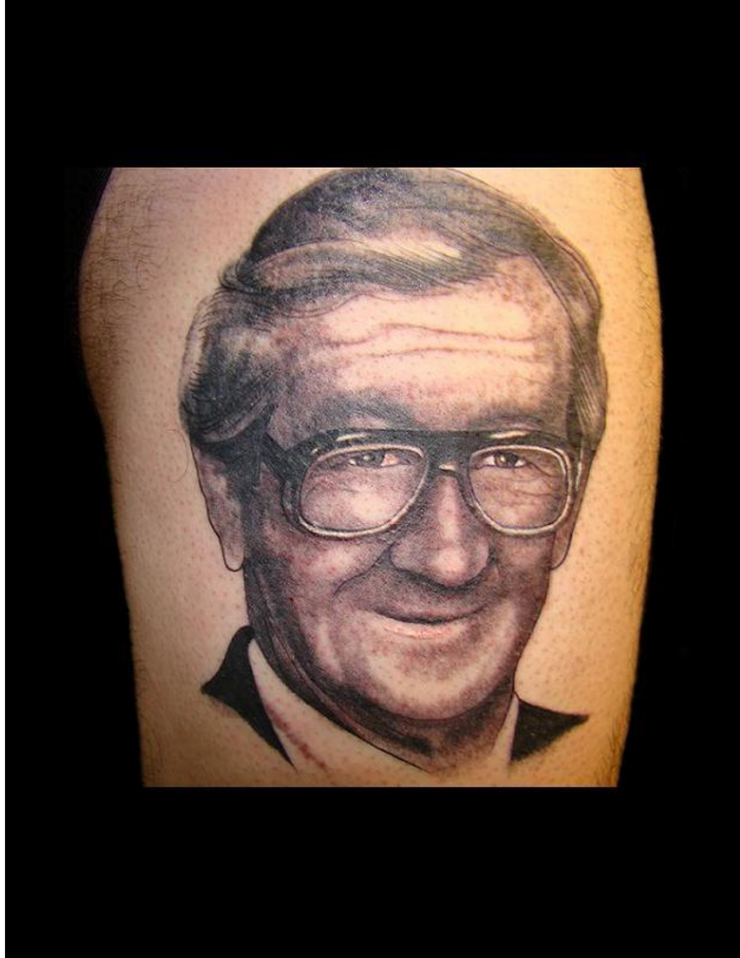

Figure C-1. Memorial tattoo for a grandfather;

Figure C-2. Memorial tattoo on right bicep.

Figure C-3. Memorial tattoo on leg.

Figure C-4. John Mooney's tattoo for his son, Jason.

Figure C-5. Angie's tattoo for her husband Patrick.

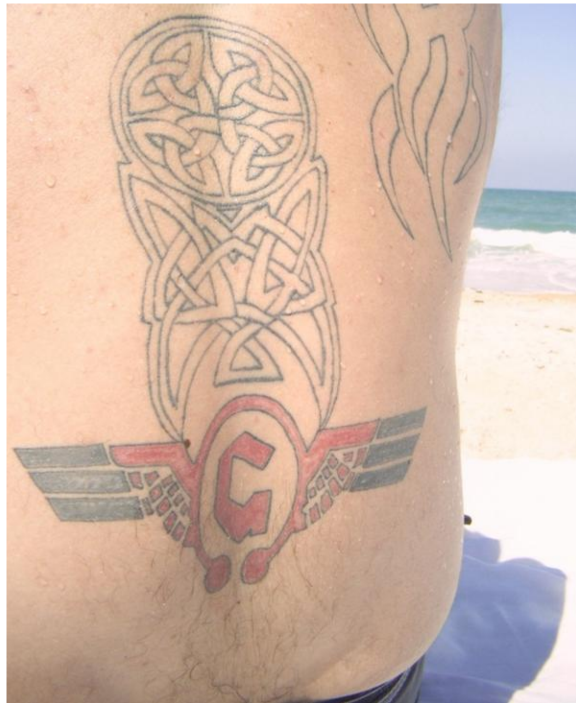

Figure C-6. Patrick's tattoo from which Angie took her design.

Figure C-7. Vedran's tattoo for his brother.

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