Perspectives from Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies on South African roadside memorials

by

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Declaration

I, JACO BEYERS, student number 02440237 hereby declare that this dissertation, “Perspectives from Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies on South African roadside memorials,” is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Magister Artium degree at University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged with a comprehensive list of references.

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Jaco Beyers

29 April 2020

Dedication

I dedicate this research to all those who have lost loved ones and try to remember them by roadside memorials.

Waar vlucht ik voor uw aangezicht?
Al steeg ik op in't hemels licht,
al daalde ik tot de doden af,
Gij zult er zijn, zelfs in het graf.
Gij blijft mij, God, in alle dingen,
altijd en overall omringen.

(Old Dutch Hymn based on Psalm 139)

Acknowledgements

To have achieved this milestone in my life, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people:

- Prof Lize Kriel, my research supervisor, for her invaluable advice, guidance and inspiring motivation during the research;
- My family, my wife and children, who had to endure my absence while writing this dissertation.

Abstract

It is a relatively recent phenomenon to see memorials as indictors of remembering the dead along South African roadsides. These memorials are expressions of places where death occurred. These expressions are arranged with visual and material elements, substantiated with some symbolic, often religious, meaning. This research wants to make the connection between Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies by investigating the way in which roadside memorials are compositionally arranged. Ten examples of roadside memorials were selected and discussed in order to come to some understanding of the connection between religious convictions and visual expressions thereof.

Key Terms: death, roadside memorial, Visual Culture Studies, religion

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Letter from language editor to indicate that language editing has been done.

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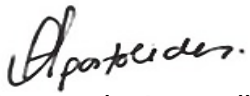
To whom it may concern

Dear Sir/Madam,

Declaration of language editing

I, Anastasia Apostolides (PhD), hereby declare that I have personally read through the Magister Artium thesis of Jaco Beyers, with the title *Perspectives from Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies on South African roadside memorials*, and have highlighted language errors.

Yours sincerely,



Anastasia Apostolides

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1. CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

There is abundant cultural evidence of the ways in which death has filled millions of people with terror and awe over thousands of years. Religion and philosophy have been intrigued by dealings with death (Becker 1973:12). In his seminal work on death, *The Denial of Death* (1973)[1] preceded by *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (1971) and *Escape from Evil* (1975)[2], the sociologist Ernest Becker identifies death as the single most terrifying event haunting human existence. Death is so overwhelming to humans that according to Becker (1973:11; 1975:xv), all human behavior is determined by death. The awareness of death creates an extreme terror within human consciousness. It is this terror that acts as a 'worm at the core'[3] of human existence, devouring all ideas of self-worth and value. Compare in this regard the work by Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski (2015) entitled *The Worm at the Core.* Like Becker, Solomon *et al.* suggest that the only way to counter this fear of death is to bolster human self-esteem. Becker (1973:5; 1975:xv) refers to this as the human strive to heroism – an attempt to transcend mortality – which provides the need for a feeling of self-value. It is this strive to heroism which Becker (1975:xv) then identifies as the source of human evil. The hero can focus so strongly on his/her own existence and survival that it may result in acts of selfishness, causing harm to others. Heroism is the expected reaction to death: it is the hero who faces death courageously (Becker 1973:12).

Over the centuries, a great deal of consideration has been given to the topic of death. Artists, poets, and philosophers alike have given expressions to their views on death. Already in 1973, Becker (1973:12) indicated the huge amount of literature on the matter of death. The work by Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski could be interpreted as coming from a psychological approach. The work by Douglas Davies (2005) reflects an anthropological perspective, and Becker's own work (1973) could be considered as a reflection from a sociological perspective. The

[1] For this work, Becker received the Pulitzer Prize in 1974.
[2] Published posthumously
[3] This expression was originally coined by William James (1958:121).

research undertaken here is not primarily a discussion on death, but rather a reflection on visual expressions related to dealings with death.

The study undertaken here does not intend replicating any of the existing compendiums of research on death. This study is also not a theological treatise on how humans ought to deal with the awareness of death and find spiritual comfort in an existence beyond death. Neither does it purport to be a sociological discussion purely of human behavior as a response to the experience of death. This study also does not propose to provide psychological evidence of human behavior and reaction to death, nor create a model of pastoral care for those in a grieving process after encountering the death of a loved one. This research, furthermore, does not intend to provide anecdotal evidence of ways in which people consider and view death in order to allay fear and grief upon experiencing death[4].

This study is rather concerned with visual ways in which the absence of dead people in society is marked in South African roadside memorials. The memorials serve as symbols of something, and someone lost. As such, the memorials want to maintain a visible presence of something no longer visible, while affirming the absence of the deceased. Some elements in the memorials may reflect religious convictions, such as the use of biblical references and symbols associated with a particular religion.

1.2 Problem statement

The aim of this study is to investigate visual ways in which the absence of dead people in society is marked in a South African context. These visual expressions, particularly the roadside memorials (consisting of flowers, crosses, portraits and other items), left by mourners at the places where loved ones died, may reflect a spirituality through the utilization of particular symbols. The study draws from three different streams of scholarly inquiry: religion, Visual Culture Studies, and theories on the dead. The approach is that of Visual Culture Studies as interpreted from a sociological and religion studies perspective. In order to present the research undertaken, an explication of terminology is necessary in order to make it clear to

[4] In this regard, compare the recent edited work by Tobie Wiese (2019) *Wreed en mooi is die dood*, wherein several Afrikaans-speaking authors provide personal accounts of their experience of death, and offer advice on how to deal with grief and loss.

the reader what the point of departure of the writer is. That which is visible is as important to this study as that which is not visible to the human eye.

The aim of this study is not merely to describe that which is encountered visually, but also to interpret the meanings conveyed by the visual expressions. Explanatory studies want to answer the question “why?” How and why does X (independent variable) affect Y (dependent variable); compare in this regard Babbie and Mouton (2000:105). The visual expressions of the absence of dead people (i.e., roadside memorials marking places of death/commemorating the death of someone) are the independent variables given. The meaning associated with the visual expressions is, however, the dependent variable, dependent on varying contexts.

Since this research is focused on visual elements (i.e., roadside memorials marking places of death) that indicate the absence of the deceased, the meaning must be searched for in the symbolic meaning of the visual. This research works from the assumption that the meaning of symbols is not something rigid and fixed to a particular time period or historic context. Meaning is not an objective entity waiting to be correctly identified. Meaning is much rather fluid, contextual, and multi-layered. Meaning takes on a new form with each new context it is placed in. Each individual viewing objects may assign meaning to them based on a particular point of view, resulting in multiple meanings even for a single object, as it is perceived in different specific contexts. Boff (1997) commenting at one stage in his life on the hermeneutical process of humans making sense of reality, made the remark that every point of view is a view from a point. This is suitably applicable here as each individual views objects through the lens of specific presuppositions.

Meaning is assigned by the observer and therefore, makes carriers of meaning manageable, knowable, and controllable. In this case, I am the observer, with limited background knowledge of the memorials but reflecting on the meaning the memorials communicate to me, as discerned through tools of interpretation. By understanding the meaning of something, one can make sense of reality. The result is that the mystery of existence is diminished once meaning has been assigned. Things with meaning are no longer mysterious, but familiar, common and usable. In this regard, the sociologist Berger (1990:27) refers to the world-creating process in which humans are constantly involved. Assigning meaning is part of creating the

world around us. This confirms the notion that meaning is not *a priori* meta-entity to be discovered. Meaning is assigned through a process Berger (1990:4) refers to as externalization. This study is concerned with discerning the meaning of visual expressions of the absence of dead people in a South African context.

1.3 Aims of the research

The main aim of this research can be formulated in the following research question:

- What are the meanings of roadside memorials as markers of the absence of dead people in a South African context?

The assumption here is that death is an undeniable part of human existence. This awareness of death fills human consciousness with fear of mortality. In order to increase self-esteem and in order that the dead may not be forgotten, visual elements (consisting of flowers, crosses or other items) are placed to serve several purposes: as reminders of death, as reminders of the deceased, and to function as places of comfort for the loved ones in a grieving process.

Much has been written on the dead and the treatment of the dead. My research responds to the gap I have identified in terms of the absence of knowledge on roadside memorials in a South African context. With this research, this vacuum will be filled with the results emanating from the investigation.

Death is not a popular topic for casual conversation, although never far from our thoughts. Roadside memorials scream to be noticed and discussed. There are many other ways of expressing the absence of the deceased, but as I travelled on my daily route to and from work, I noticed roadside memorials and started wondering about the place, the traumatic event, the emotions attached to the memorials. What I saw made me ask questions as to the why?, what? and wherefore?

Several sub-questions arise:

- Why do some people give visual expression to the absence of the deceased?
- What or who determines the meaning attached to the visual expressions of the absence of the deceased?

- How do visual expressions marking the absence of the deceased reflect the relation between immanence and transcendence?

In order to realize this goal, the following objectives are identified:

- understanding what constitutes Material Religion and how roadside memorials form part of this category;
- understanding what constitutes iconology and how it can be employed to discern meaning from visual expressions of the absence of the dead;
- understanding the need to give visual expression to the absence of dead people.

The aim is, therefore, to understand why and how the absence of the deceased is expressed in the particular roadside structures. The meaning attached by the observers to the visual expressions is the main focus[5]. The assumption is that the meaning attached to visual expressions of the absence of the deceased is based on an understanding of the existence and relation of the mundane world (immanence) to the spiritual realm (transcendence). The human response of fear to death determines human behavior. In this regard, the fear of death, especially untimely and violent in the cases of roadside deaths, may be viewed as the main contributing factor to the emergence of the practice of erecting structures that contain various elements, marking the death of a person at roadsides in South Africa.

1.4 Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to create a field of reference for interpreting visual expressions of the absence of the dead.

- **Evaluation**: ten examples of visual expressions that commemorate deaths along South African roadsides are investigated in an attempt to explain the reason/s for erecting a memorial, as well as, to indicate the religious worldview underlying the communication through such expressions.

[5] In Chapter 3 a complete discussion on methodology will follow.

- **Exploratory research**: as this research is novel in the sense that no similar research has been undertaken before in South Africa, the research can be labelled as exploratory and qualitative.
- **Developing awareness and sensitivity**: through the dissemination of the results of the research, sensitivity towards various religious worldviews that feed the need for such visual expressions will be created.
- **Empowerment**: this research generates new knowledge through interdisciplinary collaboration, and it may empower other scholars through the dissemination of the results of the research.

1.5 Key theoretical concepts

This research is placed within a theoretical frame enfolding at the intersection of religion, death and the visual[6]. It is, therefore, necessary to present an analysis of these three main concepts.

1.5.1 Religion

Defining the concept of religion can be approached in three different ways: acknowledging that religion can be defined; rejecting the possibility of a definition of religion, and conditionally defining religion. All definitions of religion assume that two constitutive elements are necessary: human agency and the spiritual 'other', which may consist of gods, spiritual beings, spirits, and/or powers. Religion is then the expression of the relationship between these two elements.

Many attempts were made in the past to define religion. These attempts can be categorized according to their point of view, whether from a sociological, psychological, philosophical, or theological stance. These traditional views are complemented by Cox (2010:3), who adds one more category in terms of moral definitions. From a sociological and psychological approach, it becomes clear that religion is considered something derived completely from within the human mind. The existence of the spiritual 'other' is merely a fixation of human creativity or a

[6] Visual Studies is a broader endeavour than Visual Culture Studies. The differences will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this study.

projection of human need to believe in higher powers based on a feeling of dependence.

Some scholars, like WC Smith (1991:50), are of the opinion that religion is impossible to define as it is a Western construct that reflects a need to name, categorize and control, and does not have application in many cultures around the world. What Westerners consider to be religion is, within many cultures, considered to be customs, practices, traditions and a way of living. Smith (1991:50) however, concedes that since the term religion has become so much a part of the world of reference, it should still be used.

To define religion, it is necessary to clearly state what phenomenon one is defining. The definitions of religion need to adhere to restrictions in order to meet certain conditions to name what is to be named. It needs to be acknowledged that culture and religion are closely related and can easily overlap. Religion is organic, and its changing dynamic needs to be reflected in a definition. Religion in the past has been used to demarcate cultures and spheres of dominance. In the context of European colonization, the division was made between religion and gentile or pagan; religion referred exclusively to Christianity as if other cultures were perceived not to have any religion. An attempt at defining religion should thus be with an awareness of the pitfalls and conditions under which a definition is to be constructed.

The study of religion and religious expressions is no longer only confined to the study of texts and doctrines. Since the 1990s, studies in religion took a new direction with the emergence of Material Religion (Hazard 2013:58), and the study of religion has indeed taken a material turn (cf. Strijdom 2014; Hazard 2013). The material elements or visual expressions of religion could include any visible or sensory perceptible element with religious connotation, such as relics and icons, or as Chidester (2016:no page numbers) indicates, “the stuff of religion”. This is not, however, a totally new discipline. In the past, the ‘stuff of religions’ was the focus of anthropologists, archaeologists, cultural historians and sociologists. Only recently, scholars in religion studies[7] realized the overly excessive focus on beliefs in religions

[7] There is not much difference between religion studies and religious studies (compare Smith 1988:231). The distinction lies in the preferred approach. If one considers the approach to be

and the neglect of the material elements related to religion. This research intends to study the visible expressions of the absence of the dead in a South African context.

This study is as much concerned with what we do see, as it is concerned with what we do not see. Erecting a tombstone is a traditional manner of marking the absence of a living person. Tombs or memorials that are reminders of the dead may be interpreted as attempts to keep the dead present among the living. Thus, the boundaries between the living and the dead become blurred by visual forms that remind the living of the absence of a person. This research combines the spheres of Material Religion, Visual Culture Studies, and social behavior with, at the center of these, the ways in which the presence[8] of the dead is expressed.

Disposing of the dead has always had some religious connotation. Whether it be the rituals associated with the dead or the philosophical-cultural understanding of what happens to those who die, a form of religion is implied. A definition of what constitutes religion will always include a reference to the human agent, as well as, a relation to the spiritual 'other' which is, in fact, a reference to something unknowable and indescribable. This spiritual sphere may be filled with supernatural elements according to various religious convictions. The theologian Pannenberg (1993:286) emphasizes that this is probably the essence of what all religions have in common: "The relationship of human beings to a reality that transcends their own being and is identified as divine by most religions." The human, as well as, the divine elements constitute most religious expressions, although divinity is not part of all religious expressions. The anthropologist Fuentes (2017:197) attests to this distinction between humans and "an ultimate reality" as essential for understanding religion. The first Homo sapiens behaved as if a transcendent or supernatural reality existed. We know of no other species than humans that have religion. No other living beings exhibit behavior similar to humans when it comes to that which we refer to as religion.

religious, it would be different from an approach which clearly wants to indicate that the approach should be without any religious bias, thus religion studies.

[8] An ambiguity exists in the sense that it can also be referred to as the 'absence' of the deceased.

Religion would then refer to the communal human expressions of becoming aware of the existence of the transcendental. These expressions take on the forms of ethics and rituals (Sundermeier 1999:27). This will be the definition of religion applied within this study.

1.5.2 The Dead

In the film *Meet Joe Black* (1998), based on an earlier film by the name *Death Takes a Holiday* (1934), Death is personified in human form. Death undertakes a 'vacation' by living with a human family and becomes entangled in their daily existence. Death at one stage reminds the audience that nothing is as certain as 'death and taxes'. Human existence is framed by a moment of birth and a moment of death, the final departure from the visible world. Stating the obvious, death is inevitable. The uncertainty of when it will come is accompanied by the certainty that it will come.

As to what constitutes death, the answer is not that obvious. Bernat (2018:399) contemplates the problem with defining 'death'. Is death the moment of departure from this world, or is it the gradual degeneration of the body? In the former, it would imply an instance, a moment, an event; in the latter, it would imply a process, as if death is a long regression starting at birth. For Bernat (2018:403), death occurs when the organism no longer functions as a whole. All the elements necessary to contribute to the existence of the organism need to be in place to constitute the opposite of death.

To counter fear or anguish at the idea of death different cultures have developed different (religious) philosophical-cultural frameworks within which death makes sense. In this regard, Becker (1973:199) refers to myth-ritual constructs. From a psychological perspective, he identifies death as the greatest psychological problem of humankind, or as he prefers to call it, the "terror of death" (Becker 1973:ix, 11).

Continuing a long philosophical line of thought, Feuerbach (1908) has affirmed that the fear of death is the greatest of all human fears. For Feuerbach, humanity created images of divine figures to allay the fear of death. As already mentioned, Becker (1973:11) indicates the formation of the concept of heroism as a reaction to the fear of death. These frameworks may also function as coping mechanisms that deal with

the fear and grief of death. For some people, death is not a final event but only a fleeting moment of change of status. Existence is continued after departure from this world in the after-life in a spiritual (compare Becker 1973:12), invisible form; or in an evolving manner, being reborn into the visible world through reincarnation; or taking up one's place in the invisible realm of the dead, as an ancestor.

Death is thus perceived differently among cultures. All would agree, however, that death constitutes the exiting of this visible world because existence requires a healthy functioning body. Without such physiological requirement, death sets in. Death, therefore, constitutes the non-existence of a (living) body but not necessarily the non-existence of a spiritual element. Death is considered to be the opposite of living, but after death, death is briefly embodied in a dead body. Being dead does not mean being invisible. The dead remain, at least until complete decomposition of the body, encapsulated in a physiological no-longer functioning body. Memorials mark thus the absence of the deceased. The bodily remains are no longer in the place – the memorial marks the place where the living body became a dead body, and 'the dead' had departed to another, invisible place**.**

It is part of human nature to keep some visible elements resembling the presence of the deceased within the visible world. Panofsky's (1992[1964]) study of tombs dating from the times of the ancient Egyptians illustrates this human need for visual remains of the deceased – almost as if we trace and preserve the footprints left behind by them. The dead are removed from this mundane world, but they leave behind traces of their presence once they depart to another spiritual realm.

The separation between these two domains (spiritual and mundane) is bridged by what Plato in the *Symposium* referred to as the *metaxu*, a mediator separating and simultaneously connecting the worlds of the gods with humans; a mediator conveying a message[9]. Material Religion can be perceived as fulfilling that purpose of conveying meaning from one domain to the other. Visual expressions that are a reminder of the dead connect the two worlds: the visible world of the living with the invisible world of the dead. The absence of the dead in the visible reality is visually presented through various forms. Davies (2005) provides an elaborate discussion

[9] Compare in this regard the remarks on *metaxu* by Kentridge in Rankin-Smith (2006:7).

on ways in which the dead have been treated in different communities. This will be further elaborated on in this study.

The absence of the dead can be expressed visually in the following ways:

a.) Idealized

Some individuals (or a group of people that died in similar conditions, such as in a war or concentration camp) are buried as heroes or heroines. This usually takes on a visual expression of a monument of some sort. The individual (or group) is socially recognized with communal consent as a person(s) of significance. The purpose is to erect an eternal structure as a reminder of the values and achievements of the individual or group. With social change, the individual or group may no longer be recognized as of significance, and the structure may, therefore, be destroyed or damaged as signs of objection to the reminder of the life of the deceased. Compare in this regard the destruction of the statue of Sadam Hussein in Baghdad or the structural damage to statues of Cecil J Rhodes or Paul Kruger in South Africa.

b.) Mass storage

Owing to the lack of physical space or for security reasons (graveyards can be desolate places ideal for committing crime), [the bodily remains of] the dead are buried in built structures that enable mass burial. The structure resembles the façade of a block of flats or mass storage rooms in which the remains of the deceased, usually cremated, are kept. This faceless uniform outer appearance of the place where the dead are kept reflects a mass mentality: huge populations cause the individual to become a faceless entity dealt with in similar ways, as items of mass production are dealt with.

c.) Custom-made personalized forms on location

The practice of burying the dead in a traditional graveyard as an exclusive residing place for the dead is no longer a taken-for-granted custom. Current tendencies are to erect visual memorials on a location where the individual may have died. These locations are regarded as places of memory and pilgrimage, marking the place of death. A wide variety of expressions are

associated with these types of memorials, ranging from crosses and flowers to memorabilia placed on location. This study focuses on roadside signs erected by mourners in remembrance of the deceased. African religions have various rituals associated with commemorating the dead at specific locations, varying from the unveiling of the tombstone to burying the dead at the place of birth. This will not be the main focus of this study, but it will prove to have some relevance.

d.) Labels

Examples of the dead being buried and labelled are evident. The label is not only a marking of the location, but a label attached to the individual who communicates something of the character of the deceased. For example, in the graveyard of the small South African mining town, Pilgrim's Rest, is a tombstone inscribed with the single inscription of 'Robber's Grave' without any name. A similar case is that of the 'Unknown soldier' buried in various locations that commemorate the death of unknown soldiers who died on foreign soil during battle. Even the unknown dead are granted the respect of a commemoration. The presence of epitaphs become important indicators of the way in which the deceased were regarded.

e.) Forgotten

Graveyards and tombstones used to be a common traditional way in which the dead were disposed of (cf. Davies 2005). The dead were collected close to the center of society, traditionally in the church graveyard at the center of the medieval European town. As a result of graveyards being moved to the outskirts of modern cities or towns, the dead who were buried in this traditional way, become the forgotten. The cremated are literally made invisible and reduced to such a small material amount that they can easily be disposed of and literally disappear. At most, extra attention might be given to creating spaces where the dead person can be kept in order to serve as a reminder. A photograph of the dead person, as captured on the front page of the brochure handed out at the funeral ceremony (or memorial service), or a candle lit in memory of the dead, are two examples of visual expressions that keep the memory of the dead person alive.

f.) Purposeful death

Disposing of the dead is not merely discarding a used body. In a recent development, the burying of the body has come to be perceived as useful. To bury the dead in a forest and plant a tree on top of the burial site is an expression of the unity of life. Based on a certain ecological understanding (Davies 2005), the dead are returned to the earth to provide sustenance for that which grows. Death is then an opportunity to return that which has been taken from the earth. However, this recent tendency in the West has been practiced in different cultures all over the world. In certain African communities, the dead can be left in nature to be consumed by wild animals or, through rotting, to return growth potential to the soil.

My research for this study focuses specifically on the memorials left at roadsides in South Africa that serve as markers of places of death. Doss (2002:67, 69) alternates between the descriptors of ‘death sites’ and ‘death shrines.’ Solso (2015) also prefers to talk about ‘roadside shrines.’ The word shrine is too religiously laden to apply within a multi-religious environment like South Africa. Therefore, a more neutral descriptor such as ‘sign of death’ or ‘roadside memorial’ is preferred in this study. Compare a discussion of the phenomenon of memorials in Chapter 5 of this study.

These memorials of death take on various forms, ranging from crosses to miniature tombstones. Some may contain artefacts (e.g., motorcycle helmets, flowers, photographs and ribbons, etc.) in remembrance of the deceased. These visual signs are erected by mourning family members and friends to serve in memory of the deceased, and they are maintained for varying periods of time. A certain spiritual awareness may be reflected by the visual structures erected. The function and meaning of these roadside signs will be investigated. These visual expressions and the meaning thereof, form the major focus of this research. A selection of these visual expressions found in different areas in South Africa form the basis of the discussion in determining how meaning is assigned to death, and given the decision to focus on roadside memorials, specifically, death caused by roadside accidents.

The symbolic connotations associated with these expressions will provide guidance in determining the meaning attached to these sites.

1.5.3 Visual Culture Studies

Mirzoeff (2000:3) defines visual culture as the interest in visual events in which "information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology." Technology can refer to any device requiring to be looked at or enables enhanced vision. This may include a portrait and even electronic devices such as a cellphone, iPad or television or any other screen. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of Visual Culture Studies.

Reid (2013:viii) reminds us that the field of Visual Studies is still in a very early stage of development in South Africa. A volume edited by Van Eeden and Du Preez in 2005 can be considered a valuable contribution to the development of Visual Culture Studies in South Africa. Reid (2013:viii) indicates that the origin of Visual Culture Studies lies in Art History, a field concerned with the appreciation of the visual.

Gradually, the discipline of Visual Culture Studies grew to an independent field with a much wider scope, including more than just art. To this, Apostolos-Cappadona (2017:45) attests by indicating that from the 1980s-1990s, interest grew in terms of the theories of reception and the response to art. Visual culture presented an alternative to the traditional ways of interpreting art. Visual culture emphasized the lived experiences of images; how images function in society and how people respond to images (Apostolos-Cappadona 2017:45).

As such, Visual Culture Studies opens various new avenues for investigating art – and other forms of visual expression and representation – related to religion. James Cox (2010:114) differentiates between presentational and representational art in a discussion of religious art [and by extension, visual culture with a religious function or intention]. That which is considered as an object of art [or, by extension, visual culture] in religion can either be an indication of an expression of the presence of the spiritual or an object symbolically acting as a representation of the spiritual. The theory by Cox is merely one possible attempt at providing a solution to the question of how the bridge between the spiritual 'other' and the mundane is crossed. Panofsky (1972[1939]:8-9) elaborates on this issue by emphasizing the symbolic

value of visual expressions. Panofsky relied heavily on the work on symbols by Ernst Cassirer, a friend and colleague in Hamburg.

The framework of this research is provided by the theory of symbols as presented by Cassirer and Panofsky. The visual has symbolic value and refers to the invisible. Chapter 3 of this study is devoted to expanding on iconology and the understanding of symbols. What we see means something. Studying the visual expressions that mark the absence of the dead, therefore, can lead to the deciphering of the meaning of the visual expressions.

The relation of visual expressions connected to religious convictions depends on an understanding of the relation between the spiritual (transcendence) and mundane (immanent). Stoker (2012:6, 8) presents four different ways in which the transcendence, his term for naming the spiritual 'other', and immanence can relate. One of the ways relevant to this study is what Stoker (2012:7) refers to as Radical Immanence. The transcendence becomes so identified with the immanent that the transcendent becomes redundant. The result is that the transcendental is no longer searched for outside of this worldly reality. Transcendence and immanence converge to such an extent that the transcendence dissolves in this reality, a process Stoker (2012:8) refers to as *kenosis*. For Stoker (2012:20), the sacred changes into the profane. Art and religion are then both expressed in this world, causing the sacred to become profane, and art to become non-art. This results in what Stoker (2012:20) refers to as the 'aesthetication of the world'.

Closely related to Radical Immanence is the position identified by Stoker (2012:8) as Transcendence as Alterity, which rejects the polarity taken on by Transcendence and Immanence. The spiritual can be expressed in any and all spheres. The content of such expressions can be religious or non-religious. Giving visual expression to the absence of the dead can either be filled with religious meaning or not, or even a conflation of religious and profane meaning. Examples discovered and discussed in the investigation to follow will indicate how symbols from various religious connotations can be combined as an expression of the absence or continued presence of the dead.

I would be reluctant to concede that this process Stoker describes, can be possible without some autonomy of the transcendence being retained. Without the acknowledgement of the transcendent, everything becomes conflated into one reality, negating the independent existence of the transcendence. The expressions of the transcendence then become expressions of immanence and not transcendence. Desmond (1995:177-178) argues that there should be a differentiation between immanence and transcendence since transcendence can be expressed in different ways. Conflating the two merely makes the *metaxu* redundant once the otherness of the transcendence disappears. Sameness and difference require a dialogue; otherness and togetherness should be in balance. Desmond (1986:35-36) explains the relation between religion, art and philosophy by indicating the relation of these three to the Absolute Spirit.

I would concede to Stoker with the addition that the transcendence is perceived to continue to exist although now perceived to be present in this worldly reality without subscribing to a pantheistic understanding of divinized reality. An understanding of reality with such a dual character is referred to as animism and stands closer to what Stoker refers to as Transcendence as Alterity.

The following assumptions guide the study of visual expressions of the absence of the dead in terms of their symbolic meaning:

- *Meaning is culturally constructed*. Finding meaning in visible expressions of religion is, among other factors, culturally determined. Meaning is culturally compromised, and therefore, fluid. Meaning can be transferred from one generation to the next as a sacred tradition. The meaning of symbols can also be lost, leaving behind the use of symbols without the traditional meaning associated with the particular symbol.[10] This is seen in cases where the Christian cross is used as a symbol marking the place of death, although it does not always refer to a Christian understanding. It is clear that meaning

[10] It might be helpful to elaborate on the terms trope and meme here. Trope is a concept already long in use but has come to denote an allegory or metaphor, like a code. It is a word or expression used in a figurative way. A meme is, according to the coining of the word by Richard Dawkins (1976, *The Selfish Gene*), a reference to the cultural equivalent of a biological gene. Memes are, therefore, cultural associations passed on from one generation to the next. A meme is a unit carrying meaning.

is not always only owing to social and/or cultural construction. Human experiences of events are universally recognized to contain the same meaning. For example, all people experience death as loss and an occasion of grieving.

- *Meaning is contextual*. The context where the visible expression originates, and is applied and eventually may end up in, plays a crucial role in determining the meaning. The relationship between the expression and the broader environment in which it appears should be taken note of. Objects cannot be studied and assigned meaning in isolation or ahistorically. Using images known from tradition does not imply that the ones using the symbols necessarily imply that meaning to be attached to the symbol. In some instances, flowers may mark the place of death, but the symbolic meaning of the type of flowers used are not necessarily part of the intended conveying of meaning.
- *Meaning is time sensitive*. Meaning has a past, a present, and a potential future. In each case, the meaning may be different. The meaning intended by the original artist may differ from the meaning a later community assigned to the object by utilizing it in, for example, religious rituals. There is also something called a potential meaning, as others outside the community may interpret an object from a different perspective.
- *Meaning is observer dependent*. Meaning is, to a great extent, determined by the observer. Although Mitchell (1996:71) argues that images should be asked what they want, the observer determines the meaning attached to an object. If the observer is seeking a transcendental presence in an object, he/she will find it. An ordinary object may become sacred by way of consecrating rituals performed by the observer.
- *Meaning is influenced by aesthetics and semiotics.* Aesthetics study the effect of beauty (appeal) (Goldman 2005:263; McMahon 2005:307) and taste (Korsmeyer 2005:267). The study of how meaning is assigned is known as semiosis. The creation and use of symbols usually convey a deeper meaning (Fuentes 2017:213). The meaning(s) of the symbols/signs can vary.
- *Religion and art are not the same.* Although religion and art can be identified to originate from human creativity, they are not the same. Art is used to

express beliefs, including beliefs related to the transcendental. The human creative ability resulting in art is also the ability to create meaningful systems of belief. They may overlap, but are not identical. “Religion uses art, but art is not necessarily religious” (Fuentes 2017:243). The broader and more contextual approach of Visual Culture Studies, as opposed to classical Art History, proves most helpful when studying the interaction between art, belief and religious practice.

This study is, therefore, inter-disciplinary as it focuses on visual culture from a religious point of view. A certain number of philosophical considerations also form part of the arguments to be constructed. The philosophy should not, however, be confused with theology, which engages with research from specific convictions and dogmatic considerations. This study is relevant to a society whose understanding of and approach to religion is becoming more and more ‘conscious’. Religion (Material Religion in particular), as a social phenomenon, is approached here from a visual culture perspective, viewing the expressions of religion as part of visual culture.

1.6 Theoretical approach, methodology and research design

The research for this dissertation is to a large extent framed by what Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski (2015:ix) refer to as the Terror Management Theory (TMT). Terror Management Theory is the result of reflections on the work by Becker (1971; 1973; 1975) where Becker makes it clear that the terror of death drives human behavior (Solomon *et al.* 2015:211). Death is the main and essential source, causing fear and terror in humans (Becker 1973:11, 20). To cope with this fear, humans act and behave in a certain way and create coping mechanisms to deal with the fear and terror of death. This terror of death is all pervasive in human existence: “Over the course of human history, the terror of death has guided the development of art, religion, language, economics and science” (Solomon *et al.* 2015:x). After several years of experimentation, Solomon and his colleagues (*et al.* 2015:211) have managed to reaffirm the validity of Becker’s theory on death pervading human decisions and actions.

The way in which Becker suggested humans manage the terror of death is by ways that increase self-esteem. Adhering more devoutly to cultural schemes of things, by trusting in the support of charismatic leaders and being confident about the existence of God and believing in the efficacy of prayer, humans create mechanisms to cope with the terror of death (Solomon *et al.* 2015:2011). The result is that defending one's worldview contributes to allaying fears of death (Solomon et al. 2015:212). The moment one relies on this cultural worldview, one finds solace in a system providing comfort and structure for dealing with the reality of death.

Solomon *et al*. (2015:215) suggest that the awareness of death and not death *per se*, is indeed the problem. The end goal of TMT is then not to provide effective mechanisms of managing death, but rather as Solomon *et al.* (2015:213) state:

> One of our goals in writing this book was to help awaken us all from the dream of the life we lead when we are totally immersed in our own cultural worldview… Most people are generally asleep to the reality of death, but there is that one young women in the picture awake with her eyes open to it.

Solomon *et al.* (2015:214) are referring to a painting by the Austrian artist Klimt (*'Death and Life',* 1910) to illustrate their point. Humans may deny or ignore the possibility of death; that is not good management of the terror of death. By being aware of the reality of death, one can deal with it in a more aware state. Becoming aware of the reality of death is likened to being awakened from sleep. Solomon *et al.* (2015:214) refer to the biblical account of how the first human beings, Adam and Eve, only became aware of death once they ate from the godly forbidden fruit that gave them knowledge. This knowledge included making them aware of death.

Cultural worldviews differ from one another in addressing the matter of death. Becker (1973:199) suggests the same reliance on spiritual structures to deal with the terror of death. Religion, as a coping mechanism in dealing with death has been discussed and will be discussed more in this research. Creating myth-ritual structures – whether associated or unassociated with traditional religious worldviews – contributes to managing the terror of death.

As previously stated, this research, therefore, focuses on the coping mechanism of dealing with death as expressed visually along South African roadsides at places of death. Ten examples of roadside memorials, each indicating a site of death are presented and discussed. From the examples, deductions are made in order to test the assumption that the fear of death did indeed contribute to the erection of the memorials under discussion.

Assigning meaning to material elements in religion is a contextual matter. Therefore, the cultural context of material religion must be acknowledged. The research to be undertaken takes a phenomenological approach, as material objects (i.e., signs for the dead beside the road) and their meaning are the focal point of this investigation. Assessing the meaning of these memorials will involve a hermeneutical activity.

Phenomenology was introduced by Husserl (1859-1938) as a philosophical proposition on how to engage with and experience reality surrounding us. The study of reality can easily result in studying theories of things instead of the things themselves. Phenomenology is concerned with the object under scrutiny, allowing the object to speak for itself, preventing the researcher from 'reading' too much into the object. Husserl referred to this process as '*epoche'* – the researcher puts his/her own thoughts in brackets, attempting to prevent any biased conclusions from entering the analysis (see Krüger 1982:18). In this study, the visual expressions (roadside memorials) of the absence of the dead are considered as phenomena to inform the observer regarding the meaning to which it refers. Analyzing material religion phenomenologically allows the objects to communicate to the researcher the meaning they carry. The phenomenon is given the opportunity to convey knowledge of the phenomenon, preventing the researcher from acting as a ventriloquist and, so to speak, laying words in the mouth of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology carries the danger of lapsing into positivism – only engaging with the visual. Phenomenologists, in fact, want to determine what lies behind (see Krüger 1982:18) that which is visually accessible. This study engages the visual expressions of the absence of the dead, but wants to focus attention on that which is invisible to the human eye, namely the meaning behind the visual expressions.

Creswell (2015:2) distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative research, even permitting a mixed methods approach when combining the two. The quantitative approach is concerned with analyzing information in terms of the numerical and statistical information it contains. Qualitative research focuses on a source, which may include interviews and/or questionnaires, to provide information. The secondary sources for this study comprise the reflections of scholars on the topics as indicated above and as captured in written literature relevant to the study. This implies that this study will be based on existing literature – books, articles and other forms of literature besides the images relevant to this study. The primary sources to be utilized in this study are the roadside memorials that have been selected for discussion. The visual expressions (roadside memorials) have a 'story' behind them. In this way, a qualitative approach will focus on exploring and explaining the story behind each visual expression.

Ten memorials marking the place of death have been selected and are investigated. For each memorial, the following information is catalogued: location of the memorial, dimensions of the memorial, the material utilized in creating the memorial, condition of the memorial at the time of viewing, date of viewing the memorial. All written text on the memorials is also recorded. This method of gathering information is in accordance with the method suggested by Rose (2016:33).

Owing to the number of memorials marking places of death in South Africa, as well as, the vast area in which the signs are located, this research will have to focus on a selection of memorials. Rose (2016:58) indicates that the visual material selected for research should be appropriate to the research question. In this case, the question is the meaning of the memorials at the places marking roadside deaths in South Africa. The principal challenge in this research is to find a sample representative of the phenomenon being investigated. Rose (2016:88) indicates that the sampling should be representative, as well as, significant to the investigation. One method of establishing a sample group is to cluster examples together and select randomly from the available samples (Rose 2016:90). In this research, the following considerations determine the sampling group:

- Accessibility: memorials are immovable and not intended to last forever.

- Significance: unique memorials get preference as memorials may exhibit similarities.
- Representative: variation of memorials will determine the selection.

In determining the meaning of signs, a semiological approach will be followed[11]. Rose (2016:113) indicates that a semiological approach differentiates the sign into the signified and the signifier. The signifier may have multiple meanings. The actual object the sign may be related to is called the referent. Meaning is obtained by determining how the signifier and signified are related and even detached from one another (Rose 2016:113, 124). Compare in this regard the notes on meaning made earlier.

Determining the meaning of memorials at roadside sites of death, firstly, requires a description of the memorials. Once the memorials have been identified, the meaning can be explored (Rose 2016:113).

Meaning is assigned by those erecting the memorials, and therefore, the existence of the memorial in its context and its relations to its audience must also be investigated (compare Rose 2016:254). The hermeneutical key for interpreting visual material in this research is the iconological approach, as worked out by Louw (2014), based on the work by Panofsky (1972). Iconography is a sub-discipline of the history of art concerned with the subject itself and its meaning as opposed to concern with the form. Iconology is the way phenomenology is applied in this study. Louw (2014:13) indicates that the comprehension of art is a spiritual category. Comprehension lies in grasping the idea or image[12] behind the object, in this case, the roadside memorial. This kind of viewing is what Louw (2014:13) refers to as “iconic viewing.” The act of giving meaning to art is related to symbolization and imagination, thus interpreting a mental image (Mitchell 1984:505). For Louw (2014:13) symbolization and imaging requires the viewer to take on a judgmental and evaluative stance. In the evaluative process, metaphorical language and visioning are necessary. Visioning is a process transcending human empirical observation, or as Louw (2014:13) refers to it: “transcendent seeing can be called

[11] See Chapter 3 on a discussion on Semiotics.
[12] Mitchell (1984:505) discusses the family of images (graphic, optical, perceptual, mental and verbal) and indicates how these images are utilized in different disciplines.

iconic… the spiritual act of seeing the unseen." Iconic viewing is to see until one sees more, namely: seeing transcendence, Louw (2014:29) states.

What one perceives through the senses is, for Louw (2014:29), the visible, which can be described as the "idol." The viewing of the invisible, the *visuel* as Louw (2014:29) describes it, is the comprehension of images that makes the invisible meaningful, and can be described as the "icon." The *visuel* operates by way of icons (Louw 2014:29). The icon and idol as metaphors for ways of observing are an important distinction between the visible and invisible. The section in this research on interpreting the visual religiously will utilize the insights gained from iconology as a form of phenomenology. According to Hasenmueller (1978:297), iconology is helpful in determining the underlying principles that contributed to the expression of art (or as I understand it more broadly, the visual) during a particular period. This will be an important exercise as the aim of this research is to determine the meaning of selected examples of Material Religion. In Chapter 3, the concept of iconology is dealt with in more detail.

To sum up: studying material elements in religion has become an important element in studying religion. The processes of determining meaning associated with Material Religion are, however, still relatively under-explored in Visual Culture Studies. The research undertaken here is thus, not only focused on examples of Material Religion, but is also directed at the processes through which meaning is assigned to material elements in religion as visual culture. The visual expressions of the experience of the absence of the dead (so-called roadside memorials marking places of death) are the focal point, illustrating how meaning in Material Religion can be discerned through iconology and phenomenology.

1.7 Units of analysis and sampling

1.7.1 Population

Although a relatively recent development, the practice of constructing memorials indicating the site of death of a loved one along the road, has grown and now occurs on many roads in South Africa. Examples may be found in all nine provinces of South Africa. It is, however, impossible to determine the exact number of such cases because many of these structures are not intended to be robust and permanent. In

weather conditions, the memorials slowly decay, and without any renovation and improvements, they gradually disappear. Some structures may even be removed by road maintenance workers as the grass along the roads is cut regularly. The South African National Road Agency (Sanral) (Hettiën Strauss 2008) has since 2008 banned all crosses put next to the road to commemorate victims of road accidents. As these memorials can be a distraction to road users, Sanral recommends that only trees may be planted at these 'accident hot spots.' However, some memorials still remain intact besides roads, and new ones still appear. It is therefore, impossible to calculate the complete population of examples in South Africa.

1.7.2 Sampling

Had this been a social scientific survey and assessment of roadside memorials, the sampling of the examples for discussion ought to have been systematically accounted for. However, this being a phenomenological and iconological approach, the rigour of the analysis can better be accounted for by an honest explanation of the researcher's experiential journey. For this research, ten examples were selected as representative of the phenomenon of roadside memorials in South Africa. Examples from roads in and around Pretoria, as well as, from places further away from Pretoria were selected (including the Orange Free State and Mpumalanga). The selection was quite random and did not only include the most colourful or interesting examples. The selection was made to be representative of the phenomenon as I experienced it. Over a period of two years (2018 and 2019), I collected examples from all the roads I travelled on – in the city where I live, as well as, when I covered longer distances on a north-south and east-west axis with Pretoria as the centre. I grouped similar examples together, according to constitutive elements, and selected the ten examples to be discussed in this dissertation to be representative of all the different categories I managed to compile.

1.8 Ethical considerations

The examples of markers indicating places of death beside roads in South Africa are located in public places. The examples are visible and accessible to the public. No permission is necessary to have access to the visual markers. Although names and even photographs of the deceased may appear on the markers, they are all unknown to the researcher. There are no indicators as to the identity of relatives

and friends of the deceased who can be contacted for more information on the meaning of elements used in the memorials. This was also not the intention either of the phenomenological approach to the research (the visual experience of the memorials) or the iconological approach to the study (the meaning of the visual elements of the memorials.

1.9 Overview of the study

Chapter 1 has introduced the research and provides the background to the study. The main aim of the study was stated; the problem statement was presented, and an overview of relevant literature was provided. The methodology utilized in the research was also explicated in this chapter.

In Chapter 2, the field of Material Religion will be addressed. The study of contemporary memorials of death is considered as part of Visual Culture and therefore, the materiality, which is the object of investigation, is discussed. As the Visual Culture under investigation in this study is within the ambit of people's religious self-expression and experience, it is necessary to define what is understood under religion, and for this purpose cognizance should be taken of discourses in religion studies.

With Chapter 3, our attention is turned to iconology as a method to analyze and interpret visual expressions. A definition and explanation of the concept are presented. An attempt is made to indicate the relation between the study of Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies.

The third main cornerstone of the study is theories on death. Chapter 4 deals with the topic of the dead. Definitions of what constitutes death are presented, and dominant theories on death are discussed. The fear of death forms the essence of the main argument in this study.

In Chapter 5, visual expressions in the form of memorials for those who died at South African roadsides are discussed. Ten examples of memorials are identified and analyzed. Each example is interpreted in an attempt to come to some understanding of the religious model determining the relation of transcendence and immanence as presented in the visual expression.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, offers a conclusion and some suggestions for further research. The limitations of the study are also presented. This chapter contemplates what was discovered during the research and how the findings and recommendations relate to the aims and research questions they had sprung from.

2. CHAPTER TWO: MATERIAL RELIGION

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an understanding of the technical term Material Religion, and how visual structures marking places of death along the South African roads relate to this term. The arguments leading to this particular approach to studying religion will be discussed. The relation of material elements in religion to cultural and visual studies will contribute to an understanding of how to arrive at meaning of material elements in religion. A critical evaluation of Material Religion will conclude this chapter.

2.2 What is Religion?

2.2.1 Introduction

A discussion on Material Religion should include a section in which terminology is explained. In this instance, it would be necessary to define ‘material’ and ‘religion’. The choice is made here, to first discuss the concept ‘religion’, as this becomes the denominator and specific field of interest. The term ‘material’ is considered the designator to describe the particular understanding of religion. In analyzing religion, it will be necessary to keep the following in mind. To approach religion from a material perspective “does not reduce religion to sheer matter,” but in fact states that material forms can be “the potential locus” for the sense and “sensation of the transcendence” (Meyer 2016:333).

There are basically two ways of describing the nature of religion: religion as from beneath and religion as from above. Religion, as from beneath reflects an understanding that religion does in fact, start with human agency. Humans project images of power, hope, and comfort in order to facilitate coping with human existence. This can also be referred to as the monopolar understanding, as humans are the origin of what is known as religion. This is typical of sociological and psychological approaches to describing the origin of religion.

Religion from above is a typical bipolar and, in some cases, a tri-polar approach, which works with the assumption that the spiritual sphere does exist and contributes

to the creation of religion. The moment when good and evil are envisaged as belonging to the same spiritual realm and humans react to the awareness of such entities, the bipolar changes to a tri-polar approach. Humans then merely become aware of the presence and influence of the spiritual realm. This is typical of a theological, and some philosophical, explanations of the origin of religion.

Religion is indeed a term too vague to contain everything that is considered as religion. There are attempts to differentiate between religion and spirituality (Villegas 2018:2) in an effort to accommodate all possible expressions of religious nature. Wittgenstein (1953:31), and later Smart (1986:46) indicated that the relatedness of all religions to one another could best be described in terms of family resemblances. Religions exhibit similar characteristics binding them into groups without identifying them with one another. In this sense, it is simultaneously impossible to define religion but also necessary to delineate what we are talking about.

2.2.2 There is no such thing as religion

The theologian Caputo (2000:1) indicates the problem with the concept of religion by asking the question if one wants to define religion, whose religion is one going to define? By this, Caputo wants to illustrate that there are many different forms of religion, each with its own set of characteristics. Which one will then be the measure? The result, according to Caputo (2000:1), is to declare the term religion as 'uncontainable' of all the elements considered part of religion.[13]

It is difficult to define religion (Smith 1991:17). To this, Braun (2000:4) and Schilderman (2014:176) consecutively concede in their analyses. For Smith, the inadequate existing multitude of definitions for 'religion' is an indication that the term should be discarded as it has become unusable. As an alternative to the dilemma of defining religion, Cox (2010:3-7) suggests that studying the groups of definitions has more value than studying the definitions themselves. In this regard, Cox (2010:3-7) identifies five specific groups of definitions to take note of: theological, sociological, psychological, ethical, and philosophical. With these perspectives in

[13] This is in essence also the argument presented by Peter Burke based on the reasoning by Edward Thompson when he discusses the problem of defining 'culture'. See a later section in this chapter dealing with culture.

mind, an attempt can be made to try to discern what the constitutive elements within religion are.

> Religion is not an entity or a field of entities but an aspect of human experience which has specific historical and cultural expressions. Religion as religiousness is the individual human being's response to what it discerns to be the most comprehensive powers of its environment. Religion as historical tradition is the corporate and symbolic expression of that discernment rendered into forms of repetition, transmission, institution.
>
> (Farley 1988:66)

The description of the concept of religion by Farley provides a good orientation as how to understand what religion entails. As to Farley's analysis, it becomes clear that monolithic blocks or entities named 'religion' do, in fact, not exist. What does exist are contextual expressions of human responses to that which is considered to exist outside of and qualitatively above humans. This reflects a dualism in understanding the nature of religion. It also confirms the varying meanings attached to expressions as determined by contexts. What is considered as religious in one context may not be considered as such in a different time and place (context). This leads to the argument that religion is, in fact, not something that really exists.

After carefully having indicated that the concept of religion is in fact, originating from a Western stance of naming and analyzing the human environment and behavior, Smith comes up with a solution to the problem of transposing the (Western) concept of religion onto world religions. Smith's (1991:50) suggestion is to discard the term religion altogether. His argument remains that the term religion is misleading, confusing and unnecessary. The term religion hampers the understanding of people's faith and traditions. This hampering is caused by any attempt to conceptualize the faith and traditions into what we refer to as religion.

Smith (1991:53 footnote 2) suggests that, instead of referring to religion, it is more appropriate to talk about 'cumulative traditions'. Traditions have contexts and history. The concept of religion tends to call to mind a structured system of beliefs. There are more words available to be used to refer to the phenomena that Western

minds, over time have provided with the name of religion (Smith 1991:52). Smith suggests the terms piety, reverence, faith, devotion and God-fearing as alternatives. These terms do not necessarily call to mind an organized system but do belong within the same discourse as related terms. In this regard, Chidester (2017:76) suggests that related terms should also include concepts such as superstition and magic, heresy and infidelity, secularism and irreligion. The point Chidester argues, is that the scope and inter-disciplinary approach to the study of 'religion' should be expanded. It is clear that Chidester would also disagree with Smith on how religion is viewed. Religion is not only the study of beliefs. This is the whole endeavor of Material Religion, as will be explained later.

In light of Smith's suggestion of discarding the term religion, Chidester (2018:2) indicates that although the concept of religion has been utilized in a context of coloniality and imperialism, and therefore, become a *terminus non grata*, he still prefers to retain it, in spite of its bad history. A discussion on Chidester's suggestion as how to view religion will follow later.

Olson (2011:16) indicates how Marion refers to religion as a 'saturated phenomenon'. With this, Marion implies that religion has an excessive nature and therefore, religion becomes invisible in its excessiveness. The result is that there is no one concept that captures the essence of religion (Olson 2011:16). If everything is considered to be part of religion, then nothing, in the end, is religion.

Over time, the Euro-centric understanding of what constitutes religion ended in a demarcation of the world between religious (i.e. everything resembling Western and European traditions and culture) as opposed to no-religion (i.e. everything non-European). Combined with this development is the Enlightenment notion that knowledge resides in facts. Facts can only be studied empirically. Any study of the transcendental seems superfluous due to the un-empirical nature of the transcendental. Human reactions and responses to the transcendental can, however, be studied empirically.

Morgan (2010:1) summarizes the argument against studying only beliefs as follows. The idea that belief is the main focus of religion is a Western construct. As Christianity had been perceived as a religion consisting of beliefs, over centuries,

this element has been applied to measure all religions against (Morgan 2010:1). Not all religions consist of only (or mostly, or primarily) beliefs. It will be an unfair reduction when Christianity becomes the matrix against which all religions are measured (Morgan 2010:3). Religion would then only be considered as religion when it corresponds to the criteria Christianity complies with. The word religion from its apparent use in the West came to exclusively refer to Christianity (Pannenberg 1999:145), as if Christianity was the only valid and true expression of what was meant with the concept religion.

The Western/Christian understanding of religion is not the only way to perceive religion. In many cultures, there is no division between culture and religion. In some cultures, there does not even exist separate words to be translated with 'religion'. Everything has to do with everything. This holistic understanding of reality complexes the matter even further and can lead to a sincere conclusion that there is indeed no such thing as religion!

2.2.3 Religion and/or culture

Defining religion is never an unbiased endeavor. This is illustrated by Cox's groups of definitions from different perspectives. The culture of the one who is defining always plays a role. Culture contributes to the lense through which religion is viewed and described (Smith 1991:18). For too long, Smith argues (1991:52), has Western culture determined the way religion is perceived and what can be deemed religious, as well as, the relations between religion and other disciplines. Western researchers have, over centuries determined the field of religion by providing names for world religions. The methods of studying religions are mainly due to historic Western scholarly processes. As Chidester (2017:75) summarizes: "religion is a modern invention, a Western construction, a colonial imposition or an imperial expansion."

There exists an undeniable connection between religion and culture[14]. Compare in this regard, the description of the relation between religion and culture as 'familial' (Beyers 2017).

[14] Compare also how Villages (2018:7) indicates that, as concepts pass through cultural lenses, meaning of concepts can change.

The question beckons as to what defines something to be considered culture? Burke (2008:29) indicates that it is extremely difficult to define 'culture'. This is emphasized by Thompson (1993:13) when he describes the concept culture as rather 'clumpish' since it is presented as a collection of many different elements – "a pool of diverse resources" (Thompson 1993:6). The notion of culture to present itself as being accommodative and consensual appears to ignore social and cultural contradictions (Thompson 1993:6). The result of perceiving culture as an accommodative category is that the bundling together of diverse elements might "confuse and disguise" the differences between the elements (Thompson 1993:13). Elements should rather be separated and detached, and studied apart from one another.

For Burke (2008:25) culture implies some kind of knowledge and/or skill handed down from one generation to the next. The problem is when several traditions or remnants of traditions co-exist in a society. It is important in terms of the critique presented by Thompson to differentiate between the cultures of groups living in one society. For Burke (2008:23), there should be a distinction made between cultures of different social classes, cultures of men and women, and cultures of different generations. For Burke (2008:24) culture should be understood in terms of its historicity: the 'times' in which people exist differs, as if all are not living in the same 'now.' As some elements from a tradition from the past may persist in the present, it may be difficult to define and describe a particular culture as it presents itself. Adding to the complexity, cultures are dynamic; they change, and diffuse, and a single human being can move in and out of different cultures several times during the day.

The historicity of cultures will become an essential part of analyzing the examples of visual expressions marking places of death along roads in South Africa. The structures under investigation may appear to express a particular cultural value that may not be necessarily part of the broader culture. For example, many structures marking places of death along South African roadsides resemble a cross, recognized as a symbol belonging to Christianity. This may only be a remnant of Christianity still present in a now secularized culture. This distinction of elements in terms of their historicity must be kept in mind.

The relation of religion to culture can either be that the one is absorbed into the other or that the two stand in opposing positions towards each other. Religion can act as anti-culture. Whatever the relation between religion and culture, Figl (2003:37) indicates that, especially in a Western understanding of culture, it is still obvious that religion is viewed as being determined by culture. The fact that religion and culture are intertwined cannot be denied or ignored (Figl 2003:37).

It is therefore, important to realize that religious expressions are clad in a cultural garment or even several layers of garments. Understanding the meaning of religious expressions will include a comprehension of the context of the expression and the awareness of the cultures at play.

2.2.4 Multi-religious belonging

As said by Caputo (2000:1) in his discussion on defining religion, the question remains what religion will be defined as. There are so many different religions already existing in the world, so that Caputo asks, which one will you be describing by defining it?

Multiple-religious belonging is an additional element to be kept in mind. Not only are there occasions where people will state that there is no such thing as religion there are also instances where people simultaneously adhere to several different religions. Society is not only multi-religious, but the occurrence of unaffiliated and multiple religious identities need to be recognized. A growing number of people worldwide are considered to subscribe to a ‘multi-religious identity’. Members of society choose to affiliate with more than one religious affiliation simultaneously or consecutively. In this regard, compare the research done by Berghuijs, Kalsky, Van der Braak and Oostveen (2017). Although this reflects the results of research in a European environment, sufficient proof exists that the concept of ‘multi-religious identity’ is a universal phenomenon (Berghuijs et al. 2017; Mercadante 2017).

This phenomenon does not reflect a hybridity or syncretism resulting from multiple religious engagements. People decide to follow beliefs and practices of different religions or traditions unopposed. The expressions of these affiliations are indeed ‘colorful’ as they represent different views as prevalent in different cultures.

This phenomenon will be kept in mind when investigating the meaning of structures erected alongside South African roads indicating places of death. The structures may exhibit symbols reflecting different religious affiliations simultaneously.

2.2.5 Possible approaches

Studying religion over the centuries has changed due to paradigm shifts and the introduction of new methodologies. For a very long period in the study of religion, the object of investigation was perceived to consist of the set of beliefs associated with a religion. All other elements associated with religion were relegated to the interest of anthropologists, linguists, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers. Religion Studies scholars studied religion in terms of the beliefs and faith associated with different religions. The understanding that the main element constituting religion, belief has been contested by several religion studies scholars, as well as, anthropologists and philosophers (Morgan 2010:2).

2.2.5.1 Transcendence and immanence

As stated earlier in this discussion, there are two definitive elements required to constitute religion: human agency (immanence) and the spiritual realm (transcendence). These two domains can be described as the immanent and the transcendent with varying interdependency as presented by different religions (Reinhardt 2016:89). Stoker (2012:6-8) identifies four distinct ways in which the relation between the transcendent, and the immanent can be described. This is especially important in this section where religion is discussed.

1. Immanent Transcendence: Humans and the absolute (God) are directly connected. Although separated, humans have an awareness of the absolute. Stoker (2012:6) indicates the alienation between the absolute and humans. In spite of the alienation, humans in their search for meaning discover the absolute as quite identical to humans, although the absolute transcends all that is considered human. The absolute is experienced within this worldly reality. Humans and the absolute are separate, but still connected. Humans are open to a revelation of the absolute. Stoker (2012:6) mentions as exponents of this position Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Tillich.

2. Radical Transcendence: According to this understanding, the absolute and humans are strangers to one another. Both are radically different from one another. The absolute starts the initiative in moving towards humans. For humans, the absolute remains a total stranger. The absolute is totally different and distinct from this worldly reality. Exponents of this position are Kierkegaard, Barth, and Marion (Stoker 2012:7).

3. Radical Immanence: According to this position, the transcendence is identified with immanence so closely that transcendence becomes redundant. The result is that the absolute is no longer perceived to exist outside of this worldly reality. Transcendence and immanence converge to such an extent that the absolute empties itself in this reality, a process Stoker (2012:8) refers to as *kenosis*. This orientation, convinced of a reality with a dual character, is referred to as animism. Exponents of this category are Altizer and Taylor (Stoker 2012:8).

   Altizer (according to Stoker 2012:20) states that art and religion, as expressed in the world, do not refer to the transcendence. The sacred then becomes the profane, and art becomes non-art. The result is that the world is interpreted in terms of aesthetics (Stoker 2012:20).

4. Transcendence as Alterity: This position corresponds with radical transcendence by also emphasizing the inexpressibility of the absolute. The difference between the two is, however, that Transcendence as Alterity rejects the opposing position taken on by transcendence and immanence. Transcendence and immanence are not opposing polarities. The absolute can be present in all other spheres. The content can be viewed as religious or non-religious. Exponents of this position are Derrida, Levinas, Irigarday, and De Dijn (Stoker 2012:8).

It is not in the nature of Material Religion to subscribe to this duality (i.e. immanent and transcendent) in the understanding of religion (Chidester 2018:4). As this is not a theological discussion, this study will rely more on Chidester's analysis than on Stoker's theological analysis. Religion should much rather be understood in terms

of the physicalization of the sacred, or as Chidester (2018:4) refers to it: “producing the sacred.” Based on this understanding, Chidester would most likely indicate that religion is the embodiment of beliefs. Religion can only be studied in the sensory expression thereof, and not in die division and separation of transcendence and immanence. That would reflect a dualism.

2.2.6 Etymology

An investigation into the origin of the word ‘religion’ can provide a clue as to the intended meaning of the word. The word ‘religion’ comes from the Latin *religio*. The root of the word might have a dual origin*: re-ligare*, ‘to connect’ as was used by Augustine (Urban 2003:88) and *religere*, ‘to follow closely’ as was used by Cicero (Urban 2003:88). Sundermeier (1999:27) adds another possible root, namely *relegere*, 'to engage again'. Based on the entymological analysis, it seems as if *religio* “wants to refer to the passive connection between [hu]man[15] and gods, as well as, the active participation by man in worshipping the gods” (Urban 2003:88).

It can, however, never be the intention to limit the meaning of the word religion to the relationship between man and gods, as indeed, some definitions intend. In this regard, compare the way in which Tylor limited the meaning of religion to the acknowledging and worshipping of supernatural spirits and beings (in Cox 2010:5). Religion cannot be limited to referring to pious human behavior and convictions directed at gods. However, the transcendence (spiritual realm) and immanence (human agency) are both constitutive elements in an understanding of religion.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the following working definition will be considered as the most appropriate: Sundermeier (1999:17) defines religion as the communal response of society, of becoming aware of the presence of the transcendence and responding to it through ethics and in rituals. This definition of religion has its root in the social behavior of human beings and acknowledges the impact of religion and society on each other. The definition also assumes the existence of the transcendence and accounts for its interaction with reality. Religion is, according to this definition, presented as a human response and thereby implies

[15] As this is a quotation from Urban, I cannot change the text to reflect inclusive language. The insertion of (hu)man is therefore an attempt to correct it.

that religion is man-made although the impetus is [presumed to be] from an exterior source. The expressions of religion are in terms of ethics and rites, which are culturally determined. This definition attempts to present a balanced view of religion as it accounts for the transcendence (spiritual realm), as well as, the immanence (human agency).

2.2.7 Phenomenological / sensory approach

David Morgan presents two arguments for the change in approach on how to study religion. The arguments are from two different positions: one is from a philosophical (linguistic) position with the American philosopher Peirce (1839-1914) as exponent; and the second is from a phenomenological position with Merleau-Ponty as the exponent.

First, Morgan indicates that studying the materiality of religion is grounded in Peirce's philosophy of pragmatism. For Peirce,[16] belief is not a linguistic phenomenon, but much rather a psychological and philosophical one (Peirce 1877:1). Beliefs determine actions (Peirce 1877:4). Belief, therefore, should rather be viewed as a practice than a linguistic phenomenon (Morgan 2010:4). Morgan, therefore, argues that the concepts of belief and faith may limit our understanding of religions. We should much rather expand our understanding of belief to view it as a practice of belief, which includes habits and actions (Morgan 2010:4). The conclusion is to indicate that belief is "more than faith in things unseen" or "the declaration of the truth of certain teachings" (Morgan 2010:5). The utterances of belief, which used to be the main focus of the study of religion, are, according to this expansion, to be seen as merely the tip of the iceberg (Morgan 2010:5). The elements that can be observed are just as important for understanding religion as those elements invisible to the human eye[17].

Focusing on more than utterances of belief would imply that we also consider the following as part of religion: human behavior, feeling, intuition, images. Religion then

[16] His main influence was in the field of logic where he focussed on epistemology. For Peirce logic is part of semiotics, causing much debate in linguistics.
[17] Compare in this regard the work by Crary (1990), emphasizing the power to observe and the problem of subjectivity.

no longer becomes the symbolic representation, but includes the symbols and their world of reference (Morgan 2010:5).

For Morgan (2010:6), the move towards Material Religion is focused on studying the *how*, *where,* and *when* people teach their children the *what* of religion. Thus, studying religion is no longer focused on the linguistics, but on the conditions that contributed to the shaping of feelings, senses, and actions of belief. This is underpinned by the understanding that belief is grounded in practice (Morgan 2010:4). This enables the study of the materiality of religion.

The second argument, presented by Morgan, is built on the phenomenological theory of Merleau-Ponty. It is clear, according to Morgan (2010:8) that materiality refers to more than just concrete objects. Materiality is much rather concerned with the relationship of humans with their physical world. It would seem that materiality is concerned with existentialism, reflecting the embodiment of human relations to their surroundings. In this manner, Material Religion would pay attention to the physical conditions under which humans consider and formulate their relation to the transcendental and eventually convey this knowledge to others. The way in which the feeling, sensation or intuition is embodied, becomes part of the scope of Material Religion. The intention is to understand how belief shapes the human consciousness and how belief functions as a way of knowing and of feeling (Morgan 2010:8). The understanding of belief is thus expanded to reflect what Morgan (2010:8) refers to as "embodied epistemology," whereby belief is perceived to resemble the culturally determined way humans experience their position in reality. The emphasis is to expand belief to be seen as belief in practice. This, then, will not only reflect a state of consciousness, but will also reflect what one's body does (Morgan 2010:9). Or put differently, "Belief is what I know with my body" (Morgan 2010:9). Belief is the connection between body and habitat (Morgan 2010:10).

These statements by Morgan are derived from his theoretical indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty's (1962:215) description of the relation between body and world. For Merleau-Ponty, the relation of body to meaning must be understood as based on the relation between perception and abstract cognition (Morgan 2010:10). Merleau-Ponty (1962:248) sees the natural self (the subject) in relation to the qualities of things.

Humans do not only exist in the world, but are part of it. Knowing and meaning are, therefore, a way of being in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962:246). The human body becomes part of reality. Merleau-Ponty (1962:273) describes it as follows: "my body is the fabric into which all objects are woven." Morgan (2010:10) summarizes Merleau-Ponty's position by indicating that the body is part of the world, but also the means through which the world is understood. The body is present in the world; through the body, humans experience the world and simultaneously comprehend the world and find meaning in it.[18]

The conclusion Morgan (2010:11) eventually offers, is derived from the arguments of both Peirce and Merleau-Ponty: understanding belief is to understand that belief takes place in material practices. The 'doing' of belief is emphasized by Material Religion. Morgan (2010:12) argues that:

> … materiality mediates belief, that material objects and practices both enable it and enact it. Handling objects, dressing in a particular way, buying, displaying and making gifts of particular commodities, attending certain events are all activities that engage people in the social relations and forms of sacred imagination that structure their relation to the divine.

Keane (2008:114) indicates how Material Religion wants to give recognition to the fact that we do not have access to ideas. Humans only have access to ideas once they are mediated by signs, which can be repeated. These semiotic forms are in the public domain; they are repeatable and visible. It is clear to Keane (2008:114) that these characteristics do not mean that the signs will necessarily have the same meaning every time or in every context, they are used.

This principle will become evident when applied to investigating the meaning of visual structures marking places of death along South African roadsides. Symbols utilized in the different structures do not necessarily carry the same meaning every time. The context needs to be kept in mind.

[18] This notion of Merleau-Ponty reflects the ancient polarity of ideas between Plato and Aristotle as to the human relating to reality. Plato and Aristotle differ on how the human presence in this world can be presented: either being in the world busy with reality (Aristotle) or in the world busy with an illusion of reality (Plato). In this regard, compare the discussion in which Dorfling (2017:3) elaborates on the approaches of Aristotle and Plato.

2.3 Material Religion

"Social sciences has taken a material turn" (Hazard 2013:58). Following suit, religion also started reflecting on material elements. This tendency followed on criticism that religion is not only, that which is captured in texts and doctrines. Religion is, in fact, most visible and audible in the everyday expression of it, or as it is popularly referred to, as "lived religion" (Hazard 2013:59, footnote 2). Lived religion would then refer to actions, emotions, and/or expressions as performed in the daily existence of humans; the form religion takes on outside of the formal institutionalized and prescriptive domain of religion – the way people participate in religion in their everyday existence.

As to the origin of Material Religion, Meyer *et al.* (2010:207) indicate that, at the root of Material Religion, lies Visual Culture Studies. Art history, among other disciplines (i.e. archaeology, anthropology and cultural history), has been studying Visual Culture associated with religion long before it was called Material Religion. This might be the connection between Visual Culture Studies and Material Religion: the visual expressions of actions associated with religion forms a subsection of Visual Culture Studies.

Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies are focused on the same elements: visual expressions of human existence in the world. These expressions are, however, not elitist, but the 'normal', everyday signs of human existence. The disciplinary line of the discourse would be traceable from art history to Visual Culture Studies to Material Religion. The difference between Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies would be the difference in approach. Material Religion views the visual expressions through the lens of religious interpretation, trying to determine how the visual expression gives an account of humans in relation to the transcendental. Material Religion is concerned with the "material conditions of possibility" for understanding the human need for expressing religion (Chidester 2017:76; 2018:3). The focus of Visual Culture Studies is not necessarily through a lens of interpreting religious value. Below in the discussion of the characteristics of Material Religion, a further description is provided of the link between Visual Culture Studies and Material Religion.

Hazard (2013:59 footnote 3) indicates that the beginnings of Material Religion most probably lies in 1995, when McDannell published a book on material Christianity discussing material objects associated with Christianity in the USA. Chidester (2016) explains the origin of Material Religion from a philosophical perspective. According to Chidester, it was the German philosopher, Feuerbach, who contributed to the understanding of the indivisibility of humans from objects. Feuerbach argued that human beings are human due to their reciprocal engagement with material objects (1957 [1841]:4). Chidester (2016) points out two dangers of conceptualizing human existence in this fashion: reification and alienation. When objects become more real than human beings, humanity diminishes in value. The projections of the human psyche become more important than reality itself. Humans are then alienated from their own ontological existence in the world. Balance is restored when religion is not reduced to either reification or alienation.

Humans from the earliest times considered material objects as part of the domain of religion. Archaeological discoveries of ancient burial sites and compounds found material examples of objects such as stones, shells, carvings, paintings and utility objects, which clearly expressed an awareness of the spiritual realm. Ethnologists and anthropologists have been studying these tangible artefacts for centuries and even based assumptions and deductions about forms of religion on the results of their research. Material Religion, therefore, is not as new as might be thought.

The origin of religion most probably lies within the evolutionary growth of the human psyche. Human self-awareness gave the spark of externalizing objects and surroundings from the individual. This alienation from the surroundings was exacerbated by the projection of beings higher than humans. Thus, a dualistic reality was created; a reality co-inhabited by humans and spirits. The anthropologist Fuentes (2017:197) attests to this distinction between humans and “an ultimate reality.” Since the beginning, humans have behaved as if there is a transcendent or supernatural reality. We know only of humans that have religion. No other living beings exhibit similar behavior as humans when it comes to that which we refer to as religion.

Mann (2011:57) ascribes the origin of religion to the mind shift early humans made. Humans moved away from a paradigm where they considered themselves to be

part of nature, to a paradigm where they considered themselves to be in control of nature. In recent times, the human inability to control nature has become evident. This paradigm change once again influences the way humans perceive their place in nature; now, humans and nature appear to exist in opposition to each other.

The historian of religions, Eliade, introduced a theory on the origin of religion that is relevant to the study of the materiality of religion. For Eliade (1987), it is clear that reality is to be divided into sacred and profane spheres. The key to understanding religion is the way in which the sacred communicates to or manifests in the world. The term 'hierophany' is key to understanding religion (Eliade 1987:9).

For Eliade, the sacred is unknown and unknowable, but mediates knowledge through manifestation in space and time. The hierophanies are the mundane objects, which become channels by which the sacred is communicated to humans. Hierophanies take on many different forms varying from nature (i.e. trees or mountains) to sacred texts (i.e. Bible, Qur'an), through visions and dreams and even human beings (i.e. shamans, prophets or holy people). Discerning the meaning of the hierophany requires a clear choice in order to distinguish the element from its surroundings (Eliade 1996:13). The hierophanies are captured in myths within traditions and are dramatized in rites. Interpreting myths and rites are essential to understand religion (Eliade 1987:63). Traces of the sacred are, therefore, left behind in the mundane (immanent) world. Religion, therefore, is the complex phenomenon resulting from the human experience of the sacred.

Material Religion attempts to study expressions of religious awareness in any material (i.e. visible or tangible) form. The dichotomy, however, lies therein that the meaning attached to the material element lies on a meta-level. The meaning is still obscure, although the expression is material.

Religion has been defined in terms of belief for too long. Some scholars continue to perceive the existence of religion only in terms of its beliefs in the transcendent. Scholars identifying this as an 'outdated' way of defining religion include Asad (1993) and Keane (2008). Houtman and Meyer (2012) also see the turn to Material Religion as a 'corrective' to the one-sided Protestant focus on beliefs. Asad (1993:41) points out how beliefs tend to carry with it a claim to ultimate meaning.

Keane (2008:115) pleads for a shift “away from beliefs and towards practices.” Defining religion in terms of beliefs may, according to Keane (2008:116), result in a circular argument: Beliefs need religion and religion needs beliefs. The arguments in favor of practices as utilized by Keane (2008:117) are as follows:

- Traditions have little interest in beliefs or doctrine.
- Although there might be differences in doctrine, the practices remain consistent.
- Religions are concerned with the question ‘what must we do?’, thus focusing on practices.
- Practices are the basis for moral judgment.
- Resulting from participating in the religious actions, beliefs may follow.

Material Religion expands the understanding of belief in order to include “the social life mediated in feelings, things, places and performances” (Morgan 2010:12), in the scope of the study of religion. The emphasis is on studying expressions framed by the social construction of the sacred. The human body is not perceived to be the essence but a “universal language” (Morgan 2010:12). The focus of Material Religion is then on embodiment and belief (Morgan 2010:13) and the assertion that these two elements are, in fact, inseparable (Lynch 2010:49).

For an illustration of what Material Religion entails, an overview of recently published articles in the journal *Material Religion* is quite revealing. As the subtitle (*The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*) indicates, the range covered by this periodical is quite extensive. Issues 2 and 3 of Volume 15, 2019,[19] provide some idea of the scope of the research. Articles on museums, films, clothes, dance and music, talismans, architecture, and art confirm that all these form part of what is considered under Material Religion. The relation of these objects and/or events to their social setting is the focus of the research. Religion is being studied as expressed in its everyday setting and its relation to its surroundings.

[19] See www.tandfonline.com/toc/rfmr/20/15

2.3.1 Characteristics of Material Religion

It is Chidester's (2017:74) conviction that, in the future, the study of religion needs to be orientated towards a material approach to religion. Studying religion needs to engage with the senses and objects and their social relevance. Studying artefacts relating to religion has always been part of anthropological and archaeological studies. Material Religion is much more concerned with the "material conditions of possibility" for understanding the human need for expressing religion (Chidester 2017:76; 2018:3).

Hazard (2013:58) explains how the tendency (which had started in humanities and social sciences) to place material things at the center of scholarly investigation, spilled over into the way religions are studied. Studying religion is no longer confined to beliefs, doctrines, confessions and practices, but now also includes studying the material elements within religion. These material elements could include any visible or sensory perceptible element with religious connotation, such as relics and icons, or as Chidester (2016) indicates, "the stuff of religion." This leads to characterizing Material Religion as being "unrestricted" in scope (Chidester 2018:2). Therefore, literally, everything associated with religion falls within the scope of Material Religion.

Religion is mediated concretely in order to make it visible, present, and tangible. Houtman and Meyer (2012) identify the following as concrete instances of Material Religion:

- objects like relics, amulets, garments, images sculpted or painted, written words and architectural designs;
- feelings and sensory experiences like seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching;
- bodily actions like gestures, rituals, ceremonies, and festivals.

Hazard (2013:59) reminds of the difficulty to indicate precisely the limits of elements in the scope of Material Religion. She adds to the list by referring to space, body, art and Visual Culture, emotion, technology, media, popular culture, architecture and film (Hazard 2013:59 footnote 4). The function of studying these sensory perceivable elements is to come to an understanding of how the practices of

religious mediation affect the presence of entities in the world (Houtman & Meyer 2012:6).

The editors of the journal *Material Religion* decided to devote a special edition (Vol 7, no 1) to the project of defining relevant and necessary terms in order to demarcate the field of Material Religion. In order to comprehend the meaning of 'Material Religion', it is suggested to associate Material Religion with words such as "body, sensation, thing and touch" (Meyer et al. 2015:6). This emphasizes the material nature and embodiment of the object of study: that which is accessible through sensory experience. The main question the study of material elements in religion wants to address is "how religion happens materially" (Meyer et al. 2015:6). This implies that meaning, the use and value of things, is not something to be considered as added to religion, but intrinsically part of it (Meyer et al. 2010:209).

Studying religion, therefore, is opened up to include perspectives from a wide range of disciplines. Material Religion is characterized by the possibility that various disciplines can simultaneously study the visual expressions in society (Chidester 2018:3). The scope of elements mentioned by Hazard (2013:59) emphasizes this. Disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, theology, and psychology can all partake in the study of religion. For Chidester (2018:6) inter-disciplinarity is not only aimed for in order to reach a richer or thicker understanding[20] (owing to a wider base of interpretation of religion as seen from the perspective of the social, culture, politics and economics), but rather to acknowledge the entanglement of these entities. Further, Chidester (2018:6) suggests, studying religion at the intersection of these domains, have value. This approach gives recognition to the dynamics of religious formations (Chidester 2018:7) and the different contexts giving rise to them. It is therefore, important to study the changing contexts to understand the different religious expressions as they occurred throughout history. The study of the entangled histories of the meaning of the powers forming history is important (Chidester 2018:8). Material Religion wants to study the conditions contributing to the religious formations as they occurred in time and place.

[20] Clifford Geertz (1973:6-7) provides a helpful discussion on the differences between thick and thin descriptions. Thin descriptions would refer to a description of things taking place and being witnessed. Thick descriptions delve deeper in search of interpretation and assigning meaning. Thick descriptions entail reflection on what is witnessed.

Chidester (2018:4) further emphasizes the monistic characteristic of Material Religion. Religion should not be viewed as the polarity of sacred and profane; spiritual and material. Material religion is the rejection of the division between spirit and matter, soul and body (Chidester 2016). Traditionally the emphasis, especially from a Protestant or modern perspective, was on the spiritual interior of humans. The approach by Material Religion to do away with this polarity is labelled as the "dematerialization of religion" (Chidester 2016). A broader study is necessary when one really wants to understand the way in which religion is embodied.

Hazard (2013:60) indicates that the approach of studying religion is characterized by the study of symbols. She departs from the definition of religion as provided by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz that religion is a system of symbols. The implication is that the outward appearances of religion (such as in shrines, dances, amulets, portraits) are outward symbols exhibiting inward religious meaning. The visible expressions of religion, therefore, represent underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes. Material things embody something else, representing religious essences (Hazard 2013:60). Studying religion, in this case, the material effects thereof, makes the scholar a semiotician – one who reads and decodes the symbols.[21]

It is clear, from the perspective Hazard (2013:60) provides, that Geertz played an important role in giving prominence to the emergence of cultural studies, a precursor to visual [culture] studies. The symbolic value of the visual expressions marking places of death along South African roads will play an important role in determining meaning.

2.3.2 Critical evaluation

The roots of Material Religion, for the study undertaken here, seem to lie within the following four elements:

- The thinking of Feuerbach: Humans are human only in their relationships with objects. Humans project the existence of a spiritual realm and thereby become alienated from reality. Being anchored in reality, and studying

[21] Compare a following chapter on iconology with more discussion on symbols.

objects in their surroundings, humans come to a better understanding of their own existence.

- Theory of religion of Eliade: Reality can be divided into sacred and profane spheres. Hierophanies are channels through which the sacred is communicated to humans. Hierophanies take on many different and visible forms. Studying these, forms contribute to understanding religion.
- The approach is known as phenomenology. Ethnologists and anthropologists have studied phenomena and artefacts associated with cultures. Deduced from their research, anthropologists arrive at knowledge of religions based on the study of material objects. Art historians and scholars of Visual Culture will fall within this category as well.
- Religion is not only expressed in beliefs. A discomfort with reducing religion to studying beliefs and doctrine led to the expansion of an understanding of religion also to include its expressions and practices.

These lines of development converged in order to lead to the rise of Material Religion as a new approach in studying religion. As with the introduction of all new approaches in science, not all scholars immediately subscribe to the new way of doing. Material Religion has had to endure some criticism. What follows here is a critical evaluation of the possibilities that Material Religion poses to the study of religion, also highlighting the limitations of the approach.

2.4 Lack of a definition of religion

It is observable that the exponents of Material Religion do not make a conscious decision as to declare what is considered to be religion. Chidester and other exponents of Material Religion describe several characteristics of Material Religion and even indicate the flaw in previous approaches to the study of religion. But still, there is no clear definition of religion. Morgan (2010) describes religion as a form of sensation. Religion is observed, heard, tasted, felt, and imagined through material bodily processes. Yet it is still unclear what the definition of religion is. At most, it would be acknowledged that religion is not limited to considering beliefs, ideas or creeds as constituting religion (Hazard 2013:59). Religion is embodied in its expressions as experienced through the senses.

The absence of a clear definition (as to what constitutes religion) among exponents of Material Religion is understandable, as they come from a wide, diverse background. Meyer et al. (2010:208) herself indicates that her own background is that of being a German anthropologist. Morgan is an American art historian, Paine, a British museum specialist, and Plate, an American humanities specialist. Although religion is not the exclusive domain of theologians or scholars of religion studies, some understanding of what is considered as religion is necessary. In order to avoid stepping in the trap of a maximal definition as Chidester may venture into when suggesting that Material Religion does, in fact, include everything, it would be preferable to set some boundaries. Chidester (2018:2) remarks that materiality refers to "…embodiment and the sense, objects and their social lives, exchange and power relations, media and meditation, and all the forces and fluctuations in the production, circulation, and consumption of things – as the stuff of religion that demands the attention of the study of religion."

The closest that exponents of Material Religion would come to a definition, is probably still the one proposed by Durkheim (2008 [1912]:46) more than a century ago:

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions – beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church.

Religion consists of beliefs and practices. As has been indicated earlier, many scholars indicated the limitations in the study of religion is caused when the focus is only on beliefs. Practices give more attention to the physical experience and manifestation of feelings and emotions. Religion is grounded in the social structure. Religion can, therefore, only be expressed in a social and cultural context. Durkheim suggested all reality can be divided into sacred and profane domains (Durkheim 2008:36). All things can be classified as either sacred or profane. It is, however, also possible that, by relegating elements to the domain of the profane, that which is considered as sacred is delineated more prominently. Eliade (1987) continued working on this premise. When searching for a definition of religion as presented by exponents of Material

Religion, it is to be assumed that the definition and understanding of religion as presented by Durkheim and Eliade forms the basis of such an 'unwritten' definition of religion as viewed by Material Religion.

2.5 Is Material Religion a revival of positivism and phenomenology?

Hazard (2013:59) indicates that, for her, the main concern about the approach by Material Religion is the implementation of methodology. She identifies three prevalent methodologies: studying symbols, power relations and from a phenomenological view, the way in which humans interact with material things. Hazard (2013:59) remarks that the focus of Material Religion is anthropocentric, focusing on the way in which humans relate to objects.

It seems as if a remnant of positivism has remained a part of the study of Material Religion. Hazard (2013:59), however, allays this fear by indicating that a fourth methodology she describes as 'new materialism' rejects the *a priori* opposition between subjects and objects. Hazard (2013:60) suggests the implementation of 'new materialism' in order to break the accusation of anthropocentrism prevalent in Material Religion. The focus of the study should be on the material things themselves. However, the focus is not on the things for the sake of things. Meaning of things appears only when humans interact with things (Hazard 2013:60). Material Religion is not interested in the objects for the sake of the objects but in terms of the objects as carriers of meaning, objects as signifiers of human meaning. Studying the material forms of religion is therefore, not restricted to the visible and tangible as positivism would require. Material Religion, in terms of studying things as symbols, seeks the meaning of the symbols.

Material Religion does not have the goal to reify things as if to study things for themselves. The way in which things stand in relation to humans is the focus of the study. Without relation to humans, objects can easily be manipulated and objectified. This position would cause the icon to become an idol (Reinhardt 2016:92). The points of contact between humans and objects transform the object into a fetish – an object containing meaning in itself without reference to exterior meaning. Cox (2010:114) refers to this phenomenon in terms of presentational and representational art. In some cases, visual expressions may be considered to represent the transcendence. This would be considered as representational art. In

other cases, the transcendent is perceived to reside in the visual expression, being identified with the visual expression. For example, the sun may be perceived as either a symbol representing the sungod (representational) or the sun may be considered the embodiment of the sungod (presentational). When it comes to studying specific objects, the value assigned to an object will determine whether the object is viewed as a symbol representing the transcendental or whether the object is considered to contain the transcendental.

To prevent Material Religion from becoming a neo-phenomenology it will be necessary not only to identify and list the phenomena (objects understood to be part of Material Religion) but to critically engage with understanding the political, social and economic uses of these objects and how they change over time as they end up in different contexts (Strijdom 2014:2). Material Religion needs to heed this expectation; otherwise, it would merely become a new way of applying phenomenology. It must critically reflect on the objects (phenomena) identified as embodied religion.

2.6 A new way of doing anthropology?

Anthropologists and ethnologists have indeed for a very long part of history been studying cultures (ancient and contemporary) in terms of the material presence of such cultures. Studying these artefacts and deducing from them some knowledge of the religions of cultures led to the conclusion that in fact, all religion is Material Religion (Engelke 2011:209). This might resemble a precarious process of reducing religion only to its material form. Reinhardt (2016:76) indicates that this is exactly the point of his greatest concern about Material Religion.

Focusing so intensely on the immanence of religion somehow causes the transcendence to be discarded in the process. The transcendence is perceived to be hidden, untouched, unseen and unheard but still co-constitutive with religious immanence to what religion is (Reinhardt 2016:76). The excessiveness of immanence in Material Religion, according to Reinhardt, causes an imbalance in understanding religion. Reinhardt (2016:76) therefore, pleads for the “reintegration of religious transcendence into the study of material religion.”

Scholars of material element in religion can easily be accused of patronizing religion by differentiating between material (immanence) religion and non-material (transcendence) religion, as if there is a qualitative difference between the two. Studying 'primitive' religion in terms of its materiality would be patronizing as it is perceived to be inferior to 'spiritual' religion, which is perceived as being more complex and advanced. The opposite argument might also apply. When the study of materiality of religion is presented as the 'better' way of studying religion, it again regards the traditional way of studying religion as inferior. Focusing on the immanent expressions of religion, as anthropologists and ethnologists have been doing, and Material Religion is now emphasizing, neglects the importance of studying the transcendence as part of studying religion. Focusing on the human agency in religion, as the psychological approach does, by emphasizing feelings and sensations framed in a social context, causes the neglect of an essential co-constitutive element in religion, namely the transcendence.

Hazard (2013:64) also emphasizes the anthropocentric focus of Material Religion, neglecting the transcendence. For Hazard (2013:60) the three approaches in Material Religion, namely studying symbols, studying discipline and phenomenology all return to the human focus – studying symbols asks: 'what do signs mean to humans?'; disciplinary power asks how humans are influenced by power, and phenomenology wants to determine how objects impact human experience (Hazard 2013:63). This analysis affirms Reinhardt's remark that material religion neglects the transcendence.

The lack of a clear definition as to what religion is within Material Religion is once again the cause of this distorted and reductionist approach. The fact that the main proponents of Material Religion are all from an anthropological background (Meyer et al. (2015) identifies herself as an anthropologist; Hazard (2013:62-63) identifies Keane, as well as, Morgan as anthropologists), makes the suspicion of anthropocentrism not at all a far-fetched idea. If religion is defined in terms of transcendence and immanence, a more balanced study of religion ought to be possible.

In the research undertaken for this dissertation, I want to study visual expressions of the awareness of [the absence of] the dead, not by exclusively focusing on the

objects but by relating them to an understanding of the transcendental as well. In doing so, the study of material elements in religion is claimed for the study of religion. This ironically, seems more possible and plausible within Visual Culture Studies than within anthropology.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, an attempt was made to discuss the origin, the functioning, and limitations of the concept of Material Religion. A definition as to what is understood by the term religion precedes a discussion of Material Religion. The new turn towards material elements in religion can, however, not be viewed uncritically. A critical analysis of the concept, therefore, presents some warnings and suggestions as to how to proceed with Material Religion as an approach.

The distinction between transcendence and immanence as constitutive elements for understanding religion is paramount in understanding the function of material elements in religion. The ways in which the transcendence is being visualized in the immanent world will form the focus of this study.

3. CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN STUDYING VISUAL CULTURE OF RELIGION

3.1 Introduction

When engaging with material elements in religion, the question beckons as to what exactly is the focus of the study, and so does the question of how to approach it. Material Religion can surely not be reduced to an uncritical phenomenological assessment of objects and events. Material Religion is also not restricted to a descriptive activity based on empirical knowledge. The meanings of objects and events are important. Discerning meaning is not an easy task. Iconology, making use of semiotics, can serve as a method in determining the meaning of material elements in religion. Although iconology was developed by Panofsky as a concept within the discipline of art history, the principles governing the method can be applied to study material religion, especially within the realm of visual culture. Cultural historian Burke (2008:12-13) confirms the contribution Panofsky's studying of symbols made to the understanding of art, as well as of cultural history – and by extension, the study of visual vulture.

In this chapter, the way in which material elements in religion can be approached under the banner of visual culture will be discussed. The concept of iconology will be considered as an appropriate method, especially given the theological-anthropological focus of the topic under investigation: the human relationship with the transcendental. This relationship can take on many different cultural manifestations, causing visual expressions communicating something about (and to!) something invisible. 'Visual' refers to things that we see; 'visuality' indicates the process by which we interpret what we see (compare Rose 2016:1-7). This apparent conundrum (a visuality of the invisible) will be investigated through the meaning attached to visual structures (memorials) constructed along South African roads to indicate places of death.

The visual has become essential to the way in which knowledge is culturally constructed and conveyed in Western [and by extension, Westernized] society [ies] (Rose 2016:6), to such an extent that the current situation is labelled by some as

'occularcentric' (Rose 2016:3). The visual expressions are interpretations of the world. This process, according to Rose (2016:4), started in the early eighteenth century when knowledge construction started relying more on visual images than on written texts. Mirzoeff (1998:4) confirms this when he states that "the postmodern is a visual culture." This is owing to the process through which knowledge creation has become more dependent on interaction with visual images. The dominance of the visual in postmodern societies led to the rise of the discipline Visual Culture Studies (Rose 2016:16).

One, however, needs to be aware of the fact that other cultures than 'the Western', and even Western culture prior to postmodernity, did have visual images as part of expressions of spirituality. It may be that the emphasis on the visual is a Western driven discourse and not universally applicable.

Viewing objects and understanding their meaning is a difficult task. It has become increasingly difficult to differentiate the background against which objects should be evaluated. An object may function within different contexts and perhaps have the same meaning within each context, or a different meaning, or no longer have meaning at all. The problem is how to distinguish when a different meaning is applicable.

For example, if an owl is spotted flying, there might be different ways in responding to the sighting. To a Classicist, the owl will be a symbol of wisdom, as the owl refers to the pet of the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena. For a farmer, an owl might be a sign of a healthy ecosystem, with the owl as natural pest control. To someone else, an owl might be witnessed as a bad and evil omen or perhaps a sign of nearing death. For another passer-by, the owl might be just another bird with no particular significance at all. The same owl, without changing anything in its appearance and flight, is perceived differently by different observers. How then, does an outsider evaluate the meaning of the appearance of an owl to different individuals? Without the knowledge of the particular culture, it is impossible to understand what an owl means to each and everyone seeing or hearing it. It is clear that a single thing can have many different meanings, even conflicting meanings at times. The observer may not subscribe to only one single culture, for example. In this regard, compare Burke's (2008:96) remark on "the multiplicity and conflict of meanings."

In these examples, the following perspectives are presented: the owl as a cultural symbol, the owl as part of an ecosystem in natural sciences, the owl as a religious symbol, and the owl as an animal from a biological perspective. Without knowledge of these contexts, the meaning of an owl's flight might be considered in a very limited way.

Another example might illustrate the same process from a different angle. Take a piece of silver, designed in the form of a cross and worn on a chain around the neck. Is this piece of jewelry worn merely for decorative and aesthetic purposes, or does the cross carry psychological meaning for the one wearing it – or does it function as a religious symbol? The context does not help in determining the meaning. Surely, the one wearing the cross was not the one deciding that this design should have religious significance. Who then, decided this, and when was it decided? The problematic question is: how then, is meaning determined?

Even more important, are the following questions regarding meaning: What is meaning, and how do we know we have the correct meaning? Can an object have more than one meaning and, if so, when would that be possible? Who decides on the meaning(s) of an object? In addition, who decides that the assigned meaning is 'correct'? The 'situatedness' of a visual element surely contributes to the meaning it entails.

Rose (2016:18) indicates that we never view an image in isolation; we always consider the image in relation to ourselves and its surroundings. Images are embedded in the wider culture (compare Mirzoeff 2000:22). Based on this remark, Rose (2016:18) identifies three elements contributing to the meaning of visual images: the picture itself, the place where the image is viewed, and the audience viewing the image.

Meaning of a visual image is not always dependent on its social context alone. The image itself may contain keys to understand the meaning. Yet, social conditions contribute hugely to the meaning assigned to an image. Panofsky elaborates on this particular element. The interpretation of the audience, the viewer, is the third element contributing to determining meaning. As Rose (2016:18) reminds us, viewing is never innocent; it always comes from a particular approach (either

culturally, geographically, socially or spiritually). The viewer needs to reflect on the way of their own viewing.

Panofsky (1972[1939]:12)[22] insists that there can be no guarantee that the meaning of an image arrived at, is correct. Further, it seems as if assigning meaning can become a highly subjective exercise (Panofsky 1972[1939]:16). Determining legitimate meaning(s) requires familiarity with what Panofsky (1972[1939]:4) refers to as the "practical world of objects and events, but also with the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilization." Someone uninitiated into a context will not recognize the underlying meaning of objects and events. Does it then mean that all attempts at assigning meaning are in vain? Alternatively, is there a way of determining meaning – in this case, meaning of materiality in religion?

With this research, I propose to confirm the possibility of determining meaning and to identify the conditions under which such possibilities may exist. Determining meaning has been a human endeavor since eternity. The symbols we use carry meaning. The study of meaning is known as semiotics and falls within the domain of epistemology, the philosophical field presenting theories on knowledge and the acquisitioning thereof.

This chapter intends to investigate the process of making meaning, in particular, with regard to material elements in religion. The method applied here, is iconology as developed by Panofsky. The background as to the development of his method needs to be investigated. Who and what influenced Panofsky? In this regard, the contributions of Warburg and Cassirer are investigated as the background against which Panofsky's theory is to be read. Since Panofsky works with making meaning of symbols, it will be necessary to establish a theory of symbols.

This chapter links up with the previous chapter on Material Religion through the connection of Visual Culture Studies. Religion, in its visual expressions, studied through the method of iconology, can be perceived as a category of visual culture.

[22] Panofsky published the discussion of the three forms of meaning in different texts. It appeared in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissanc*e (1939), p. 3-31, but also in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955), p. 26-54. In this research, references to the three forms of meaning will be restricted to the discussion published in *Studies in Iconology* (1939), which was published in English.

What follows is an explication of the connection between visual culture and material elements in religion.

3.2 Visual Culture Studies

The visual image has come to stay. While Rose (2016:4) affirms this renewed [and sustained] interest in interpreting the visual image, she also notes that it is not the same as a methodological approach to the study of the visual (Rose 2016:4).

One explanation for the prominence of the visual is the argument that modern culture has failed to visualize. To illustrate this, Mirzoeff indicates how the nineteenth century was characterized by the newspaper and the novel as opposed to postmodern culture represented in the visual. The inability of the modern era to facilitate visualization properly, led to a postmodern culture characterized by a "fascination with the visual": "It is the visual crisis of culture that creates postmodernity not its textuality" (Mirzoeff 2000:3). The fascination and obsession with visualization necessitates Visual Culture Studies. Visual Culture Studies is, however, not limited to visual expressions. Mirzoeff (2000:3) indicates that Visual Culture Studies focus on the functions of postmodern everyday life from the perspective of the consumer and not the producer. The task of Visual Culture Studies is to investigate how pictures connect (Mirzoeff 2000:7). Visual Culture Studies are, nevertheless, not limited to the structured and formal visual elements, but in fact, wants to study the visual experience in "everyday life" (Mirzoeff 2000:7).

It must be acknowledged that, what is perceived as the development that led to the postmodern culture of visualization must have been preceded by a period emphasizing not only the textual, but also the aural, the Word. Compare, in this regard the work by Chidester (1992) on seeing and hearing applied to religious symbols, myths, rituals and traditions.

It also needs to be recognized that the dominance of the visual and the emphasis on visuality did not develop along similar trajectories and at the same time, in all cultures. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it might be a Western construct to view the cultural progression from the aural to the visual in this manner. Traces of emphasis on the aural still persist in current societies. It might thus only

be conditionally true that postmodern society can be labelled as 'occularsentric' (Rose 2016:3).

Reid (2013:viii) reminds that the field of Visual Culture Studies is still in a very early stage of development in South Africa. In this sense, the scope for investigating visual expressions related to religion as part of visual studies in South Africa is rather novel within the field. This may be a contested statement, as visuality has always been part of culture in Africa. Even though culture was and still is to a large extent based on oral tradition (emphasizing the aural nature of culture), the visual performance of culture is not something new in an African setting.

The connection between Material Religion and visual studies lies on two levels. Firstly, Mirzoeff (2000:5) identifies the process to visualize things that are not in themselves visual, as a late development in culture. This includes giving a face to the transcendental, which is the focus of religion. Material religion entails studying the visual expression of religion and includes the visualization of the transcendental in whichever incarnate form. Visualizing the transcendental leads to symbolic representation, which again requires an understanding of the function of symbols and the way in which they are studied.

Secondly, the connection between Visual Culture Studies and Material Religion lies in its focus on lived experience. As mentioned above, Mirzoeff (2000:7, 8, 26) insists that the true focus of Visual Culture Studies is on everyday life. New tendencies in the study of religion focus on "lived religion" (Hazard 2013:59), the way in which religion functions in everyday life. The focus is not on the exceptional and the extraordinary, but on the ordinary and the regular as experienced and expressed by ordinary people practicing religion.

In this way, Visual Culture Studies and Material Religion overlap in terms of approaches (namely focusing on lived religion) and object of interest (namely studying attempts at visualizing that which is not visual).

3.2.1 Methodologies for Visual Culture Studies

There are several methodologies available to study images. Rose (2016:24) mentions the following: compositional interpretation, content analysis, semiology, psychoanalysis, discourse analysis, and audience studies. When discussing

approaches in studying visual material, Rose (2007:224) suggests the anthropological approach as the most appropriate (Rose 2007:216). Methods to be used in the anthropological approach are, however, diverse (Rose 2007:225), ranging from ethnography to historical studies.

Studying objects entails, according to the anthropological approach, not as much attention to the meaning of the object, but rather studying the way in which objects are utilized for doing things (Rose 2007:217). The focus of this study relies on seeing how objects are used in order to achieve something. “Sometimes things happen with images which aren’t necessarily about meaning; the images may provoke some actions” (Rose 2007:17). The transformative power of objects will be discussed in more detail in a following chapter (see Chapter 5).

Rose (2016:16-17) discusses three sites where the meaning of visual images is produced: the site of the production of the image, the site of the image itself and the site where the image is viewed by the audience. Within each site, there are three modalities contributing to the processes of making meaning (Rose 2016:25):

- Technological – this refers to any apparatus to view or to enhance natural vision. This may include paint, building material or natural elements like rocks and plants. The visual expressions along South African roadsides consist of structures erected with different materials like steel, wood, plastic, rocks, etc.
- Compositional – this refers to the strategy in which the elements in the image are arranged and may include color, content, and special considerations. The composition of the structures under scrutiny in this study will be analyzed to determine the reasoning for the arrangement of elements.
- Social – this refers to the ways in which the image relates to its surroundings, whether it is economic, political, religious, or social. It is clear that there is a strong social element to the structures along roadsides indicating places of death. The constructed signs relate the deceased to family and friends.

The debate on the meaning of images concerns the three sites, and the three modalities within each site discussed by Rose. Depending on the site and modality selected as the most important, the interpretation of the meaning will vary. These considerations will form the structure of how visual images in this study will be

described. See Chapter 5 for this analysis. As to the sites discussed by Rose, the following remarks will make the relevance clear.

Site 1: production

Images are produced on a certain site. The circumstances surrounding their production may play a role in their effect (Rose 2016:25). Certain technologies may be used in their production, and therefore, the technologies contribute to the meaning of the images. As to the composition of images, Rose (2016:25) indicates the importance of identifying the genre into which an image fits. Images falling in the same genre will exhibit similar characteristics, and therefore, images belonging to the same genre must be compared in order to come to an understanding of the image. The last modality is that of social, which is regarded by some as the most important element (Rose 2016:30). Here Rose refers to the understanding provided by Harvey that the economic considerations are the most important of all social aspects. Images are commodified, mobilizing fashion and pop art to create superficial images, which become attached to surfaces rather than roots (Rose 2016:30). Rose concludes by indicating how Harvey suggests that through “contemporary capitalism …time is compressed, and space is collapsed." Interesting enough, Rose convincingly indicates that the one social element regarded as providing the best understanding of the intention of the image, the intention of the maker of the image, is, in fact, unimportant (Rose 2016:30). The audience and their interpretation of the image in relation to the audience and its surroundings are considered more important in understanding the image itself (Rose 2016:23).

Site 2: the image itself

The next site where the meaning of the image is created, is the image itself. The components an image consists of refer to the technologies employed to create the image (Rose 2016:25). Other components rely on social practices. One important element contributing to the effect an image has on those who view it is the composition. The way the image is constructed and presented conveys meaning. Rose (2001:24) here refers to “the spatial organization of looks.”

Site 3: the audience

Every member of an audience brings to the image their own viewing and knowledge (Rose 2016:25). The audience then becomes the third site, where meaning is created. Although the composition of an image, as well as the technologies employed, dictate how the image is viewed by the audience, it is still the audience that creates meaning by viewing. “Audiences make their own interpretations of an image” (Rose 2001:25). The social element becomes for Rose the most important modality for understanding the role of the audience in creating the meaning of an image. The space where an image is viewed is as important. Every space carries with it a set of social practices. Rose (2001:26) refers to how one acts differently when going to the movies than when visiting a gallery. Rose finally refers to the social identity of those doing the viewing of the image. The social identity of the one viewing an image determines the way one sees and interprets an image. Rose concludes by indicating that the images selected to be viewed, have a social and an aesthetic function. The images say something of whom we are and how we want to be seen (Rose 2001:28).

We now turn our attention to symbols. By employing symbols, that which is difficult to express, is made visually possible.

3.3 Symbols

The use of symbols is as old as the existence of Homo sapiens. Cassirer (1874-1945) identifies the human as an “animal symbolicum” (Cassirer 1945:26). This implies that humans, through the ability to create symbols, contribute to the growth of culture (Rolf 2006:70). Humans are, according to Dillistone (1986:15), the only species able to make the connection between a symbol (a word or an object) and the referent, that which is encountered through the senses. Symbols are therefore, man-made. No other living being on earth utilizes symbols in this way.

Rolf (2006:5) identifies the following ways in which the concept ‘symbol’ can be applied. Symbols refer to:

- conventional signs,
- signs of replacements or representations,

- the totality of the transcendental,
- calling in mind a larger body.

These functions of symbols operate within the following spheres (Rolf 2006:5):

- Linguistics (language theory) – the written and spoken language as symbols in relationship to our thoughts.
- Knowledge theory – the quality of our knowledge and the way in which we come to this knowledge.
- Art theory – a philosophical analysis of what art is and how the incomprehensible can be expressed.
- Sign theory – the function, types, and relationship of signs; how they represent, replace, and refer.
- Consciousness theory – how to describe the function of the unconsciousness in terms of its psychological ability to relate to social concepts or religious realities. Symbols can assist in understanding mental concepts in and beyond consciousness.
- Social theory – to explain the existence of constitutive elements in society.

As to what the origin of symbols is, Biezais (1979:xi) answers that such a question has no answer. It is impossible to indicate the purpose of the symbolic figures early humans drew on cave walls. Were these pictures indications of pleasurable pastime or expressions of the awareness and experience of some transcendental existence in a different reality?

Dillistone (1986:16-18) explains how symbols originated among early hunter-gatherer communities. According to Dillistone, it is possible that these humans used hand signals during hunting as a means of communication. A complex system of signs came into being, built on past experiences of the hunting party. The change in culture from hunter-gatherer to sedentary agricultural communities brought about a change in the use of symbols. Agriculture needed a new set of symbols.

There seems to have been two processes, which served as sources for the origin of symbols: a process of complex communication signals among hunter communities, and a second process of communication in development, organization, and production activities associated with agricultural communities. It is necessary to differentiate between *sign, signal,* and *symbol* to avoid confusion. Cassirer sees sign and signal as synonyms (1945:64) and as opposed to symbols.

Fawcett (1970:27) explains that signs are created by the creative human imagination as opposed to symbols, which exist independently and 'impinge' on human existence. Dupré (2000:1) states that all symbols are signs. Signs, however, are "forms which refer to something that is not directly given" whereas symbols are signs representing something (Dupré 2000:1). Fawcett (1970:28) elaborates on this by indicating that a sign points to one object, as opposed to a symbol that can refer to a complex of things. A symbol does not refer or point towards that which is signified, as a sign does. A symbol represents, is "making present" and "taking the place of," thus replacing and becoming, that which is signified (Dupré 2000:1). Symbols have a mediating function, which signs do not possess. To this distinction, Dillistone (1986:8) adds the function that signs and signals want to transform, whereas symbols do not necessarily want to transform. Signs want to bring about change and reaction, which symbols do not necessarily intend.

Reyburn (2013:58) indicates that a sign can broadly be understood as "any distinct unit of meaning." Symbols carry meaning in themselves, and therefore, can be present without causing a change. This position is closer to Cassirer's theory of symbols. Warburg maintained that symbols operate between two distinct worlds. This difference will be discussed later. Symbols are versatile and are able to be applied to different situations (Fawcett 1970:28; Cassirer 1945:36).

Barthes and Peirce contributed to the understanding of semiotics. Peirce (Hartshorne and Weiss 1932:135) identifies three components of a sign, namely sign, object, and interpretant. The sign creates in the mind of the observer thereof an equivalent sign, known as the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, or an object. This is in opposition to De Saussure's notion that there are two constitutive elements: the sign (signifier) and signal or meaning (signified)

(compare Reyburn 2013:59-60). Peirce's theory[23] implies that the result of interpreting the relation between the sign and the object results in the interpretant (Hartshorne and Weiss 1932:165). The object is that which the sign refers to. The interpretant is nothing else than a new sign derived from the interpretation of the sign and its relation to the object (Hartshorne and Weiss 1932:169). This implies a continuous process of creating meaning depending on the relation between signs and objects. This means that meaning is flexible, as relations of signs and symbols and objects constantly change (compare Mirzoeff 2000:7) and the meaning thereof grows (Hartshorne and Weiss 1932:169).

The French philosopher and literary theorist, Barthes (1915-1980), contributed to the understanding of meaning-making by re-evaluating the role of the 'author' as the creator of meaning in a visual (or even written text or lyric). In his essay entitled "The Death of the Author" (1967), Barthes challenges the idea that meaning can be discerned once the context of the author is established (once one knows the author, one knows the meaning of the text the author produced). Instead, Barthes emphasizes that meaning is possible only once the author is removed from the equation. "Literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (Barthes 1967:2). Once the author is removed, the context of the text provides an opportunity to arrive at a meaning, leading Barthes (1967:6) to conclude: "…the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author."

The debate as to what are constitutive elements in semiotics differ in the results. Mirzoeff (2000:13) identifies the constitutive elements as the viewer and the viewed, but in the sense of their interaction. This interaction Mirzoeff (2000:13) refers to as a "visual event."

Eco (1979:7) defines semiotics as follows:

> Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist

[23] All references to Peirce are made from his *Collected Papers*, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss.

> or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it. Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie.

The implication of the dual understanding of De Saussure is that signs should always be seen as being part of a sign system. Signs can therefore, only be understood in terms of their relation to other signs in the system. Furthermore, De Saussure's theory creates the impression that signs can be studied objectively, implying the ability to identify the meaning associated with each sign. A "dictionary" of signs seems, therefore, a possibility.

Five different perspectives of understanding symbols will be presented here: etymology, mythology, philosophy, psychology, and theology.

3.3.1 Etymology

The word *symbol* comes from the Greek word *symbollein* – to connect. Dillistone (1986:14) recalls the origin of the word as follows: The context of the meaning of symbol is a social environment where two parties would engage in establishing a contract. To signify the binding effect of the responsibilities of the two parties, an object would be broken into two parts. Each party retains a half. When the other party is called upon to act on its responsibility, both parties would present the two parts. The two halves forming a unity were known as *symbola*. Thus, the word 'symbol' came to refer to an object, a sign, or a word used by two parties to indicate reciprocal responsibility and simultaneously calling into mind a shared meaning.

Originally, *symbola* referred to two parts of the same substance. Dillistone (1986:14) indicates how, through gradual development, the two parts no longer necessarily had to be of the same substance or form. The two parts were still able to represent or recall that which is symbolized.

3.3.2 Mythology

The origin of the word *symbol* can also be explained according to mythology. Rolf (2006:3) recalls a myth told by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposion*. The myth tells how humans apparently had four arms and legs, a head and two faces with four ears. Owing to this wonderful appearance, humans became boastful and considered

themselves superior. The gods decided to teach humans a lesson. The gods, therefore, divided humans into two parts. From then on, humans were incomplete, consisting only of a part it used to be. Humans are now only a part, a *sumbolon* (Greek), of a human being. Humans are constantly in search of their other halves.

From this, it seems as if the word symbol came to refer to two distinct elements that once were undivided. The one calls to mind the other. Even when only one is present, the other is assumed.

3.3.3 Philosophy

Any explanation of symbols implies a dualism. Symbols are visible expressions of an invisible reality. This is an essential understanding of symbols. Dupré (2000:3) differentiates between appearance and content. The appearance, Dupré explains, simultaneously obscures, and reveals the content. The content is mediated by a symbol. The human mind, according to Dupré, is in need to express itself in a sensory form. The function of a symbol, therefore, is to enable the mind to express itself (Dupré 2000:3). There are two elements present: the symbolic reality and the reality of that which is symbolized (Biezais 1979:xii). The symbol contains a “surplus of meaning” (Dupré 2000:3) and is not simplistic in the sense that it refers to only one aspect. This duality and relationship between the two elements can be expressed with the following table:

Symbol	**That which is symbolised**
Appearance	Content
Recognizable	Unrecognizable
Visible	Invisible
Present	Absent
Immanent	Transcendent
Significant	Significate
Reference	Referent
Signifier	Signified

There are certain thought processes at work to establish a symbol. Compare Dupré's (2000:4-5) analysis of Kant's explanation of the process of the mind to connect the appearance (symbol) with the content. Dillistone (1986:15*)* refers to this thought process by indicating how a symbol (a word or an object) awaits to be connected to the referent, that which is encountered through the senses.

Aristotle understood human language as *symbola* (Rolf 2006:12), placing symbols in the domain of linguistics. Language is a sign (expression) of pre-determined meaning. Aristotle explains the relationship between human speech and human thought with symbols. The audible spoken word is a symbolic expression of the thought in the human mind. Written texts become the symbols of spoken words (Rolf 2006:11). The conclusion Rolf comes to is that Aristotle presents a process of symbolizing symbols: written words symbolize spoken words; spoken words symbolize experiences in the mind. Written texts are, therefore, symbols of symbols.

Aristotle's theory is concerned with human thought as a reaction to the surroundings. According to Aristotle, the constants to which humans are exposed to are surroundings which remain stable. Human thoughts as a representation of surroundings are similar. The variable is, however, human speech, which differs according to language differences (Rolf 2006:11). The letters, which are written, are signs (*semeion* – Greek) and not symbols (*symbola* – Greek). Aristotle refers to signs (*semeion*) as symbols (*symbola*). According to Aristotle, words are primarily signs of thoughts and secondarily signs for things.

Understanding symbols requires the acknowledgement that symbols are real, perceivable objects that refer to invisible, unperceivable objects. Symbols can be seen as expressions of the unseen, expressions of the un-representable, or expressions of the non-existing. In this regard, Plato provides some insight. Symbols should be seen as referring to something "non-existing" – "*Nichtseiende.*" This is not the opposite of being – "*Seienden,*" but referring to something, which is different from it (Rolf 2006:285). The unique nature of the inhabitants of the transcendental world is illustrated by this view.

The process of the selection of symbols is arbitrary and subjective (Biezais 1979:xiii). Each community identifies elements to become symbols, or stop being symbols.

3.3.4 Psychology

Symbols appear to be part of human existence in the world (Fawcett 1970:27). They are built into the human experience (Fawcett 1970:27). Social life, according to Durkheim (2008:176), is only possible owing to the vast body of symbolism. The psychologist Jung (compare Fawcett 1970:27) suggests that symbols must be universal in past, present and future. The underlying theory is that similar mental processes in humans make use of a common set of symbols existing universally. This will lead to the conclusion that all have a common experience of symbols and react in a similar fashion to this experience.

Durkheim (2008:317) explains how the realm of the sacred is superimposed over the real world; the profane. This superimposed world is identified as the ideal world. Through several psychological processes, man explains the one world in terms of the other (Durkheim 2008:317). Durkheim describes these psychological processes as the result of social life, which reaches a certain level of intensity, which then awakens religious thought. Energies are overstimulated, passions grow stronger, and sensations heighten. Human existence is being transformed and transforms its surroundings. Powers from the ideal world are superimposed onto the profane world. To make these superimposed thoughts about the ideal world accessible in the profane reality, symbols are used.

Symbols are contextual. Symbols are socially constructed. Each construction differs according to the boundaries set by the particular community within which the symbols originate. Different communities identify different elements as symbols. The process by which it is determined what symbols are is a contextual process following social guidelines.

The result, Biezais (1979:vii) points out, is that the relationship between the forms and the content is secondary in nature. The way in which current experiences determine the forms in which the content is presented, is of essential importance. This theory is a variation on Jung's. It assumes that the content remains stable and

unchanged owing to human experiences in life, but that the forms (i.e. symbols) into which these experiences are poured, may differ according to current experiences. This theory recognizes the existence of varying contexts – as will be discussed later in this investigation.

3.3.5 Theology

Religious symbols form a unique category. Rolf (2006:6) places religious symbols within the broader category of psychoanalysis or phenomenology to indicate the relation between elements in a state of awareness and a state of unconsciousness. Man crosses over from one state of mind to another, either socially or religiously (Rolf 2006:6).

Tillich (1964:196-197) ascribes four characteristics to religious symbols. These four characteristics are formulated by Tillich in opposition to Cassirer's description of symbols as if they do not represent two separate worlds, one visible and the other invisible. What follows below, is a discussion of the four characteristics (compare Biezais 1979:ix):

1. *Uneigentlichkeit* – "Not the obvious." This refers to the fact that the mentioning of the symbol does not obviously refer to the symbol itself, but to that which it symbolizes.

2. *Anschaulichkeit* – "Visibility." This refers to the ability a symbol has to present something invisible, unclear, ideal, or transcendental in the form of a symbol, thereby making something visible, clear, and present. That which is presented, is not dependent on a visible form for existence.

3. *Selbstmächtigkeit* – "Self empowering." A symbol possesses an inner power that differentiates it from powerless signs. This characteristic is important when it comes to signs and symbols. Signs can at random be exchanged. Signs are not necessary, as they do not possess an inner power. Symbols, on the other hand, are necessary. They are not interchangeable. Symbols can disappear when they lose their inner power owing to the symbol becoming unimportant. Symbols cannot be discovered; they can only be created.

4. *Anerkanntheit* – "Acknowledged; recognized." Symbols are socially embedded. Acknowledgement of and becoming a symbol happen simultaneously. To create a symbol is a social act. Acknowledging something as a symbol is a collective act in which societies participate. Symbols are culturally embedded.

These characteristics identified by Tillich, indicate how symbols as religious phenomena have the ability to represent and make present in the world the transcendental that belong to the otherworldly, or as Bellah (2011:5) differentiates, between the "religious reality" and the "daily life." In this regard, Biezais (1979:x) makes it clear that symbols in a religious context can only have the function to represent. Symbols can never become the objects of veneration. Symbols point to the object of veneration. In this regard, Cox (2010:114) distinguishes between the presentational and representational presence of the transcendental.

Tillich (1973:278) indicates how symbols can indeed "die out" the moment the correlation between the revelation and human's recognition stop being adequate. Existing symbols become old the moment the revelation of the transcendental changes. Symbols then become ineffectual.

This refers to the diachronic understanding of symbols. Symbols exist in a particular context. There are reasons why a certain symbol is used in a certain context. The process of determining why this is the case, is important. Symbols are socially determined. Symbols exist because of the collective acknowledgement that they are symbols (Heumann 1983:78; Tillich 1964:197). The social environment, in which a symbol exists, forms the social context for that symbol. Symbols also determine the relationship between people (Heumann 1983:71). Symbols become indicators of identity to those using the symbols; a letter of introduction, so to speak. Symbols as expression of identity set up the boundaries between people. In this regard, clothing as a symbol associated with a particular religion, forms social boundaries between communities and individuals.

Tillich (1964:197) indicates that religious symbols are especially bound to their social context. The context in which the revelation of the transcendental occurs, gives rise to the symbol, which becomes the adequate expression of the revelation

to humans. The uninitiated to a community will not recognize the symbols functioning within such a community. Should the symbol become outdated because of a new social context, it disappears (Tillich 1973:278). Tillich (1964:211) refers to this as the process of profanisation of symbols.

The cultural context of symbols is also a determining factor in the way in which symbols might change. Humans and symbols exist within a particular cultural context. This context is continuously growing through the human ability to generate culture. Changing cultural contexts, therefore, lead to the creation of new symbols or the interpretation of existing symbols.

3.4 Theory of symbol

There is a general consensus among scholars who, when studying religion, a dualistic worldview is a prerequisite. Durkheim (2008:36) indicates how religions differentiate between two realms of reality, the sacred, and the profane. Religion is concerned with the way in which humans living in this-world reality relates to a dimension of existence in another reality. Weber (1968:404) attests to this when he states that the realm of souls, demons, and gods can only be presented in a transcendental existence. Compare in this regard, Eliade's differentiation between the sacred and profane realities (1987[1957]). This-worldly reality is considered the world in which humans conduct everyday activities; an ordered, "cosmicized, consecrated world" (Eliade 1987:29). The otherworldly is seen as the realm of spiritual existence; a chaotic, foreign world inhabited by demons, spirits and souls (Eliade 1987:29). The sacral sphere does, however, not exist objectively; it is socially constructed (Bellah 2011:3).

At the base of any definition of religion, as also the definition of Sundermeier (as discussed in a previous chapter), lies the assumption of the existence of two worlds: a visible world we live in and an invisible world that we relate and respond to. This response and relation are expressed by way of symbols. Heumann (1983:11) prefers to say that symbols refer to elements on the periphery of society. Symbols are then assigned to religion, sub-cultures, or tradition (Heumann 1983:11). Symbols become keys for unlocking the invisible world, as well as a medium of expressing the relationship with religious reality. Symbols come from the visible, ordinary world or territory we live in, but point to something mysterious and unknown.

Symbols represent that which we assume to exist in the religious reality or territory. As Dillistone (1986:13) puts it, symbols connect two worlds: the world of the greater, transcendental or the ultimate – the world of ideals, reality, values, convictions, and concepts – to the world of words, objects, actions, rituals, and people. Weber (1968:404) indicates how the transcendental world is only accessible through symbols.

A dual worldview presented by Eliade seems to be at the basis of understanding religion (compare Bellah 2011:5). This dualism is however, extended by Bellah's suggestion of the existence of multiple realities. Bellah (2011:2) differentiates between the main spheres as the "working reality" (a term Bellah borrows from Schutz) – there where humans live their daily lives – and reality concerned with religion. Man can at times 'escape' the working reality by engaging in experiences such as watching television, or a play. These activities seem less real than our "working reality." Other such escapism activities identified by Bellah (2011:3) comprise of sleeping, dreaming, traveling, daydreaming, watching a movie, praying, or meditating.[24]

The "working reality," where humans spend the majority of their time, is socially constructed. Compare in this regard, Berger's (1990:8) theory of world building as the way in which humans construct the world. Every culture creates its own world and by doing so, creates differentiated realities. The reality engaged when practicing religion, is one of the multiple realities identified by Bellah. This religious reality, is also socially constructed and therefore, leads to multiple religious realities (Bellah 2011:5).

Symbols become the keys to unlocking the hidden reality in the religious world, enabling communication between the two worlds. Symbols are the keys to unlock the transcendental reality. Symbols have their origin in the "working reality" (this-worldly reality), but refer to elements in the otherworldly reality (religious world). Any element in the "working reality" is a potential symbol (Bellah 2011:8) as it can be used to relate to the otherworldly.

[24] In some way, virtual reality can also be interpreted as the convergence of working reality and our escape.

The separation between these two worlds – the other-worldly (transcendental) and the "working reality" (immanent) – is bridged by what Plato in the *Symposium* referred to as the *metaxu*, a mediator separating and simultaneously connecting the worlds of the gods with humans; a mediator conveying a message. Compare in this regard the remarks on *metaxu* by Kentridge[25] in Rankin-Smith (2006:7). Symbols fulfil the purpose of connecting one domain to the other.

It is, however, not as simple as to suggest that symbols refer to the communication between two distinct but linked worlds. Eliade, working from a theological perspective, suggests that symbols are the intermediary medium between the profane and the sacred. Bellah, on the other hand, working from a psychological perspective, understands symbols as a possible way of connecting with other realities.

A symbol is not identical to that which it refers to, nor does it share in the same substance (compare Toynbee in Dillistone 1986:12). The function of symbols is not to reproduce, but to illuminate (Dillistone 1986:13). Symbols become instruments assisting the human mind in understanding. Symbols are therefore, a guide to reality and not a photocopy thereof. In some cases, symbols can indeed be confused to be the actual reality. This is the difference between the representation *of* and representation *for* something.

3.4.1 The challenges of symbols

One of the main problems when studying symbols is the challenge not to de-contextualize them. When investigating symbols, it can easily happen that a symbol is removed from its context and inter-relatedness to other symbols within a network, and studied in isolation. This can limit knowledge of a symbol. It is important to investigate the position of a symbol within a network and context and identify the relationship with other symbols and how it functions inter-relatedly.

A further possible challenge when studying symbols is reductionism. It can easily happen that the only perspective on a context is to seek out the symbols within the

[25] William Kentridge (1955-) is a South African-born artist known for his animated films where he films drawings and changes part of the drawing in a next scene to form a complete film. Kentridge's reference to *metaxu* is a remark on the process of making meaning of symbols.

particular context and interpret the meaning of the system according to the understanding of symbols. The whole can indeed be re-presented by a part, but the whole is not the part. The understanding of the whole of a system can never be reduced to the understanding of its symbol. The danger might also be that only the recognizable symbols are studied and that which the viewer is unfamiliar with, is ignored.

Not all scholars are excited about studying symbols. Todorov (quoted in Rolf 2006:7) indicates how Ferdinand de Saussure postulates that symbols have no place. This statement by De Saussure is based on the premise that symbols are, in fact, words. Therefore, he prefers the term semiotolic to symbolic (Rolf 2006:7). The peculiarity of De Saussure's statement is that what he describes as words, are indeed referred to by Aristotle as symbols (Rolf 2006:11). De Saussure's studies are better allocated within the domain of linguistics.

3.5 Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of theories on symbols and their meaning. The study of how meaning is assigned, is known as semiosis, but the creation and use of symbols convey a deeper meaning (Fuentes 2017:213). The effort of making sense of something is an exercise in understanding. The exercise of epistemology consists of many different methods, all attempting to reach meaning.

Iconology can be viewed as a sub-category of semiotics, as a specific method in the process of determining meaning. Iconology, as developed by Erwin Panofsky, is especially concerned with the search for meaning in art. Some background to the theories of Panofsky is necessary.

The contribution of the Warburg School to the thought development of Cassirer and Panofsky cannot be denied.[26] Characteristic of the Warburg School is the deep

[26] The University of Hamburg was established in 1919 (Ferretti 1989:1). Abraham Warburg (1866-1929) and his family is closely linked to the formation of the University. Warburg, an art historian, contributed to the University by establishing a library on culture studies and availing his library to students. In 1933, under Nazi threat, the famous library was moved to the Warburg Institute located in London. Five years prior to his death in 1929, Warburg met up with Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), since 1919 the newly appointed chair in Philosophy at the University of Hamburg, with whom he immediately made an intellectual connection. Warburg as avid art historian and Cassirer with his theory on symbols, started influencing the scholarly activity of determining meaning. Erwin Panofsky was part of this school of thought, later known as the Warburg school, named after Warburg.

conviction that history does play a role in determining meaning. Warburg (Ferretti 1989:4) is convinced that all images have a twofold nature. Images can be reproduced in different historical periods and circumstances, each time with a different meaning. Although images may change over time, Warburg argues that they remain identical in their essence. Tradition then becomes the link history has with its essence. The forms remain unchanged, but are expressed differently and at times in a disguised form in diverse historic contexts. Warburg's understanding of history entails a permanent, unchanging substratum to which diverse expressions in every historic epoch connect. A historian's task is, therefore, to search for the connections between these expressions and the underlying motives (Ferretti 1989:4-5).

Symbols, for Warburg, have a mysterious wandering over centuries and then suddenly burst forth in their fullest meaning the moment the restrictions of tradition are shed. Cassirer, however, differs in his understanding of symbols. For him, the symbol carries the essence, since in its abstraction dwells inherently the intelligible (Ferretti 1989:5).

It does however, seem as Warburg's thinking subscribes to a modernistic understanding of progression of thought over time. Earlier epochs may reflect 'primitive' forms, and as time passes, more complex representations of motives may emerge. This may be the case, as long as there is no qualitative difference between earlier and later expressions of motives.

For Warburg, the essence of art lies in symbols. These symbols, once constructed, continue to live in humanity's consciousness (Ferretti 1989:33). Here symbols lie hidden and are transferred from one generation to the next by persons familiar with the symbols. Clearly, some symbols will disappear from memory, and some might change in meaning as the contexts change over time.

In collaboration with Warburg, Cassirer formulated two concepts prominent in the discussion of appreciating art. For Cassirer *eidos* (form) and *eidolon* (image) stand in tension with each other. Knowledge cannot focus on the visible world alone (the form), but needs to be directed at the image, the invisible underlying the form, the true being of the thing (Ferretti 1989:144). Cassirer's discussion of the dichotomy of

form and image was a revisiting of Plato's dualism of reality, but now Cassirer applied it to art theory, seeing the form (physical expression) of an invisible image (idea) (Ferretti 1989:156). Cassirer's explanation of his concept was published with an invitation to respond to it. Erwin Panofsky responded with a publication emphasizing the idea in art history. In this way, Warburg and Cassirer influenced Panofsky in constructing his concept of iconology.

3.5.1 Cassirer's theory of symbols

Cassirer's thoughts provide direction on understanding symbols. According to Biezais (1979:viii), Cassirer's understanding of symbols grew from his idealistic philosophy. According to Rolf (2006:60), Cassirer's theory of the symbol is based on his understanding of epistemology. Cassirer apparently focused his research of symbols on the psychology of speech and ethnological material (compare Cassirer 1965a and 1965b Vol 1 and 2). This, in turn, implies that his theory of culture cannot be seen separately from his epistemology (Rolf 2006:60). Cassirer maintains that the field of studying the forms of symbols continuously develops (1965a:74). This development follows the track from a discernible meaningful reality, towards a mythical understanding of the world, towards religion. Philosophy of religion is, according to Cassirer, the latest development. The purpose of philosophy of religion is to explain the dualism between an empirical world and a non-empirical world (Biezais 1979:viii).

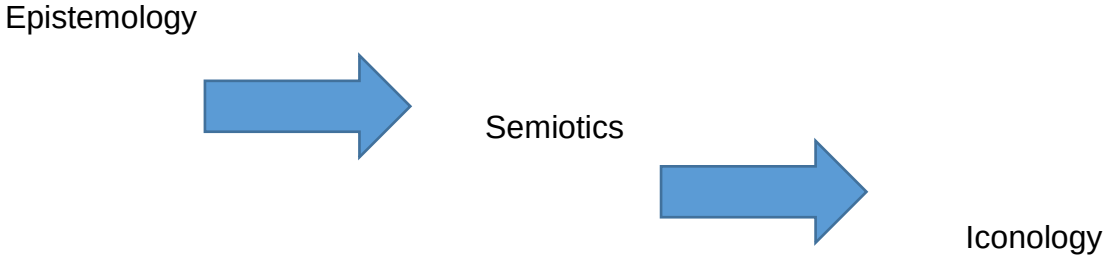
According to Cassirer (1965a:73), understanding symbols does not require understanding the metaphysical world. Symbols seem to jump the fence. Symbols belong neither to the immanent (physical) nor to the transcendental (spiritual) world (Cassirer 1965a:73). The value of symbols lies therein that symbols conquer the dualism stemming from a metaphysical two-world view. Symbols do not operate in one or the other of these two worlds. Symbols are one in the world and the world in one (Biezais 1979:viii). The form (symbol) does not present the issue. The form is the issue (Rolf 2006:70; Cassirer 1965b:51). The value of symbols, whether language, myth, science or art (Levesque 1997:66), does not lie in the fact that an otherworldly existence is reflected in symbols. Symbols much rather possess an own, inner, independent world of meaning (Biezais 1979:viii; Levesque 1997:67). In

this sense, Cassirer differs from Warburg. For Cassirer, symbols carry meaning in them. For Warburg, the meaning is assigned to symbols.

The implication of Cassirer's theory is that the dualism now becomes a triple world: the metaphysical world as the first, the immanent visible world as the second, and then the world of symbols as a separate world on its own. Humans live in an "image-world," as Cassirer puts it (1965a:111). Dillistone (1986:120) calls this a "symbolic universe." The only access to "objective truth" is the activity of the human spirit (Cassirer 1965a:111). We know our world merely through the images we create of it in our minds. Therefore, human existence in the world becomes an existence by way of symbolic presentation. Man is indeed, according to Cassirer, an "animal symbolicum" (1945:26). Our being is defined by our ability to create symbols.

Cassirer's theory stands in opposition to Bellah's and Eliade's assumption that any element within this-worldly reality can become a symbol of and for the other-worldly. The source for symbols is the world we know. We make use of elements familiar to us to represent something unfamiliar to us. Cassirer claims that symbols carry meaning in themselves (Levesque 1997:65).

The argument so far was to try to indicate (even if the journey did take us across several mountain ranges), that iconology is a sub-division of semiotics, which is a sub-division of epistemology. This relation can be visually presented as follows:



3.6 Panofsky and iconology

The German art historian, Panofsky (1892-1968), who mainly worked in the USA, can easily be labelled as the founder of iconography and iconology.[27] Panofsky

[27] Panofsky differentiates between iconography and iconology. Iconology is the interpretation that goes beyond the articulate, while iconography is articulate (compare Hasenmueller

(1972[1939]:3) defines iconology as a sub-discipline of the history of art, which is specifically concerned with meaning and not the form of art. Belting (2011:2) indicates how, in German-speaking countries, the term *Bildwissenschaft* is presented as a new kind of iconology. The unique character does not lie in introducing a new methodology, but rather in the subject matter to be investigated. Texts are no longer the focal point of research. Belting (2011:2) suggests that iconology needs to be redefined in order to indicate that its concerns are reaching beyond art history, the area in which Panofsky originally meant iconology to be applied. By expanding the field of iconology, Belting suggests a new, more appropriate terminology describing what iconology has been doing for a long time. By moving beyond history of art, a more comprehensive scope comes into view, a true anthropology of images (Belting 2011:1).

The relation of iconology to semiotics is very vague. And yet the broader category under which iconology should fall, is indicated as semiotics, since semiotics is the study of symbols, of which iconology specifically addresses religious symbols, Panofsky has, in fact, equated the term iconology with semiotics (compare Hasenmueller 1978:289). Panofsky's idea of iconography and iconology corresponds to the expression "semiotics of art." This is based on the idea that the icon is to be viewed as a variety of symbols (Hasenmueller 1978:291).

A differentiation between iconography and iconology is necessary. Panofsky understood, under iconography, the interpretation of images and indicating the reference of these images to particular stories and allegories (Panofsky 1972[1939]:8,11,14). "Iconography is the analysis of systematic associations of motifs and literary content" (Hasenmueller 1978:291). The connection between the visual and tradition becomes clear here.

As to iconology, Panofsky (1972[1939]:7) indicates this as a third and final phase of analysis of visual images: Iconology is "ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious philosophical persuasion – unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one

1978:291). Iconology is more interested in the symbolic values and accessible through subjective understanding while meaning based on an iconographical understanding is based on the decodable and conscious knowledge, like the conscious knowledge of language, helps decipher meaning from a text.

work." The "principles" are the true object of investigation in iconology (Hasenmueller 1978:291).

For Panofsky (1972[1939]:5-7) the process of determining meaning in images is to be differentiated into three levels.

1. Primary or natural subject matter (pre-iconography): The most basic level of understanding without [as far as that is possible] any addition of cultural knowledge.
2. Secondary or conventional subject matter (iconography): Cultural knowledge is applied.
3. Tertiary or intrinsic meaning (iconology): This refers to the content. Consideration is given to the personal, technical, and cultural information. Art is to be perceived as a product of a historic context. This phase might be subjective in terms of the subject, trying to assign meaning.

The way in which these three levels of meaning function can be summarized as follows (Panofsky 1972[1939]:5-7):

1. The primary or natural meaning can be divided into factual meaning and expressional meaning. At this level, the interest is in the mere appearance of forms. The difference between these two is that factual meaning is gathered through identifying visual data as experienced, whether it is a rock or a stick or a human or an animal that is being looked at. The psychological nuances of these facts lead to expressional meaning (Hasenmueller 1978:290). Here the goal is to determine the expressional qualities present in the image, such as a gesture, a pose, or a trace of emotion. The forms that carry primary meaning are known as motifs (Panofsky 1972[1939]:5). Studying the motifs offers a pre-iconographic description of that which is perceived. This level is limited to identifying motifs (Panofsky 1972[1939]:9). The lines are identified to represent a motif (factual), and the emotion expressed through the motif (expressional) is the focus of phase 1. The experience of the viewer plays a huge role in the process of identifying the factual and expressional. With limited experience, the viewer will identify the motifs incorrectly. Knowledge of motifs associated with cultures is necessary to identify and understand the

motifs. Once the motifs have been identified, the interpretation of the motifs proceeds (Hasenmueller 1978:291).

2. Secondary or conventional meaning through iconography is based on a presupposed knowledge stemming from a shared cultural context (Hasenmueller 1978:290). In order to pass through the first phase (primary meaning) one has to identify the motifs. Now the motifs are combined to form compositions with themes and concepts attached to them (Panofsky 1972[1939]:6). Motifs with secondary meaning are known as images. A combination of images forms stories or allegories. The function of iconography is to identify images, stories, and allegories and indicate the relation between the images and the stories. Proper iconography, therefore, demands that motifs are correctly identified (Panofsky 1972[1939]:7). Hasenmueller (1978:291) indicates that this identification of stories and allegories is, in fact, the attempt to connect motifs and literary content as the latter captures stories and allegories. This second level of meaning differs from the first, since the second is concerned with interpretation, whereas the first is limited to the description (Hasenmueller 1978:290). This interpretation is only possible when presupposed knowledge of the cultural system is available. A motif with its meaning attached must be known to the viewer. In this sense, the motif carries meaning, which is accessible through the process of semiotics. Panofsky differentiated between a signifying gesture and a signified message associated with it (Hasenmueller 1978:290).

3. A final phase ensues: establishing the intrinsic meaning, or iconology. The intrinsic meaning at this level is not as obvious as in prior levels of meaning. This level of meaning contains the essential meaning (Hasenmueller 1978:290). Attaining this meaning concerns identifying the underlying principles associated with a particular nation, a class in society, a time period or a matrix of religious or philosophical beliefs. The stories, allegories and images, and motifs identified earlier, are all expressions of underlying principles, which are in need of being identified (Panofsky 1972[1939]:8). The motifs and images are instigated in order to find the symbolic values underlying them. In this sense, Cassirer's theory of symbols comes into play.

> The images represent underlying principles unique to a context (time, place, culture, religion). The work under view is, in fact, a symptom of something else (Panofsky 1972[1939]:8). The investigation of symbols and their meaning is labelled as iconography at a deeper level (Panofsky 1972[1939]:8). This process in phase 3 should be considered as synthesis rather than analysis. All elements are combined in a comprehensive way to make meaning of the separate elements as they relate to one another. Essential is the correct identification of images (phase 1). In turn, the correct identification of images, stories and allegories (phase 2) is necessary for an iconographic interpretation in the deeper sense, thus iconological interpretation (Panofsky 1972[1939]:8).

In her evaluation of the three levels of meaning, Hasenmueller (1978:291) indicates that phases 1 and 2 are descriptive and part of a process to classify. Phase 3 might be described as subjective, analytical and interpretive, and part of the process of synthesis. Phases 1 and 2 are concerned with a pre- and iconographic process limited to subjects that can be articulated, whereas the object in phase 3 is going beyond the articulate through iconology. Panofsky himself warned that iconology could easily become unscientific; subjective to the extent of “synthetic intuition” (Panofsky 1972[1939]:15). This subjectivity may be stemmed by the knowledge and insight into historical processes, which Panofsky (1972[1939]:16) calls “tradition.” Knowledge of history and cultures helps to base the iconological interpretations on traditions that contain motifs, images, stories, and allegories. These images, motifs, stories, and allegories contain “symbolical values” which need to be interpreted (Panofsky 1972[1939]:14). Iconology is, therefore, dependent on correct iconography (Hasenmueller 1978:298).

Interpreting symbols requires a process of indicating the reference from the symbol to a phenomenon outside of the work under review (Hasenmueller 1978:292). The meaning is to be discovered in the referents without suspecting that each motif has only one referent. Motifs are not signs that have only one meaning. Knowledge of the culturally shared knowledge assists in determining meaning. The symbol is a message-bearing entity (signifier) associated with a message (signified) (Hasenmueller 1978:293). Compare in this regard Cassirer’s influence on Panofsky.

When these three phases are applied to our example of the owl (see the introduction to this chapter again), the meaning attached to an owl will surface. Phase 1 might require that the image we see flying past us, is correctly identified as an owl and not any other nocturnal flying creature such as a bat or a moth. Once the image has been identified correctly, phase 2 will require a connection be made between the motif (image) and possible stories and allegories. Here cultural knowledge plays a determining role. If one is familiar with the tradition of the myth of the goddess Athena (also known as Artemis) as the goddess of wisdom, and that according to the myth, she had a pet owl, one will make the association with the image in relation to the allegory. Once again, the importance of cultural knowledge must be emphasized.

Finally, phase 3 can start: to seek the deeper meaning (iconological meaning) of the image. Here the warning of subjectivity Panofsky identified needs to be heeded, as the meaning is hidden from sight. The owl becomes a symbol of wisdom. Wherein might the association of an owl with wisdom lie? Perhaps the unique character of an owl to fly and feed during night-time is an indication of the intellectual capacity of the owl. The size of the eyes of an owl already gives an indication of the power of sight the owl carries. Any creature who can exist and flourish during night-time, seeing obstacles and prey, must be wise. Any creature seeing in the dark, able to see where no one else can see, has special knowledge. In this example, an effort was made to apply the three phases of Panofsky's iconology to a simple image of a flying owl.

The process of iconology can exclusively be applied to religious images. This is the thesis of Louw, who attempts the application of iconology to determine if human beings can see the divine (transcendental). This he addresses in his aptly named publication *Icons: imaging the unseen*. Louw (2014:13) suggests the use of iconology as a way of seeing what he deems the unsee-able. Being able to see beyond the visible (idol) and see the true intent (icon), or see that which supersedes the senses (Louw 2015:4). Louw refers to this as the effort to see the "idea" within and behind the object. In this regard, Louw attempts at seeing beyond the form and seeing the true content. This is referred to as "iconic view." An iconic view implies a spiritual gaze until one sees the transcendence (Louw 2015:10). A differentiation needs to be made between that which is visible to the senses (the visible) and the

“visual," which implies seeing the images and making the invisible meaningful (Louw 2015:10). When the looking stops at the visible, the visible can easily become an idol (Louw 2015:10). The “visual” focuses on the icon, the invisible transcendence. Mirzoeff (2000:16) refers to this process of making the unpresentable present as the “sublime,” which is intrinsically part of the character of the postmodern era and central to visual culture.

3.6.1 Critical evaluation of Panofsky’s iconology

Although iconology is the method of choice in this investigation, one needs to be aware of its limitations.

According to assessment by Hasenmueller (1978:291), Panofsky does warn that iconology can become like astrology in the sense that it can turn out to be subjective, unscientific, and speculative. Panofsky’s own differentiation between iconology and iconography indicates the very nature of iconology as the search for intrinsic meaning only accessible through “subjective understanding” (compare Hasenmueller 1978:291). This confirms part of the problem with iconology.

Iconology is indeed a method of interpreting and determining meaning in art. However, it is a method designed and constructed from within a Western mind-set and within a particular paradigm. This problem is made clear by the argument presented by Garuba (2003:283) that the worldview of the one creating art and the worldview of the viewer of the art may differ. For Garuba, the animist worldview of Africa sees a “re-enchantment of the world” as opposed to Western “rationalization and secularization.” “The seemingly uncodified could, in fact, be highly culturally coded” (Garuba 2003:283), causing the viewer to be unaware of the meaning of the art viewed. Rosalind Hackett (1994:301) supports this line of argumentation when she concludes that Western scholarly traditions with their quest for “rationality and objectivity ...have not favoured the investigation of the visual arts.”

From its origin, it is clear that iconology is nothing else than a method designed within a Western matrix imposed on non-Western art, in order to ascertain meaning. One set of elements is used in order to determine meaning, resulting in what I would like to call “collective subjectivity.” The cultural environment shared by many serves as the sole matrix in order to ascertain meaning.

This creates the problem that the moment iconology as method is utilized to interpret art, a particular set of criteria is super-imposed over an art piece, and meaning is forced to fit the matrix. Cultural knowledge is assumed, and an awareness of a particular meaning of symbols is taken for granted. Symbolism is interpreted from a single stance, re-enforcing a cultural hegemony. Panofsky's (1972[1939]:3-4) whole discussion in the introduction to his *Studies in Iconology*, on the meaning of two men greeting on the street by lifting hats, illustrates this concern of cultural hegemony. This manner of greeting is explained by way of tracing its Western origin. The analysis may be correct, but the application of the symbolism is intransferable. This is not the manner in which men in all cultures greet. If all men in all cultures wore hats, it might not imply a congenial or courteous action when they do lift their hats upon seeing one another. This may be true for Western culture [in a particular era] but does not apply everywhere, or always.

In a post-colonial environment, one should be aware that methods arising from one paradigm cannot be applied to art, or visual culture more broadly, emanating from a different paradigm. This would be like using the picture on a box in which one puzzle was sold and trying to build a puzzle that came from a different box. What perhaps redeems iconography and iconology to the degree that it can still be rendered useful for application on non-Western, and postcolonial environments, is the self-reflexivity about the importance of cultural, historical meaning-making inherent in Warburg, Cassirer and, eventually, Panofsky's thinking.

We are in need of postcolonial hermeneutics, a way of gleaning meaning appropriate to the subject matter we encounter. West and Cornelius, for example, have endeavored to point out the difficulties of interpreting (religious) art in an African environment.

Material Religion attempts to study expressions of religious awareness in any material (i.e. visible or tangible) form. For quite some time, scholars have been studying artistic expression with religious meaning in South Africa. A decade and a half ago, however, Cornelius (2004:254) still identified a lack of research on visual arts reflecting on interpretations of the Bible in South Africa. Cornelius's own research made a contribution to this field.

West (2016:76) is another scholar who has responded to this *lacuna*. He indicates how artists in Africa tend to use images from the Bible when considering religious art. The Bible is, strangely, simultaneously organic and foreign to Africa. In this regard, "the Bible inhabits and haunts the arts in Africa" (West & Ngwa 2015:22). It is no surprise that the presence of the Bible in an African context is not the presence of the Bible in African churches, but in graphic art in Africa.

The Bible (Christianity) and its meaning were brought to [sub-Saharan] Africa by (Western) missionaries. The presence of the Bible in Africa manifests in Western-inspired expressions. This mold is, however, broken when African artists take to expressing biblical themes and narratives cloaked in African culture. Artists are not only illustrators of the Bible but become interpreters (Cornelius 2004, 254). These expressions have become a critique on colonialism and represent a cultural revolution (West & Ngwa 2015, 24). With an indigenous interpretation of biblical themes, the colonial meaning is contested and representations of an understanding in Africa, is created.

Rose (2001:144) indicates how Panofsky's method of iconography links to semiotics, as the primary level of interpretation for Panofsky lies on the level of denotive signs and the secondary level lies on the level of connotative signs. The limitations of iconology as a method does not render it invalid. Iconology, assisted by the principles guiding the study of material elements in religion (as discussed in a previous chapter), will deliver some guidance on how to create meaning from visual expressions at places of death along the South African roadsides.

We are investigating visual expressions of the absence of the dead. We need to be aware that the religious worldview underlying these expressions is functioning in a postcolonial African environment. This perspective has thus contributed to the formation of these structures, and an attempt should be made to utilize an African lens in determining meaning from these structures.

3.7 Meaning

Investigating the process of making meaning, in general, ought to take into consideration the psychological factors underlying the decision-making process. In this regard, the psychologist Maddi (2012) provides relevant information.

Meaning, according to Maddi (2012:57), derives from the individual decisions people make every day. It is the decisions that people make that give their lives meaning (Maddi 2012:59). Meaning is further influenced by cultural, social, and familial norms (Maddi 2012:57). This emphasizes that meaning is not an arbitrary process, but a process of which the outcome is already partially presupposed by adhering to mutually recognized norms, the "cultural knowledge" Panofsky (1972[1939]:5) referred to. The partiality lies therein that through daily decision making, the individual actually transcends the limitations of norms. The meaning then becomes highly subjective or "more individualistic" (Maddi 2012:57) and not exclusively dependent on cultural or social norms.

The goal of all seeing is to make meaning. Iconology thus becomes a tool in order to assist the one viewing to comprehend the intrinsic meaning of that which is viewed. The problem, however, is that the viewer may stumble across meaning without even knowing it, or even worse, may suspect that meaning has been discovered, although it has not. In order to ensure meaning, some principles are necessary for understanding the nature of meaning. These have been discussed in the introductory chapter (See pages 15-16).

Is there a world existing out there separate from the reality we experience and perceive now? Is meaning perhaps clearer when we see the world behind this world? Dorfling (2017:3) indicates the implication of such thinking when she refers to the ancient theories on the perception of reality as represented by Plato and Aristotle. When one subscribes to such dualistic reality as illustrated in the table below with words belonging to each domain, how then does one perceive the transfer of meaning between the two worlds?

Sacred	Profane
Holy	Secular
Transcendent	Immanent
Spiritual	Material
Divine	Mundane

The separation between these two domains is bridged by what Plato in the *Symposium* (2006) referred to as the *metaxu*, discussed earlier in this study. Material Religion can be perceived as fulfilling that purpose of conveying meaning from one domain to the other. Meaning is, therefore, not in the object but behind the object. Objects do not have meaning, but rather: meanings have objects. Objects become carriers of meaning. For each and every viewer, meaning may be different. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind that meaning is determined by the cultural context of the viewer.

3.8 Conclusion

As to visual studies, it is obvious that visual culture has an irreversible presence in postmodern society. It is impossible to ignore or deny the impact of the visual on our everyday experiences, including religious activity in the ordinary routine of daily life. As Mirzoeff (2000:31) summarizes: “We are all engaged in the business of looking.” What do we see when we are looking? This research is focused on looking at religious expressions and how to make meaning of them. Iconology is suggested as the process by which meaning can be gleaned from material elements in religion. Iconology and iconography differ from each other in as far as iconography and pre-iconography, as two phases preceding iconology are, according to Panofsky (1972[1939]:5-7), only concerned with the description and analyzing based on cultural knowledge. Iconology is concerned with intrinsic meaning to be discovered at a deeper level.

Although the criticism against iconology may be valid, it does not discredit iconology as the method of discerning meaning. As a multi-cultural environment creates layers of cultures on one another, the influence cultures have, can create an awareness of symbolic meaning immanent within one culture, but shared by many.

I will now move on to test and apply the theories of Panofsky to an example of Material Religion – visual expressions of the absence of the dead in the form of structures constructed along the roads of South Africa.

4. CHAPTER 4: THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT DEATH WHEN YOU ARE DYING

4.1 Introduction

There is nothing as certain as death and taxes. This extract from the movie *Meet Joe Black* (1998) gives expression to the human awareness of the certainty of death.[28] Where, when, and how death will come, remains speculative. The only certainty is the fact that death will come for all.

We have been fascinated and mystified by the existence of an afterlife ever since the first humans had buried their dead alongside food, clothes, and weapons. Anthropologists have been studying the meaning of these findings from excavation sites long before Material Religion as a method of understanding religion started taking notice thereof. This fashion of burial is evidence of a suspicion or belief of the existence of afterlife (cf. Solomon *et al.* 2015:68), as well as the need to mark the absence of the dead from the visible world. The fascination with how death is viewed, is considered by Davies (2005:57) as an important perspective on human self-understanding. Thoughts on death are inseparable from self-reflection. Reflecting on death is evidence of an awareness of human fragility and temporality. Awareness of death also leads to reflection on the dual nature of being human – possessing a physical body and self-consciousness (Becker 1973:42, 44).

Death is nothing new to human existence. The ways in which the absence of the deceased from this world are marked, changed over time and place. Every era has ideas and convictions determining the thoughts of humans on their relation to the dead. Besides the awareness of where in time we exist, every community has its own way of giving evidence of an awareness of the dead. Expressions of the absence of the dead are therefore, spatially, temporally and culturally determined.

A lot has been written from different disciplines in dealing with death. Over centuries, medical practitioners, anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers, ethicists, artists, and theologians have presented perspectives on death. The purpose of this chapter

[28] The expression 'death and taxes' is also ascribed to originate from the sayings of Miguel De Cervantes (1583-1641), the Spanish author of the work *Don Quixote.* Cervantes was, among other things, also a tax collector for part of his life.

is not to repeat what has been said about the dead. The aim is to reflect on the religious thoughts determining expressions of awareness of the absence of the dead in the early twenty-first century. This will entail investigating forms of expressions in a South African context, determining patterns of repetition of particular forms, and also reflecting on the reasons why these particular forms are currently immanent. In anticipation of the results, the reasons behind the choices of forms of expressions may reflect nuanced changes in religious convictions.

This chapter consists of two parts. Firstly, I focus on definitions of death and philosophical frameworks determining fearful thought of the dead. Dealing with death is explained by way of describing the Terror Management Theory (TMT). The second half of the chapter consists of a reflection on the rituals marking the departure of the living. This will be presented in order to form a hinge to the next chapter, which will focus on examples of the visual expressions of the absence of the dead along roadsides in a South African context.

4.2 Definitions of death

Although several attempts at defining death have been made over the centuries, there still seems to exist disagreement as to what exactly a definition of death is. Prior to medical advances, death was considered the ceasing of one of the three vital bodily systems (respiration, circulation, and brain function) (Bernat 2018:399). This medical-clinical definition of death has been challenged by new medical and technological advances, enabling the postponement of death, resulting in the process of re-defining death.

Luper (2018:534) provides two possible definitions as to what may be considered as death: the first definition sees “death as the cessation of the processes by which a living thing sustains its existence.” A second definition understands death as occurring when the physiological system of a living thing irreversibly ceases to constitute an integrated whole. Bernat (2018:403) provides several more possible definitions. Death can be the irreversible cessation of all cellular functions. A definition accounting for modern technological developments, states that death is the loss of innate, spontaneous and medically provided respiration and circulation. A more recent attempt at defining death sees death as the loss of the interrelatedness of the organism’s parts, the loss of wholeness and coherent unity

of the organism (Bernat 2018:403). Although definitions abound, there is still no consensus as to what human death is (Bernat 2018:408). This can be ascribed to the multitude of perspectives from which death is viewed and defined.

Death does not occur merely when biological processes stop functioning. As will be presented later on in this chapter, life does not only constitute existence in the material world. Death needs to account for the existence in a spiritual realm as well. Bernat (2018:401) alludes to the fact that death is also intrinsically a social phenomenon. This distinction causes us to differentiate between death and dying, where the first (i.e. death) alludes to biological and the second (i.e. dying) to associated social processes. This research does not intend to provide a complete analysis of what constitutes death, but much rather focuses on the social aspect of death – the processes of mourning and burial practices and the underlying reasons for the forms of expressions.

From an art historian's perspective, Panofsky (1992:10) defines death as the understanding that a person as a whole continues to exist on some unknown plane with the possibility of returning. The body indeed decays, but the power of the body remains and is able to enter the world of the living (Panofsky 1992:11). Ancient cultures interpreted the persistent element as the "person minus the body" (Panofsky 1992:11). This invisible element was portrayed in art in a symbolic form.

For the sake of this research, death is defined as the end of physical (and biological) existence. The conventional cultural understanding that existence continues in a spiritual form, is accepted. There are different ways in which cultures perceive of an existence beyond death in the greater "scheme of things." This study does not judge the validity or correctness of the different convictions, but takes it as granted that these convictions exist and determine human responses to the absence of the dead. One way in which these responses are recorded, is through the construction of edifices along roadsides where death has occurred. These visual expressions are the focus of this investigation.

The contention this research works with is that death can only be defined once life has been defined. Alternatively, perhaps a more nuanced position would be to state

that, what we are, determines when we die. Once we can define life, we will be able to indicate when life ceases to exist.

Bernat (2018:403) refers to a religious perspective on dying when he indicates that some religious writings (he does not specify any) indicate that death occurs when the soul departs from the body. This immediately implies a dual understanding of human existence.

4.2.1 Monism and dualism

The importance of providing some overview of what to consider as death, is highlighted by a statement made by Davies (2005:90) regarding the relation between religion and an understanding of death. For Davies, it is possible that religious doctrine may be based on an understanding of how death can be conquered. Although this is a very general claim, which Davies agrees might be "not entirely likely," the relation between death and religion might be important. My suggestion will be that the possibility of a reversed relationship ought to be investigated: an understanding of death is based on religious grounds. What constitutes religion may even be interpreted as a worldview or an understanding of reality. The human existence in the world may be viewed either as monistic or dualistic.

The Greek philosopher Parmenides (first half of the fifth century BCE) presented a monistic understanding of nature by propagating a "unity of existence" between human beings and nature. The teachings of Parmenides are found in a single available document written by him; a poem called *On Nature*, of which we only possess 160 lines. For Parmenides, all existence originates from the same matter. He considered the multitude of things to be encountered through the human senses to be an illusion (in Russell 2010:55). The only true being is 'The One', which is infinite and indivisible. This 'One' is not God. Parmenides thought of it as material and extended. It cannot be divided, since it is everywhere (in Russell 2010:56). All matter is one, eternal and timeless. Human existence is intrinsically a part of nature, as humans and nature share the same essence.

The Greek philosopher Plato had the greatest respect for Parmenides and apparently agreed with him, but later, in his dialogical treatise, *Parmenides* criticized

and opposed monism. Plato pointed out that, although Parmenides maintained the unity of existence, he still ended up with a dualism, namely the idea of unity and the idea of existence. For Plato, there can be many ideas, while for Parmenides, there can only be 'One' (in Russell 2010:129).

In his treatise entitled *Timaeus*, Plato set out a description of creation. God created everything, calling into order all that exists. Intelligence was put in the soul, and the soul placed in the human body (in Russell 2010:143). The body was only created after the soul. The creator made the world as a whole – as a living organism – possessing a soul and intelligence. The creator made humans, animals, as well as gods. Humans are in nature and are created matter. Humans are, however, of dual nature: part matter and part spirit. This implies an (explicit or implicit) connection to a spiritual dimension. Plato pointed to this dual human existence by indicating that the body is matter and belongs to this earth. The soul is spirit and belongs to a different dimension (in Russell 2010:134).

Socrates explored this idea further and suggested (compare in *Phaedo*) that the body is of lesser value. The soul is of superior value and worth engaging with (in Russell 2010:134). This anti-material position created an aversion for anything encountered through the senses. All material matter is there to sustain the human body. There is no intrinsic or permanent value in matter. This caused a utilitarian outlook on nature, since it contributed to the division of two separate spheres of existence – spiritual and material – with the spiritual being of more importance. Matter also became viewed as temporary and inferior in value. The spirit or soul is eternal and of more importance.

This has become the understanding typical of Western philosophy, which dominated the scene of art history. This also influenced Panofsky in his contemplation of how to come to the meaning of images. The inferior consideration of material matter is, however, not the only view of reality.

Understanding death is based on a dual understanding of human existence in terms of material and spiritual. Death occurs in the physical, biological domain, whereupon life (or a form of existence) continues according to religious convictions or particular worldviews, after earthly death, in some spiritual domain. Death is not presented as

the final end. In some spiritual domain, a remnant or an evolved form of human identity continues to exist. Some religions (such as Eastern Religions – Hinduism and Buddhism) present the continuation of the existence of the soul when it returns to be reincarnated in a new physical body. The process of reincarnation is then eternal. Some religions, such as the Monotheistic religions – Christianity, Islam, and Judaism – foresee the permanent residing place of the dead in a beneficial realm (heaven or paradise) free from any hardships. Existence there is eternal. This residing in a peaceful eternal spiritual realm is presented as a reward or compensation for a life lived according to the rules and will of the deity. Once dead, however, the possibility of earning access to such a realm is impossible. The soul is then condemned to an unpleasant and dreadful existence for eternity. Many Primal Religions (including but not restricted to African Religions) envisage a spiritual existence of the deceased in a spiritual realm without any particular conditions to be met in order to be granted access to such a realm. The souls of the dead gather with the deceased before them in a community that can best be described as the "living dead" (Nürnberger 2007).

Even after departing from this world, some social construction of the dead continues to exist. The souls of the dead accumulate in some spiritual realm and may or may not interact with the living.

'Life' can continue without a body. This leads to concepts such as ghosts, spirits and angels, which are forms of the presence of the dead in the visible world. Compare in this regard Davies (2018:343) on ghosts, Arnold, and Walter (2018:352) on angels. Both ghosts and angels are considered as "liminal beings," as beings between worlds. Ghosts are beings that are part of the spiritual domain and able to traverse to the world of the living. Ghosts are normally viewed pejoratively as they are associated with the dark side of death, causing harm to the living. Angels, on the other hand, also belonging to the spiritual domain, are considered friendly beings acting in the benefit of the living. These liminal beings, often depicted in art, illustrate the awareness of a spiritual domain where spiritual beings, such as the spirits of the deceased, may reside. Communication with spiritual beings may or may not be perceived to be possible.

Humans, somehow, experience some kind of connection with the dead. The spiritual element within human existence reaches out to the spirits now residing in the spiritual realm. Van Gennep (1960:189) brings these rituals under words when he distinguishes between a perceived world preceding life, the complexity of the world of the living and the world following death. This again brings us to the importance of material elements in religion as conveyed through Plato's concept of the *metaxu* – a bridge, or a mediator, between the spiritual and the mundane. Visual expressions reminding of the dead connect the two worlds: the visible world of the living with the invisible world of the dead. The absence of the dead in the visible reality is visually presented through various forms, which can be denoted as the *metaxu* – carriers of meaning over the divide between the world of the living and the dead.

This research wants to investigate how people in a South African context express and perceive the absence of humans from the earthly existence after death and how the absence is visually presented as a reminder and as visual communication with and about the deceased.

How people perceive death depends on how people perceive what humans are (Luper 2018:541). Are we animals, consisting of physiological processes only; are we in essence minds within biological operating mechanisms; or are we persons – entities with the capacity for self-awareness – as John Locke had suggested (see Luper 2018:541)? Each of these three possibilities consists of different conditions qualifying such existence and the end of it.

Bernat presents a sober view by indicating that it is, in fact, impossible to define death. A much more beneficial endeavor would be to investigate how the word death is utilized in different contexts by different cultures (Bernat 2018:400).

4.3 Fear of death

The dual human nature, as Becker formulates (1973:69) it, to be "self-consciousness and physical body," reminds humans of their limitations; the duality of physicality and spirituality. To be constantly reminded of a slowly decaying body, creates a constant awareness of imminent death. The inner self represents the possibility of freedom of thought, human imagination, and the "infinite reach of symbolism" (Becker 1973:42). On the other hand, the human body represents

"determinism and boundness" (Becker 1973:42). This awareness and constant reminder of death creates terror and fear of death: "…the final terror of self-consciousness is the knowledge of one's own death…" (Becker 1973:70). This fear of death, Becker (1973:20) argues, is natural and innate in the human condition.

The way in which humans react to this fear of death, is by "repression" (Becker 1973:20). Humans do not want to be reminded of death and therefore, create mechanisms of coping with the terror of death. One effort might be to deny death – repress the thoughts of death. This is the main position humans take on, according to Becker in his aptly named book *The Denial of Death* (1973). In this losing battle against death, humans may end up at making peace with death, by reminding themselves and others of the inevitability of death and simultaneously reminding themselves and others of the need to be prepared for death.

Davies (2005:137) points out that fear is a general human emotion. For the German philosopher, Feuerbach, (1908:32) fear becomes the most basic expression of a feeling of dependence (*Abhängigkeitsgefühl*), which he identifies, lies at the root of all religion. Fear led to the creation of the world of the gods. Human beings are prone to fear. The biggest fear humans have, according to Feuerbach (1908:41), is the fear of dying. Death is the awareness of human limitations. The feeling of dependence and awareness of limitation leads human beings to the awareness of death. Humans can flee from many dangers, from enemies, from animals, from heat and rain, but not from death.

Awareness of death, according to Feuerbach (1908:41), leads to the creation of religion. He goes so far as to claim that without death there would not have been gods: 'Nur der Grab des Menschen … is die Geburtsstätte der Götter' (the human grave is the birthplace of the gods) (Feuerbach 1908:41). As proof of this close relationship between religion and death, Feuerbach (1908:41) indicates how, in ancient times, the tombs of the dead were also the temples for the gods and how treating, even admonishing, the dead were essentially part of religion. Reverence for the places of burial among African communities is important to this day. Reflecting on the dead creates awareness of the death of oneself. There seems to be an inextricable relation between religion and the notion of death – to such an extent that Feuerbach believes that, without death, religion would not exist.

The reason(s) for fear may be plenty. Fear arises from the self-conscious human nature: aware of our own limitations and aware of the life-threatening conditions we live in. Other people, animals, plants and even nature can kill us (Davies 2005:137), confirming fear of the possibility of the end to life.

From a psychological point of view, Becker (1973:ix) indicates how fear is the greatest of challenges to humankind. One of the principles that move us, is “the human terror of death," as Becker prefers to refer to it. In order to manage with this innate fear of death, humans created the concept of heroism (Becker 1973:11).

There is an unresolved debate as to the origin of the fear of death. On the one hand, there are those who perceive the fear of death to be culturally determined and sparked from outside of the human mind (Becker 1973:13). According to those who hold this position, fear of death is not a natural human reaction, and humans are not born with this fear. Fear of death is something we learn through culturally induced experiences and observations. On the other hand, there is the possibility that fear of death is natural and inherently part of human nature (Becker 1973:15). This fear, whether consciously or unconsciously, becomes the driving force behind all human actions, decisions, and behavior. As to which of the two positions is correct, Becker (1973:15) concludes by indicating it might just be impossible to indicate whether fear of death is a natural human inclination or not. What remains uncontested is the universality of fear of death and the influence the fear of death has on the human condition and functioning (Becker 1973:16).

The reasons to fear death are many (Davies 2005:131), ranging from illogical (i.e. fear of being tormented by the dead and fear of the dark) to rational fears (i.e. fear of being buried alive) to religiously inspired fears (i.e. fear of hellish fire and punishment in the afterlife). The basic reason for fear of death may be the fear of uncertainty of what lies beyond this earthly existence. Self-preservation and survival are driven by the innate fear response (Becker 1973:17). The human awareness of their own limitations and powerlessness against reality causes fear to be a coping mechanism with the uncertainty of existence. Fear has over time become part of human nature; programmed into the human fiber of existence.

As fear has to do with the risk of survival, Davies (2005:137) indicates that it is only natural that fear and death form partners. Schweitzer (1875-1965), presented a unique opinion on fear of death. Schweitzer (in Meyer and Bergel 2002:128) explains how fear of death should bring excitement about life here and now. Death implies freedom from dependence on material things. The reality of death causes excitement that earthly life, with all its worries and hardships, is not eternal. Instead of fearing death, one can rather celebrate every day as a gift, knowing that the end will eventually come. This opinion of Schweitzer is not an attempt at ignoring death, but rather accepting life as a gift. “The issue is not whether we do or do not fear death. The real issue is that of reverence for life” (Meyer and Bergel 2002:128).

Although death is perceived to be a natural process, it is not an event going by unnoticed. Humans were aware of the limitation death puts on human existence since the “remotest of times” (Panofsky 1992:9). This extinction of life meant the end of existence and caused trepidation. Dreams, which are a form of visualization, however, seem to have provided assurance that the dead will continue to exist in some distant form and place (Panofsky 1992:9). James Frazer expressed the importance of dreams playing a crucial role in the creation of ideas of the dead (compare Davies 2018:543). Death has been feared by humans for centuries. Frazer (1913:143, 152; 1933:36) indicates that the fear of death is an underlying human action.

This fear of death must be distinguished on two levels: fear of death as fear of dying and the fear of the deceased. In the latter case, fear of the dead must be nuanced as reverence and respect instead of anguish at the sight of the dead. Death is shrouded in mystery and magic and the deceased function within this domain. Everything associated with the dead is then treated as mysterious and potentially dangerous and therefore, a taboo. This, however, reflects only one extreme of understanding the status of the dead.

Panofsky (1992:12) indicates that it is precisely the fear of the dead and the fear of the gods that contributed to the visual expressions of the absence of the dead, what he refers to as “funerary art," that necessitates “looking once in a while at the development of funerary art in general." Changing ideas about death manifests in changing expressions of the absence of the dead. Roadside memorials under

scrutiny here indicate how “funerary art” no longer manifests in churches, catacombs and graveyards, but now enters the public realm alongside public roads. One such example of changing ideas about death as manifested in the visual expression of the absence of the dead is mentioned by Panofsky (1992:20) as the change in view of commemoration instead of provision for the dead. This change, according to Panofsky (1992:20), happened around the sixth-century BCE when the life the deceased lived was being depicted. No longer were images depicting the dead interpreted as providing for the needs of the dead as adding food, clothes, and weapons at the burial site, but rather commemorating the dead by way of erecting a marker. This plays an important role in the interpretation of memorials constructed at roadside sites in current South African contexts. The dead are commemorated by way of producing signs of their absence. It is no longer a case of keeping the dead, powerless or happy as Panofsky (1992:10) interprets ancient efforts of treating the dead.

Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2000:200) explain from a psychological point of view how the awareness of death can create anxiety and dread. The fear of death has the potential to create terror. This terror, according to Solomon *et al.* (2000:201), is managed through creating cultural worldviews expressed in visual forms and belief systems in order to minimize the anxiety caused by the fear of death.

Becker (19973:199) also indicates how the neurosis of death is in need of a mechanism to allay the fear. Religion takes on the function of the ‘cure’ to neurosis. Religion creates a worldview filled with myth-ritual constructions as a way for humans to make sense of and deal with the terror of death. “The myth-ritual complex is a social form for the channeling of obsessions” (Becker 1973:199).

By employing rituals, one acts and not only reflects. Too much reflection can cause inaction. Therefore, Becker suggests we start acting and only then reflect (Becker 1973:199). In this way, rituals can contribute to the making sense of the event of death. Constructing visual signs marking the place of death along roadsides becomes a ritual for making sense of the death that occurred there, but simultaneously also for making sense of one’s own incumbent death.

Markers of death are not sanctuaries where the dead are venerated. I believe the markers of death form part of the ritualized dealing with death, assisting people to cope with the fear and terror of death. Markers of death may also function as attempts to increase the esteem in which the deceased was held in order to have the deceased remembered and viewed in a positive light by others. High self-esteem protects against fear of death (Solomon *et al.* 2015:52).

In an African environment, death does not represent the end of human existence, but only a change in status (Masango 2006:935). Therefore, there does exist a continuity between the living and the dead. This continuity is based on a worldview where interaction is possible between the living and the dead. When the elderly die, they become living ancestors acting as spiritual advisors to the young (Masango 2006:936). Olupona (2000:11) emphasizes that becoming an ancestor upon death is not an automatic process. Only 'good' elders become good ancestors. One's whole life is therefore, perceived to be a preparation for ancestor-hood.

The relation between the living and the dead causes the living to have specific responsibilities towards the dead. Through the performance of certain rituals, the living can lead the deceased to become an ancestor (Masango 2006:937). By neglecting the dead, the living can attract the vengeance of the dead onto them. The living are, therefore, constantly living in fear of the potential harm the ancestors can bring on them. By performing rituals of remembrance, the ancestors are calmed and implored to look down kindly on their descendants[29]. People live their lives constantly under the watchful gaze from those in a spiritual realm. There exists a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead in Africa. By venerating the dead, the living can expect kind gestures from the ancestors.[30]

This section is concerned with the ways in which humanity deals with the fear of death, in particular, in a South African context. There is not enough scope to investigate a history of the ways in which the dead were dealt with in the past. In this regard, Davies (2005:48-67) provides a very brief overview. This investigation is concerned with the visible traces established by those left behind in order to

[29] Compare *The Economist,* 23 February 2019.
[30] Ancestor veneration is not unique to Africa. Communities in China and Korea also consider the ancestors as important.

remind, celebrate, and take leave in a dignified manner of those departed, at roadside memorials in South Africa. These signs created as markers of death are partly caused by a consistent fear of death.

Now that an awareness of the fear of death has been established, we can turn to ways in which the terrors of death are dealt with.

4.4 Terror Management Theory

In Chapter 1, an extensive discussion on existing literature on death was presented. Here a short reminder of the most influential literature will suffice.

As mentioned earlier, studies on death have been conducted from within different disciplines. Human fascination with death drove psychologists, anthropologists, theologians, and philosophers alike to reflect on the impact of death on individuals and communities, and on ways in which the dead are treated. The work by Becker (1973) became a seminal work on this matter. From a psychological perspective, Becker argues that, through his research, he has determined that all human actions can be explained and can be related back to humans dealing with the terror of death. Becker claims that death is the single most important aspect governing all human action and consideration.

Although the theory by Becker is plausible, such reductionism is questionable. Death undeniably plays a role in determining human actions and decisions, but it is doubtful whether all human actions and decisions can be fitted into one mould of awareness and fear of death. There may be many more different elements determining decisions and actions in the world, like the fear of pain, or rejection, amongst others. Nevertheless, as death forms an integral part of this study, I use the perspective presented by Becker, aware of its limitations, in order to come to some understanding of roadside memorials.

Reflecting on Becker's research, Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski (2015) continue to indicate how death becomes the primary concern for all human existence. Death becomes "the worm at the core" of human existence. Once aware of mortality, the thought and reminder of incumbent death gnaws like a worm at the human core of self-consciousness (Solomon *et al.* 2015:155).

The thought of death creates terror. How do people deal with this reality and terror? Death is a constant reminder of human fragility and temporality. Solomon *et al.* (2015:9) present a solution in dealing with the terror of death through what is known as Terror Management Theory (TMT). According to their theory, there are two resources providing support in dealing with the terror of death: cultural worldviews as manifested in visual elements, and self-esteem.

4.4.1 Cultural worldviews

Everybody dies – that is factual. In order to deal with the terror of death, humans employ rituals and myths that become part of a cultural construct in the order of the "scheme of things." Solomon *et al.* (2015:28) describe how the awareness of death develops among children. Once children come to the realization that their parents, grandparents and themselves are finite beings, fragile and mortal, they shift from their parents to their culture as a source of "psychological equanimity." "Deities and social authorities and institutions now appear to be more stable and enduring than our all-too-mortal, and therefore, all-too-vulnerable parents, grandparents and pets" (Solomon *et al.* 2015:28). It is through relying on culture that fear of death is managed. The cultural "scheme of things" provides support to banish the dread of death (Solomon *et al.* 2015:33).

Part of the strategy of humans to allay fear, based on the TMT (cf. Solomon *et al.* 2015:127), was to "create a supernatural world, one in which death was not inevitable or irrevocable" (Solomon *et al.* 2015:67). "Rituals, art, myth and religion – features of every known culture – together made it possible for people to construct, maintain and concretize their supernatural conceptions of reality" (Solomon *et al.* 2015:69).

The cultural "scheme of things"[31] consists of a cultural view of reality supported by a system of beliefs, values, and ideals, which are reinforced with signs and symbols present in society (Solomon *et al.* 2015:36). These accumulated beliefs include an understanding of the spiritual world from where and to where the souls of the deceased may travel. This creates a perception of what happens upon dying and where the dead go. The cultural "scheme of things" not only serves as an

[31] This may also be referred to as a paradigms; the matrix against which human thought and actions are measured.

explanation, but also as a source for comfort and peace. While relying on a cultural worldview, people may find comfort in the face of death. Death does not have the final say. A culturally constructed worldview may contain an understanding of existence after death. This makes the terror of death bearable.

Worldviews may change the moment they no longer serve as a sufficient explanation of reality and source of comfort.[32] A process of searching for new ways of making sense of reality is then engaged in. This process is described by Solomon *et al.* (2015:53): "Some compensate for the loss of meaning and self-esteem by adopting an entirely new worldview." In this way, creating structures along the roadsides of South Africa, marking the places of death, is a way of producing an alternative to the traditional custom of having the dead buried in a graveyard. A new worldview, understanding of death, is introduced. The only sign indicating the absence of the dead used to be a gravestone in the graveyard, next to and among all the others who have departed from this world. By introducing a new way of indicating the departure of the dead, in this case with structures along roadsides, a new understanding of death may be introduced.

4.4.1.1 A new way of seeing death

Davies (2005) indicates how changes in customs surrounding death have been taking place over the past decades. Death is no longer restricted to the domain of the religiously or institutionally demarcated spaces declared sacred. Death is made visible everywhere, especially among the living. Where the dead were relegated to the graveyards on the fringes of society, the dead are now enabled to enter and reside in homes (compare the way in which people keep the ashes of deceased loved ones in flasks at home), occupy spaces along roads and even become part of nature. The awareness of death even accesses social media (compare the commemorative websites, Facebook pages and Instagram commemorations).[33]

By making the dead more accessible and visible, some stigmas surrounding death are being removed:

- The dead are not to be feared but remembered.

[32] Compare how Thomas Kuhn's scientific model is employed in the social sciences to describe the process of paradigm shifting and changing.
[33] See a discussion of Dobler (2010) in Chapter 5 for more examples of death in cyberspace.

- Death is nothing to be ashamed of but is part of natural existence.
- Religious institutions do not have a monopoly on dealing with death.
- Death is common and not sacred.
- The dead need not be relegated to the fringes of society.

In this way, the cultural worldviews, especially relating to understanding the visualization of death, have changed and are still changing. By devising new ways of populating cultural worldviews, people still create a “scheme of things” that can ally fear and the terror of death.

4.4.2 Self-esteem

Solomon *et al.* describe the role of self-esteem as counter-measure to the experience of death. Self-esteem is necessary in order for people to feel that they are good, worthy and valued (Solomon *et al.* 2015:21, 39). The source of self-esteem is identified by Solomon *et al.* (2015:39) as the values encapsulated in the cultural worldviews of each individual. In this way, the feeling of personal significance – self-esteem – assists people in managing the fear of death. “We combat mortality by striving for significance” (Solomon *et al*. 2015:46). Self-esteem becomes the vehicle in the strategy of combatting the terror of death. “Terror is the natural and generally adaptive response to the imminent threat of death.” The cultural worldviews consisting of “beliefs," “explanation of the nature of reality," a “blueprint for valued conduct” and “hope of symbolic immortality” provide humans with a sense of meaning (Solomon *et al.* 2015:8). Meaning bolsters self-esteem, which feeds into fighting the terror of death.

This all-pervading fear of death can only be allayed by bolstering self-esteem, “because self-esteem protects people from their deepest fears” – in this case, identified as death (Solomon *et al.* 2015:21, 52).

Low self-esteem is, according to Becker (1973:188) induced by a disillusioning of the cultural worldview. The disillusion can take place on the levels of economic uncertainty, church scandals, and/or political polarization (Solomon *et al.* 2015:48). A disappointment in existing structures providing meaning to life leads to uncertainty. As Solomon *et al.* (2015:48) describe it: “When people lose confidence in their core beliefs, they become literally ‘dis-illusioned’ because they lack a

functional blueprint of reality." This disillusionment contributes to a decrease in self-esteem, causing an increase in the amount of terror death infuses.

By establishing markers to increase self-esteem (and this may take on different forms as signs of wealth, health and beauty), people try and restore self-esteem, "because self-esteem protects people from their deepest fears" (Solomon *et al.* 2015:52) and "self-esteem is a powerful vaccine against fear … self-esteem is our symbolic protection against death" (Solomon *et al.* 2015:58).

Elaborate death rituals play a role in this regard. The more elaborate the ritual, the more self-esteem is conveyed onto the deceased. The way in which family and friends reflect on and respond to the death of the loved one contributes to the self-esteem associated with the deceased. If little or no attention is paid to the dead, the impression is created that it was not a person of value. The more attention is paid to the deceased, the more valuable the life of the deceased appears. The worth and value of the person increases as more attention is paid to the dead.

In this regard, the way in which the dead are mourned in African culture becomes an important indicator of the value of the deceased. In many African communities in South Africa, it is expected that the news of the death of someone is greeted with wailing and groaning. These signs of grief are expected to last until the funeral and can even last up to a year after the funeral. The funeral as event is further marked by a substantial meal for all guests. If the dead are not properly grieved[34], it might be interpreted that the news of the death was, in fact, welcomed and that the deceased was not a person of value to the family or community and that his/her death is not considered a loss. In some cultures in South Africa, the person(s) at a funeral not grieving loudly or 'enough' might be suspected of having a part in the cause of the death of the deceased.

Signs of veneration of the dead reflect the high regard in which the deceased was held during his/her life. The more elaborate the veneration, the higher the regard for the deceased. By giving no recognition to the identity of the deceased, the interpretation may be that it was a person of no value and worth in life. This is evident from the gravestone in Pilgrim's Rest, South Africa, merely marking the site of the

[34] *The Economist*, 23 February 2019.

burial of a ‘Robber’ (see Figure 1): an unidentified person considered of no value to society and not held in high regard, even pejoratively only referred to as a ‘robber’.

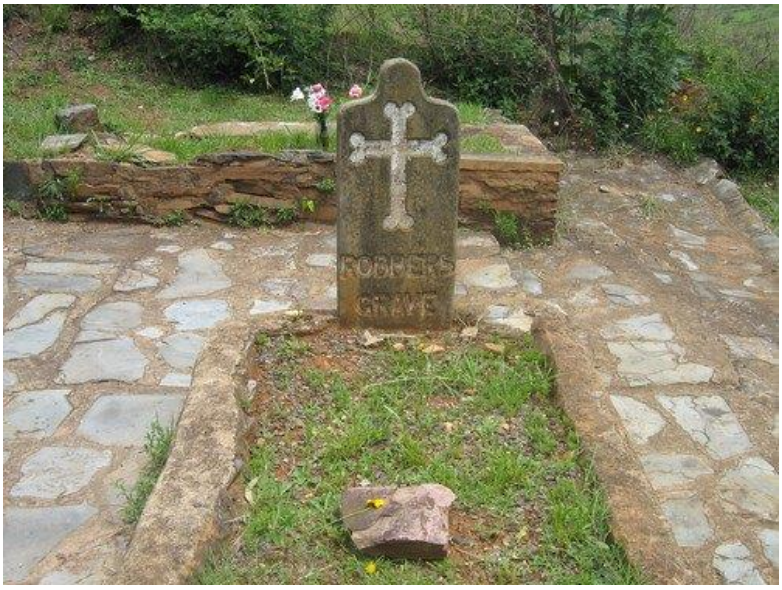


Figure 1: Robbers grave, Pilgrim’s rest
https://www.jacarandafm.com/shows/the-complimentary-breakfast-with-rian-van-heerden/rian-and-the-team-visited-pilgrims-rests-famous-robbers-grave/

As opposed to this, the elaborate death memorial of the Vice-Admiral Baron Willem Joseph van Gendt (died in 1672), in the church of Utrecht in The Netherlands (see Figure 2), serves as an example of a person held in high regard. The elaborate depictions of achievements and identifying the bloodline through hereditary insignia on the memorial (see Figure 3), indicates that it was a person of value who lies buried here. The mere place of burial is an indication of the high regard in which the person was held: inside the church, close to the altar where the most sacred of rituals in the church are to be performed in the presence of God.

Figure 2: Frontal view of the memorial of Vice-Admiral Baron Willem Joseph van Gendt
(photographer: J Beyers)

Figure 3: Close-up view of the memorial of Vice-Admiral Baron Willem Joseph van Gendt
(photographer: J Beyers)

The way in which the dead are treated, contributes to the self-esteem of the deceased. The esteem exhibited by the people burying the deceased, contribute to the value of the deceased. The result will be that the deceased will be remembered longer, and held in high regard by others owing to the self-esteem conveyed.

Solomon *et al.* describe the TMT by indicating the debilitating effect death has on human behavior. To combat this terror, humans rely on cultural worldviews and self-esteem. By building memorials for the dead, a visible sign of the value, the high esteem in which the deceased was held, becomes a constant reminder to society of the loss of the individual. These visible signs (memorials) consisting of a variety of elements (i.e. flowers, crosses, toys, motorcycle helmets) are studied in order to understand the reason behind the making of the memorial. Death has meaning (Doss 2002:70). Elements used in the memorial, such as inscriptions of Bible texts, and the visibility of symbols (i.e. cross, phoenix) derive from cultural worldviews and convey some religious meaning. Studying the visual elements used in the memorials and the religious significance of the material objects contribute to an understanding of the memorials.

4.5 What happens to the dead?

Over centuries, different communities explained the occurrence of death differently. Cultural worldviews are constructed differently and may even have overlapped. These attempts at making sense of death continue to be culturally and religiously determined, populating the "scheme of things" with myths, rituals, and symbols (Solomon *et al.* 2015:69), trying to explain reality. The main reason for dealing with the dead was (and remains) to establish some concept of immortality, whether literally or symbolically (Solomon *et al.* 2015:84). Some examples of what humans perceive[d] 'happen' to the dead, can be described as follows[35]:

4.5.1 The dead depart (monotheistic religions)

The body decays, and the soul of the dead departs from this worldly existence and mysteriously enters an invisible reality. There the souls reside until some end time will occur, and the souls of the dead will be judged to determine their eternal destiny

[35] Solomon *et al* (2015:88-89) provide only a very condensed version of these possibilities, which are discussed more elaborately here.

where either good or bad fortune will befall them, depending on how they measure up to ethical criteria applied to their conduct while they were alive.

4.5.2 The dead never die (Eastern religions)

The souls of the dead are reborn (reincarnated) to re-enter the world of the living in a new physical form once the previous bodily form had died and was destroyed. This eternal cycle of life-death-rebirth will continue with varying levels of existence depending on ethical considerations.

4.5.3 The dead are not dead (primal religions)

The spirits of the deceased continue to exist in an invisible realm. From there, they can still communicate and influence human activities in the visible world. The spirits of the dead remain the living dead in need of being acknowledged and venerated by the living descendants. The main task of the ancestors is to be the guardians and custodians of cultural values and customs. This is not only the way in which the ancestors in Africa are perceived, but also the ancestors in monotheistic religions exhibit something of this. The saints in Christianity become guardians and custodians of cultural values.

4.5.4 Death is the end

There is no belief in existence after death; no form of spiritual existence is expected upon the death and decay of the physical body. What these attempts at explaining death convey, is an effort in establishing human immortality. The pursuit of immortality is an ancient human endeavor (Solomon *et al.* 2015:99). I am reminded of an anonymous saying once read, “You only live once, but if done correctly, once is enough." These ways of perceiving what happens once one dies, determine and influence the way in which the living treat the dead. The ways in which the dead are treated, are prescribed culturally by different forms of rituals dealing with the dead.

4.6 Dealing with death: ritualization of death

This section attempts to indicate how the cultural worldview, which includes a presentation of reality (life and death), influences the rituals dealing with death. Before discussing these different rituals, it is, first necessary to contemplate a theory of ritual.

4.6.1 What are rituals?

Rituals are the symbolic re-enactment of events organizing the relation between humans and the spiritual world.[36] Grimes (2011:50) indicates that rituals need not be formalized actions, but can include de-formalized actions as well. Rituals are also not exclusive to actions relating to divine beings, as Buddhism is proof of. Meaningful actions are performed at specific occasions in human existence. Grimes (2011:49) indicates that the motives for ritual processes include occasions of "flight, search, transformation, flow and pilgrimage." Rituals are, therefore, actions filled with meaning and differ from types of repetitive actions with no (or no longer a) meaning.

Grimes (2011:51) adds the following elements as constitutive of any helpful definition of ritual: repetitive, sacred (related to the holy), formalized (prescribed and unchanging movements), traditional (based on historic practice), and intentional (non-random and filled with meaning). Grimes (2011:50) states that the essential element of rituals is the fact that "thresholds" are crossed and that not only liminal phases are entered.

Van Gennep (1960) identified a threefold pattern of rites[37] of passage: at death, a person is separated from a social status (pre-liminal phase), which is followed by a period of apartness (liminal phase), and finally succeeded by a reintegration into society with a new status (post-liminal phase). This model, according to Davies (2018:544), gives a tool to analyze funeral processes: the dead are separated from the living, greeted by rituals, and sent off to another existence and are finally assigned a new status as ancestors in the post-mortal world.

On the origin of death rituals, Van Gennep (1960:183) is of the opinion that death rituals indicate the close relation between death and rebirth. In some cultures, this is related to the understanding of nature as containing and perpetuating cyclical events, for example, the movement of the moon from full moon to the next.

[36] Compare in this regard the definition provided by Victor Turner in Grimes (2011:50): Ritual is "formal behavior prescribed for occasions not given over to technological routine that have reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers."
[37] Some scholars, like Sundermeier, prefer to differentiate between rites and rituals. Rites are references to actions with spiritual and religious meaning, whereas rituals can be mere secular repetitive actions. In this study, however, the terms rite and ritual are used interchangeably as the intention of the repetitive actions is not always clear.

Many rituals associated with the dead reflect similarities to rituals incorporating new members to the clan (Van Gennep 1960:165). The third phase, indicated by Van Gennep (reintegration or post-liminal phase), reflects the social connection between the dead and new members incorporated into the community. Davies (2005:53) is of the opinion that many death rites indicate not the separation (first or pre-liminal phase of Van Gennep), but rather the transition (second or liminal phase of Van Gennep). This implies that Davies does not foresee the third phase of reintegration (post-liminal phase) as part of modern death rites. The process of removing the dead from ordinary society for them to become a member of the otherworldly, is not emphasized by current death rites (Davies 2005:54). It is important to understand that Davies is talking from a Western perspective and that the initiation into an otherworldly may indeed be part of rites within other cultures.

This implies that the current tendency among Western orientated societies is to keep the dead as part of this worldly reality. Grimes (2013:126) alludes to this by referring to the rituals performed as social events in order to remind family and friends of the deceased. The reason for social events, is that relatives and those remaining behind can find constant comfort (compare Grimes 2013:127) through access to sites where the remains or signs of the deceased are established. This is an important aspect also observable from the memorials indicating places of death along South African roadsides. Roadside memorials become part of the myth-ritual construct (Becker 1973:199) people create in order to deal with the terror and fear of death. The accessibility of places marking death causes the deceased to be considered as part of this worldly reality.

Davies (2005:91) is of the opinion that myths explain the rites associated with death. These myths (or rationalizations) on rites differ over time and from one context to the next. It is therefore, important to study contexts to determine the explanations of actions, thoughts, and expressions concerning death. By studying funerary art or visual expressions relating to the dead (compare Panofsky 1992), we create meaning and “add to the significance” of these expressions (Davies 2005:98).

As to the possibility of creating new rituals, Grimes (2011:51, 53) argues that it is possible through a process he refers to as “ritualizing.” According to Grimes (2011:51), field studies indicate that rituals can change and can indeed be created.

For Grimes (2011:52), the context and intention of directors and performers are indicative that new rituals can be created.

In the instance of roadside memorials alongside South African roads, the context (that of death) and the intention of the directors and performers (i.e. creating comfort) need to be taken into account when trying to determine whether the event of marking a place of death, is ritualized or not. The making of a visual structure can be a once-off event, but passing the structure and being reminded of the deceased, become a repetitive act commemorating the event of death. Rituals are events with a lifespan – "rituals deteriorate" (Grimes 2011:52) – and therefore, one can expect that, as the roadside marker of a place of death gradually and naturally decays and erodes, the ritual effect may also wane. Once the ritual has served its purpose (i.e. to transform the emotional state of a loved one dealing with the grief over the loss of a deceased), the performance of the rite has passed.

4.6.2 Death rituals

The social aspect of death has been mentioned earlier in this section. Social engagement between the living and the dead – and even among the dead – is perceived to continue after death.

Once death sets in – when death occurs as per definition – death is in need of "attention and treatment" (Davies 2005:48). The 'otherness' of the dead requires the living to react to death. Davies (2005:49) is of the opinion that the stillness of the dead seems to be out of place among the living and therefore, requires removal from the active realm of life. There are many reasons why the dead are disposed of. Davies (2005:48-49) refers to the "stillness" and "impurity" of the dead that requires action by the living. The impurity should, however, not be understood only in terms of hygiene and the possibility of the spread of disease through the decomposition of the corpse. This impurity can also refer to a spiritual condition. Many religions prohibit physical contact with the corpse as contact brings (temporary) spiritual impurity over the one touching a body (compare monotheistic religions' traditions). The removal of the body is therefore, not only a hygienic process, but also a removal of the unwanted and the impure.

The realm of the living is no longer the place for the non-living. The dead now belong in a different place – a different world or realm. Cultures have different ways of disposing of the corpse. Since the earliest times, earth burial and cremation have existed as ways of disposing of the body (Davies 2005:49).

Death has generally been accepted as something normal, although nearly all humans view it as traumatic. All religions consider death and birth to be connected in some mysterious way – almost as the point of contact in the circle of life and death; life follows death. Most probably, it has to do with the pattern of nature itself: the moth lays eggs before it dies, but may be regarded to continue living in its procreation. Seeds must go into the soil in order to germinate and develop into a plant.

Most primal cultures accept a mythical 'underworld' as the final destination of the deceased. It also serves as a kind of reservoir of life where all new life comes from. This portrays an animistic understanding of reality – two realities co-existing with the inhabitants of the invisible world able to enter and exit from the visible reality.

The same connection between death and birth is reflected in the way a deceased is buried. A burial pit is dug vertically. From one of the walls, a burial chamber is cut in the form of a uterus. The body of the deceased is then inserted into this chamber in the foetus position. Davies also refers (2005:49) to this early human practice. In classical Greek religion, the god of the underworld, Hades, is also the god of fertility and new life.

Besides burials, bodies of the deceased can be disposed of in various other ways. Cremation is widely accepted in the Indo-Aryan context. The flames consuming the body symbolise the liberation of the spirit from the entrapment of the body and of material bondage. In India, the British banned the practice of 'sutti' – a custom where the widow of the deceased was expected to throw herself on the funeral pyre of her husband in order to accompany him into death. Traditionally, cremation has been done in the open. Modern cremation technology entails a closed oven, defeating the symbolism indicated.

A rather unique way of disposing of the dead, reflecting a worldview which emphasises the harmony of all creatures living in nature, is to put the bodies in

places where wild animals (jackal, hyenas, vultures, etc.) will devour them. The best-known example is the so-called 'towers of silence' – towers erected by Zoroastrians in India on the top of platforms where the dead are put to be devoured by so-called sacred vultures. When Tom Mboya (in his time deputy to President Jomo Kenyatta) was assassinated in the streets of Nairobi, his body was transported right across Kenya and eventually put on a small island in Lake Victoria to be consumed by crocodiles. The background of these practices may be totemistic.

In communities where burial is performed, burial tombs or a funeral mound may be constructed. The ancient Etruscans excavated elaborate underground burial chambers. Such grandiose structures were for the privileged few (kings, chiefs, major officials, etc.). In addition to the body of the deceased, implements, weapons, jewellery, the bodies of favourite animals (horse, dog, cat) and the bodies of trusted companions (specifically killed for this purpose) may also have found their way into these burial spaces. The most famous examples are the pyramids of Egypt (compare Solomon *et al.* 2015:85).

Death is also compared with sleep. Homer described *Thanatos* (Death) as the twin of *Hypnos* (Sleep) (*Iliad* XVI 672). Dreaming is accepted as a spiritual experience of the mythical-mystical world. Compare in this regard Tylor's and Frazer's idea that dreams played an important role in the understanding of death (in Douglas Davies 2018:543).

Very few religions accept death as the final end of existence. In cultures where ancestral worship is practised, death is only one of several thoroughfares to the final demise. The deceased will spend a long time close to home and his/her family (according to primal belief). A very old person may be seen as a living ancestor and the deceased as the living dead (Nürnberger 2007). Final death follows when nobody is left to remember the deceased. The person's stature in life will determine the pace towards the final demise.

Life after death is commonly accepted. The understanding is that life is re-circulated all the time. The idea of reincarnation is prevalent in the Indian world of religions. These concepts are based on the understanding that this material world is underscored by an invisible, mythical, transcendent or metaphysical reality.

Christian belief differs from the above in that reality is not seen as founded and rooted in another mythical and metaphysical reality. God maintains it above the empty abyss through His sheer will. This world is nothing more or less than material reality. Nevertheless, it is also a testimony to the fact that God created it and maintains it through His provident will. In that sense, it testifies of another Reality, namely God.

To the Christian, 'final death' amounts to being alienated from God. This is what happens when the impenitent sinner dies. It is accepted that those who died in Christ will be united with God. 'True life' is to live in close relationship with God (whether humans are alive or dead). The Christian, therefore, lives in 'eternal light'.

Life and death are balanced in some mysterious way in all living creatures. We are dying from the moment of birth in the sense that all cells are programmed to die off after a number of divisions. It is, therefore, necessary that death remains death in order to guarantee quality of life.

4.6.3 Visualizations of the dead

There are various ways in which the absence of dead people from society can be visually expressed. As "the dead are removed from the active realm of life" (Davies 2005:49) signs of the departed are left behind.

a. Idealized

Some individuals, as agreed by public consent, are buried as heroes or heroines. Commemorative structures are erected as monuments to serve in remembrance of the individual who is venerated for some service to society, whether it be intellectual, military, economic, political or social. The same reasons can be applied to commemorate the meaningful lives and deaths of a group of people. Examples might be soldiers who died in a battle, or prisoners who died in a concentration camp (compare the memorial at the Irene Concentration Camp, Centurion), or protesters who died in a political uprising. Doss (2002:67) refers to memorials unveiled where the Oklahoma City massacre took place in 1997, and the 1999 memorial in Clement Park, near Columbine High School, Littleton (2002:68). The commemoration usually

takes on a visual expression in the form of a monument of some sorts. The individual (or group) is socially recognized with communal consent as a person(s) of significance. The purpose is to erect an eternal structure as a reminder of the values and achievements, or sacrifices, of the individual or group. With social change over time, the individual or group may no longer be recognized as of significance, and the structure may, therefore, be destroyed or damaged as signs of objection to the reminder of the life of the deceased. Compare in this regard the structural damage and ultimate removal of the statue of Cecil J. Rhodes in front of the University of Cape Town in South Africa.

b. Mass storage

The traditional graveyard has in recent times been relocated. On the one hand, owing to the lack of physical space or, on the other hand, for security reasons (graveyards can be desolate places ideal for committing crime), the remains of the dead are buried in built structures enabling mass burial (Davies 2005:118). The structure resembles the façade of a block of flats or mass storage rooms in which the remains of the deceased, usually cremated, are kept. This faceless uniform outer appearance of the place where the dead are kept reflects a mass mentality: huge populations cause the individual to become a faceless entity dealt with in similar ways as items of mass production are dealt with.

c. Custom-made personalized forms on location

The traditional graveyard and tombstone (cf. Davies 2005:101) as exclusive residing place of the dead according to a Western cultural worldview, has been dissipated. Current tendencies include visual structures on the location where the individual may have died. These locations are regarded as places of memory and pilgrimage, marking the place of death. Roadside memorials attest to this tendency. A wide variety of expressions are associated with these types of structures, varying from crosses to memorabilia placed on a specific location. An alternative tendency is the strewing of ashes, in particular, locations after cremation. This rite is performed based on a subjective decision made by relatives and friends of the deceased.

This study will focus on roadside memorials constructed by mourners in remembrance of the deceased. African religions have various rituals associated with

commemorating the dead at specific locations, varying from the unveiling of the tombstone to burying the dead at the place of birth. This will not be the main focus of this study, but it will prove to have some relevance.

d. Labels

Examples of the dead being buried and labelled are evident. The label is not only a marking of the location, but a label attached to the individual communicating something of the character of the deceased. Compare the cases of memorials for the 'Unknown Soldier' in various locations, commemorating those who died on foreign soil during battle. Even the unknown dead are granted the respect of a commemoration. The presence of epitaphs become important indicators of the way in which the deceased were regarded.

e. Forgotten

A Western cultural worldview resulted in the gathering of the remains of the dead close to the center of society, traditionally in the church graveyard at the center of the medieval European town (Davies 2005:118). As space in the city center became occupied for other purposes, graveyards were eventually moved to the outskirts of towns. The dead being buried in this traditional way become the forgotten. The cremated are literally made invisible and reduced to such a small material amount that it can easily be disposed of and literally disappear. At most, extra attention might be given to create spaces where the dead can be kept in order to serve as a reminder. A photograph of the dead, as captured on the front page of the brochure handed out at the death ceremony, a candle lit in memory of the dead, are all cases of visual expressions of keeping the memory of the dead alive.

f. Purposeful death

Disposing of the dead is not merely discarding a used body. In a recent development, the burying of the body has come to be perceived as useful. To bury the dead in a forest and plant a tree on top of the burial site, is an expression of the unity of life. Based on a certain ecological understanding (Davies 2005:125), the dead are returned to the earth to provide sustenance for that which grows. Death is then an opportunity to return that which has been taken from the earth. However,

this recent tendency in Western society has been practiced among different cultures in different forms all over the world.

The visible signs marking the absence of the dead culminate in the traditional tombstones that have been erected over time. These “tomb sculptures” as Panofsky (1992) refers to the visible signs, are to be interpreted as “permanent symbols of imagination, wishes and hopes that the respective cultures and epochs had linked with death” (Panofsky 1992:7). Tombstones – as well as, all visual forms expressing the absence of the dead – ought to be interpreted as art and consequently, as “symbolic form” (Panofsky 1992:6).

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, consideration was given to how humans give visual expression to reflections on death. It became clear that human self-awareness created awareness of death (Solomon *et al.* 2015:63). Who we are, determines when we consider someone to be dead. This section also attempted at providing a definition of what death is considered to be. It has been concluded that death is the cessation of life-supporting systems.

Death causes fear in humans. Humans deal with this all invasive fear in different ways. The Terror Management Theory by Solomon *et al. (*2015*)* provides insight into how cultural worldviews and self-esteem become vehicles in combatting the fear of death. The fear of death is visually manifested in the creation of memorials, which serve as a reminder of the deceased (memory), but also as a warning of the immanence of death. The memorials can also provide hope (cf. Davies 2005:115).

Communities deal differently with the dead based on their cultural worldview. People have for very long been celebrating the passing over from one world to the next by way of death rituals. Rituals and visual markers serve as a remembrance of, and communication about and with, the dead.

Death is not a commodity in need of advertising in order to improve consumption. Death comes on its own without invitation or acquisition. The uncertainty of when death will come is balanced by the certainty that it will come. Death is a reality no one escapes from. The South African author Langenhoven (1873-1932) described

the inevitability of death eloquently when he stated that death is no accomplishment – everybody manages to do it – but life, not all manage to accomplish it.

Now, with a better understanding of death, we can continue to the next chapter to investigate the different visual markers – roadside memorials – pertaining to the dead in a South African context, as well as the reasons for such expressions.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: EXAMPLES OF ROADSIDE MEMORIALS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

5.1 Current research on roadside memorials

As confirmed by Hagemann (2018:59), no extensive research on roadside memorials has, thus far been conducted in a South African environment.[38] Interest in this topic outside of the borders of South Africa is, however, prevalent. Compare the masters dissertation completed by Dobler (2010) entitled "Alternative memorials: Death and memory in contemporary America." The following articles also prove to be of value and show the extent of international interest in the phenomenon of roadside memorials: Research by Doss (2002), Everett (2002) and others contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon. Przysybylska and Flaga (2019) investigate the reasons for the anonymity of the majority of roadside memorials they investigated in Poland. Their conclusion is that the reasons for anonymity were mainly social rather than private. People chose not to reveal the names of the deceased, as they were known in the local community.

The contribution by Doss (2002) is especially significant for the current research because of its emphasis on the importance of the use of material culture in the process of mourning. As my research here is focused on the relation between material elements in religion and death, Doss's (2002:70) emphasis on the creation of memory through "spontaneous, often impermanent and distinctly 'unofficial' …roadside shrines," is insightful. Similar research on roadside memorials was conducted in Romania and the Czech Republic (compare Nešperová and Stahl (2014)) and in Australia (compare Hartig and Dunn (1998)), and in the Netherlands (compare Klaassens, Groote, and Vanclay (2013)).

In his masters dissertation, Dobler (2010) argues that roadside memorials serve the purpose of support in the grieving process, empowering the mourner to express

[38] There is a reference to roadside memorials in an article by Elizabeth Lange (2016), although her focus is much wider than memorials. Michael Eric Hagemann (2018) provides a good overview of the occurrence of memorials in a South African environment in his article on this topic. By his own consent, Hagemann (2018:62) acknowledges that his research is not comprehensive.

grief in a personal form. Memorials remove the process of grief from the official places like cemeteries and funeral homes, and make the process of grief a more personalized event. Dobler (2010:iv) also argues that memorials become focal points of communication, where the next of kin can engage in continued interaction with the deceased. Dobler's research focuses on three types of alternative memorials: the MySpace pages that are continued even after the death of the original user, the creation of "ghost bikes" at the sites of motorcycle accidents, and memorial tattooing. The insights gained from his research, although not explicitly related, may contribute to the current research in a South African context.

Dobler (2010:5) indicates that roadside memorials in the USA had been common practice since the eighteenth century. These roadside markers of death are, according to Dobler, also to be found all over the world, as is evident from the research just mentioned.

Doss (2002:69) emphasizes the therapeutic effect of the shrines and memorials created at places of death. These structures facilitate in the grieving process, whether for individual or collective purposes. Everett (2002:82) emphasizes the shift of mourning away from the traditional, private sphere in a cemetery to the public sphere next to public roads. This is also the contention of Klaassens, Groote, and Vanclay (2013). According to Dobler (2010:14) this shift causes that the mourning is shared by all who witness the memorial visible in the public landscape. One can argue that the cemetery was once indeed a public space, but as fewer and fewer people frequented cemeteries to show respect to the deceased, roadside memorials became a more obvious space to remember the deceased.

The majority of the researchers mentioned so far, focus on the aspect of mourning, whether by showing how memorials serve as structures to assist in the grieving process (Dobler 2010), or by emphasizing the shift of mourning as a private matter to the public sphere (Klaassens, Groote and Vanclay 2013). Hagemann (2018:61) perceives these memorials as "the expropriation of public space by private mourners." One can argue that, for centuries, mourning has, in fact, been a public affair. Communities, and not only close relatives, used to attend funerals. Customs such as a widow wearing a black dress for a prescribed period, made the community

aware of death in a family. Mourning practices are, however, not the focus of this research – although it proves to be a topic worth investigating.

As to the cultural aspect, it needs to be noted, as will become obvious in the discussion to follow, that all the examples selected for my research, will reflect a Western cultural background. As Hagemann (2018:64) affirms, even in his own research, no examples reflecting an African background could be found. It does not mean that they do not exist; it is merely an indication that it is not a common practice among Africans (and for the argument's sake not among adherents to Muslim, Jewish, Hindu or Buddhist customs) to construct roadside memorials.

5.2 Preference for the term 'roadside memorial'

The structures that are erected alongside roads, marking places of death are referred to with different terminology. According to Dobler (2010:5) terminology range from "memorial" to "shrine." Hagemann (2018:60) uses the terms shrine and memorial interchangeably. The concept of shrine emphasizes the spiritual connection between the living, and the dead associated with such markers alongside the road. In some instances, roadside memorials are likened to altars (Dobler 2010:6) as people see the site as a place of dialogue with the deceased. The memorials function as places of pilgrimage for the friends and relatives of the deceased. This has been witnessed at some of the examples to be discussed below. Fresh flowers are placed regularly at some of the memorials, confirming that regular visits do occur. Some memorials are maintained, in the sense that they are made sturdy as natural decay sets in.

As to the arrangements and decorations of the memorials, Doss (2002) discusses the material elements placed at such memorials. She uses the expression "sacred folk art" to describe these assemblages often found at memorials. These assemblages have the effect to "make death meaningful" (Doss 2002:63). Dobler (2010:3) prefers to use the term "vernacular memorial" to describe these constructions outside the official and institutionalized forms of memorialization (represented in tombstones, plaques, and commissioned monuments).

The term 'memorial' might call to mind a place to be remembered and might be intended to have significance for a larger audience, even extending to a national

level. A memorial also calls to mind a somewhat more permanent structure. The term ‘memorial’, therefore, has some limitations in its use. The concept ‘shrine’ falls within a religious dimension and might also be limiting in describing the roadside markers under discussion. As the examples to be discussed below show similarities with cases in the recent research referred to, the term memorial, seems to be the best term to describe the phenomenon. Thus, although aware of the limitations of the term, ‘memorial’ will be used in this research to refer to the roadside markers of places of death.

5.3 Analysis of examples of roadside memorials in South Africa

This chapter will present ten examples of roadside memorials indicating places of death along roads in South Africa. These ten selected examples will be discussed and interpreted in order to come to some understanding of the meaning of the elements used in the memorials. In the process of observing memorials alongside roads in different regions of South Africa (i.e. Gauteng, Mpumalanga and the Free State), a final collection of ten examples are discussed as a representation of the diversity of the memorials. Of course, the research is not exhaustive, but the examples discussed here are representative of the types of memorials that I recorded over a period of two years, travelling along roads in the above three provinces. In his analysis, Hagemann (2018:61) agrees that the memorials in a South African context exhibit similarities, as a majority of the memorials, include crosses, flowers, photographs, poems and personal artefacts. My interest is in the particular ways these symbols are combined and enhanced to reach a variety of effects as represented in the ten examples selected.

It is to be noted that the photographs depicting the selected memorials are not to be taken as the visual expression in need of interpretation. The elements in the images are the focus of the research. All photographs in this chapter were taken by the author. The following principles, as identified in Chapter 3, on the method of making meaning of images, will apply here:

(i.) Audiencing: This refers especially to the genre of dealing with death and grief processes (Rose 2001:29). The audience is perceived as the greatest contributor to meaning. Social practices are contributing to the modality.

(ii.) Iconology: This is based on Panofsky's three levels of interpretation with the emphasis on knowledge of culture as determining meaning.

(iii.) Semiotics: Barthes' concept of meaning that starts with the death of the author, is important here. The reader adds meaning in terms of the context of the image.

(iv.) The role of the interpretant: Peirce's division of the sign, object, and interpretant determines how meaning is created by the interpretant and is continuously dependent on the relation of sign to object.

Ideas on death must be viewed within a matrix of factors determining meaning. The relation of a public and private understanding of death needs to be considered. It needs to be determined whether a particular expression of the awareness of death is a 'new' or 'traditional' expression of such an awareness. Does the expression conform to general ideas characterizing a particular understanding during a particular era and/or culture? It is also necessary to determine whether such expressions are religious in nature or secular. It might even be that such expressions reflect a dual nature of being partly religious, as well as, partly secular. A mixture of cultural elements may also characterize images.

Interpretation of visual expressions, such as roadside memorials can only be approached and understood based on secondary sources. The original intention and feelings of those who designed and built the memorials are not accessible to the observer. All that remains for the observer to interpret, are the memorials as manifestations of feelings and intentions. Panofsky (1992:9) attests to this, as well as, the diversity of opinions – many of which are presented from an outsider point of view.

5.4 Analysis of examples of roadside memorials in a South African context

Ten examples of roadside memorials in South Africa will be discussed. Each of the ten cases will start out with a description of the memorial, which is followed by a discussion and interpretation of the possible meaning. This is what Geertz (1973:6-7) refers to as a "thick description." When an observer of culture is trying to perceive and interpret that which is observed in order to reach some kind of meaning, the process can be referred to as a "thick description." In opposition to this, a "thin

description" would merely entail an account of that what is observed without interpreting it (Geertz 1973:7).

Description plays an integral role in determining meaning. Description, according to Jordanova (2012:16) may consist of an array of elements: physical details, evaluative terms, emotional and aesthetic responses and even an indication of how that which is described was made and what role it played in the life of the observer. In the research presented here, it becomes clear that description is more than giving an eye witness account. One cannot but experience an emotion of some sort when observing the expressions of the grief and sorrow others experienced at the place a loved one died.

The descriptions of memorials presented here, can be flawed in as far as the observer may have missed out on some detail at the time of observing the memorial. Jordanova (2012:16) indicates that it is impossible to describe fully any given object as there are limits to a verbal description (Jordanova 2012:17).

As to the definition of 'description' Jordanova (2012:18) indicates that it is merely "an account," but the context in which this account takes place, matters. There is a difference in how one will describe an event, for example, as compared to describing an object. Describing is sharing and building a common understanding, resulting in interpretation (Jordanova 2012:19). The description becomes the "bridge" between the source inaccessible to the "audience of the observer," and the interpretation derived from the description. Description for Jordanova (2012:19-20) ideally consists of a description of the physical properties, which progresses to the life history of an artefact (i.e. who made it, and how). This includes a reflection on the relation between the one producing the artefact and the one to whom it is presented or to whom it refers. The social relationships are important (Jordanova 2012:20).

In the discussion of the memorials, the relationship between the ones creating the memorial and the one to whom the memorial refers, becomes evident in the presentation of the memorial. This will be described as best as possible to give an indication of the kind of relationship that exists.

5.4.1 Example 1: Hybridized cross

a.) Background information

Two wooden crosses relating to the death of one individual have been attached to a tree on the same location. It is on a suburban road close to the highway. No information regarding the way in which the deceased died is made public on the site.

Category	Information
Location	Centurion: The Hoewes
Height	Cross 1: 75 cm; cross 2 higher up in tree: 30 cm
Breadth	Cross 1: 50 cm; cross 2: 20 cm
Material used	Cross 1: Light colored wood Cross 2: white painted wood
Date photo taken	3 August 2017
Description	Cross 1: The image appears to have a bird-like head and wings. The silhouette is that of a cross. The cross is decorated with flowers. An inscription reads “RIP” “Blayne” and includes a date “13-06-15.” Cross 2 is decorated with a single plastic red rose.
Analysis	The image has outstretched wings, causing the figure to appear in the form of a cross. The bird creature may resemble a Phoenix.

Figure 4: Hybridized cross.
Photograph taken by J Beyers.

b.) Discussion

It is not clear what those who composed this memorial had intended to convey with the image. It is clearly a marker of the place of death of an individual known by the name of “Blayne.” His death probably occurred on 13/06/2015, as indicated on the structure. The plastic flowers (roses and sunflowers) on the scene are signs of affection. Flowers can be seen as signs of life that spring from death.

The use of the cross is problematic. Although the cross is universally accepted as a Christian symbol, it should not be taken for granted that it represents Christianity[39].

[39] The cross as symbol in Christianity has its origin in the manner in which Jesus was executed. The ancient Roman way of executing convicted criminals through crucifixion created the image

The image of the cross, through its use over centuries in Western society, has become part of the collection of symbols associated with Western civilization and has become part of popular culture, simply connoting death. In current society, the presentation of the cross should not be viewed as necessarily having a Christian connotation. In this regard, the use of the cross as a motive in jewelry design illustrates the point that not all exhibiting the cross should be considered as having an affiliation with Christianity. Apostolos-Cappadona (2017:28) discussed the nature of religious art as either being representational or presentational. The cross can be viewed as being presentational, as it becomes a symbol alluding to the presentation of the sacred reality. This allusion to the sacred does, however, not necessarily have anything to do with faith (Von Veh 2011:174). The symbolism is communicative, since religious images and their meanings have permeated Western culture over centuries. This is especially true about the symbol of the cross, which over time has become intrinsically part of Western culture. This analysis of the cross applies to all instances discussed here where a cross forms part of the montage of the memorial.

The smaller white cross-forming part of this particular composition may reflect a Christian notion – or merely the Western tradition to indicate the place of death with a cross. The bird-like structure may recall similarities with the mythological creature known as the Phoenix. According to ancient mythology, the Phoenix is believed to have been a bird living five hundred years in the Arabian Desert, whereupon it dies burning itself on a funeral pyre. After this, the Phoenix is reborn from its ashes and returns to live for another cycle. Variations of this myth occur in Egyptian, Greek, Persian and Eastern cultures. Via Christian interpretation of this tradition, the Phoenix entered the Western culture. A recent popular application of the Phoenix is found in the work by J.K. Rowling, in the *Harry Potter* series, where the Phoenix is used as a Christian symbol of purification and resurrection.

The connection with death and resurrection and eternal life (compare Job 29:18) might play a role in the intended meaning of the Phoenix as a symbol in the image marking the place of death. The combination of a bird-like structure representing a

of the cross as closely related to Christian belief in Jesus as the crucified Redeemer of humankind. Over time the cross became symbol for the death of Jesus and no longer as symbol of execution. As Christianity became a state religion, the symbols associated with Christianity became part of popular culture.

Phoenix with outstretched wings, creating an image of the cross, might be a combination of the meaning of eternal life represented by the Phoenix and Christian belief. The early Christian church father Clement, mentions the Phoenix in *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.* It is therefore, not impossible that the Phoenix is here combined with the image of a cross, which is traditionally associated with Christianity, although, as argued above, the cross as a symbol in Western society is part of popular culture. The intended meaning of this roadside memorial may be that of resurrection from the ashes of death, implying a second life about to start after death. The memorial can in this sense, bring hope to the friends and relatives of the deceased. Death is not the end, but perceived here as the gateway to a new life.

In this way, the relatives and friends of the deceased manage their fear, and the terror associated with death. According to the TMT referred to earlier in this study, death is perceived as a devastating event, creating anxiety. By erecting an image of hope (Phoenix and Cross), terror is denied.

5.4.2 Example 2: Memorial garden

a.) Background information

Two crosses next to a country road close to the town of Villiers (Free State) have been assembled to indicate the death of an individual. The cause of death is unknown.

Category	Information
Location	Villiers (Free state)
Height	100 cm
Breadth	70 cm
Material used	Two white painted crosses, one painted wood, the second iron, standing 2 meters apart from each other.
Date photo taken	27 March 2019
Description	Two crosses. One standalone wooden cross and the second iron cross elaborately decorated. The iron cross bears an inscription “Rus sag” (*rest softly)* and a name “Gustav Ludick.” A date appears on the cross “1997-2017.” The wooden cross has no inscription, but is only decorated with a blue ribbon. On the ribbon, there appears to be printed a name, ineligible to read clearly.
Analysis	The most elaborate of the two crosses contains a miniature garden with a gnome[40] and teddy bear and stones with inspiring messages and references to two text verses (Jeremiah 29:11 and Job 1:21) written on them. A vase with flowers stands next to the cross.

[40] Gnomes and dwarfs belong to the categories of mythical creatures associated with magical events, which include mining and building in secrecy. Gnomes are depicted as short human-like creatures living underground. Dwarfs are associated more with inhabiting forests. The figure referred to above appears to be what is typically referred to as a garden gnome.

Figure 5: Memorial Garden.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

Figure 6: Memorial Garden, cross 1.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

Figure 7: Memorial Garden, cross 2.
Photographs taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

This very complex memorial contains several elements to be discussed. Firstly, there are two crosses, one more elaborately decorated than the other. The white-painted wooden cross is decorated with only a blue ribbon and can be assumed to have been erected by a family member or friend of the deceased. It appears as if the name of the donor of the ribbon is printed on it, as the name is different from the deceased's. Although the possibility cannot be excluded, there is no indication that this cross-refers to a second death. This is similar to the first example, where two

crosses are present at the same site, but the selection of symbolic elements in this one differs significantly enough to justify its inclusion as an example of a different category of a memorial.

The white, iron cross is elaborately decorated. At the bottom of the cross, there is a "happy" scene representing playfulness. A single figure of a gnome standing on a swing attracts attention. Looking at the scene, to the right-hand side of the gnome, there is a teddy bear stuck behind a rock with what appears to be a blanket. To the side of the cross, stands a blue jar filled with white, purple, and pink plastic flowers. The flowers appear to belong to the aster family (family *Asteraceae*), in which pink, purple and white are the most common colors. Traditionally, the aster flower represents love, wisdom, and faith, and they have come to be associated with funerals in popular culture. On the opposite side of the cross, a tree has been planted, surrounded by pebbles. This tree will grow and in future provide shade to the memorial, and even make the memorial more noticeable from a distance.

In front of the gnome and the teddy bear, is an arrangement of large and medium-sized rocks on a bed of pebbles. The pebbles give the impression of a grave. On the larger rocks, verses from the Bible are inscribed in white lettering. Prominently displayed, are three references: to Jeremiah 29:11[41], Job 1:21[42], and in smaller lettering, Isaiah 43:4[43]. The remainder of the larger rocks are covered with short personal messages: "Miss you!", "love you!", "my love, Gus!" One large inscription reads "Koningskind" (my translation: Child of God).

Right in the center of the arrangements, is a structure in the shape of a red heart placed on the larger flat rock. The heart appears to have cracked. It is unclear whether this was done deliberately or was caused by exposure to nature and weather elements. It appears as if the damaged red heart signifies a broken heart in the metaphorical sense.

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[41] (Jeremiah 29:11) "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (NIV version).

[42] (Job 1:20-21) "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship [21]and said:
"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised." (NIV version)

[43] (Isaiah 43:4) "Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life." (NIV version).

It is clear that material elements were used in order to reconstruct the identity of the deceased using personal items (Dobler 2010:6). The participation of mourners in constructing memorials provides a sense of control in response to the feeling of powerlessness as a result of an untimely traumatic death (Dobler 2010:6). It appears as if the family and friends of the deceased re-created a scene reminding of an earlier happy and joyous time. A gnome and teddy bear fondly cuddling in a blanket recalls the images a loving mother would have of a baby and even a toddler. Perhaps this is how the relatives and friends want to remember the deceased: lovingly, happy and innocent.

The multiple references to verses from the Bible create the impression that the family members have strong Christian-religious convictions, and that they find hope and comfort in faith during their time of grief and despair. They project an identity of religious people and create the identity of the deceased as also having been a religious person. Faith and religion bring them comfort and help them deal with the terror of untimely death.

The research by Doss (2002:70) reminds us of the role of material objects as being an integral part of mourning. In this case, the gnome and teddy bear as material objects with no religious meaning, are combined with religious convictions (demonstrated by the Bible verses quoted) in order to cope with the grieving process and give expression to the act of mourning.

5.4.3 Example 3: Brotherhood beyond death

a.) Background information

The following example consists of one wooden cross next to the main road *en route* from Centurion to the Pretoria Fountains circle. Two weeks after the first sighting of the cross on the right-hand side of the road, the cross was moved across the road to the left-hand side and was made more visible. A year later, the cross totally disappeared from view, apparently removed either by traffic officials or friends and family of the deceased.

Category	**Information**
Location	Centurion (Fountains)
Height	75 cm
Breadth	50 cm
Material used	The memorial consists of a brown painted wooden cross with yellow lettering attached to the cross. The letters are cut out letters available from any arts and crafts supplier. A photograph in protective plastic cover appears on the cross.
Date photo taken	30 March 2019
Description	There is a single cross with a lot of written text on the cross.
Analysis	Some background information is necessary in order to establish the meaning of the numbers printed on the cross.

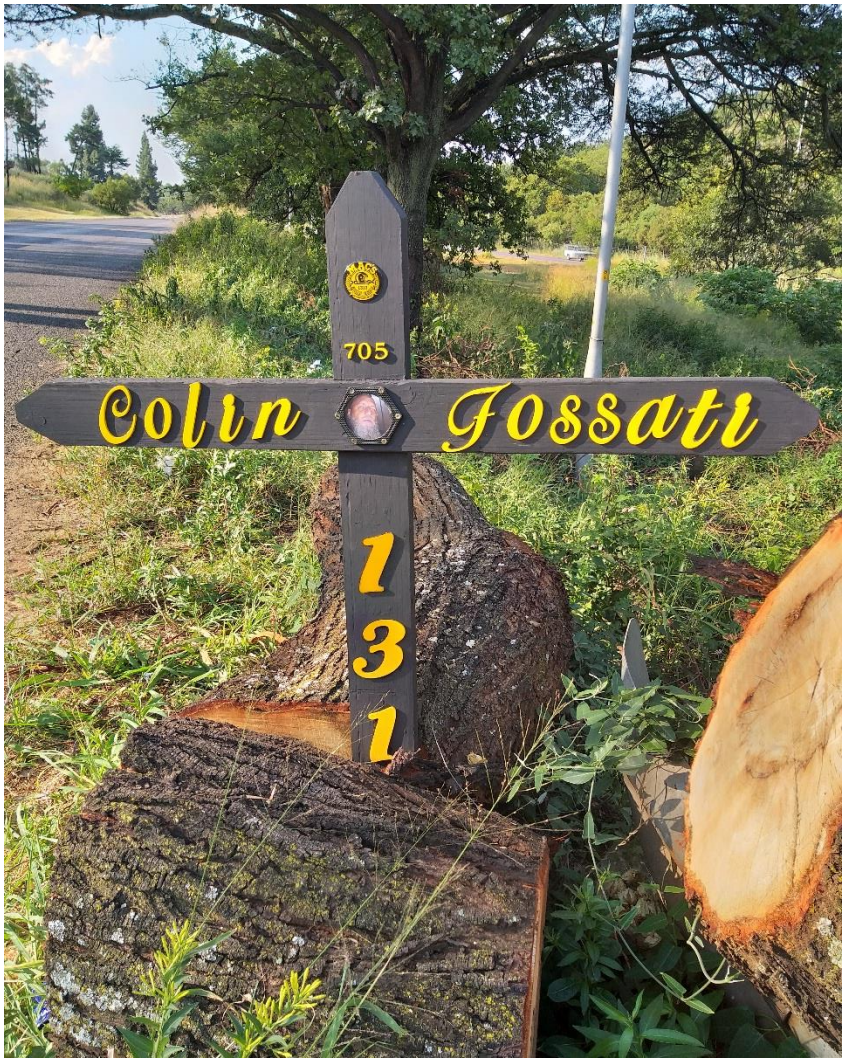

Figure 8: Brotherhood beyond death.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

The name on the cross is indicated in yellow lettering as “Colin Fossati.” Right at the center, a photograph of the deceased is placed behind a protective plastic cover. Just above the photograph, in yellow lettering, the numbers “705” appear. In larger yellow font, on the bottom part of the cross, the numbers “1313” are displayed. On the top section of the cross, appears some kind of emblem. The name and number “1313” also appear on the back of the cross in the same position as on the front.

There is no obvious explanation for the numbers “705” appearing on the cross. However, the emblem right at the top of the cross seems to carry some significance and can assist in interpreting the memorial. At the top of the emblem, one finds the

letters “MAC’S.” In the center is a motorcycle helmet and underneath that, are the numbers “1313” and below that the word “South Africa,” and at the bottom, the Latin motto “Macum Amicum est.”[44] On Facebook, this appears as the logo of a local motorcycle club, MAC’S Motorcycle Club, known as MAC’S 1313. A YouTube video (MAC’S MCC 1313 South Africa posted on July 7, 2014[45]) gives a photo montage of the club’s activities and its members, all exhibiting the same emblem as found on the cross, on their clothing. Part of the message of the video is the emphasis on brotherhood.

The memorial erected here for Colin Fossati, therefore, indicates that Colin Fossati was in fact at the time of his death a member of MAC’s Motorcycle Club, or at least, closely associated with the club. The memorial communicates something of the identity and lifestyle of the deceased. The friends of the deceased have created a memorial representing who the deceased was during his lifetime. Just as the gravestone identified as “Robber’s grave” (Figure 1) and the grave of the Vice-Admiral Baron Willem Joseph van Gendt (Figure 2) are intended to recreate self-esteem and identity, the memorial of Colin Fossati is an attempt to create and establish identity and posit an extension of his self-esteem (compare the discussion in Chapter 4).

The care, with which the memorial of Colin Fossati has been treated, is also a visible expression of the brotherhood so highly regarded by the club. Fellow members of the club must have constructed this memorial in remembrance of their fellow club member. Brotherhood appears to extend beyond the boundaries of life and even include those deceased.

5.4.4 Example 4: Beauty in death

a.) Background information

This example consists of a single white cross next to a country road close to the town of Reitz (Free State).

[44] This is translated, according to the Facebook page (MAC’S motorcycle club), as “mark of a brother.” This is, however, an incorrect translation of the phrase (*Macum Amicum est*). A different possible intended meaning would be “MAC is a friend,” but then the Latin ought to read “*MAC amicus est.*”
[45] Viewed on 20/12/2019

Category	**Information**
Location	Reitz (Free state)
Height	165 cm
Breadth	35 cm
Material used	Single white painted metal cross
Date photo taken	27 March 2019
Description	Singe white metal cross, decorated with red and white plastic flowers and glass buttons. No name appears on the cross.
Analysis	White and red are dominant colors in this memorial. The natural surroundings create the image of a park or garden.

Figure 9: Beauty in death close-up.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

Figure 10: Beauty in death.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

On the road surrounded by the beautiful green scenery of the Eastern Free State, there suddenly appears a break in the almost monotonous variation of the natural vegetation. A single white cross almost as tall as a human being protrudes besides the road. Shaded by cypress trees, as one would expect traditionally to find in a cemetery, the lonely cross is visible from quite a distance. Upon closer inspection, the observer discovers a well-planned decoration on the cross. Glass buttons have carefully been attached to both beams of the cross, each button being separated by the same measured distance. Adorning the cross is a single wreath consisting of a flower arrangement of red and white plastic flowers, contributing to the almost beautiful appearance of the structure. The white and red colors dominating this scene make the structure even more visible. The flowers appear to represent asters, although red is not a common color for the aster flower.

Perhaps visibility is the goal of the memorial. It appears as if those erecting the memorial intended the memorial to stand out from the surroundings and be noticeable. The anonymous deceased remains visible in this world.

Death is not always depicted as ugly, tragic, and despicable. The planned serenity and simplicity of this memorial creates the impression of dignified contentment with death and inner peace. The whole scenery contributes to the visual appeal of the memorial.

5.4.5 Example 5: Departed and abandoned

a.) Background information

A single cross next to a country road close to the town of Tweeling (Free State) is the next example.

Category	Information
Location	Tweeling (Free state)
Height	75 cm
Breadth	40 cm
Material used	Single iron cross
Date photo taken	27 March 2019
Description	The memorial consists of a rough, unpainted, somewhat rusted metal cross without inscription. No name appears on the cross.
Analysis	The simplicity of the cross creates the impression that this was maybe simply two crossed iron bars that never were intended to appear as a cross, but through natural decay, ended up in the form of a cross.

Figure 11: Departed and abandoned.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

A single wrought-iron cross appears next to the road. At first, one is uncertain whether this is truly a memorial. There is no name or decoration attached to the cross. Just the unrefined, unpainted, rusted two iron beams in the shape of a cross.

Simplicity and anonymity of memorials do not always portray the beautiful serenity of death. Whereas in the previous example anonymity contributed to creating a visually appealing image, in this case, the opposite is perceived. The unpainted wrought iron appears coarse and undecorated as if no attention was given to detail and beautifying the memorial (one cannot but still wonder whether this really is intended as a memorial). The cross appears to have been planted haphazardly beside the road with no consideration of a place with a scenic view of the surroundings; no tree providing shade is considered.

The memorial appears as an unpretentious and course reminder of the reality and inevitability of death. Just as vehicles pass the memorial almost not noticing it, the living pass the dead almost not noticing signs marking their remembrance. Death becomes an unnoticeable (natural) reality forming part of the landscape of human existence. The unpretentious presence of this memorial is as if it wants to communicate to passers-by: “O, by the way, so-and-so died on this place.”

5.4.6 Example 6: Ritualized mourning

a.) Background information

The following example consists of two crosses next to a suburban road indicating the death of a single individual.

Category	**Information**
Location	Centurion (Hoewes)
Height	Cross 1: 50 cm Cross 2: 40 cm
Breadth	Cross 1: 40 cm Cross 2: 30 cm
Material used	Two wooden crosses standing 1,5 meters apart from each other. At the bottom, both crosses are covered by large white pebbles.
Date photo taken	12 June 2019
Description	The memorial consists of two crosses decorated with fresh flowers. Both crosses have a photograph and typed message addressed to the deceased behind a plastic cover. The two crosses stand on the pavement next to the entrance to a psychiatric hospital.
Analysis	Perhaps two groups have paid homage to the same individual, and therefore, two crosses appear. Compare in this regard Examples 1 and 2.

Figure 12: Ritualized mourning. Cross 1.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

Figure 13: Ritualized mourning. Cross 2.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

Figure 14: Ritualized mourning. Close-up.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

Two wooden crosses relating to the same individual have been assembled at this site. It is peculiar that the crosses appear on the sidewalk next to the entrance to a psychiatric hospital, a place where people come in search of healing, new hope, and life.

The crosses are decorated. Both have white pebbles surrounding them at the base, simulating the appearance of a grave. Carefully assembled bouquets of foliage and flowers, with the stems wrapped in cellophane-covered cloth or cotton wool to keep them moist, decorate each cross[46]. A photograph of a young man is affixed to the crosses. There is no indication as to the reason for the death of the young man.

On both crosses, an identical framed page is affixed. A closer look at the page reveals the following: The name of the deceased is indicated as Hano. It is stated that he lived from 14 August 1996 to 29 April 2016. Thus, he was twenty years of age at the time of his death. A personalized message addressed to the deceased reads “Words are too few to describe how much we miss you. We love you eternally, our son.”[47] Five photographs of the young man at different ages in his life, form part of the montage on the page.

One verse from the Bible, printed in Afrikaans and in English, appears on the same page: Jeremiah 29:11-12 “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you.’”

Cross 1 has a heart-shaped wooden ornament with a message printed on it, attached at each end of the cross beam. The one side reads: “Precious child of mine, you are my heart’s desire. It is you I love … indescribably much. For now… for yesterday …for ever!”[48] The second heart reads: “Jesus is my rock! My anchor ...my safe haven in the storms of life.”[49]

[46] The author has on several occasions passed this site and each time fresh flowers have replaced the old flowers.
[47] The original message is in Afrikaans and has been translated here.
[48] The original Afrikaans reads: “Kosbare-kind-van-my. Jy is my hart se punt. Vir jou het ek lief …onbeskryflik baie. Vir nou …vir gister …vir altyd!”
[49] The original Afrikaans reads: “Jesus is my Rots! My Anker …my veilige hawe in die storms van die lewe.”

On top of the cross beam of Cross 1, there is a peculiar purple box attached. On closer inspection, it is identified as a plastic container filled with neatly colored and equally cut strips of paper, each with a different Bible text printed on it. It appears as if these strips of paper are there for the taking. In this way, this memorial becomes an interactive site where people not only come to remember, but also to receive messages of encouragement and comfort from the Bible. This memorial not only stands in remembrance of the death of a young man, but also wants to serve the community by providing some kind of comfort for those who stop and pay attention to this memorial.

No reason for death is made known. It is clear that the family and friends of the deceased miss their loved one dearly. The fact that fresh flowers are regularly placed at the memorial, testifies to the fact that the site has become somewhat of a place of pilgrimage for the friends and family of the deceased. This is a place of remembrance, and perhaps a place where people feel closer to their deceased loved one, so close that perhaps even communication seems possible.

The comforting Bible verse reflects something of a desire for hope and reassurance that the deceased has some kind of good future after death. The One providing comfort and assurance is God. This expression of belief in a God that is able to protect and support human beings even after death reflects the notion of Ludwig Feuerbach, discussed earlier in Chapter 4. Feuerbach (1908:41) stated that human beings have many fears, of which the greatest fear is that of dying. Based on this fear of death, humans project the existence of a divine figure who is able to provide comfort to the dead and those remaining alive. The fear of death leads to the creation of gods (Feuerbach 1908:41).

Although the use of Bible verses does not prove the existence of God, it does prove the comfort people find in the belief that a divine figure more powerful than death will take care of their deceased loved ones.

To an irreligious person, this belief in a divine Comforter seems illogical and irrational. Some might suspect, as Feuerbach suggested, that the existence of gods are illusions. In a similar way, the disbelief in the existence of gods may appear to the believer just as illogical and irrational. Life and death, and the connection to the

divine appear to be comprehended only by those somewhat “insane.” To this fact, the presence of the two crosses next to the entrance of a psychiatric hospital is a reminder.

5.4.7 Example 7: Forgotten

a.) Background information

The following four examples are all found on a single road between Belfast and Dullstroom, Mpumalanga; a distance of only 35 km.

The first of the four examples consists of a single wooden pole planted in the ground next to the road indicating a place of death of a single individual. It is clear that the memorial stood for quite some time and is no longer in the form it was erected in. A veld fire has since its erection destroyed the cross beam of what appears to have been a cross. There is no indication of remains of any decorations or additions to the cross. The only addition is a single motorcycle helmet attached to the top of the wooden pole.

Category	**Information**
Location	Road between Dullstroom and Belfast
Height	1,8 m
Breadth	-
Material used	The memorial consists of one wooden pole planted in the ground. At closer investigation the remains of a cross bar forming a cross was discovered at the bottom of the pole. A recent fire destroyed the crossbar.
Date photo taken	2 Nov 2019
Description	A single wooden pole planted in the ground. It was once a cross with a motorcycle helmet on top of the pole. At the bottom of the cross are some large rocks, imitating a grave.
Analysis	There are strong indicators that the person remembered here, had died in a motorcycle accident.

Figure 15: Forgotten.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

The grim picture of a single motorcycle helmet on top of a wooden pole that perhaps used to be a cross, serves as a warning and a reminder. All motorists passing this memorial will pay attention to their driving skills, as this is an indication of the result of reckless driving either by the deceased or other road users. The memorial also serves as a reminder of the death of a particular individual as the motorcycle helmet can be taken as belonging to the deceased. In this way, the memorial has been personalized with an item that belonged to the one whose death is commemorated. This once again indicates the role of material elements in the mourning process (compare Doss 2002:70).

A second warning besides one on cautious driving exists. All those passing the memorial are reminded that death can be unexpected. The presence of the memorial is unexpected in the pleasing scenery of green flowing fields stretching out on both sides of the road. Here one indeed becomes aware of the concern of the South African National Road Agency (Sanral) that such memorials need to be banned from South African roadsides as they are distracting the attention of the road

users (Hettiën Strauss 2008). Looking at this memorial, while driving, makes it difficult to keep your eyes on the road.

The warning is stretched even further when one realizes that even death is a passing event. The fact that this memorial has been almost completely destroyed by the natural occurrence of a veld fire, makes one aware that even reminders of death come and go. The finality of death is relativized by the destruction brought about by fire.

Roadside memorials do not appear to have the intention to be permanent structures. For those assembling the structures, they serve a temporary purpose of consoling them in their time of grief and loss. As time passes and through natural decay, the memorials stop being as visible as first intended. As audience, the observer only witnesses the remains of a process of grief.

5.4.8 Example 8: In loving memory

a.) Background information

The second of the four memorials on the road between Belfast and Dullstroom is a single cross next to the road indicating the death of an individual or multiple individual(s).

Category	**Information**
Location	Road between Belfast and Dullstroom.
Height	1,7 m
Breadth	1,6 m
Material used	Two iron bars in the form of a cross. Two plastic containers are attached at each end of the crossbar.
Date photo taken	2 Nov 2019
Description	A single cross with two inscriptions on either side of the crossbar. The words “Tokkie” and “Mammie” are visible. It is not clear if these are two names used for the same person, or if they are a reference to two separate people who died on the same scene. The containers were probably used to put flowers in. In the center of the cross, a plastic cover containing the remains of a photograph and a page with wording on is visible. Neither the text nor the photograph is discernible anymore.
Analysis:	Perhaps one person died on the scene. The natural deterioration of the white paint on the iron bars indicates that this is not meant to be a permanent structure – not without maintenance, at least. Rocks placed at the bottom of the cross give the more longer-lasting impression of a grave.

Figure 16: In loving memory.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

If in the previous example, the natural decay of memorials was suggested, this memorial is an indication of the temporal function of memorials. Long grass has covered the bottom of the cross. The white paint on the iron cross has almost completely been replaced with rust. There are no longer flowers in the pots intended for that purpose. The photograph and text that are supposed to be behind the plastic covering at the center of the cross have faded. The death of this/these individual(s) has been almost forgotten. No one visits the site any more. No one keeps the memorial clean and intact any more.

Is the reason perhaps that the grieving process has been completed, and everybody related to the deceased managed to cope with their grief and sorrow and no longer need a place to vent their sorrow? Have the relatives and friends of “Tokkie” and the children of “Mammie” managed to overcome their grief and moved on in life? It appears indeed that this is the case. The memorial has served its purpose and is now deserted and forgotten.

5.4.9 Example 9: Permanence

a.) Background information

The third of the memorials on the road between Belfast and Dullstroom is a single cross next to the road indicating the death of a single individual.

Category	**Information**
Location	On the main road between Dullstroom and Belfast.
Height	1,75 m
Breadth	1,4 m
Material used	A single galvanized iron cross
Date photo taken	2 Nov 2019
Description	The cross has a decorative form with an inscription of a name and date. On one cross beam, a braid of faded flowers is attached. It is unclear what type of flowers they are.
Analysis	This is a memorial for an individual. The structure appears to be more durable.

Figure 17: Permanence.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

The name “Chris Fourie” and the date “2016-09-17” appear on the cross. This memorial appears to have had some detailed planning behind it. It is made of galvanized iron that will ensure it withstands the onslaught of rust. It is made sturdy and planted firmly in the ground. No temporary attachments have been made. The name and date are cut into the iron cross, ensuring the permanent visibility thereof.

The form the cross takes on is similar to designs found on crosses used in graveyards all over the world. This particular design is referred to as the “f*leur-de-lis* design.” The use of the *fleur-de-lis* is closely related to French royalty originating from the baptism of the French King Clovis (466-511 CE). According to legend, Clovis, upon his baptism, was presented by the Virgin Mary with a lily, which was later represented with the motive today known as the *fleur-de-lis*. The lily is a symbol

of purity and was taken up by the Roman Catholic Church as a symbol of association with the sanctity of Mary on specific occasions (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

The memorial under discussion consists of an iron cross decorated with the *fleur-de-lis* motif on each of the three ends of the cross. This can be interpreted as a reference to the Holy Trinity as the *fleur-de-lis* had been interpreted in the past (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

It is unclear whether the relatives who created this memorial are aware of the meaning and origin of the *fleur-de-lis*. This is where Panofsky's analysis of deep cultural knowledge plays a role. People are not always aware of the deeper meaning of symbols and may use the symbols, merely because they are visually appealing. Panofsky (1972[1939]:12) reminds us that there can be no guarantee that the meaning of an image arrived at, is correct. Assigning meaning can become a highly subjective exercise (Panofsky 1972[1939]:16). Determining legitimate meaning(s) requires familiarity with what Panofsky (1972[1939]:4) refers to as the "practical world of objects and events, but also with the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilization." Someone uninitiated to a context and familiar with the meaning of symbols originating within a particular tradition, will not recognize the underlying meaning of objects and events.

If the theological meaning of the *fleur-de-lis* was the intent of the relatives and friends of the deceased with the design of the cross, a strong theological meaning is expressed with the memorial. First of all, the sanctity of Mary is brought here in close connection with the event of the death of the particular individual. This place becomes sanctified due to the death that took place there. The three motives of the *fleur-de-lis* on the cross's ends may refer to the Trinitarian Christian God under whose sign the deceased is immortalized in this indestructible memorial. The place is regarded as sanctified by the death and the fact that Mary and God are aware of the death.

The relatives and friends of this deceased gave some thought to the design of his memorial. Death can be fashionably commemorated.

5.4.10 Example 10: The Patriarch

a.) Background information

The last of the four memorials found on the road between Belfast and Dullstroom is a single wooden cross next to the road indicating the death of a single individual.

Category	**Information**
Location	On main road between Dullstroom and Belfast.
Height	2,1 m
Breadth	1,5 m
Material used	The memorial consists of a single wooden cross with rocks at the bottom. A motorcycle helmet is attached to the top of the cross.
Date photo taken	2 Nov 2019
Description	Single large cross with a granite plaque at the bottom with the name of the deceased and a date printed on it. At the back of the cross at the base is a single boot. Rocks surround the base of the cross. A motorcycle helmet adorns the top of the cross.
Analysis	The structure was erected recently (2019). A boot and motorcycle helmet forming part of the memorial may belong to the deceased.

Figure 18: The Patriarch.
Photograph taken by J Beyers

b.) Discussion

This monumental memorial is visible from afar. Its imposing form breaks the monotonous flat surrounding countryside. This is, as the first of the examples, on the Dullstroom-Belfast road, also a memorial to an individual who lost his life in a motorcycle accident. The motorcycle helmet is evidence of this. Despite this obvious similarity, this tenth example is included because of some other features making it representative of yet another category.

A granite plaque at the bottom of the cross contains the following wording: “Barend Venter,” born “29/03/1964” and died “13/01/2019.” An inscription reads “You will always remain in our hearts our beloved husband, father and grandfather.”[50] The

[50] The original Afrikaans inscription reads: “Jy sal altyd in ons harte wees ons Geliefde Man, Pa en Oupa.”

rocks surrounding the bottom of the cross imitates the form of a grave. It is not clear how the deceased died. At the bottom, behind the cross, is placed a right foot boot. It appears to form part of motorcycle gear.

In many aspects, this memorial shows similarities to Example 7, as it is also a memorial to a motorcycle accident. This memorial has, however, been constructed more recently and was still in good condition at the time it was photographed. It differs, however, from Example 7, in that it does contain details of the person who died here and also includes some personalized items (i.e. helmet and boot).

The mere size of this memorial calls to mind a monument commemorating the death of someone considered to be like a “hero” to his family. This memorial stands as a sign of the greatness and respect with which this individual was treated. It contributes to the self-esteem and identity that is created surrounding this individual; an attempt to counter the threat and fear of death (compare the discussion in Chapter 4). The bolstering of the self-esteem of the deceased contributes to the identity of the deceased: a dearly loved individual who made a difference in the lives of all who knew him. They would like to continue to remember him and make his esteem known to all who pass this way. This memorial stands as a monument to all revered fathers, husbands, and grandfathers who died in a similar fashion. Perhaps this erected memorial resembles manhood and reminds us that even the perceived strong patriarch of society is subject to death.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, ten examples of roadside memorials on South African roads were examined. Each example was described and then analyzed by way of interpreting the meaning, thereof by way of implementing the following principles:

(i.) Audiencing: This refers especially to the genre of dealing with death and grief processes (Rose 2001:29). The audience is perceived as the greatest contributor to meaning.

(ii.) Iconology: This is based on Panofsky’s three levels of interpretation with the emphasis on knowledge of culture as determining meaning.

(iii.) Semiotics: Barthes’ concept of meaning that starts with the death of the author is applied. The reader adds meaning in terms of the context of the image.

(iv.) The role of the interpretant: Peirce's division of the sign, object, and interpretant determines how meaning is created by the interpretant and is continuously dependent on the relation of sign to object.

The roadside memorials serve as markers of places of death. However, the dead have not departed completely. Although dead and buried, their remembrance is kept alive by reminders through visual signs of them being absent. The 'present' in which they had existed, is superficially kept present in the moment by those who have made the memorials (Berger 2017:134). The dead may no longer roam this earth, but their remembrance is kept alive through visible expressions in the memorials.

All the examples discussed in this chapter seem to mimic a grave, utilizing elements traditionally associated with graves, for example, crosses, flowers, rocks, and stones, headstones with text on. These, however, are all pseudo-graves as there is no evidence of the deceased being buried on the location of their death. The pseudo-grave serves a different function in this regard. It becomes a place of reference. The use of the cross has also been discussed. By merely using a symbol traditionally associated with Christianity does not imply the affiliation to Christianity. The cross has become part of the Western tradition and part of popular culture. It might be implemented in these cases, merely out of sentiment for how places of death have been marked over centuries in Western society. One needs confirmation also from additional markers (like inscriptions referring to the Bible) before one can deduce that a cross has indeed been incorporated into a Christian ritual.

The memorial becomes the created space marking the death of a person at a specific place and time. The roadside memorial is there for the sake of the friends and relatives of the deceased, assisting in the process of grief and mourning. Memorials may even serve as places of pilgrimage, sites to be visited, and places where one feels close to the deceased. Memorials are there to assist in remembering the deceased.

Some memorials may even serve as a warning to others passing it; not only warning of a dangerous curve in the road that may cause a road accident, but also warning of the temporality of human existence.

In the last chapter conclusions from the analysis in this chapter will be drawn.

6. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this study, an attempt was made to establish the connection between Material Religion and Visual Culture Studies by way of referring to roadside memorials along the South African roads. Ten examples of memorials were identified, described and discussed to derive some sense of meaning thereof. Mitchell (1996:71) indicates that images, and in this case the elements used in the memorials, should be asked 'what they want' in order to create meaning thereof, but in the end, it remains the observer who answers this question and determines the meaning of the images.

In this final chapter, conclusions are drawn from the investigation of the visual examples. The conclusions will refer back to the examples discussed in the previous chapter, as well as, to topics featuring in preceding chapters.

Material religion consists of visual elements conveying some religious meaning. Religion is no longer confined to the restraints of confessions, doctrines and beliefs, but is also observable in the visual expression thereof. Religion has a close connection to the cultural worldview from which it stems. The symbols and their meaning used within the religious framework, have their origin within the cultural worldview. This is what Panofsky wanted to emphasize with the three levels of creating meaning in iconology. At times, the meaning of the symbols may be lost, although the symbols may remain. In this regard, the use of the image of the Phoenix in Example 1, as discussed in Chapter 5, is evident. It is not clear if the creators of the memorial in Example 1 intended the meaning associated with the mythological figure of the Phoenix to be part of the meaning conveyed by the memorial. Visual Culture Studies assist in interpreting the meaning associated with the memorials.

One important aspect the study revealed is the role of visual culture in the grieving process. The research by Doss (2002:70) emphasizes the role of material elements in mourning. This is evident also in the memorials investigated in this study: the display of particular material objects with meaning known only to the creator of the memorial plays a role in mourning the death of a beloved son (compare Example 2 discussed in Chapter 5).

The role of memory is significant in the grieving process. The fear that the dead will be forgotten, results in the creation of some visible demonstration that the dead who are absent now, have had a significant and lasting presence in society. The memorials play a role as places of memory (Davies 2005:101), places to be visited in pilgrimage-like fashion in order to remember the dead. Relatives and friends of the deceased create some sign of remembrance, some proof of existence, in commemoration of the deceased. Example 6 discussed in Chapter 5 has become such a place to remember the deceased by. The memory is not a permanent aspect. For a time, the memorial serves the place as a reminder that death has occurred there, but as time passes, the natural decay of the memorial makes it no longer a place to be visited. Several examples discussed in Chapter 5 show signs of decay (paint being replaced by rust, veld fire destroying a wooden cross, etc.). The memorials are not permanent structures, but serve a purpose in the mourning process. As they deteriorate and become visually less appealing, they 'want' less and less attention to be paid to them as images.

This study emphasized the use of Threat Management Theory to explain ways of dealing with death and how people try and cope with the fear of death. The terror of death, which gnaws like a worm at our human core, causes immense and eternal despair. To counter this, people increase the esteem of the deceased by emphasizing the relevant and important role the individual played in society. In this way, the significance of the loss of the individual is increased considerably. By increasing the high esteem and regard in which the individual was held, people become aware of the importance the individual had to society. Example 10, discussed in Chapter 5, exhibits this aspect. A beloved husband, father and grandfather, a revered individual, will surely be missed in society.

In African culture, veneration rituals exist and continue to re-enforce the relation between the living family members of the deceased. This might be a reason why no roadside memorial from an African background could be found. The rituals pertaining to death are culturally constructed and strongly maintained.

The construction and presence of the roadside memorials must be seen as attempts to make death meaningful (Doss 2002:63). Those who died on the roads are

remembered. The mourning and loss of a loved one are exhibited in the public domain. Their deaths become bearable if many share the burden of grief.

The memorials also convey a message of hope. Davies (2005:110, 115) indicates how messages about death and the history of death also contain an element of hope. All is not in vain or lost with the death of someone. There remains an aspect of hope; life still continues. Several of the examples discussed in Chapter 5 contain messages of hope. The memorials where verses from the Bible formed part of the montage, all had the intention to convey a message of hope; hope for a better future after death; hope for peace and comfort to those who remain alive. For Davies (2005:115) hope is linked to a place and to feeling. Hope is framed by psychological-philsophical-theological-geographical-archtectural considerations (Davies 2005:115). Hope becomes the counter to the fear of death. The roadside memorials become the visual manifestation of hope in the face of death.

The roadside memorials appear to be objects out of place. The serene and peaceful vistas of nature along the roads are suddenly interrupted by the presence of a visual object reminding one of death. The memorials remind us of the fleeting brevity of life. In the case of Example 4 discussed in Chapter 5, the park-like setting of the surroundings, the beauty of the landscape, is marred by a visual expression of the reality of death. This interrupts the pleasurable experience of natural beauty along the roadside for the drivers and passengers in motor vehicles passing by.[51] One is not expecting to encounter a reminder of death in this environment. The memorials as objects out of place, remind us of what Foucault (1967) identified as heterotopia[52]. The roadside memorials become these heterotopia; places present in

[51] Van Eeden (2012:87) addresses the matter of automobility describing the privilege of mobility. All the memorials discussed here are accessible only for the traveler and reflect in its origin something of the ability to travel.

[52] In Foucault's analysis of spaces, he identifies two categories of space: the utopia and the heterotopia. The heterotopia is a space that represents the realization of the utopia and simultaneously represents all arrangements in society. It is in fact a space that lies outside of all places, but can still be localized (Foucault 1967:3). These spaces reflecting all possible relationships are called heterotopias. As example, Foucault (1967:3) discusses the mirror, which simultaneously reflects an unreal reality (utopia) but also shows the real world in which one exists (heterotopia). Spaces that exist, created and maintained by society, but reflect a 'realized utopia', that combine and challenge all connections within society, are what Foucault (1967:3) calls, 'heterotopias'. Heterotopias reflect a relationship with what is real, as well as that, which is not real nor present.

one environment but reminding us of a different world: the reality of death. Foucault (1967:4) refers to the places reminding us of the deceased as heterotopia.

6.2 Implications of the research

Some concluding remarks containing the results of and implications drawn from this study are presented below.

6.2.1 The memorials are meant to be [want to be] seen

The memorials are visible, some more than others. They are not hidden. They are in the public domain. In different contexts over time, mourning practices have oscillated between being in the public or the private domain. According to Davies (2005:64), there has over time been a gradual shift, moving death and mourning from the public sphere to the private domain. The contexts may, however, differ. An individual decides and arranges personalized rites in dealing with death. The opposite perspective is presented by Klaassens, Groote, and Vanclay (2013) when they indicate how roadside memorials actually contribute to the making public of private mourning. Both perspectives are valid, as Davies emphasized the personalization of the mourning rites and Klaassens, Groote and Vanclay the place where mourning is located. This perspective can be subjective, as mourning may in its very nature, be personal and can also simultaneously be publicly displayed, although it is not so in all cases. Traditionally, a funeral was a public affair for all in society to attend. Although roadside memorials may be viewed as a personal matter, the expressions of grief are still publicly exhibited.

The memorials do not have meaning only to the ones who initiated them. Those who build them are sharing the memorial with society. All the memorials are erected in clear sight of all passers-by. The memorials as material religion are intended to be seen in Mitchell's phrasing: they *want* to be seen.

The materiality of the memorials creates an awareness of duality. Although physically present in the material world, the memorials contain symbols and are pointing towards an invisible existence. Once again, the memorials serve as a reminder of the dual human condition: a human body combined with a self-consciousness (Becker 1973:42, 44, 69). By looking at the materiality of the

memorials, humans are reminded that all human existence is bound to this earthly body with physical needs. However, a non-physical existence is alluded to by the mere presence of the physical sign recalling the absence of the body of the deceased. The memorials serve as reminders that humans are to live here and can exist elsewhere as well, alluding to human existence in the face of the sacred reality. By being visible markers, the implication is that the dead are intended to remain visible among the living. The dead are no longer relegated to the fringes of society, but remain part of the lives of the living. Compare in this regard to 4.6.1 where the death rituals are discussed as being considered to indicate the presence of the deceased among the living.

6.2.2 The memorials communicate meaning

The memorials mean something. They are not just erected for aesthetic reasons to function as some sort of decoration of the surroundings – to liven up the monotonous landscape along roads. They are not erected for aesthetic value only (compare Example 4 discussed in Chapter 5).

The obvious meaning is that all will recognize the memorial to convey a message about death. Nobody looking at the memorials will suspect that a birth or baptism took place at the site. All know that the signs (whatever form they have) refer to death. That is the first meaning possible through the shared culture. People have seen crosses in graveyards or have seen images of crosses associated with death and may immediately suspect the reference to death when seeing a cross. The more obscure meaning(s) may be somewhat different. The way in which death occurred may be communicated (i.e. the presence of a motorcycle helmet may indicate a road accident). The emotion conveyed through the elements constituting the memorial is not obviously identifiable. Some elements, however, exude the feeling of sorrow and despair (compare Example 2 discussed in Chapter 5). The meticulous and loving way in which a childlike scene has been recreated at a memorial, reveals the sorrow of a mother losing a child. Yet it is not possible to discern the complete meaning of the elements in the memorials as intended by the people who assembled them.

The memorials convey a longing for togetherness. The absence of the deceased makes a difference in the world, to such an extent that people deem it necessary to express their terror, grief and despair at the departure of the deceased. Many people

seek comfort in messages of hope and reassurance; messages found in the Bible. The deceased will be missed in the roles they played in the lives of those remaining behind (compare Example 10 discussed in Chapter 5). A motorcycle accident robbed a family of a father, a husband, and a grandfather. The memorial conjures up a world of emotions.

6.2.3 The memorials are concerned with death

The fear of death is communicated. The memorials serve as a reminder of the reality and presence of death. The memorials create an awareness of death, forcing society to face the fact of death. Solomon *et al.* (2015:224) suggest this corrective is necessary in order to face the terror of death: acknowledge death as reality, do not ignore death. People are reminded of the inevitability of death. The memorials also remind us of the deceased, trying to indicate the relevance and value of the deceased and by doing so, establishing some kind of self-esteem for the deceased. The value of the deceased is indicated, and a message is communicated that the one who died did matter to some people; they may no longer be here, but they are missed. Their absence is noted with sadness. The recognition given to the absence of the deceased provides meaning to the life of the deceased. Their death has meaning (Doss 2002:63).

The memorials serve the purpose of creating awareness of death. According to the Terror Management Theory, it is this awareness of death that helps people cope with the fear of death (Solomon *et al.* 2015:213). Becoming aware of the reality of death is likened to being awakened from sleep (Solomon *et al.* 2015:214).

Memorials may sometimes mean nothing, but only beckon for a response. “Sometimes things happen with images, which aren’t necessarily about meaning; the images may provoke some actions” (Rose 2007:17). The memorials serve the purpose of assisting in the grieving process. The question is not so much how the viewer should treat the image, but how the image affects the viewer (Rose 2001:28). The reaction to the memorials is to share in the grief and mourning of the deceased. The memorials may have no other function than that.

6.2.4 The memorials communicate something about an understanding of transcendence

By constructing the memorials, people are enacting their beliefs about life and death. The meaning associated with the memorial must be seen as framed within a specific worldview. Life is perceived not as a fleeting moment of existence, which abruptly ends. Life transcends this worldly existence and crosses a border into an invisible spiritual realm. The memorials serve as communication to the deceased. There are personal messages left at the memorials, indicating a wish to communicate with the deceased. Compare the personal messages addressed to the deceased in Examples 2 and 6 discussed in Chapter 5.

The construction of memorials for the dead becomes a human attempt at reaching out to the transcendence to provide support for human life (Becker 1973:200). The citing of Bible verses in the memorials indicates how God is implored to provide hope and comfort. As has been indicated earlier in this study, Feuerbach was convinced that the fear of death leads to the creation of gods – giving faces and places to the transcendence. In this way, death motivates people to seek the presence of the transcendence. The event of death is so personal that people do not turn to the church or religious community for support. The personal loss is experienced as an individual loss requiring an individualized ritual. Faith becomes a personal matter in dealing with death (Becker 1973:200).

Becker (1973:202) comes close to arguing that religion becomes the counter for the neurosis of death: Reliance on God becomes the way in which humans can find comfort outside of themselves. The myth-ritual constructs associated with religion assist humans to pass through life. By focusing on God for support, humans agree to rely not on themselves or others. In this way, religion does become a coping mechanism for human existence. Compare in this regard Von Gennep's discussion of the rites of passage assisting humans to deal with and celebrate main events in life.

It is peculiar that the gods humans create out of fear of death (compare Feuerbach), become the supporting power for humans in time of death. In this way, Peter Berger's (1990:27) analysis of how humans make sense of and contribute to the creation of their surroundings makes sense. First, through a process of

externalization, humans create reality (in this case, creating the domain of the gods). Then, through objectification, reality becomes autonomous and then starts governing human behavior (subjectification). Humans create gods, the gods become autonomous and start governing human existence.

An important perspective is provided by Apostolos-Cappadona (2017), in her discussion of religious responses to art. She argues that, what is important is that the religious image should be considered as the "embodiment of the Sacred" and that, as such, the image provides "immediate and permanent access to the deity" (Apostolos-Cappadona 2017:35). The responses to religious images are, however, varied; based on the observer and believer's preconceptions of encounters with the sacred. It is not to be assumed that the crosses in all examples discussed here fulfil the function Apostolos-Cappadona refers to. As has been indicated earlier, the cross is part of popular culture in Western societies and can be utilized without any religious significance.

In the case of the memorials under discussion, the image of the cross does become important. Where the use of a cross is combined with the inclusion of Bible verses, it becomes more likely to conclude that the cross is no longer just a Western cultural symbol marking death. Instead, it becomes the embodiment of the sacred, when from a Christian point of view, the cross is presented as a symbol of Jesus. The cross then becomes the point of access to the sacred, wherever the cross may be. For Apostolos-Cappadona (2017:35), the embodiment of the sacred becomes the "centering point for meditation, prayer, ritual, or religious experience." In this case, the cross beside the road becomes a "centering point" where materiality is transcended and access to the sacred is gained. The religious image further provides the religious observer with the reassurance of the omnipresence of the sacred, which is not held hostage to only one location and in only one image (Apostolos-Cappadona 2017:36).

The roadside memorials become places where the visible expressions of the absence of the dead people are sacred places and gateways to the sacred. These memorials become a point of contact between two worlds, a hinge between the immanent and the transcendent.

6.2.5 The memorials communicate something about spirituality

The creation of roadside memorials, although evident already from the eighteenth century, is a fairly new phenomenon in South Africa – at least in the ways reported on in this study. Traditionally, the dead were relegated to a cemetery, later niche gardens complimented the resting place of the dead, and most recently, roadside memorials started appearing to keep the place of departure of the dead visible to the public as well. Roadside memorials have not been a recognized part of South African cultural practices for very long. It indicates a dissatisfaction with prescribed mainline belief and religious practices amongst those opting to construct a memorial at the place of a loved one's death.

It affirms that there are bereaved for whom, traditionally, death rituals and customs were centered around churches and graveyards, and who now find these lacking in significance. By making roadside memorials for the dead, these individuals are acting outside of the mainline traditions that once would have applied to them. It indicates actions deriving from an autonomous spirituality not prescribed by the church or any religious community. People seek and create rituals – meaning bearing actions – to assist in rites of passage; meaningful moments in life – in this case, dealing with death. Davies (2005:56) refers to this autonomous spirituality, where mainline belief is replaced by individual preferences.

The main reason for the changes in spirituality Davies (2005:57) identifies is the changing view of the role religion should play in society: Where religion has become marginalized or ignored in a society, this new practice contributes to a new way of thinking about and dealing with death. Death, as the immanent reminder of transcendence, somehow still has to be accommodated in a new visuality in which the church may have been decentered.

It is thus, not as simple as Davies tries to make it sound. In a post-secular world, there are signs of an upsurge in the growth and importance of religion in society. There is even talk of a period of re-socialization in current times.[53] Religion is again

[53] Compare Peter Berger (1999) and Jose Casanova (2011).

becoming an important consideration in society.[54] This should not be understood as a return to the role, and influence religion had in society prior to secularization. Religion now will have a new role and function (Berger 1999). Compare in this regard how Krüger, Lubbe and Steyn (1996:300) emphasize the new role of religion as presenting an "alternative spirituality" to society.

Becker (1973:199) indicates how humans create myth-ritual constructs in order to deal with the terror and fear of death. Through erecting memorials of death alongside roadsides, people are participating in the myth-ritual construction in order to cope with their fear of death and the terror death causes. These myth-ritual constructs become part of the traditional worldviews associated with religion. When there are no worldviews into which the myth-ritual construct fits, it leads to a situation where "religion becomes a very personal matter" (Becker 1973:200). People create their own myth-rituals serving their personal needs of dealing with the terror of death. The memorials are therefore, expressions of a form of spirituality, expressions of a cultural worldview consisting of myths and rituals as a means by which people mitigate their existence from the beginning to the end of their presence in this world.

In communities with a worldview providing in the ritualized contact with the dead, it serves no purpose to construct rituals and constructions serving the purpose of connecting with the dead. In African communities, rituals around death have not become loosened and deteriorated to the extent that Western-centered rituals around Christian church and graveyards have become. The result is that no roadside memorial pertaining to an African background was discovered so far.

6.2.6 The memorials indicate a fear of being forgotten

The fear of being forgotten leads to the creation of means of extending human presence on earth. This fear of being forgotten also serves as motivation behind the excessive use of social media. By participating in social media, making one's presence known, the perception is created that 'I am still here, do not forget about me'. This study only focuses on visual expressions of dealing with the dead. Social

[54] Although the demise of religion has been predicted due to secularization (cf. Berger 1967), a report by Norris and Inglehart (2004) indicates how religion is in fact growing worldwide and especially among poor and destitute communities.

media as an expression of fear of death may prove to be a field in need of research in the future.

Visual expressions are there to remind us of the absence of the deceased. By doing so the self-esteem of the deceased is bolstered as if to indicate that the deceased was a person of note, a valuable member of society, a worthy person who did not deserve to die, a person who will be missed. By bolstering the esteem in which the deceased is held, the fear of death is allayed.

By constructing structures indicating places of death, people are, in fact, extending the presence of the deceased. They are not only constructing signs as a reminder that their loved ones did exist, but they are also keeping them symbolically present in society. And yet, this is what Eco (1979:7) refers to as a lie. Symbols are unable to convey the truth; they constitute a lie. The truth remains that people live, and then they die, no longer being present on earth except by way of symbols that can allude to their (former) presence. This implies that the current tendency is to keep the dead as part of this worldly reality, in order that relatives and those remaining behind can find constant comfort in access to sites where the remains or signs of the deceased are established. This is also confirmed by the research done in The Netherlands by Klaassens, Groote, and Vanclay (2013).

6.3 Final consideration

Did this research effectively address the research questions posed at the beginning of this study?

- What are the meanings of roadside memorials as markers of the absence of the dead in a South African context?

The hypothesis worked with here is that death is undeniably a part of human existence. The awareness of death fills human consciousness with fear of mortality. In order to increase self-esteem and to ensure that the dead will not be forgotten, visual structures are erected to serve several purposes: as reminders of death, as reminders of the deceased and to function as places of comfort for the loved ones in a grieving process. As already indicated in Chapter 1, this research resulted in examples reflecting mainly a Western cultural worldview. As Hagemann (2018:64) had also affirmed, roadside memorials are not common among Africans. Africans

have rituals fulfilling the purpose roadside memorials intend to have. Rituals venerating and remembering the dead exist in Africa, making the construction of roadside memorials to mark the place of death unnecessary.

Several sub-questions arise:

- Why do some people give visual expressions to the absence of the dead?

Visual expressions of the absence of the dead form part of a process of coping with fear. It is also an acknowledgement of the reality of death. The visual expressions serve as a reminder to others of the reality of death. Visual expressions are manifestations of grief and the terror of death. Places of mourning are created in order to establish a ritual in order to cope with grief.

By constructing a monument, the life of the deceased is celebrated. The visual memorial is created in honor of the deceased and serves to keep a life worth remembering visible – in the public eye. It contributes to the self-esteem of the dead. The visual manifestation affirms that the deceased was a meaningful person who will be missed.

- What, or who, determines the meaning attached to the visual expressions of the absence of the dead?

Threat Management Theory suggests that the meaning of visual memorials is to express fear; the fear of the limitation of human existence; the fear of one's own death; the fear that death creates separation and the possibility of forgetting the deceased.

- How do visual expressions of the absence of the dead reflect the relation between immanence and transcendence?

By creating visual expressions of the absence of dead people, an expression filled with religious symbolism (i.e. a cross) is exhibited as an awareness of the religious domain within which death is framed. It does not imply faith is present in the creators of the memorials, but it does imply the presence of a spirituality. This is what is referred to as the individualization of faith. It becomes a private affair of grief and allows private thoughts of, what one personally considers, happens to the dead.

Roadside memorials serve the purpose to establish the self-esteem of the deceased, indicating their importance and worth. The memorials calm the anxiety of the relatives, and friends concerned that the deceased will be forgotten. The memorial serves as a reminder that such a person did once live and mean something to someone.

6.4 Conclusion

There has been a shift in the way in which the dead are treated. Panofsky (1992:10) indicates how, in earlier times, the living treated the dead by merely trying to keep them powerless and happy. In more recent times, the living have been treating the dead with respect and maintained the dignity of the dead (cf. Davies 2005:60). This shift has occurred with a re-evaluation of the meaning of life (Davies 2005:61). The living and the dead are eternally connected. In the present cultural worldview, the connections between humans and the sacred are presented in varied visual expressions. The way in which the dead are treated by the living may vary according to changing perceptions in cultural views.

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