Roadside death memorials revisited: Mourning in public spaces

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Abstract: Recently, the family of the victim of police brutality in the USA, Mr George Floyd, visited the site where he passed away together with thousands of mourners bringing flowers and cards. Private roadside memorials are part of a growing trend in the use of (urban) space for purposes other than what is it officially intended. The use of (urban) space in unforeseen and therefore unplanned ways is increasingly becoming a reality of urban life. At the same time, this phenomenon is also observable in certain parts of cities, which highlights the particularities of context and prevailing culture. This revised paper represents a contribution, from a planning point of view to the anecdotal evidence on this phenomenon. It canvasses the interdisciplinary literature in order to shed more light on this practice. Part of the argument being presented is that city-form is not an eternal archetype. It is subject to the constant movement of people, which in turn transforms urban space in both planned but also increasingly unplanned and unanticipated ways. The concepts of “loose space” or “smooth space” combined with notions of “spatial representation” and “representation spaces” provide for a much more flexible explanatory framework. Together, they provide a unique vantage for generating a more nuanced understanding of private roadside memorials from a planning point of view. The

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
The theorisation and practice of planning take place in a state of flux owing to an increasingly multi-cultural and diverse contexts. Increasingly, planners are confronted with the challenges of operating in complex environment where there are competing interest and voices to be heard and accommodated.

Spatial justice demands some sort of fairness in land use allocation. Local authorities as the locus of decision-making through land use scheme find themselves at the centre of these diverse demands, which manifests themselves as illegal land uses.

This paper documents such an instance as part of a broader research agenda on Spatial Justice. The usual official response has been to turn a blind eye partly because of the understandably sensitive nature of matter., but largely because the knowledge may not be yet at hand. It has mainly been treated as a road traffic matter and not a planning issue. This paper analyses the phenomenon from a City Planning perspective.
paper advocates for phronetic approach and reflection in action instead of the current uniform approach.

**Subjects:** Urban Studies; Urban Theory; Urban Cultures; Urban Politics; Planning; Cities & the Developing World; Urban Development

**Keywords:** loose space; smooth space; phronesis; roadside memorials; spatial representation; representational spaces

1. **Introduction**

Cities are increasingly becoming more than places of collective memory as embedded in civic architecture and public memorials, they are much more complex and diverse. They represent what Sassen (2010:14) regards as "cityness", which "captures these potentially enormously varied types of urbanity". For Sassen, the key condition for cityness is "not so much some European-style urbanity but the intersection of differences that actually produces something new; whether good or bad, this intersection is consequential" (ibid).

The phenomenon of spontaneous, private, and intensely personal roadside death memorials inserts an element that has hitherto been restricted to the private sphere. For Clark and Franzmann (2006), the authority to erect these memorials emanate from the intensity of grief, the spiritual presence of the deceased, and a profound sense of the importance of place where it happened. This alternative source of authority for land use has, among others, endowed the urban landscape with a contingency and an elusiveness that makes it difficult to classify, categorize, and define (J. M. Murray, 2008), as existing theories of urban transformation fail to adequately account for this state of flux.

As an area of intensive study by scholars who seek to explain what is happening (Sitter, 2010), from a variety of disciplines, the main aim of this paper is to contribute to this ongoing dialogue from an urban planning and African perspectives. The research is aimed at trying to answer two main questions. What, if any, is the role of planning as a practice that regulates urban land use? Are there any insights from an African perspective? The view being expressed here is that Africa presents both a unique and an international character to the phenomenon. The paper extends an invitation to go beyond the current and formal theoretical frameworks of urban transformation and begin to look at cities in symbolic ways. It follows a well-trodden path on the significance of the ephemeral, often unplanned and unanticipated uses of urban space (Franck & Stevens, 2007; Krieger, 1987; J. M. Murray, 2008; Mchunu, 2006). Since most roadside memorials are erected without any official permission, it could be argued that they represent a rebuff to government that owns the land (Sitter, op cit), and regulates land uses through, among others, zoning schemes.

Roadside/Street memorials also mark the process of continuity and change as memorials, symbols, and signs have always played a significant role as purveyors of meaning in society. As products of human ingenuity and collective cultural heritage and consciousness, cities are saturated with symbols and signs. This is largely necessitated by the increasingly dynamic nature of cities, the resultant need to renegotiate shared symbols and meanings, and to recognise what Koster and Nuitjen (2016) refer to as coproducing urban space.

All these views express a nod to accommodate the complexity of cities beyond the current zoning schemes, which is hard to fault, yet the most compelling case against these memorials is the potential car accidents owing to drive distraction and the oftentimes awkward location of the memorials. No other spot will do except where the fatal accident happened (see Beanland & Wynne, 2019).
The first part consists of a brief exposition on methods for collecting data. The second section offers a discussion on Franck and Stevens (2007) concept of “Loose Space”, and Lefevre’s (1991) notions of “spatial representation” and “representation spaces”, to try and provide for a much more flexible explanatory approach. “Loose space” refers to the creative use of urban space by people to meet their needs. The third part introduces and discusses the phenomenon of Roadside/Street/Spontaneous death memorials. The discussion tries to situate the phenomenon within the broader conversation about the forces that are altering the built environment in unanticipated and unplanned ways. The
final section deals with the significance of symbols and signs in everyday life as Grider (2001), Juhlin and Normark (2008) among others, and Durkeim (1912) before them have observed. This section also draws on the insights of Krieger’s (1987) notion of planning as religious and theological activities concerned with transcendence and sacralisation. This view seeks to shed light on how spontaneous memorials transform public/private spaces into sacred spaces. The paper concludes by drawing the arguments presented together to provide what J. M. Murray (2008) has dubbed a panoramic totality of the city through the patchwork assemblage of fragments.

2. Materials and methods
A combination of primary and secondary methods were used to gather data for the study. The aim was not so much to document the design and construction of street memorials nor to engage with the bereaved in any shape or form, and certainly not to capture the messages contained in the memorials. It is to document the prevalence of the practice in terms of location and to a lesser extent the variety of memorials. The significance attached to the meaning of spontaneous death memorials arises out of the connection between the geographic/location/place and the symbol. Since no other place would be appropriate for the memorial other than the spot of the fatal accident, the memorial would be out of place if it was moved anywhere else, thereby loose the meaning being conveyed.

The primary method consisted the time-consuming (ongoing) fieldwork in search of roadside death memorial sites within Durban Metropolitan Municipality. In the majority of cases, this followed a word of mouth on the location of some of these sites. The secondary method involved internet and newspaper searches for articles on spontaneous memorials, which has yielded a much broader variety at both national and international scales. Also, personal and professional networks were solicited for assistance in locating these memorials. Both data gathering methods are ongoing as part of the much broader research agenda on unplanned and unanticipated uses of urban spaces. As in Przybylska (2015), elements of spatial perspective (location, distance) are combined with social perspective (beliefs) to locate this phenomenon in South Africa.
3. Theoretical frameworks

Franck and Stevens (2007) popularised the concepts of “tight and loose” spaces. “Loose spaces” occur where the designated/official use seems no longer relevant, or where different land uses are tolerated simultaneously. These also tend to be spaces that seem superfluous, or “leftover spaces” that are free of official planning and commodification” (ibid: 8), as exemplified in roadside death/spontaneous memorials. According to Franck and Stevens (ibid), loose spaces are central to the production of a healthy urban texture.

The most prevalent official land-use allocation systems guarantee certain amounts of “loose” spaces, which become ‘superfluous’ during the course of the life cycle of the built environment. According to J. M. Murray (2008), the city-building process oscillate between creative intervention, the fashioning of something new that never existed before, on the one side, and the selective destruction, erasure, and elimination, on the other. It is this process and pace of building and rebuilding that yield “loose” spaces on the urban fabric.

While the random occurrence of the phenomenon of spontaneous memorials suggests that no space is immune, a cursory observation of “targeted” locations suggests that more accessible “loose” spaces represent the most likely spaces, especially those that seem to endure for extensive periods of time. Suffice to mention that the element of ‘looseness’ may somewhat predict memorial that are likely to endure, it alone is inadequate to predict where next to a memorial may appear. “Superfluous” spaces merely provide opportunities for moments of spontaneous and unscripted acts to occur.

For Lefebvre (1987), the city may be characterised as a “spatial practice” produced between “spatial representation” of professionals and city officials, and “representational spaces” as lived and imagined by inhabitants of the city. “Spatial representation” refers to those spaces produced by professionals and officials, and “representational spaces” refer to those spaces that result from people’s interaction with the built environment produced by professionals (Mchunu, 2005). Memory/identity and place become significant and are intertwined as evidenced by the naming and marking of certain buildings and spaces.

“Representational spaces” oftentimes are instances of cultural conflict and change, which activates spaces in ways hitherto not imagined, and as such, bring excitement and stimulation that transforms cities beyond the imaginations of officials and academic theory (Murray, op cit). In this sense roadside death memorials could be understood as instances of “representational spaces”. They are a rebuff to the government which owns the land (Sitter, 2010), and therefore allocates uses. The current practice of erecting roadside memorial challenges accepted ideas of the roadside as public not private space, as secular not sacred (Clark & Franzmann, 2006) space. The moral authority to express grief takes precedence over government regulations (Reid op cit, Clark and Franzmann op cit) of space.

Unplanned, unanticipated, and diverse, spontaneous memorials compete with conventional and official allocation and use of (urban) space in a number of ways. Whereas the official process may take time from application to decision-making, in this instance space is transformed almost overnight. This is because the authority to erect spontaneous memorials rests with family, friends, and sometimes the public. Compared to official land uses, spontaneous memorials are elusive and therefore hard to detect and predict partly because of the above, but also because not all roadside deaths are memorialized, and that no two memorials last the same amount of time. This spatiotemporal element of these memorials remains an enigma for officials who seem to be at a quandary in terms of trying to generate an understanding of what is going on in order to inform practice.
4. Roadside death memorial as a phenomenon

The nationwide diffusion of street/roadside death memorials is both a local and an international phenomenon (Reid and Clark & Franzmann, 2006; J. K. Reid, 2001; Przybylska, 2015; Stahl, 2013; Steinert & Carvallo, 2019). There are complex motivations for roadside memorials as Przybylska (op cit). They are communal and spontaneous performances of grief to work out a personal connection to an otherwise numbing catastrophe (Grider, 2001). Although roadside death or street memorials, sometimes referred to as spontaneous memorials (Grider, 2001; Sitter, 2010), are not a new phenomenon, they have proliferated in the last 10 to 15 years (Klaassens, Groote, and Huigen, op cit). The terminology varies, including roadside memorials, sudden death memorials, memorial crosses, street memorials, and hasty graves.

According to A. Reid (2013), Klaassens et al. (2009), and Clark and Franzmann (2006), the practice has an eclectic origin with Catholic, Hispanic, and Native American influences. Small white crosses or descansos in Spanish (A. Reid, 2013; Sitter, 2010), were placed at the side of the road to mark the areas where the coffin rested during a funeral procession to the graveyard (Klaassens, Groote, and Huigen, ibid; Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010; Suter, 2010). “Resting places” have since evolved into globe-wide memorials that commemorate death at traffic fatality locations (A. Reid, 2013). There are strong associations with Latin American indigenous cosmologies and within traditional and folklore culture and popular Catholicism (Steinert and Cavallio op cit).

For Sitter (2010), spontaneous memorials express regret that some people are robbed of their chance to live longer; hence, emphasis on using the term “sudden death memorials” by Stahl (2013) to describe being robbed to live longer. Sitter also argues that while there is a marked decline in church attendance in the West, there is an increase in spirituality coupled with a hunger that established faiths are not satisfying. These memorials also include sites where people were shot dead (Sitter, 2010; Suter, 2010), and not just fatal road accident victims. Clark and Franzmann (2006) point to the emergence of new forms of ritualised mourning because traditional practices are regarded as old-fashioned. They also allude to the evolving nature of burial methods, from the original burial on church-grounds for those who met theological requirements of their churches, to modern cemeteries for those who did not meet these requirements. They argue that memorials are an expression of alternative authority drawn from the intensity of grief, from the belief in the spiritual presence of the deceased, combined with a profound sense of the importance of place.

Their proliferation could be explained in terms of poor/lack of enforcement (Przybylska, 2015), as the government is the body vested with the authority to deal with public space and public safety (Clark & Franzmann, 2006). It could also be attributed to benign official approach against informality in general. Some have disappeared though due to city planning as Stahl (2013) noted in the case of Bucharest. The issue of safety is important as most are sited along busy and high-speed roadways.

Like most parts of the world, in South Africa, they are located mainly along arterial routes and highways, and predominantly white suburbs. These roads are under the jurisdiction of the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL). Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of the South African case is that these memorials are not found in African townships for reasons to be articulated in the relevant section below. South Africa, therefore, shares both some common elements and unique features. As in most cases, items on the site are flowers, personal items, and a wooden often white cross.

A. Reid (2013) and Sitter (2010) point out that places and spaces of death are professionally managed and regulated in modern society, which means that death is largely absent and invisible
in most everyday environments. Reid (op cit:131) goes on to make the following point about death and attendant practices;

“Death is no longer an integrated part of life, it is insulated within institutions of death, it has moved out of the home, outsourced to 3rd party professionals. Consequently, we are less accustomed to death, and a sudden, unexpected death often leaves the bereaved traumatized and shocked”.

Klaassens, Groote, and Huigen (op cit) also make a similar observation, noting that the prevalence of these memorials coincides with modern societies where circumstances surrounding death are controlled. Sitter (op cit) attributes this to a change in attitude towards death. This is linked to what Klaassens, Groote, and Huigen (op cit) perceived as a shift in contemporary commemorative culture connected with changing attitudes in Western society regarding death, funerals, and mourning.

Suter (op cit) and Sitter (op cit) suggest therefore that the creation of these “ad hoc” ephemeral memorials is suddenly a fact of life. Both authors pose a rhetorical question as to whether this means death has moved out of the cemetery.

Created by friends and family members to assist with their grieving process (Klaassens, Groote, and Huigen, op cit; Mullins, 2012; Strunk, 2012), roadside death spontaneous/street memorials are intensely personal, and are among the deepest expressions of our shared humanity and a vast panoply of our cultural repertoire to create a tactile and visual expression of our connectedness to one another (Grider op cit). They serve to commemorate the “last alive” place of the deceased, and form part of deeply meaningful bereavement practices that support the grieving process among the bereaved who seek to make sense of a senseless death (Reid and J. K. Reid, 2001; Klaassens, Groote, and Huigen, op cit). Spontaneous memorials provide a means to deal with sudden and unexpected deaths.

Street or roadside memorials also commemorate and celebrate ordinary life. They are about ordinary people going about their daily lives, rather than people who have done great deeds, and in recent times there is a growing urge to honour “ordinary” life in public spaces (A. Reid, 2013; Sitter, 2010). These unexpected violent deaths of individuals participating in routines of life that we think are safe, such as daily commutes, are considered “bad deaths” (Clayton & Hensley, 2008; A. Reid, 2013; Sitter, 2010; Suter, 2010). To give a magnitude of “bad deaths” worldwide, a person dies in a road accident every 30 seconds (Sitter, 2010), and 1.2 million people die from road accidents worldwide (A. Reid, 2013). This leads to complicated grief characterised by a sense of disbelief, anger and bitterness, yearning and longing, and preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased (Clayton & Hensley, 2008).

The church and similar institutions are bypassed as prime social purveyors and mediators of grief and life, a “do it yourself” mourning and grieving process as memory is being reclaimed from an institutionalised and market-driven society (Reid, ibid). Whether this phenomenon communicates some kind of critique against modernity—transportation, death practices, and religion as Reid (op cit) suggests, or whether memorials represent some fad or someone’s abiding involvement with a place (Suter, op cit), remains a moot point.

These roadside death memorials are not homogenous in their intent, meaning and kind. But their diversity belies their similarity in terms of the overall meaning being conveyed. Preliminary survey of photos and sites confirms a consistent basic “vocabulary” that Grider (op cit) also identified.
Although the cross tends to be the dominant feature of most roadside memorials, the symbol may not necessarily be used for religious reasons because it could also symbolize human form.

For Sitter (op cit), the cross is popular because there is a dearth of culturally appropriate symbols to commemorate death. A range of other objects used (Mullins, 2012, Grider, ibid), tend to reflect the community most affected by the incident, for example, toys tend to feature on children’s memorials.

Finally, the message contained in these memorials is about not forgetting what happened and to whom it happened, and also to warn others of constant danger and ultimately, the fragility of life. It is about remembrance of the deceased and caution to other drivers/riders. It is noteworthy that some of the memorials cited above, a few still remain. This is the ephemeral nature of this phenomenon.

In the following section, a completely different approach, which underlines a cultural aspect of this practice. It introduces more complexity in that a city-wide uniform approach would not suffice.

5. African perspective
At this stage of the discussion, it is important to introduce another perspective, if only to mark the complexity involved with this phenomenon of spontaneous memorials. There is a clear distinction between Western society and her counterpart in Africa in relation to death and dying. At the risk of gross generalisation, roadside death memorials are not an observable phenomenon across cities in the African continent. This is certainly true for areas that are predominantly inhabited by Africans, i.e., the infamous townships of South Africa. This may be attributed to the relationship between the dead and the living, which takes on a different meaning among Africans. Notwithstanding the significant impact of diverse (religious) belief systems and lifestyles, roadside death memorials are still conspicuous in their absence. This is not because there are no roadside fatalities in the townships. They are treated differently.

In Ghana, the general belief is that erecting a roadside death memorial for a beloved would be tantamount to encouraging/inviting such incidents to occur in one’s life. Among the Nguni speaking peoples of Southern African, death is integrated into everyday life. It permeates all aspects of life. The deceased is never separated from the living. For example, a common practice is that ancestors are allocated a specially designated space inside the house (emsamo), where rituals are performed by the head of the household. This is a sacred place where ancestral spirits dwell. Nowadays, reference to this place where one’s ancestors dwell is not physical but symbolic. It denotes the status of one’s relationship with one’s ancestors, which when it is not good, one is unlikely to suffer misfortunes in life, including “bad deaths” alluded to earlier. This means performing necessary rituals to mark significant/memorable events/occasions in one’s life. The occasions vary from thanksgiving, marriage ceremony, to introducing a newly born. Rituals vary from one clan to another and sometimes one family to another within the same clan.

The deceased also occupy the same physical space with the living in the sense that the burial of kin takes place within the family compound. In this case, the concept of a cemetery was and still is alien, especially in rural areas. Although people no longer share the same physical space with their deceased due to the predominant practice in urban areas of burying the dead in cemeteries, a semblance of traditional practice persists that has been adapted to suit a more Western urban way of life as alluded to before.

The notion of a “bad death” alluded to earlier may be one of the common features that both cultures share. In the African context, such deaths are not commemorated in places where they occur, the “last alive” place alluded to earlier. When a person dies an unexpected and violent death outside the home, a branch from a special tree is brought to the spot where the individual met their
untimely death. The Buffalo Thorn Tree (Umlahlankosi or Umpha) or Marula Tree (Umganu) is used for males and females, respectively (Ndlovu, 2008). A ceremony is performed at the site and with the branch of this special tree; the soul of the departed is symbolically carried away from the site of the fatal accident. The branch is placed on top of the coffin to be buried together. A memorial is therefore never erected on the site where death occurred, however temporal. While the special place of the fatal accident and presence of the deceased still matter (Clark and Franzmann (2006)), in the African context both are acknowledged as exact spots where the soul of the deceased must be lifted and repatriated to be afforded a proper burial. The only memorial is erected at the site of burial.

Among other concerns that the roadside death memorials raise, what are the implications it poses for planning practice? In light of the entire discussion above, how should planners respond? No doubt more research into this phenomenon is needed from a planning point of view in order to inform meaningful practice. The paper now turns to address some of the issues raised as they relate to planning practice.

6. The significance of place

Ashworth (2005) refers to sense of place as meaningful relations between the place and agent allocating or deriving meaning from it. In this case, a sense of place finds material expression in roadside memorials, which is also another raison d’etre for spontaneous memorials. For Clark and Franzmann (op cit), the actual spot is sacred as a focus for grief and communication.

Spontaneous memorials tend to have a strong geographical background (Klaassens, Groote, Huigen, op cit) as they are situated at the exact location or as close as possible to the “last alive” place. Unlike other official (public) memorials, roadside death memorials would be “out of place” anywhere else. Therefore, not any other place would do.

The placing of personal items of the deceased also serves to personalize the space albeit symbolically, thereby transforming it from ordinary into sacred place. The combination of “last alive” place and the introduction of personal items in effect transform public spaces into sacred spaces.

According to Krieger’s (1987), the role of planning is central in this process of transforming ordinary spaces into sacred spaces. His view is that what is taken as secular and scientific, i.e., planning theory and practice, could also be interpreted as religious and theological. The language and practice of planning are replete with references to spirituality. Planning and planners do try to convert people to a new way of thinking and living; “we lose the capacity to understand our deepest motivations and desires” (Ibid: 7).

The authority bereaved to erect a memorial emanates from this symbolic significance of place, that is, where death occurred, coupled with the intensity of grief (Reid, op cit, Sitter, 2010; Suter, 2010). Grief is in a sense taken out of the confines of the cemetery and beyond the emotional and spiritual boundaries of the church, to the scene of the fatal accident.

The location of the memorial in space and time and its contents provide for a different means for communication. Physically marking the site of the tragedy and also introducing personal items are important aspects of honouring and commemorating the deceased. The significance of place lies is this communicative aspect first between the bereaved and the deceased whose presence can be felt on the site (Klaassens et al., 2009); between the bereaved and general public to convey their sense of loss and to warn others of imminent danger; and to communicate with other bereaved that frequent the site.
7. Implications for planning practice: conflicting approach

Roadside death memorials introduce a level of complexity into urban planning that hitherto did not exist. Research into this phenomenon is almost non-existent from an urban planning perspective. This may partly explain the consistent official response of not intervening. The South African National Road Agency Limited (SANRAL), the agency responsible for the main roads where the phenomenon is predominant is concerned about safety hazard the memorials pose.

The official response to these shrines varies, ranges from outright banning as Przybylska (op cit, Ka Nzopheza, 2006; Strauss, 2008) has indicated, placing a time limit for the duration of the memorial, to turning a blind eye. SANRAL has resorted to outright ban of street memorials and instead allow planting of trees far enough from the road reserve (Strauss op cit). According to Mullins (op cit), this inconsistent response may be a reflection of a largely unspoken recognition of the significance of these spaces in society. In a similar vein, Reid (op cit: 143) noted that public officials “are in an ongoing quandary concerning how to balance traffic safety and the aesthetic interests of the community with the grieving process of the bereaved”.

Various perspectives offer divergent views, some of which do not provide ideas for planning practice. For example, the sociological view is that traditional western forms of bereavement may not be adequate. Roadside death memorials may, therefore, be meeting an important human need that hitherto has not been officially acknowledged adequately by planners without prescribing action. Spontaneous memorials symbolize a profound sense of loss in space and time. Durkeim’s (1912) view that “we must reach beneath the symbol to the reality it embodies and which gives it its true meaning”, is significant in this regard. This is because for him the most barbarous or bizarre rituals and the strangest myths translate some need, some aspect of life, whether individual or social. Trying to translate this symbolic need into meaningful practice may be a worthwhile endeavour and a huge challenge, yet removing the memorial from the “last alive” place in part or completely may lose a significant component of the message being conveyed since the memorial is out of place anywhere else.

The official quandary could also be attributed to the fact that roads tend to fall under the jurisdiction of different government agencies ranging from national, regional, and all the way to a local authority/municipality. This makes it difficult to monitor and respond accordingly and in a consistent manner across these different tiers.

There is also the ephemeral nature of these roadside death memorials, rendering them difficult to manage. Not all roadside deaths are commemorated with a memorial, and those that are commemorated do not seem to last the same amount of time. Finally but equally important is the mixed response of public opinion about whether roadside memorials should be permitted or not (Reid, op cit, Clark and Franzmann op cit, Przybylska op cit).

Ideally, the official response should strive to balance the needs of the bereaved with those of the affected community as Reid (op cit) rightfully pointed out. Reid (ibid) also makes another valid point that traffic safety and community aesthetics are indeed squarely within the purview of local government to regulate, as well as a compelling interest to protect the safety and welfare of citizens (emphasis added).

The discussion above highlights three main elements that should be considered for planning practice. The first element has to do with the significance of place. No other place would do but the exact spot or “last alive” place, although some of the spaces may pose safety problems for commuters and visitors alike. Secondly, policy prescription should be flexible enough to take into consideration the diversity of the practice, which speaks to specific communities immediately affected. The diversity also
speaks to local, personal, and religious autonomy that is characteristic of modern pluralistic societies. Thirdly and finally, since spontaneous memorials tend to be erected by family and friends largely, they are embedded in the local context and placed into everyday life as it is being lived.

This brings us back to the rhetoric question posed earlier in the second section of the paper, that is, what to do? Since the one size fits all approach may not be appropriate given the complexity and local nature involved with the practice, a much more flexible approach is more appropriate. Some fatal accidents elicit a more sense of outrage and grief beyond the immediate circle of friends and family. The case in point was the Fields Hill (Figure 3) accident that claims many lives. Such memorials could be permitted to stay longer because the outpouring grief would be difficult to contain or enforce against. Furthermore, the symbolism associated with the practice imbues it with a transcendental and elusive character such that any rational objective approach would be inappropriate.

The suggested form of engagement is a phronetic approach. Flyvbjerg (2001) defines this approach as practical judgement, practical wisdom, common sense, or prudence. It goes beyond analytical knowledge (episteme), and technical knowledge or know how (techne) and involves what has been called “the art of judgement”, that is to say, decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social actor (Flyvbjerg, 2009). Phronesis is the most important activity by which the analytical and instrumental rationality of episteme and techne is balanced by value-rationality, as opposed to instrumental rationality.

The requisite judiciousness and perceptiveness of a phronetic approach are resonant with Schon’s (1993) idea of reflection in action. Schon (1993:18) called to attention the “mismatch of traditional patterns of practice and knowledge to features of the practice situation—complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict”. He proposed to substitute the idea of reflection in action for the knowledge and application model of positivism and epistemology based on the idea of reflection in action.

Figure 3. White crosses along next to highway (field’s hill, pinetown).

Source: Author
Both approaches demand a certain level of understanding of the local context in terms of mediating between relevant legislations, and local cultural practices. The fluidity and ephemeral nature of spontaneous memorials also demand an ability to extemporise, which is at the core of both approaches. But listening and discernment are both critical to the art of extemporising.

In a nutshell, this calls for a planning practice that is infused with a sense of empathy. This capability to be in mystery, uncertainty, and doubt, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason, what Keats (1871) called “Negative Capability”, is a fundamental aspect of current planning practice.

The issues that were raised in this section and the previous highlight the complexity involved with spontaneous memorials. The fact that the phenomenon may not be practised in an African context due to a different worldview regarding death and dying may partly explain the lack of identifiable official response in spite of its prevalence. It may indeed be regarded as inconsequential to planning practice.

The next section explores another significant element to roadside death memorials, what cultural geographers refer to as a “sense of place”. This refers to how meanings are attached to places. Roadside death memorials represent one form of the material expression of this attachment to a place.

8. Conclusion
The context within which planning of cities takes place is marked by an increasing complexity that is characterised by, among others, the increasing significance of memory and place, unprecedented levels of cultural, racial and ethnic diversity, persistent class divisions, and rising social inequality. Informality is also increasingly becoming a visible and significant part of life for many (Iveson et al., 2018). The significance of this complexity cannot be overestimated as the urban environment is constantly being shaped and reshaped in both anticipated and unplanned ways. Moreover, built environment professionals are increasingly confronted with ephemeral, less tangible, more elusive uses of urban spaces. The heterogeneous and highly differentiated spaces reflect a diversity of experiences and lifestyles and activities (J. M. Murray, 2008).
The use of (urban) space in unanticipated and unplanned ways is therefore increasingly becoming a reality of urban life (Alsayyad, 2004; Franck & Stevens, 2007; Ameel & Tani, 2012; Stevens & Franck, 2016; Iveson et al., 2018 among many others). Urban planners and other built environment professionals are at the forefront of trying to make sense of this challenge and similar practices. For example, in Canberra, they have developed a policy document with guidelines on how to manage street memorials (Transport Canberra and City Services, 2019). However, in this instance, the relative infancy of the phenomenon of spontaneous memorials as a social practice in (South) Africa, and as a consequence, the dearth of scholarly research on the topic especially from an urban planning point of view remains a challenge.

The combined concepts of “loose” space and “representational spaces” as espoused by Franck and Stevens (2007) and Lefebvre (1991) provided a useful framework for trying to generate more insight on the practice. A phrasonic approach was identified as most relevant in this case, which provides for a more flexible, context dependant, and therefore less prescriptive and less uniform approach. This approach mirrors the patchwork of responses and lends credence to an otherwise seemingly incoherent official response.

9. Further research
Research into the phenomenon of roadside death memorials is at its relative infancy in (South) Africa. There is still a dearth of scholarly work, more especially from an Urban Planning point of view. The following are some of the gaps in information about this practice, which would undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of the practice. This list is not exhaustive:

- Mapping the geographic spread and variety of the phenomenon to highlight the extent of the practice in general, and more specifically its racial/ethnic/class aspects.
- Documenting specific memorials, for example, those that transcend social boundaries/racial categories in terms of the amount of outrage they elicit.
- Document the number and duration of these memorials. This would assist with formulating a personal policy by SANRAL and the Department of Transport (DOT) who are responsible for safety and maintenance.
- Develop a more personal approach than the current uniform SANRAL policy of planting trees as memorials.

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