Vernacular Memorials as a Response to Trauma: The Case of Kyron Horman

I am interested in extending research that I have been involved in during the last ten years on visual rhetoric and memorialization to the case of Kyron Horman, age 8, missing for over a year. In particular I want to assess the physical memorial—the Wall of Hope—in Beaverton (its third and now permanent location), the memorial blogs that have been developed in response to his disappearance, and memorial billboards that have been erected. Each of these vernacular memorials acts as a site of memory, and a way to negotiate the trauma associated with Kyron’s disappearance. The “offerings” at the Wall of Hope reflect the fear and loss felt by his parents, classmates, friends, and strangers who leave photographs, letters, drawings, toys, and other memorabilia to add their hope for his safe return. These memorials have also captured the attention of the print and electronic media. With each move of the wall, the erection of new billboards, and distribution of Kyron teeshirts and posters, the media continues to respond with print and film accounts of his disappearance and the perseverance of his friends and family to keep the story alive. Memorialization seeks to bridge the past we remember and the future we desire by providing closure to painful events. The same impetus inheres with vernacular memorials. These sites of memory evoke verbal and visual memorialization in an effort to obviate the trauma, in this case the “Endangered, Missing” Kyron Horman.