Searching for Closure: Vietnam War Literature and the Veterans Memorial

by Charles J. Gaspar

That many soldiers returned home from the battlefields of Vietnam only to find themselves mired in another battle in their own country is well recognized now. A vignette which opens the Preface to Frederick Downs' compelling memoir, *The Killing Zone*, makes this point dramatically:

> In the fall of 1968, as I stopped at a traffic light on my walk to class across the campus of the University of Denver, a man stepped up to me and said "Hi."
>
> Without waiting for my reply to his greeting, he pointed to the hook sticking out of my left sleeve. "Get that in Vietnam?"
>
> I said, "Yeah, up near Tam Ky, in I Corps."
>
> "Serves you right."
>
> As the man walked away, I stood rooted, too confused with hurt, shame, and anger to react. (n.pag. [vii])

This theme — that there was no easy closure for the trauma of the war experience for the individual soldier — recurs throughout many Vietnam War narratives. "Senator," a wounded veteran in James Webb's *Fields of Fire*, knows this truth and rebukes his father's cajolery with the assertion that "It'll never be over, Dad. Most of it hasn't even started yet" (392). Similarly, Tim O'Brien's hero in his first novel, *Northern Lights*, tells his brother only half jokingly, "Glad I didn't wear my uniform. Look plain silly coming home in a uniform and no parade" (24). Indeed, powerful recent narratives such as Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* and Philip Caputo's *Indian Country* have shifted the focus from the soldier in combat to the soldier as he attempts to reconnect with the mainstream of American society. The reality of that painful experience is also captured in Bob Greene's recent book, *Homecoming*. Formatted as a "sort of oral history of the homecoming experience," the collection of letters to Greene validates both the range and depth of the emotions felt by the soldiers on returning to their homeland (45). [1]

For the nation as a whole, concurrently, the war in Indochina produced a rift that has not yet closed. With far-sighted concern, Norman Mailer, in *The Armies of the Night*, observes that "the two halves of America were not coming together, and when they failed to touch, all of history might be lost in the divide. . . . [H]ad the two worlds of America drifted irretrievably apart?" (179). That was in 1967. In 1975, rather too easily perhaps, President Gerald Ford called the war "finished" (qtd. in Karnow 623), and that year does, in fact, delimit our nation's combat involvement in Southeast Asia. Yet the

repercussions have been felt in both national and international politics since that time. A decade after President Ford stated his desire for closure, Robert Stone, author of *Dog Soldiers*, offered in a 1985 interview this more clear-sighted metaphor:

> You're right; it didn't end over there. What it meant, its significance, didn't stop there. It's like a wound covered with scar tissue or like a foreign body, a piece of shrapnel. [I]t is embedded in our history. . . . I don't think it is a mortal wound for this society, but I think it is a very, very painful one. (qtd. in Schroeder 154)

On the international level, notes political scientist Timothy Lomperis, the lessons of Vietnam are often invoked: "everywhere in the Third World where the remotest prospect for American intervention in some local conflict looms, the ghost of Vietnam again and again casts its shadow" (3). On the national level, Laura Palmer posits in *Shrapnel in the Heart*, returning Black soldiers "found [that] their service in Vietnam was one more reason for discrimination in America" (xvi). These, of course, are but two of the areas in which the War has affected American history.

On two levels, then, the personal and the national, there exists an impulse to reconnect, to reunify. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, designed by Maya Ying Lin in 1981 and situated on the Washington, D.C., Mall, provides a physical site for this process of reconnection. As Harry Haines observes, "The Wall, in effect, broke the silence of the immediate postwar years [and] returned the veteran to discourse[,]" thus marking a vital "reintegrative phase" ("Disputing" 142).[2] Yet the Memorial provides more than the *locus amoenus* for healing. In its structure, placement, and form, the Memorial represents both for the soldier and for the civilian, the soldier's experience, not only of the War itself but also of his return home to a nation at war with itself. In this the Memorial serves, as Catherine Howett suggests, a "symbolic function" founded on "the language of communication, of semiotic meaning" (6). More specifically, I suggest that five of the Memorial's architectural features — Frederick Hart's representational statue of three American soldiers, the arrangement of the names of those Americans who died in the conflict, the black granite walls, the abstract shape of the Wall itself, and the context of this Memorial — subtly speak to the viewer, asking him or her to participate vicariously in, and to analyze, America's experience in Indochina on two parallel planes.

These two levels of inquiry may be discerned in analogous artistic expression in the plot, structure, and rhetoric of many of the major Vietnam War narratives. Philip Beidler's comment, in *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*, conveys this need for inquiry; the importance of Ron Kovic's narrative, *Born on the Fourth*

of July, is that it presents "a search for a context, an attempt to connect the experience of the war with some idea of a representative American consciousness" (159). Because of the breadth of this inquiry, and because I examine artifacts from two different art forms, this paper ranges broadly and descriptively between the literature and the Memorial. In the spirit of *ut pictura poesis*, I propose that both the Memorial and the literature express similar themes — ones advocating understanding, connection, and closure.

To placate those who argued that the Wall itself was not an appropriate symbol of the proud service of the veterans, a realistic statue of three soldiers and a nearby American flag were added. Uproar ensued: Maya Lin initially reacted by asserting that these added dimensions were "Like drawing moustaches on other people's portraits" (qtd. in Buckley 68).[3] More recently, though, Lin has seen the juxtaposition of styles as "ironically correct": the two styles, abstract and representational, seem to Lin to "artistically [memorialize] the fact that we *still* can't make up our minds about the Vietnam War" (qtd. in Horowitz 16). To be sure, the statue, flag, and Wall are in separate sections of the Memorial's two-acre site. Charles Griswold, noting this placement, proposes that "the physical and aesthetic distance between these two additions and the VVM [Vietnam Veterans Memorial — the Wall itself] is so great that there exists no tension between them. All three finally just seem to be separate memorials" (711).[4] Yet the placement of these parts of the Memorial works for another, more important, reason: the viewer needs to stand back, and consciously work, to discover a place where she or he is able to take in the entire scene. It's difficult. There are, perhaps, only three or four areas where one can see simultaneously the statues, the flag, and the Wall. That difficulty — which emphasizes that viewing the Memorial is a process that requires active participation — seems analogous to the trouble which we as individuals and as a nation have in comprehending the War. For we feel the need to include both an historical perspective, embodied in the shape and placement of the Wall itself, and a personal element, here most immediately apprehended in the statue of the soldiers.

In advance of the major literature of the War, Norman Mailer expresses this concern with the difficulty of attaining a proper perspective when he introduces Book Two of *The Armies of the Night* with these words:

> [I]f you would see the horizon from the forest, you must build a tower. . . . So the Novelist working in secrete collaboration with the Historian has perhaps tried to build with his novel a tower fully equipped with telescopes to study . . . our own horizon. (245)

"Of course," notes Mailer wryly, "the tower is crooked, and the

telescopes warped" (245). Ironically, Mailer's "battle" on behalf of the antiwar movement began on the Washington Mall, the very site where, more than ten years later, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would be constructed. Appropriately, however, Mailer's concerns are compatible with the most thoughtful of those authors who portray the lives of men engaged in the maze of combat in Southeast Asia, who wish to picture, to adapt Hemingway's phrase, "the way it was" for the individual soldier while concurrently examining larger, national issues. To come to this bifocal way of understanding, one must have a carefully placed vantage point. John Del Vecchio, in *The 13th Valley*, enunciates his authorial position on his important Acknowledgements page: the genesis of his large, classically controlled narrative springs from an anonymous soldier's telling the author that "People gotta know what it was really like." In the subsequent paragraph however, Del Vecchio cites numerous scholars, both military and civilian, for their assistance "with the theoretical constructs of war causation" (n. pag. [v]). Elements of the historical and personal thus combine, asking for understanding on two levels.

Because it is with the lives of the soldiers that the major narratives begin, I will consider first the statue. As in the literature, the details, seen here in Figure 1, provide a sense of realism: the canteens, the bandoleers of ammunition, the weapons, the "boonie" hat — all these are small details which signify important elements of the soldier's life. Even more compelling, as Figure 2 demonstrates, are the soldiers' facial expressions; a quiet determination clearly mingles with a sense of weariness on these youthful faces with the tired eyes. Philip Caputo, in *A Rumor of War*, captures this feeling of weariness well:

> The company had run nearly two hundred patrols in the month I had been with it, and then there were all those nights on the line. The men were in a permanent state of exhaustion. They were in a shaft, plunging daily from one level of fatigue to the next. . . . (237)

Yet, because there can be no break, they persevere.

Indeed, the most striking feature of Hart's sculpture is the sense of surprise and wariness which the soldiers evince, both in their faces and in their stances. In mute warning one soldier has placed his hand on his buddy's back. The three soldiers have stopped, slightly offset from a direct confrontation with the Wall. This is a moment quite unlike the apocalyptic vision mockingly derided in *Paco's Story*; as Heinemann satirizes that fictitious statue, a soldier is imagined holding "a corpse of a [second,] dead GI heavenward, as if just that minute he clean-and-jerked it" (151). Nor is it a moment like that memorialized in the statue of the flag-raising at Iwo Jima. That is clearly a photographic instant; this statue, conversely, conveys a diachronic quality, for the moment of quiet, interrogative repose could continue indefinitely.

Fig. 1. Frederick Hart's representational sculpture of three soldiers at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Fig. 2. The soldiers' faces express weariness, surprise, and a quiet determination to persevere.

Whether the soldiers are returning from a patrol (as their placement at the edge of the brush intimates) or coming upon their own memorial, as critic Tom Wolfe suggests, many years after returning "home" (4), what has caused these men to pause is something which they recognize as larger than themselves. And it is, clearly, something which they do not understand.

Leaving the soldiers and entering the area of the Wall itself, viewers are drawn in, as Figure 3 suggests; they become immersed in what Maya Lin has called a "sea of names" (qtd. in Horowitz 12) — over 58,000 of them, identifying all those who perished in the war in Southeast Asia. Griswold proposes that the structure might present "a delicate allusion to the ancient *tholos* tomb . . . buried in the earth and approached by an angled, graded passage downward" (706). The allusion may be valid for one who stops and intellectualizes about the structure and its engraved names; but the immediate experience is one of disorientation, chaos, confusion. As poet Robert Morgan writes, this sea of names begins "almost / imperceptibly in the lawn / on one side and grow[s] on black pages / bigger than any reader," frightening the viewer, almost overpowering him (291). The experience becomes, asserts Joel Swerdlow, "like finding bodies on the battlefield" (571). These emotions, of disorientation and confusion, are precisely those portrayed in the literature of combat. Certainly, part of that sense of impending chaos derives from the spatial formlessness of the War — what Caputo, describing the experience of Vietnam combat in 1965 compares to stepping over the edge; or what Webb, in *Fields of Fire*, pictures with this image: " '*We* are here.' [Snake, the veteran soldier, explains sarcastically.] He then made a circle in the air. '*They* are everywhere else' " (77).

Yet a more profoundly troubling disorientation occurs in the temporal realm. Sociologist Charles Moskos captures the essence of the causative agent of this distortion:

> every soldier knows his exact departure date from Vietnam. The combat soldier's *whole being* centers on reaching his personal DEROS (from Date of Expected Return [from] Overseas). *It would be hard to overstate the soldier's constant concern with how much time — down to the day — he has remaining in Vietnam.* (141-42)[5]

Dr. Ronald Glasser, M.D., makes a similar comment in his carefully written collection of short stories aptly entitled *365 Days*: "A tour of Nam is twelve months; it is like a law of nature" (54). Yet the title of the narrative, like this assertion, is deeply ironic, for each of Glasser's tales is a testament that there is no simple closure of the Vietnam experience, even for those who did not actually serve in Southeast Asia. Yet, in close, from the perspective of the men engaged in combat, the end is artificially delimited, and any alteration to this perception becomes traumatic. The soldiers perceive the distortion of time in many situations — during the extended periods of monotonous waiting and with the adrenalin surge which occurs in a firefight, for instance — but most prominently at the random deaths of one's fellow soldiers. In *Fields of Fire*, as Senator watches his platoon reduced, man by single man, he expresses the suppressed doubts of many of the soldiers in his unit when he observes that their lives — and deaths — may be "undirected, without aim or reason"

Fig. 3. The wide-angled *V* of the Wall. At the apex, where the end is embedded in the beginning, the viewer is submerged in a "sea of names" on the planes of the Wall, ten feet high.

(Webb 200). Indeed, the very structure of Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*, shifting unexpectedly and randomly from past to present to future, conveys the protagonists' sense of temporal disorientation. Caught in these shifts, Paul Berlin, like Senator, feels the frustrations of attempting to understand the meaning of his experiences as a soldier:

> Order was the hard part. . . . Events did not flow. The facts were separate and haphazard and random, even as they happened, episodic, broken, no smooth transitions, no sense of events unfolding from prior events. (248)

Yet if the soldier feels the distortions of time while he remains in combat, he also attains an awareness of the need to construct a sense of order out of the chaos. Even Senator, who feels that the random deaths of his fellow soldiers are "like Russian roulette" (Webb 242) and who compares his experience to existentialism, makes the effort to order his tour in Vietnam. After the disabled soldier has returned home, he reconstructs — as does Cacciato, before his death — the chronology of his experiences by creating what he labels a "Vietnam scrap book [*sic*]." On this task he spends "whole dull days sorting out the stacks of Instamatic photos, placing them in their proper chronology" (394). That same impulse to order events is also felt by the narrator of Jack Fuller's *Fragments* when he observes that "You tried to make connections. . . . Chronology. Cause and effect. When did each man die and how? . . . [Y]ou kept at it anyway. You had to. You were going home" (14).

For the men who have come home, as well as for other visitors to the Memorial, the Wall performs a function similar to Senator's scrapbook. Each name, engraved in proportions and color that preclude its being lost in shadow, tells a singular story, and hence, in one sense, the individual's tale becomes a reified, self-contained text. Indeed, the diamond-shaped symbols separating the soldiers' names reinforce the sense of individual meaning. Yet when one learns that the "sea of names" is ordered chronologically, the separate, reified texts attain an additional metonymic quality. Each tale takes place in the context of similar but discrete ones, and a secondary meaning — one of national as well as individual loss — accrues in the ordered succession of names.

If this orderly chronology creates one sense of community, the black granite walls themselves create another. Rather than being "a black gash of shame" as Tom Carhart, an early critic of the design argues (qtd. in Buckley 66), the smooth, polished black surface provides a reflective quality that is essential to the Memorial's purpose. Indeed, this aspect of the Memorial artistically fulfills the design selection criterion that the structure be "reflective and contemplative in character" (U.S. Dept of Interior n. pag. [2]). To be

Fig. 4. Viewers may be startled to see their own reflections in the polished, black granite of the Wall.

sure, the wall reflects both the surrounding monuments and the natural setting — the sloping grass hillock, the trees near the statue and the flagpole, clouds forming in the sky. These reflections are at once majestic and idyllic. Most poignant, however, is the viewer's sudden recognition that he, himself, is reflected in the dark, mirror-like surface. Figure 4 captures that sense of surprise and awareness. Noting this quality, Harry Haines, in an important article about the Memorial's susceptibility to political manipulation, observes that we must "read ourselves into the text, literally *into* the black reflective surface as a way of making sense of the war"; the resulting ambiguity thus "generates a shifting symbolic ground . . . in which veterans and others *enact* Vietnam's meaning" ("What Kind" 9). Indeed, seeing one's own image suddenly superimposed on the inscribed names of those who fought and died in Southeast Asia requires an active communication, if a silent one, about the personal and national implications of the war in Indochina.

Much of the literature of the War requires the same active participation by the reader. Norman Mailer's interrogatory title *Why Are We In Vietnam?* asks that the reader emotionally and intellectually examine that question, and in his companion piece, *The Armies of the Night*, creates what Mikhail Bakhtin would term a dialogic text, since the reader must analyze what is clearly a constantly shifting narrator. Similarly, Tim O'Brien, in *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, entitles his last chapter with what quickly becomes a rhetorical question: "Don't I Know You?" Here, as the specific "I" melds into the more generic "you," the two participants — narrator and reader — seem to merge into one, and the topic of that chapter, coming

home, is an issue for all to consider. In a similar manner Philip Caputo, in *A Rumor of War*, constantly shifts and finally merges his dual perspectives to stand as both witness and actor. As critic Neil Baldwin suggests, Caputo ultimately hopes that his narrative will "force us to ask ourselves 'what would *we* have done under these circumstances?' " (35). Speaking of his men — and himself — Caputo proposes in his "Prologue" that, for his virtues as well as his faults, "the American soldier was a reflection of [all Americans] themselves" (xx).

Yet if the reader is expected to engage these texts as a participant on a personal level, developing empathy with the soldier himself, he is also encouraged to analyze the historical confusion surrounding the War. Experiencing the Wall, one senses, initially, an analogous ambiguity in the very form of the V-shaped walls. In fact, Maya Lin, according to Laura Palmer, "never thought of it as V-shaped. She always thought of it as a circle to be completed" by the viewers (xviii). Charles Griswold finds, similarly, a "simultaneous openness and closure" that he expresses in an interesting textual metaphor: "The closure just mentioned is the closure not of a book but of a chapter in it. The openness indicates that further chapters have to be written, and read" (708). The actual experience of the Wall, with the apex of the *V* containing the ending, 1975, embedded in the beginning, 1959, suggests more appropriately the self-enclosed form of a Moebius strip. When the viewer makes one circuit of the Wall he arrives at the end that is also, paradoxically, the beginning. Yet it is different also: the initial date is at the top of the Wall, while the closing date, conversely, is at the bottom. Like a Moebius strip, the viewer feels that she is on the obverse side of the same point. And the two inscriptions, again similar but different, lead a reader to feel that she is seeing variations of the same issue.[6] And, once more like a Moebius strip, another trip along the Wall, if the viewer chooses to follow another line of names, will lead to a second terminus, but still one embedded in the beginning. What kind of larger causality, the Memorial seems to ask, can this seemingly circular form reveal? From one perspective, in close, the Moebius strip appears frustratingly tautological.

The literature also expresses a concern with historical knowledge that is initially frustrated and then only attained with difficulty, as one changes perspective. To be sure, some Vietnam War narratives discourage the necessity for any historicizing impulse. In Gustav Hasford's *The Short-Timers* for instance, the issue is treated sardonically when the narrator, Joker, notes simply that "Machine guns started typing out history" (158). Yet in other works the topic is treated with sincerity. Although Norman Mailer proposes in *The Armies of the Night* that history "inhabits a crazy house" (68), that there exist numerous "intersections between history and the comic books" (109), his search for a viable historical approach is rooted in honest epistemological concern. In *Dispatches*, similarly, Michael

Herr begins with an initial desire to represent the fragmented, ahistorical understanding of the soldiers. Yet he also explores various events that might, symbolically at least, define the War's beginning, and he examines myth as an alternative to a more objective historical understanding. Likewise, John Del Vecchio in *The 13th Valley* may reveal the same initial frustrations when his characters themselves discuss different modes of historical inquiry; only at the end of this narrative does Del Vecchio offer, very tentatively and through the troubled vision of one of the protagonists, a synthesizing solution to the problem of a larger understanding of the War. And James Webb, in the narrative structure of *Fields of Fire*, suggests that the convoluted history of the War may be finally understood only by looking at cultural as well as personal histories; here the open-ended epilogue to his novel becomes an excursus into the futures of various cultures.

Similarly, the Wall does open, and it is the experience of the overall context of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial which makes the design an appropriate one. In a pastoral setting, one conducive to reflection, viewers ponder the experiences of the soldiers and ponder their own experiences. They discover, perhaps, from a more encompassing perspective that the *V* opens to and thus symbolically includes, both the Washington Monument, seen in Figure 5, and the Lincoln Memorial. Although Griswold observes that the 125-degree, 12-minute angle of the *V* causes the tips to "point like arrowheads" (705) toward these structures, a more apt comparison might be to arms, a relevant anthropomorphic image.[7] Indeed, the arms seem to reach out, as if to embrace the other monuments. Appropriately, the end of each outstretched arm stops, if the chronology of deaths is followed, in the summer of 1968, just at the moment when dissent about the War became most openly and violently divisive, and when a healing embrace was most needed. One end of the widely extended *V* points to the tribute to the man who founded the country and, significantly, the one who guided his troops through our nation's first official war. Off the other end sits the memorial to the president who preserved the Union despite a terrible civil war. Indeed, words from President Lincoln's 1865 Inaugural Address, inscribed within his Memorial, seem congruent with the meaning of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as well. "[L]et us strive on," Lincoln intones,

> to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations. (qtd. by Bacon)

It is in this context of American values of endurance and perseverance, then, that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial assumes its

Fig. 5. The Wall extends as if to embrace the Washington Monument or, in the other direction, the Lincoln Memorial.

place, asking for an incorporation of the experience into the mainstream of all American experiences. As Bernard Barber demonstrates in his 1949 article on the sometimes conflicting symbolic, aesthetic, and utilitarian functions of public art, "The essential purpose of a war memorial, though not necessarily the only one, is to express the attitudes and values of a community toward those persons and deeds that are memorialized" (328). As the Wall's inscriptions imply, these "persons" include not only those who lost their lives in the conflict but others who made sacrifices as well.

As with all pastoral art, however, the viewer must return to "reality," signaled here by a striking but probably unintended aspect of the Memorial: the almost constant low arrivals and departures of both airliners and helicopters at the nearby airports. Having located oneself in history, the viewer recognizes that his meditations about life and death and suffering are connected with actual experience; that death is sometimes random and without apparent justification; that the process of searching for historical causation and connection is sometimes futile and often filled with frustrating ambiguities. Yet in having stopped, in this quiet, pastoral setting, to ponder and reflect on, indeed to experience, these qualities of the Memorial, the viewer expands his knowledge of the War, of those who fought in it, and even, perhaps, of himself.

If there remain questions and obscurities about the soldiers' lives, and indeed about the historical and national ramifications of the War, the process of communication continues to be vital. Both the Memorial and much of the major literature about the Vietnam War provide that opportunity for dialogue, for the exchange of ideas. In considering the sometimes harsh and disjointed realism of the reified stories of the soldiers, we open the necessary channels of communication. In working to understand the spatial, but especially the temporal, disorientation perceived by the soldiers, and in comprehending the soldier's need to come to grips with and re-order the events of his experience, we further enhance that vital communication. In reflecting on the implications of the War and on our relationships with the soldiers then and now, after their return home, we may understand the experience more fully. Finally, in considering the need to position that experience within the larger context of national and cultural concerns, we participate in the reintegration of those individuals into the mainstream of American society. Such is the process — a long and complex one, and one not helped by an initial rejection — that may lead to reconnection on both a personal and a national plane.

Commenting on the initial 1982 dedication ceremony for the Memorial, one observer remarked, "The completion of the Wall [marks] the beginning of a long healing process for our Nation and the men and women who fought in a recent, unpopular war" (U.S. Senate). If that healing process continues, then perhaps the dream of

Paul Berlin, the protagonist of Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*, may come true: "to return home to live in a normal house in a normal town in a time of normalcy" (153). O'Brien elsewhere overtly discounts the possibility of the soldier's "teach[ing]" us anything (*If I Die* 32). Yet we, as an active and questioning audience, may certainly learn something in the process of hearing their stories, whether they tell a personal, discrete narrative or reflect the ordering impulse to create a more comprehensive vision of the nation's history during this disjunctive era. The Memorial, like much of the literature of the War, invites that participatory openness. Only in this way, the architecture and the narratives suggest, will an honest and healing closure be achieved.

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Notes

[1]Greene, in introducing the *Esquire* adaptation of his book, proposes that this was a "history . . . of what it was like to return to the United States after the most controversial war in the nation's history." The extraordinarily painful emotions associated with the homecoming experience, he writes, "ran so deep they [the soldiers] never wanted to tell anyone" (45).

[2]Haines goes on, in this important article, to note that "ideological struggle" (142) over the meaning of the Memorial is inevitable. "By claiming the Wall," Haines writes, "conflicting groups claim the memory — the 'lessons' — of Vietnam for their various purposes" (148). That the article appears in the premier issue of *Vietnam Generation*, a journal "devoted to promoting scholarship on recent history and contemporary issues," attests to the importance of understanding the Memorial in the context of current American issues.

[3]For an informative short article describing the political and personal machinations of those involved in obtaining governmental permission to construct the Wall, finding financial backing, and organizing and publicizing the commemoration ceremonies, Buckley's article is helpful. For an interesting editorial commentary on the intersection of the worlds of art and politics, see Wolfe, cited below.

[4]Griswold's fine article was in press as I prepared the initial, shortened form of this article for presentation at the Rocky Mountain American Studies Association Conference in October 1986. Griswold's emphasis, like mine, is on the "therapeutic" (712) purpose of the Memorial, although his context is more directly political than mine. His article is valuable, also, for establishing the Memorial within the relevant architectural context of other Washington monuments.

[5]In "The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam," which appears in the *Journal of Social Issues* 31 (1975), Moskos reaffirms this principle and adds that "the 12-month rotation cycle was the dominating feature of the Vietnam combat experience" (12).

[6]The opening inscription honors "the men and women . . . who served in the Vietnam War" and gives special tribute to those who perished or are missing. The closing inscription commends the "courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty" of all veterans. Significantly, however, there is no mention of the dead or missing in this inscription; instead there is this thought: "This Memorial was built with private contributions from the American people." The effect of that last statement is inclusive and cohesive; it seems to broaden the scope of the Memorial to include many Americans, not just veterans.

[7]In point of fact, Griswold does use the word *arms* later in his article, although he does not seem aware of the symbolic significance of that anthropomorphic image.

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