

Zorica Rajković
(Institute of Folklore Research, Zagreb)

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ROADSIDE MEMORIAL
SIGNS FOR TRAFFIC
ACCIDENT VICTIMS

Roadside memorials to traffic accident victims began to appear along Yugoslav roads in the 1960s. Although legislation and public opinion have come out against them, they tenaciously survive. They appear in various forms, from improvised and temporary ones to more durable and monumental memorials. This specific phenomenon of Yugoslav contemporary culture is clearly continuing an earlier tradition of marking the place of a person's accidental death.

Wreaths, crosses, memorial slabs or plaques, and monuments are a widespread, common feature of the landscape along Yugoslav roadways*. These signs of fatal accidents have been the cause of profound concern to police and traffic authorities, and for different reasons to those engaged in tourism. The proportions the practice has assumed of marking the sites of fatal accidents in this way is best illustrated by attempts to limit it through public criticism and ban it through legislation. A number of articles have come out in the papers on "highway graves", on "turning our roads into avenues for the dead", and on the depressing effect of this "funeral atmosphere" on tourists and drivers in general; these memorial signs attract the driver's attention, and the memorials become, in turn, a possible cause of carelessness and further accidents instead of acting as a reminder and prevention of further

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death. Legislation has been passed to put an end to the growing number of roadside memorial signs, or at least to preclude their expansion. Federal legislation in 1974 forbade the erection of memorial signs on public roads and the embankments that runs along either side, and after this some of the republics passed regulations stipulating how the memorial signs could be put up (by permit only, when at a certain distance from the thoroughfare) or decisions were made to remove those signs that had been put up in an unsatisfactory manner. Since the question was a sensitive one, these regulations were followed by commentary in the newspapers, written with an understanding for the phenomenon as such, and with due respect for the deceased, but intent on explaining the necessity of legal intervention, in an attempt to alleviate any possible misunderstanding and resistance. In spite of this, however, quite a few years after the laws were passed, new memorial signs continue to be raised, and those built previously, persist, even in unsatisfactory spots, against the explicit stipulations of the regulations.

Forms of Roadside Memorial Signs

Roadside memorial signs appear in various forms, made of a wide range of materials with different additions (decorative or functional); they are of varying dimensions, some have a verbal message while others do not, and those that do, have messages that range considerably in content and breadth.

Wreath. The spot at which a fatal traffic accident takes place is marked with a wreath such as one might place on a grave. Wreaths are almost obligatory as well where a more durable memorial sign is erected: a cross, plaque or slab, or monument. The wreath might serve as the initial, temporary marker for the site of the tragedy, where a more permanent sign appears subsequently; the wreath's permanence depends, of course, on the material it is made of. Objects which happen to be near that locality, perhaps intended for some other purpose, are often used to attach the wreath to a specific place, so that it is visible from the road. One might find a wreath attached to a lamp post, an electric line pole, hung on a sign for traffic regulation or elsewhere, the railing of a bridge or fence surrounding a yard, or on a tree by the road.

Cross. Crosses are often found as memorials for the victims of fatal traffic accidents. They are of varied dimensions and construction, ranging from those improvised of two poles or boards without any additional decoration, to ones carefully fashioned from wood or metal with additional decorative and functional supplements such as a plaque with an inscription, vessels holding flowers or a candle, hooks for wreaths. It is difficult to judge to what extent the cross is chosen to mark roadside memorial signs to traffic victims as a Christian symbol, and to what extent it is simply a symbol of death, perhaps without any conscious, underlying religious feeling. Those cases where the cross is crudely fashioned, unsightly and hardly visible under the wreath lead one to consider that the cross's sole purpose is to hold up the wreath.

Memorial Slab. The most common memorial sign commemorating the victim of a traffic accident is a stone or metal slab or plaque, with or without a metal frame. It stands on

a separate stand or carrier, fixed to a natural base (such as a stone cliff overhanging a road or a large rock along the roadside) or it is built into a pedestal that has been prepared especially. Slabs of artificial black marble are very frequent in which an inscription has been carved, sometimes also showing the face of the deceased.

Monument. Monuments raised to traffic accident victims are creative and plastically formed structures, composed of a number of parts, built of various materials with the intent of permanently commemorating the victims of traffic accidents. Monuments usually give information about the victims or the accident and other texts appear, messages, and certain symbols (crosses, stars) as well as occasionally the figure of the deceased, and other symbolic, decorative and functional constituent parts or additions (parts of a car, vessels for flowers, wreath holders, railings). There are all sorts of monuments, ranging from the most modest to the most elaborate, from those made to resemble grave stones to more specific monuments which are put together from parts of cars, tools and other items, showing a leaning towards original form and symbolic expression. On the monuments of this type one often comes across a steering wheel in a compositionally prominent position, the symbolic import of which is clearly the most powerful.

“Pyramid” and Memorial Fountain. Aside from these forms of roadside memorial signs to traffic victims we also come across what is known as “a pyramid” - a wooden trapezoidal sign which usually replaces the cross on the graves of atheists, and quite rarely one can find memorial water fountains (memorial signs which include a source of fresh water as a composite part).

Care for Roadside Memorial Signs

Certain elements can sometimes be found near memorial signs to traffic victims, such as special wreath holders and parts of automobile wreckage (this is not referring to the parts that have been built into the monument itself). The area surrounding some of the memorial signs has been carefully landscaped, pathways have been built from the road to the monument, and some are encompassed by a fence, probably to protect them from possible damage. The fence and fenced-in area around the monument enhance its importance. People take care of the memorial signs they have put up: they visit them, maintain them, bring fresh flowers and wreaths, light candles. They do so most frequently on the anniversary of the accident and death of victims, as well as on All Saint's Day. On memorial signs to victims of the Orthodox faith or to those whose customs have been formed under the influence of that religion, one can come across scenes identical to those at the graveyard: the family gathers on certain days to pay their respects to the deceased. They bring food and drink, cigarettes and flowers to the memorial sign to be left there, and the mother or wife of the deceased may keen (addressing the deceased with a text that is structured and performed in the traditional manner).

Who Raises Roadside Memorial Signs?

Research on memorial signs to traffic accident victims has not provided a precise answer to the question of the identity of those who have these memorials built. It has only been established that these are usually members of small, closely knit communities (familial, social and professional). Roadside memorial signs to traffic victims are not put up by relatives and friends of the victims alone, but also by the place the victims worked, or social and sports organizations they belonged to. The places of employment that most commonly do so are transport companies. This is a socially acceptable custom, and it is entrenched in the highest sociopolitical echelons, as evidenced by the memorial signs raised to prominent politicians such as Boris Krajer, Slobodan Penezić Krcun, Svetolik Lazarević and others. The procedures associated with these memorial signs for erecting them, presenting them, and visiting them at yearly commemorations, are quite ceremonial, official, formal and go on in accordance with a specific protocol. The expansion from the strict framework of the family, especially in the direction of the professional circle and then on towards even larger social groups (place of employment, sports and sociopolitical organizations), is a sign of a shift from the strictly traditional village outlook, within which only members of the immediate family would erect monuments to their dead. But this change can be interpreted as an indicator that the emergence of the phenomenon of memorial signs to traffic accident victims is part of the conflict between old and new notions of death, i.e. part of the realm of interaction between tradition and contemporaneity.

The Phenomenon of Marking the Place of Death

Although the roadside memorial signs to traffic victims are the most frequent and obvious, it is important to note that commemorative signs are put up for victims of other sorts of traffic accidents as well: railway, air, and even waterway accidents (both maritime and river traffic).

And aside from memorial signs to victims of all sorts of traffic accidents, there are also memorial signs raised to human loss of life caused by some other accident than that of traffic: freezing, drowning, lightning or electric shock, an accidental fall, or even murder. This category includes signs put up to commemorate fallen soldiers and victims of war, if placed on the actual site of the deaths. There are such signs of all types from the more recent periods, but also from the distant past. The idea inspiring those who built them was the same, or at least similar to cases of roadside memorial signs to traffic victims, and this is the notion that the place of a person's sudden, tragic demise ought to be marked somehow. For ethnological understanding of the roadside memorial signs for victims of traffic accidents as a specific recent phenomenon of our culture, it is important to observe the links which connect this phenomenon with the past, because certain continuity and tradition in marking places of death in accidents have been established. Legends and earlier monuments are testimony to the fact that the phenomenon of marking the place of a person's death dates back a long way; there is mention of it in both recent and earlier literature. Long ago, it was customary throughout Europe for a murderer to raise a monument to his victim at the spot where the murder took place, for the salvation of the victim's soul; and aside from the monuments themselves there are agreements (from the 13th to the 16th century) that have been preserved

to this effect, drawn up between the murderer and the family of the murdered. (Zadnikar 1964,14; Wörterbuch der dt. Völkde 1974,540,774-775, Steinkreutz)

Apart from various monuments which are the material evidence of such events, there are other proofs for this phenomenon. One of them is legends about various fatal accidents which mention memorials for the victims of those tragic accidents. Among these legends there are a few well-known and wide-spread types: legends about the murderer of a feudal lord, about the "svatovska groblja" (places where all the participants in a wedding-feast perished in a conflict with another group), legends of fratricide and others.

However, it is necessary to take certain earlier interpretations of legends of "wedding cemeteries" with a grain of salt, because of the lack of distinction between various monuments intended for the deceased, and especially when confusing grave stones with memorials built on the site of a death (where the deceased is not buried).

On the other hand, legend as a source of information on the tradition of marking the place of a person's death should be treated with due caution and a full awareness that this is legend and not historical fact. Strange natural stones and monuments of unknown origin in legends are sometimes interpreted as memorials built at sites of accidental death or as grave stones, and yet this may not be the case. The question of associating a legend with some object, the relationship between a legend and an object, was quite inspiratively touched upon by H. Bausinger: objects do not create a legend, but rather an interpretation anchored in a general horizon of assumptions is decisive, provoked by the object. Crosses and memorials of unknown origin located at unusual spots provoke the interpretation, so there is talk of death and crime where events of this kind cannot, in fact, be proven. (Bausinger 1968: 175).

One could also treat the case of a site acquiring the name of the person killed there as a memorial of sorts of the place of death.¹ Toponyms connected to a legend of someone's death are a similar case.² Fiction provides examples of the broadly accepted custom of marking the spot where someone meets a tragic end.³ If we turn to the present we can also discover some generally known phenomena of this kind: these are the temporary and permanent signs put up in spots where victims of terrorism, political conflict and violence of other sorts have met their death (to mention just a few examples: flowers and permanent monuments along the Berlin wall where those who tried to escape were killed; flowers and candles on the spot in Prague where Jan Palach burned himself to death; flowers at the spot where Aldo Moro was kidnapped and his chauffeur killed; heaps of flowers, wreaths,

¹ I am familiar with examples from the Yugoslav islands: two coves were given names after people who lost their lives there. From the literature there is a Soviet example: the town of Spasko changed its name to Vengerevo, because this was the name of a man who was shot there. (Russkoe narodnoe poetičeskoe tvorčestvo 1971: 410-413).

² Such are, for example, the toponyms like "Maiden's Leap", "Maiden Cliffs" and so forth, which are allegedly widespread from Germany to the Balkans, and are related to the equally widespread legends of a girl's suicide who leaped from a cliff to defend her honor". (Pilar 1931: 23-26).

³ I mention one example each from world and Yugoslav literature. In the novel *Colombe* by Prospero Merimee, the heroine takes her brother to the place that their father was killed. There is a heap there of dry and fresh branches, and from it protrudes a black painted wooden cross. Merimée interprets this as an ancient custom in Corsica that passersby toss a stone or branch onto a place where a person has met a violent death, and the heroes of his novel, brother and sister, pray for the soul of their father. (On heaps of stones at sites where someone has died, see: Chevalier-Gheerbrant 1983: 249). In the novel *Djeca božja* (Children of God) by Yugoslav writer Petar Šegedin, crosses are mentioned on crossroads, in hills and in sea caves that were placed there to commemorate someone's death or accident.

decorations and death notices at the spot where the victims of terrorism in Munich during the 1980 Oktoberfest were struck down; flowers at the place where John Lennon, member of the Beatles, was killed; wreaths tossed into the sea near Sahalin following the South Korean airplane crash, 1983; the laying of wreaths by official representatives of Yugoslavia and France on the spot where the Yugoslav airplane crashed on Corsica, etc.).

A Particular Facet of Our Culture

I have meager data on the marking of traffic accident sites outside of Yugoslavia. It seems that this custom is not as widespread elsewhere as it is here. There are a few examples of this behaviour from countries bordering on Yugoslavia: Italy, Greece, Austria, Romania, and from far off Mexico. Apparently the custom of marking traffic accident sites within Yugoslavia has assumed proportions and characteristics specific to this country, with considerable local variation. The predominance of the solidly made, monumental type sign in the south of the country, especially in the Dinaric region, and the more modest, improvised type in the northwest illustrate the very real, vital distinctions existing in the degree of traditionalism of individual regions; in this particular case they relate to concepts of death and the cult of the deceased. These distinctions are obvious enough that they serve to confirm findings from earlier ethnological research (the ethnographic zones) and indicate that these results are still relevant and ought to be taken into consideration when studying contemporary phenomena.

Memorial signs to traffic accident victims are a particular facet of our contemporary culture. They are closely linked to certain aspects of contemporary life, particularly of the sudden upsurge of traffic. It is widely known that the sudden increase in the number of vehicles and drivers on the road has not been accompanied by a corresponding development of traffic arteries, and a culture of traffic etiquette is also slow in emerging. All this culminates in an exceptionally large number of traffic accidents. The urge to own a car does not merely spring from the dynamic pace of the modern way of life; the automobile in this environment at present is more than a mere transportation vehicle; it is also an indication of financial power, standard of living, prestige, a sense of being up-to-date, and consequently a statement of the owner's social status. The attitude to the automobile in some cases borders on fetishism.

Death in a Traffic Accident

The memorial sign is raised to a person who has died, but speaks more of the individual who had it put it up and his attitude towards death, to the deceased, to other people (for whom the message is intended) and expresses his feeling for beauty - in the shaping of the memorial sign and its decoration.

Memorial signs to victims of traffic accidents are a product of the expression of man's feelings about death in general, especially death caused by our current lifestyle - death in traffic accidents. This is a current continuation of death customs, the many shapes and forms of which are familiar to us from the recent and distant past. This is, therefore, a new response to an old, eternal question, in new garb. Man's attitude towards death has changed with time.

In the past it was determined more profoundly by tradition and religion, with considerable local differences springing from the narrow cultural region and religion or confession. Many elements of the attitude towards death are still alive that date to earlier periods, founded on the traditions of individual cultural (ethnographic) and religious regions. In terms of the commemoration of traffic accident victims, this earlier layer is evident in the very fact that the need from earlier times to mark the place of death imposed itself profoundly at the moment that a new type of tragic, sudden death was on the ascent; that earlier layer is visible in the transferral of earlier content from the cult of the deceased (with local and confessional differences, such as the maintenance of *pomen*- ritual visit - at the memorial and the leaving of food, beverage and other necessities near the memorial sign) it is also visible in the language of the inscriptions, the inherited symbols, the tendency to build the memorial in the first year following the death, and other details.

The custom of marking the place of a violent death and death under unusual circumstances as known from the past, especially death for the good of the community i.e. heroic death (the death of a soldier) easily establishes points in common with the new death - death in a traffic accident. In the situation of the sudden motorization boom, with this first generation of Yugoslav drivers, death in traffic accidents, no matter how frequent, is not ordinary death. The automobile fetish is transmitted to the death that is caused by it. Death in a traffic accident is not the alienated death of a sick person in a medical institution, nor is it the death of a lonely elderly person in village or city. It is the death of young people in the prime of their vitality and productivity. It is therefore understandable that this form of death can not be included in the model of standard death; it floats in some gap governed by the specific circumstances of such an end. Partially, or at least in some cases, this form of death coincides with the pattern of "heroic death". (Rihtman-Auguštin 1978,125) It is a markedly tragic death (explicit in the inscriptions on the memorials, in the newspaper announcements, new epitaphs and the latter-day epic poems inspired by traffic accidents). In cases where professional drivers are killed, their death is the consequence of their professional activity, and has the dimension of a contribution, a sacrifice for the sake of the community. Death in a traffic accident in this country is not death out of defiance or a disregard for life, out of a lack of motivation for life or a gambling nature as is the case with the death of idols such as James Dean. Death from traffic accidents is seen as very serious in its tragedy, it is a part of our modern way of life and as such is accepted, one of the responses to this being the emergence of memorials to its victims.

The phenomenon of memorials to traffic accident victims clearly holds no place in the notion of death as described by contemporary world scholars, or those who see the essential feature of death in the 20th century as its invisibility (the isolation of the dying in medical institutions), the denial of death and modern civilized man's inability to face it. (Ariès 1977; Kübler-Ross 1979; Morin 1981; Thomas 1980) The phenomenon of marking the place of traffic death, seen as a response and way of facing death in traffic, indicates that contemporary Western European and American notions of death are foreign to our perception of death, which produces memorials to victims of traffic accidents. (As far as I know, it is not customary to mark the place of traffic accident death in Western Europe and the United States.)

The Communication Aspect

The phenomenon of memorial signs to traffic accident victims is also linked to the need for interhuman communication in as broad a circle as possible; this need is manifested in a desire to communicate the message of the tragic event beyond the circle of the limited social group to which the victim belonged, but not to anyone and everyone; it is to be communicated to those who take part in traffic, who travel by road.

Roadside memorial signs to traffic accident victims can be considered as factors in interhuman communication. They are objects that people have shaped to transmit messages. People who pass by a roadside memorial to traffic accident victims, even when they see it from afar, and if we assume they are already familiar with such phenomena, will know that one or more people were killed in a traffic accident on that spot.

The roadside memorial as a whole, as an object that communicates something, has semiological value. We can treat it as a unique sign that transmits a message between the sender (the people who erected the monument) and the receiver (the passerby). In simple terms, these messages can be reduced to one basis which could be formulated as follows: A person was killed in a traffic accident here! This message, for example, is conveyed by every wreath resembling those placed on graves, as long as it is by the roadway. No additional inscription is necessary.

The wreath, cross, memorial slab or plaque, and some form of monuments, as well as the memorial water fountain are forms that have been traditionally bound, in this culture, to the phenomena of death. They are chosen, as such, as generally accepted signs for death, acquiring a new but easily interpreted meaning when erected by a road: they become signs for death in a traffic accident.

The features of any shape with an inscription realize one of the basic forms of human communication, which is linguistic, i.e. verbal communication. Since it appears here in written form, in the form of a text, the text can be analyzed itself from communication and literary theoretical aspects. Aside from verbal communication, the features facilitate non-verbal communication as well, i.e. they contain signs from other semiotic systems. These are symbols and images such as the cross and five-pointed star, palms and other branches, and photographs of the deceased or his or her figure portrayed in some other technique, a picture of the vehicle and so forth.

Two levels of symbol are intertwined on the roadside monuments. One is of inherited symbols (such as the cross) and the other is of poetic symbols which come from poetic metaphors and which we meet verbally and artistically expressed (such as bud, flower=youth, a broken branch=interrupted youth); some of these also are rooted in inherited symbols (such as wreath, branch) which does not mean that those who chose them to express something were aware of all the overlaid meanings.

The most frequent symbol on roadside monuments is the cross. This symbol of Christianity indicates one's membership in a faith, but it is also a widely known sign for death. When there is a cross in an inscription - a little cross before a date or the year of death - it is clearly reduced exclusively to a symbol of death. Instead of it one may find a verbal sign in its place - a written word either in full or abbreviated form (deceased, dec.).

The five-pointed star is sometimes painted red, and is also often added to roadside memorials. It symbolizes ideological membership, i.e. the idea of Communism. A star also appears on memorials as a part of the inscription, as a symbol equal to letters and numbers,

as the cross does. This is then a small star, five-pointed or shown schematically as three intersecting lines, and it is before the date or year of birth. Instead of it one might find the word, in full or abbreviated form (born, b.).

The branch has been borrowed from the symbolism of Western Christianity. It is recognizable on some of the memorials as a branch, shown more or less schematically. More frequently it is simply a branch (drawn, scratched in, carved in, soldered on). Perhaps the branch is sometimes chosen as a principle that is the opposite of death, as a sign of life, perhaps the tree of life. The fact that a broken branch counters a whole one seems to suggest this, since the broken branch certainly symbolizes interrupted life. In some instances it is a branch with a bud. This is a symbol of life enhanced by emphasis on youth. And these symbols (the branch, bud, the broken branch) find their corresponding expressions in the text of the inscription (such as "Oh, the broken branch on my tree...")

An additional meaning for the wreath and cross may be conveyed through color; when painted in white they signify the death of a very young person or a small child.

In the context of a traffic accident, the vehicle becomes the cause, the guilty one, bearing part of the guilt or at least participating in the accident. This new, deadly role for the vehicle seems to be concentrated on one part of it - the steering wheel. The selection is hardly random. The steering wheel mediates between the person and the vehicle, one guides the car with the steering wheel, and guilt for poor handling of the car is directed at the steering wheel. In this manner it becomes a symbol of death by traffic accident and it appears either as an object, on memorials, an authentic steering wheel incorporated into the memorial, or it is symbolized graphically. As a graphic sign it is part of the inscription and for the informed observer it corresponds to a verbal message that communicates the cause of death: "in a traffic accident". With the rubber tire of the vehicle something similar happens as with the steering wheel. Shaped of stone as a composite part of the monumental and costly monument, depicted more or less realistically, the tire acquires the function of a sign that interprets the circumstances of an accident or death under the wheels of car.

The messages on roadside memorials to traffic accident victims can be "read" in various ways. Each individual can interpret them differently in terms of individual receptivity and cultural readiness, and the capacity to infiltrate into their polysemy and those contents on which one can only indirectly conclude. A complex memorial, for instance, ornately decorated, carved in stone, conveys much more than is written in its inscription. It tells us of the affluence of those who built it, their relationship to the deceased and death in general, their relationship to the community at large, and it indicates relations in the family or work collective, and leads one to note certain hidden motives behind the decision to build such a memorial.

The messages of roadside memorials to victims of traffic accidents are fixed in terms of space, but not in terms of time. They last as long as the memorials do, and are realized whenever a receiver appears. With time the messages of a memorial change: a neglected and shabby memorial offers different additional information from those that show signs of human care. The senders of these messages, the people who had the memorials built, are not part of the communication, but are being replaced by the mediator - the memorial. This circumstance makes it possible for the messages of the memorial to victims of traffic accidents even after the senders are gone.

One may attempt to interpret the messages of these memorials on individual concrete examples, and while doing so it is important to keep in mind that these are only the

interpretations of a specific person (the receiver). On individual examples it is visible in what way the verbal and non-verbal messages interweave, whether or not they overlap, and how much, i.e. if they say the same thing or complement each other successfully.

Roadside memorials to traffic accident victims communicate in two different ways. The first goes on in the brief contact between receiver and memorial, which happens under specific circumstances: the receiver is in a vehicle and passing the memorial at a greater or lesser speed, the memorial enters his or her field of vision, and the receiver's interest in the memorial at that moment varies, depending on many other circumstances. The perceptive capacity of individual receivers varies under such conditions. With such fleeting contact, in passing, the first degree of communication takes place (if we can call it that), in which only a part of the information contained in even slightly complex memorials reaches the receiver. The communication minimum which should be realized in such contact is reduced to recognizing memorials as signs of death in a traffic accident and the basic messages that all memorials have in common (it says that someone was killed in traffic on that spot).

In the case of memorials from the category of memorial plaques and monuments, the communication maximum can only be reached through more intensive contact, because such memorials rely, along with the non-verbal, on verbal communication through the inscription. It is as if certain memorials, i.e. those who erected them, knew that most of the contacts realized with passersby would be of that first, fleeting type of contact, and so they don't insist on a verbal message, reducing it therefore to the minimum (victim's first and last name, date of birth and death). They leave the roadside memorial to convey all else with its form, site, symbols and other facets of non-verbal communication that act at much greater distances. Those specific and original memorials composed of parts of the vehicle and tools, with a steering wheel in a visible place are prominent in this respect. The roadside memorials to traffic accident victims do not, principally, rely on the verbal message, rather the inscription is built in as one of the possible languages of communication. The inscription can not be their most important and first language, because the conditions for communication are specific: in passing and from afar it is difficult to read anything. That is why the memorial usually speaks with its own language, the language of visual signs and symbols, which can be recognized from afar.

Inscriptions on Memorials

Verbal messages on roadside memorials to traffic accident victims include the brief or longer sentiments inscribed on the more lasting memorials (such as monuments, monument plaques and crosses), as well as inscriptions on wreath ribbons and inscriptions added to any type of memorials, written on a separate metal or wooden plaque, or on paper or cardboard.

The inscriptions on monuments to traffic accident victims differ considerably among themselves, in terms of breadth, the type of data they contain and their composition. They vary in a range from several personal facts on the accident victim to more extensive inscriptions with information about the victim, the accident and about those who had the memorial built, expanded sometimes to include texts written in ways customary for the epitaph, in prose or in verse.

The briefest inscriptions on memorials contain only the first and last names of the victims, possibly the dates of birth and death. The epitaph additions in prose or verse are not an obligatory addition. Sometimes they are only an additional sentence, other times a longer prose text, couplet or a whole poem.

In the language of the inscriptions on roadside memorials to traffic accident victims one notes three intertwining layers. The first is the folklore language of death, taken from old epitaphs and mourning verses. The second is part of the more recent language of death such as is found in newspaper death notices. The third layer is based on literary, or more precisely poetic language which was always the preferred language for speaking of death (Čolović, 1983).

Motives, Functions, Models

Just as the automobile is an item of prestige and an expression of status, the same applies to roadside memorials. They originated and continue to appear as an expression of status; most statements from informers indicate that the majority of the roadside memorials were put up because others had done so before, and because they had seen it somewhere else. In cases where the monuments are imposing and costly, a desire for prestige and prominence certainly played a role. As far as the conscious and declarative intentions of those who had the memorial built are concerned, the two underlying functions of the memorial are: an expression of honor to the deceased and a warning to the living. (The inscription on one of the earlier memorials in Bosnia says: "May this serve as an eternal memory of you to us, and for the other drivers may it be a reminder.") One can sense the latent function, along with these others, of the community's consolidation at the moment it is threatened by the loss of its member, and the function of enhancing social prestige.

It has not been established just where and how the custom of raising memorial signs to victims of traffic accidents first began; data for each region indicate certain memorials which served as models and motivation. According to the opinions of some, the monuments raised to prominent politicians Slobodan Penezić and Svetolik Lazarević had considerable influence in Serbia on the erection of memorials to traffic accident victims. These monuments got considerable coverage in the papers. The initiators and builders of these monuments combined an old idea with new intentions: the monuments were modelled after the *krajputaši*- monuments built to Serbian soldiers who died in the 19th and early 20th century wars (the accident happened in 1964 and the monuments were officially presented to the public in 1967). Boris Krajger's death (1967) and later commemoration at the site of his demise were also events in the public eye; an epic poem was published about Krajger's death. New epic poems appeared for other traffic accidents too, as well as books containing prose descriptions of tragic traffic accidents, and other related texts. A cassette was published (1986) with an epic poem to gusla accompaniment on the death of a famous soccer player, and there is mention in the poem of a roadside memorial at the site of the accident.

The roadside memorial signs to traffic accident victims became quite widespread on Yugoslav thoroughfares in the 1960s. The earliest document on building a memorial was registered in the course of this research as 1958 for the year it was erected, and the earliest dates of accidents specified in memorial signs inscriptions are 1956 and 1957. Most of the field work was done in 1977, so it is understandable that most of the memorials studied at the time were from the 1970s. Further study of this phenomenon, up to 1983, although without extensive field work, has indicated that the memorials continue to be erected, that some have fallen into disrepair or have been removed by the invested authorities, and that some of the raised memorials withstand the wear and tear of time and legal action. The

appearance of new and persistent maintenance of the older memorials are testimony to the fact that the phenomenon is still alive.

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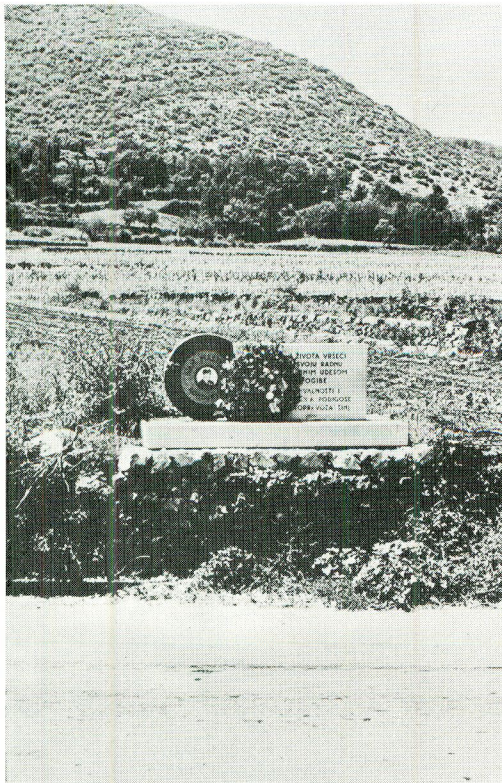
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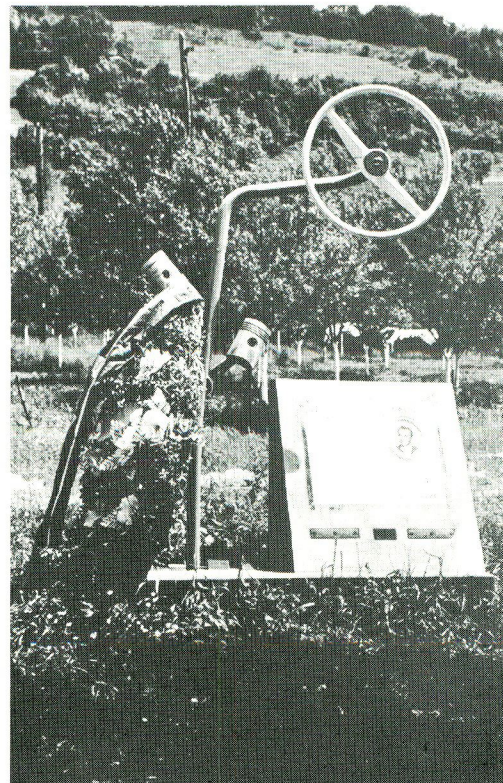
1. Roadside memorial to traffic accident victim. Zagreb (Croatia). Photo: Ivica Rajković, 1977.



5. Memorial plaque to a young man killed in a car accident. Srednje (Bosnia). Photo: Zorica Rajković, 1977.



2. Memorial to a conductor who was run over by a bus, raised by the workers of the transport company. Dicmo (Croatia). Photo: Zorica Rajković, 1977.



3. Memorial to a professional driver. Vinac (Bosnia). Photo: Zorica Rajković, 1977.



4. Memorial plaque, cross and wreath to deceased husband and father. Arandjelovac (Serbia). Photo: Zorica Rajković, 1979.