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Beyond the Battlefield:
Direct and Prosthetic Memory of the American War in Viet Nam

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Abstract

“Beyond the Battlefield: Direct and Prosthetic Memory of the American War in Viet Nam” examines shifts in American, Viet Nameese, and Philippine memorial, literary, and cinematic remembrance of the war through the cultural lenses of later wars: the Gulf War (1990-1991) and the “War on Terror” that began in 2001. As opposed to earlier portrayals of the American War in Viet Nam (1964-1975), turn-to-the-twenty-first-century representations engage in an ever-broadening collected cultural memory—a compilation of multifaceted, sometimes competing, individual and group memories—of the war. “Beyond the Battlefield” begins with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) because it serves as the impetus for active participation in the reception and creation of memory. It traces a multifaceted collected cultural memory pattern through the stages of recognition for servicewomen, American women, Viet Nameese Women, and reconciliation between soldiers and civilians as well as between Americans and the Viet Nameese—veterans and civilians alike. Ultimately, a collected cultural memory of the war encourages prosthetic memory—memories of the war acquired via mediated representation by those with no direct experience in or hereditary connection to the war. Prosthetic memory permits an ongoing memory of the war that refuses to relegate the war to the forgotten past.

A Note on Nomenclature

“Vietnam” is an American term used in the United States, and elsewhere, to signify an American experience.” However, most Viet Nameese words have one syllable. Therefore, the name of the country is not “Việt Nam,” but Viet Nam according to appropriate bifurcated rendering. For all words—places, names, groups, organizations, and memorials—I adopt the usage appropriate to their language of origin. Therefore, because they are American terms, “Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” “Vietnam Women’s Memorial,” “Vietnam veterans” and all other American titles of American memorials, groups, and organizations appear in the fused American spelling. For most Viet Nameese cities and place names, save the most recognizable, Saigon and Hanoi, I employ the Viet Nameese syllabic divisions. The choice is not merely a matter of syntax; it is also political. Viet Nam is more than a war; it is a country. Thus what is commonly known in America as the “Vietnam War,” and in Viet Nam, the “American War,” is designated throughout the dissertation as “the American War in Viet Nam.” Moreover, Viet Nam has experienced and engaged in many wars. To term the American War in Viet Nam, the “Vietnam War” privileges the American experience and ignores the very history of Viet Nam.

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Chapter One

Remembrance Beyond the Battlefield

The American War in Viet Nam (1961-1975) was and remains a national crisis ripe for expressing both profound disillusionment *and* the emergence of American mythic identity and memory. The war continues to disrupt the American myth of exceptionalism, which holds that American democracy is morally superior to other political systems and that powerful technology and indefatigable masculine capability back American foreign policy. More generally, the myth holds that the ideal American is self-reliant, capable of warding off foreign “evil,” and inherently benevolent. The shattering of the myth of American exceptionalism during the war years is central to the battle over American remembrance of the war. As Americans confront the “War on Terror,” they now encounter both attempts to reinstate the myth of American exceptionalism and memories of a collective disillusionment.

Myths of American exceptionalism depend on a powerful narrative of manifest destiny, patriotism, technological supremacy, masculine capability, democratic legitimacy, freedom, and dichotomies of good and evil. Americans learned from the Gulf of Tonkin controversy (1964) and Watergate scandals (1972-1974) that they could no longer place implicit trust in their highest leaders.¹ The loss of the figurative national father stemmed from the

¹ The Gulf of Tonkin incident, preceded by both the North Viet Nameese and American forces engaging in covert warfare in violation of the Geneva Accords, occurred in August 1964. The USS *Maddox* and USS *Turner Joy*, destroyer-class ships, reported that they were under attack and President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered aircraft reprisal raids against North Viet Nameese targets. Days later the U.S. Congress enacted the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution granting Johnson authority to repel and prevent further aggression. Johnson later used the resolution as a postdated declaration of war. It was later discovered that there were no attacks. Many have since argued that America entered the war under false pretenses.

acknowledgement that leaders are fallible, inept, self-serving, and at times dishonest. Other important cultural shifts during the war era shattered myths of the exceptionalist American identity. These shifts include, but are not limited to, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the second-wave feminist movement that began in the 1960s, the loss of pride in military service, and a felt impotence in the failure of an industrial and technological first-world superpower against an assumed third-world agrarian primitivism. These cultural shifts are key symbols of a personal and national identity compromised. Essentially they are a realization of lies, errors, inequalities, futile sacrifice, defeat, and ideals falling short of reality. In response to cultural shifts, memorial, literary, and cinematic subversions of disillusionment concerning American exceptionalism actively participate in cultural contestation over the memory of the American War in Viet Nam. Despite efforts at healing located in narratives and memorials of the American War in Viet Nam, the war continues to haunt American national memory, culture, politics, and military actions.

Texts addressed in the following chapters include a range of genres from memorials and poetry to cinematic and fictional narratives. With the exception of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982), all representations of the war were published or produced since the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), and through the “War on Terror” that began in 2001 in response to attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11). Situating this exploration between these wars not only contemporizes the study, but also imports current cultural, rhetorical, and political perspectives of understanding why the American War in Viet Nam continues to haunt

The Watergate scandals uncovered President Richard Nixon’s secret bombing campaign on Cambodia and his illegal wiretapping of National Security Council staff and journalists, ultimately resulting in his resignation.

American politics, and its military, government, soldiers, and civilians. Moreover, the choice of narratives aims to demonstrate that memories of the war are not solely American, nor Vietnamese, but that memories of the war find new transnational contexts in the twenty-first century. Narrative representations of the war at the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century often simultaneously look to the pre-war past and the post-war aftermath in order to demonstrate the flexibility of time, space, and place of memory.

Memory

“Beyond the Battlefield” considers several modes of memory. Imaginative memorial, literary, and cinematic representations of the American War in Viet Nam “always already” *re-member* the war, culture, and society at the moment of their production. Yet these works also represent various means of remembering and memorializing the war and its after effects. The cultural relationship between memory and narrative found in memorial architecture, the time-based medium of narrative film as celluloid memorial, and the poem as memorial moment reveal the paradoxically time-bound and timeless nature of cultural memory. In addition, memorials, poetry, narrative remembrances, memorialization, and appropriation of the war have the potential to influence cultural memory, thereby impacting cultural, psychological, and political attitudes toward war in the United States and around the world.

The focus on memories of the American War in Viet Nam establishes that a collected cultural memory—a culturally mediated gathering of contradictory memories—of the war and its aftermath in memorials, film, and literature published between 1990 and 2009

demonstrates that the war cannot be simply relegated to the forgotten past. While some texts remember the war for the purpose of recuperation or reconciliation, other texts refuse the forgetfulness often required by recuperation and reconciliation.² Contending memories of the war expose the haunting nature and influence of the American War in Viet Nam on the “War on Terror.”

Twenty-first Century Memory

More than thirty years after the 1975 Fall of South Viet Nam’s capital Saigon marked the undeniable end to the American War in Viet Nam, Americans summon the war for a variety of personal and political reasons in equally diverse ways as a test of faith, a barometer of truth and lies, a narrative of perseverance, and a legacy of error. For example, during the 2004 United States presidential election, Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry came under immediate Republican attack for invoking his service in the American War in Viet Nam to boost his credibility for the presidency. Specifically, a group called the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth responded to the Kerry campaign focus on his service in the war, his receipt of Purple Heart medals for war wounds, his heroism during the war, and ultimately his courage to speak before Congress asking for an end to the war in Viet Nam. Kerry’s famous 1971 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee wherein he asked, “how do you ask a man to die in Viet Nam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die

² Recuperation signals recognizing the service and suffering of soldiers and women participants of the war; its aim is to reestablish national cohesion. Reconciliation, however, stresses recognizing suffering between nations—the United States and Vietnam.

for a mistake,” held particular relevance to his bid for the presidency during what many consider a misguided war in Iraq.³

However, John Kerry’s service both in the military and against the war came under immediate fire. Questions of truth and authenticity pervaded as Swift Boat Veterans quickly swept in with allegations that Kerry’s wartime service was politically motivated, that all three of his Purple Heart medals resulted from superficial wounds —easily treated with band-aids.”⁴ They further claimed that Kerry incited the torture of American Prisoners of War held in North Viet Nam when in his allegedly —false” 1971 testimony before the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee he spoke of American war crimes.⁵ Such assertions overshadowed incumbent President George W. Bush’s service in and alleged desertion of the National Guard—the only military branch of service not deployed to Viet Nam during the war. Thus, Vietnam veteran John O’Neill and political science scholar Jerome Corsi alleged John Kerry, according to the title of their book, was *Unfit for Command*, and the United States citizens again engaged in a heated twenty-first century debate over the war.

What does the 2004 presidential election reveal about America’s cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam? It suggests that the war continues to divide the country, that the war is not forgotten, and that the search for truth and authenticity stimulates memories of the war. American cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam remains hotly contested. Historians and the public alike continue to debate who to blame for the loss of the war that

³ Congressional Record. *Complete Testimony of Lt. John Kerry to Senate Foreign Relations Committee April 22, 1971* (US 92nd Congress, 1st Session).

⁴ John O’Neill and Jerome Corsi, *Unfit For Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry* (Washington: Regnery, 2004).

⁵ John O’Neill and Jerome Corsi, *Unfit For Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry* (Washington: Regnery, 2004).

resulted in American withdrawal and the unification of Viet Nam under Communist control. Since the end of the war, the answer has varied from the anti-war movement, and individuals such as Jane Fonda,⁶ to the veterans themselves, politicians, and the corruption in South Viet Nam's Republic of Viet Nam (RVN). Due to the protracted ending and loss of the war, America's cultural memory of the war has experienced revolutions of healing, remembrance and forgetfulness, and revelations of ongoing psychological and political damage.

Literary and Cinematic Traditions: Twentieth-Century Remembrance of the War

Representations of the war in cinematic and prose narratives evolved through several stages during the last thirty-five years. Narratives of the 1970s tend to emphasize veteran guilt over fighting the war and civilian guilt over ignoring veterans. However, in 1979 Congress recognized Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), defined by the American Psychiatric Association as an anxiety disorder typified by avoidance, reexperiencing trauma, or hyperarousal.⁷ With the recognition of PTSD, civilian concern for veterans began to replace guilt. Literary and cinematic traditions evolved in the early 1980s emphasizing recuperation—attempts to reestablish American masculinity or to “refight” the war: prisoner of war rescue narratives set in the 1980s provided a cathartic sense of redemption wherein private citizens accomplished rescue missions that the government could not. In the late

⁶ Jane Fonda famously visited American Prisoners of War in 1972 in the northern Democratic Republic of Viet Nam capital, Hanoi. For a discussion of the transformation of Jane Fonda into the myth Hanoi Jane, see Jerry Lembcke, *Hanoi Jane: War, Sex, and Fantasies of Betrayal* (Amherst: U Mass P, 2010).

⁷ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington, 1980).

1980s, narrative films emphasized realism and authenticity, yet war poetry of the decade responded to the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) by meditating on the war's legacy and on American acts of memorialization.

The "Vietnam Syndrome"

The 1980s were also a time in the United States when healing from the war became synonymous with revising memories of the war. Occurring within the specific historical context of the Reagan administration, the desire for recuperation and reconciliation and thus healing became a sought after ~~–eure~~" for the ~~–Vietnam Syndrome~~"—a misnomer that categorizes anti-war sentiments as an ~~–illness~~" in need of a ~~–eure~~"—that has come to define the national post-war unwillingness to intervene militarily in the Third-World.⁸ According to literary and cultural critic Donald Pease, Ronald Reagan set forth a new understanding of the American War in Viet Nam, ~~–enam[ing]~~ the unwillingness to intervene in the Third-World a national pathology, the –Vietnam Syndrome" (558). Pease claims that Reagan renamed American military reluctance because he was concerned with the ~~–nation~~'s loss of resolve" and thus hoped to reactivate ~~–eold~~ war certitudes" (558). Certainly, Reagan desired a ~~–eure~~" for the ~~–Vietnam Syndrome~~" and attempted to provide one in his 1980 Veterans of Foreign Wars convention campaign speech wherein he purported that ~~–for~~ too long, we have lived with the –Vietnam Syndrome'...[claiming that the war] was, in truth, a noble cause...[and

⁸ See Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1996) and Donald E. Pease, ~~–Post~~-National Spectacles." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 557-80.

that] we dishonor the [memory of the dead] when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were doing something shameful” (Turner 63). Many United States citizens and Vietnam veterans hoped that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would annul the ~~–shame~~” and ~~–guilt~~” associated with the war. However, responses to and interactions with the memorial are too varied to symbolize collective national healing.

Remembering the War since 1990 and the Persian Gulf War

The 1990s marked the post-Cold War era. Seemingly, Americans could then put Reagan’s ~~–Vietnam Syndrome~~” behind them. Yet in the 1990s the United States engaged in a war in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), wherein American troops pushed the Iraqi Army out of Kuwait and back into Iraq, a militaristic precursor to the twenty-first century Iraq War. As opposed to the 1970s’ guilt and isolationism and the 1980s’ revision and so-called limited United States military incursions in Nicaragua, bombings in Libya, invasion of Grenada, and funding of revolutionaries in Afghanistan in their war against the Soviet Union, the 1990s brought additional limited military incursions for the United States.

The Persian Gulf War conveyed sentiments of victory and righteousness for Americans toward United States military operations. Continued attempts to relegate the American War in Viet Nam to the forgotten past found what many hoped would be a ~~–eure~~” for the ~~–Vietnam Syndrome~~” in a new successful military intervention overseas—the Persian Gulf War. That war provided then President George Herbert Walker Bush an opportunity to

declare just days after the end of the war in 1991 that there would be ~~no~~ more Vietnams” and that America had ~~finally~~ kicked the Vietnam Syndrome.”⁹ As literary scholar Lynda Boose aptly noted, the Persian Gulf War produced ~~the~~ parades, the cheers, the public excitement over military hardware, and the popular sloganeering about a new pride in America ‘ . . . In short, a revived militarism.’¹⁰ Post-war celebration in Anthony Swofford’s Persian Gulf War novel, *Jarhead: A Marine’s Chronicle of the Persian Gulf War and Other Battles* (2003), and Sam Mendes’s cinematic adaptation *Jarhead* (2005) signifies the connection between the Persian Gulf War and the American War in Viet Nam. For example, on the bus ride back to his California Marine base, Swofford notes the cheering crowds lining the streets ~~to~~ welcome home the heroes” (205). However, a specter from the American War in Viet Nam disrupts this moment when a Vietnam veteran boards the bus to congratulate the Marines. Swofford describes the man as ~~—obviously~~ on and off the streets for many years, in and out of VA hospitals” (250). ~~—Somewhat drunk~~” with tears rolling down his face (250), Mendes’s Vietnam veteran thanks the newly anointed Persian Gulf War veterans because they ~~did~~ it clean . . . [and] made [America] proud” (*Jarhead*). Swofford reflects and the film tries to depict that the welcome home parade ~~might~~ help the Vietnam vet heal his wounds” (251).

The Persian Gulf War contradictorily subdued memories of the American War in Viet Nam as it simultaneously invoked and revised a collected cultural memory of the war. Several scholars have addressed the Persian Gulf War’s influence on American memory of

⁹ Quoted in Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1996) 120.

¹⁰ Lynda Boose, ~~—Techno-Muscularity~~ and the Boy Eternal ‘ From the Quagmire to the Gulf,’ *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 584.

the war in Viet Nam. Pease and Kaplan's *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism* (1993), for example, includes several essays that contrast the war with the American War in Viet Nam, often emphasizing the Persian Gulf War's role in "finally kick[ing] the Vietnam Syndrome" as then President George Herbert Walker Bush declared in 1991 at the end of the war.¹¹ Still others, such as cultural critics Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz have conducted compelling studies on the media representation of the Persian Gulf War, arguing that the war was highly censored and sanitized in response to the media coverage of the war in Viet Nam.

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Moreover, in the 1990s with fiftieth anniversary celebrations of World War II battles, representations of World War II dominated the American cultural imagination. America could finally turn away from its losses and celebrate its successes during World War II and the Persian Gulf War. The few representations of the American War in Viet Nam during this time turned toward reconciliation based on the seemingly innocuous notion that everyone suffers in war that bolstered desires for reconciliation. As a time that new, but subtle, voices and perspectives on the war emerged, reconciliation surfaced with the inclusion of women's experiences and perspectives represented in the 1993 dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial (VWM). In addition, the appearance of Viet Nameese literature in English translation contributed to reconciliation via recognition of mutual psychological distress. Normalization of relations between the United States and Viet Nam in 1994 under President

¹¹ Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993).

¹² Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz eds., *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War* (New Brunswick N.J., Rutgers UP, 1994).

William Jefferson Clinton, President George Herbert Walker Bush's successor, lifted the trade embargo against Viet Nam and encouraged further diplomatic reconciliation.¹³

Yet limited military incursions and perceived peace would not last. With the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, the United States Pentagon, and possibly on the White House by a third commercial passenger plane that crashed before reaching its suspected destination, a new "War on Terror" began. At the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century it seemed that the American War in Viet Nam might finally be relegated to the forgotten past as cultural representational production of the war slowed with one glaring exception, Randall Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* (2002), a cinematic adaptation of Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway's memoir *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young* (1992). Although the publication and release of other memoirs, novels, and narrative films about the American War in Viet Nam occurred at the turn-to-the-twenty-first century, audiences generally overlooked them in favor of the wider release of Wallace's film. Rather, reconciliation and American memory of the war consolidated most significantly in *We Were Soldiers*, a film that emphasizes the strength and suffering of American women and North Viet Nam's Democratic Republic of Viet Nam's (DRVN) Peoples Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (PAVN) as prominent narrative elements of reconciliation.

¹³ These works include Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* (1993) and Duong Thu Huong's *Novel Without a Name* (1996) discussed in Chapter Five.

Memory and Memorial

Memory always negotiates a tenuous relationship with the past. Memory is not static; it is historically and culturally specific, meaning diverse things to people in different times, places, and cultures. Memory theorists raise important questions concerning the modes of memory that individuals, cultures, and nations implement and to what end. For example, Durkenheimian theorist Maurice Halbwachs, the first to define “cultural memory,” understands group identities as the primary structure for collective memory (Fentress and Wickham ix). In *Collective Cultural Memory* (1950) Halbwachs argues that individuals acquire memories through society—family, religion, and social class.¹⁴ He claims all memories are therefore collective and are always in accordance with the predominant thoughts of a particular society. Halbwach’s collective focus demands further questions: how, for example, can one explore collective memory without regarding the individual as submissively obeying an interiorized collective force? Considering Sigmund Freud’s work on screen memories and his understanding of memories as composites mediated through representation, it is easier to understand the complex nature of memory as an entanglement of collective and individual memories. In addition, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth defines traumatic memory as belated and beyond the point or place of inception.¹⁵ Bleeding into and fermenting at the intersection of American memory and imagination, traumatic memory of the war exceeds individual soldiers, generations, and countries.

¹⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* ed. Lewis A Coser (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992).

¹⁵ Cathy Caruth ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1995).

Rejecting opposition between history and memory, cultural critic Marita Sturken contends that “cultural memory” rather than collective memory emerges at the intersection of history and memory.¹⁶ The concept of cultural memory engages other recent developments in memory theory put forth by critics James Young and Alison Landsberg. Writing within and against the tradition of memory theory, Landsberg labels memory in modern, mass culture as “prosthetic” because the memories are not natural, organic, lived, or inherited, but derived from mediated representation. Landsberg defines prosthetic memory as an individual’s “deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live” (2). Prosthetic memories share similarities with “postmemories,” Marianne Hirsch’s term for present and future remembrance of the Holocaust because they provide for ongoing remembrance (3). Prosthetic memories can result from an engagement with a mediated representation of events not expressly experienced by those who form these prosthetic, rather than direct, memories. Inspired by Marcel Proust’s description of the smell, texture, and taste of a piece of *petites madeleines* provoking childhood memories in *À la recherche du Temps Perdu*, translated as *Remembrance of Things Past* or *In Search of Lost Time* (1909-1922), Landsberg stresses that mediated representations or experiential sites—a film, a memorial, or a museum—arouse the senses of sight, sound, and touch. Exposure to these mediated representations holds the possibility for individuals to acquire prosthetic memories of event(s) being remembered or memorialized. Derived from mediated representation, prosthetic memory arises from a commingling of personal and historical memory, thereby making particular memories more

¹⁶ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997).

widely available. Mediated representations of the American War in Viet Nam—memorials, poetry, prose narratives, and narrative films—rest at the center of the following chapters. Ultimately, collected cultural and prosthetic memories, because they reject unification of memory, refuse to relegate the American War in Viet Nam to the forgotten past.

While I adopt Landsberg's delineation of prosthetic memory as an inspiration, the term can be developed beyond Landsberg's theory. The designation prosthetic invokes a replacement, a substitute, a removable attachment, and an addendum. Thus, prosthetic memories are new memories, different memories that may or may not appear to perform the same functions of healing or revision as memories held by those with direct experience of the event(s) remembered. Sometimes these new memories replace older memories; sometimes they are additions to previous memories, and most often they are addendums to earlier memories. New memories reimagine, reinvent, revise and re-member; the possibilities are limitless. Significantly, new memories ensure that the war is not forgotten.

Prosthetic also invokes amputation and its often-attendant phantom limb syndrome—the perception of feeling, often pain or discomfort, in the absent amputated limb. This haunting sensation of present absence gives the impression that the limb still exists. One of the most common cures for phantom limb syndrome is a mirror box wherein a patient will place their parallel remaining limb and regard the reflection as the missing limb. Doing so provides the patient with a sense of being able to move the missing limb. Returning to a pre-amputation past provides a reenactment of movement, and a memory of the lost limb that often provides the “eure” of closure for patients suffering from phantom limb pain. Likewise, imaginative representations of the war at the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century reflect the past in the

present. Public and private memorialization and memorial performances often seek to reenact or revisit the past in order to assuage the pain. Memories of the American War in Viet Nam at the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century supplement the memories of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, these earlier memories linger like a phantom limb.

Moreover, prosthetic memory acquired through memorialization by those with no direct experience of the war demonstrates that the memories of the war do not solely belong to those of a singular generation who participated or witnessed the war directly or from the home-front. Prosthetic memory broadens the possibilities of remembrance. It circumvents identity politics and thereby suggests that memories of the past and memories of the American War in Viet Nam are transgenerational and transnational. Thus, I begin with a formulation of a collected cultural memory to demonstrate that transgenerational, transnational, and prosthetic memories of the war continue to be shaped and reshaped in imaginative representations of the war.

Situated within the tradition of memory theory, the discussion of memory and memorial in the following chapters aim also to delineate a definition of a collected cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam. The formulation of collected cultural memory joins and transcends Marita Sturken's cultural memory, Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory, and James Young's regard of memorial sites as places of collected, rather than collective, memories. A collected cultural memory, in accordance with Young in his *Texture of Memory* (1993), suggests a "collective memory" that signifies cohesion, while "collected memory" suggests the contentious nature of cultural memory (xi-xii). Collected memory is a compilation of multifaceted, sometime competing, individual and group memories.

The term emerges from the insufficiencies of the phrase cultural memory in that memories of the war do not always coincide with the predominant thoughts of society. Thus the combination of “collective” and “cultural” results in a collected cultural memory. The terminology also imports the cultural emphasis of collected memory found in Sturken’s theory of cultural memory as shared outside formal historical discourse and situated among culturally mediated negotiations. The concept of collected cultural memories, then, refers to a culturally mediated collection of multifaceted memories. Although there may be a cultural shift in the 1990s towards recuperation and healing, memories also exist that reject the forgetfulness necessary for recuperation. Memorial, cinematic, and literary representations of the war often represent a collection of contending memories and proffer the possibility of prosthetic memory.

Recuperation and Reconciliation

The following chapters focus on poetry, prose narratives, and cinematic narratives created between the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) and 2009, well into the “War on Terror,” that began in 2001. Situating this exploration between these wars not only contemporizes the study, but also requires consideration of twenty-first century cultural, rhetorical, and political perspectives on why memories of the American War in Viet Nam continue to haunt, to varying degrees, the United States’ military, government, soldiers, and civilians.

Analysis of memorial sites, poetry, and narratives of recuperation and reconciliation in the following chapters relies on consensus in the field of Vietnam War studies to address the

shift in national American memory of the war from a sense of guilt in the 1970s, through the revisionist refighting of the war in the 1980s, to “kicking” the “Vietnam Syndrome” in the 1990s. Often, the key to recuperation and reconciliation is healing through recognition. In addition, reconciliation emphasizes the notion that everyone suffers in war. In reconciliationist texts American men and women suffer alike; however, as reconciliationist texts show, the suffering extends beyond Americans to include the Viet Nameese from the northern DRVN and southern RVN. Reconciliation also often requires forgetfulness. Therefore, lack of healing and an understanding of the far-reaching consequences of the American War in Viet Nam undermine reconciliation. For example, consequences of the war exceed both American and Viet Nameese suffering in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle* (2003). Consequences of the war also include transgenerational American and Viet Nameese memories and disillusionment, as well as the New Vietnam Syndrome that emerges, affecting the policies of and attitudes toward the “War on Terror.”

Chapter Two, “Reflections of Memory: Past Presence and Present Absence at The Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” begins by discussing remembrance at the National Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial (VVM) in Washington D.C. Although the VVM was dedicated in 1982, this study commences with the memorial because it became a catalyst for the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century narrative, cinematic, and poetic memories of the war. The chapter does not examine the controversy over Chinese-American undergraduate architectural student Maya Lin’s proposal winning the design contest, because several studies, including the memorial project founders Jan Scruggs and Joel Swerdlow’s book *To Heal a Nation* (1985),

provide accounts and analysis of the debate about Lin's abstract design.¹⁷ The chapter focuses instead on the memorial's aesthetic design, visitor interaction with the memorial, and the possibility of visitors creating new memories at the memorial via the objects they leave at the base of the memorial's walls. Memory theorist Pierre Nora's contention that an adversarial relationship exists between history (events) and memory (sites) informs the examination of memorials throughout the following chapters.¹⁸ Nora's concern is that memorial displaces the responsibility of memory onto the site or object; yet he also understands history as an incomplete and problematic reconstruction of that to which we no longer have access. Refusing to relegate the war to the forgotten past, the memorial's dynamic design, visitors' memorial performances, and poetry about the VVM culminate in a multifaceted collected cultural memory of the war that encourages prosthetic memory.

Chapter Two's section on poetry discusses Yusef Komunyakaa's poem, "Facing It" (1988), a poem that inspired other poets to write what I term a "cycle of poetry" about visiting the VVM. These poems include W.D. Ehrhart's better known "The Invasion of Grenada" (1984), his lesser known "Midnight at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial" (1993), and Doug Anderson's "The Wall" (1991). The chapter also discusses selections from Eugene Grossman's obscure collection *At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C.: Between the Lines* (1988), and Lamonte B. Steptoe's "A Second Wall" (1990). By situating these poems at the VVM, a democratic space of memory, poets contribute to making memories of the war more accessible to those who did not directly experience it. The poetry

¹⁷ Jan Scruggs and Joel Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

¹⁸ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989).

serves as both mediated representations of remembering the war and as reflections on the VVM as a mediated remembrance of the war. The poems engage with the memorial's design—material, form, structure—and visitor interaction with the memorial. While the poems treat the same historical event, and each responds to remembrance at the VVM, some poems rebuff sentimental closure and others encourage the possibility of prosthetic memory. Set in the shared, democratic space of the memorial, those poems often present fusion of past and present that joins individual memories in a collected cultural memory. Although many hoped the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would be history's final chapter on the war, instead it generated further memories of the war that this study underscores.

Chapter Three, "Remembering Women: Servicewomen and Civilian Women, American and Viet Nameese," emphasizes recuperation via representations that recognize women's war and post-war experiences. The first section of Chapter Three discusses servicewomen's contribution to recuperation by examining the Vietnam Women's Memorial, dedicated in 1993. The VWM has received little critical attention from scholars in the fields of memorial architecture, military history, cultural studies, and Vietnam War studies.¹⁹ Hopefully, this oversight will be remedied because the VWM holds the potential to become a principal site

¹⁹ Short pieces promoting the Vietnam Women's Memorial appeared in nursing journals in the late 1980s. Two such examples include Marlene Jezierski, "Vietnam Women's Memorial Project: Donna Marie Boulay Highlights Women's Wartime Roles," *Journal of Emergency Nursing* 13:2 (1987): 122-24 and Elizabeth Paul, "Wounded Healers: A Summary of the Vietnam Nurse Veteran Project," *Military Medicine* 150 (1985): 571-76. Mass publications included articles about the memorial's dedication in 1993. See, for example, Cindy Loose, "Vietnam Women's Memorial Dedicated before 25,000," *The Washington Post* 12 Nov. 1993: 2. Founder of the VWMP, Diane Carlson Evans, has written about the history of the memorial in "Moving a Vision" found at www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org/pdf/dcevens.pdf. However, scholarly examination of the memorial appears to be limited to Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall, "The Sexual Politics of Memory: The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project and 'The Wall'" *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* ed. Jack Salzman (Cambridge: UP, 1989) 341-72 and Donald Ringnalda, *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1994).

for exploring American aesthetic representations of women and war. Educating the public about women's role in the war, the VWM provides a narrative to replace omission with recognition. The VWM's feminist origins, careful promotion, and the design itself engage the recuperative work of feminism. Although the VWM engages the political and historical failures to recognize women's military service in the war, its sculptural narrative—which calls attention to nurses' sometimes futile efforts to assist wounded and dying soldiers—evokes the central trauma that many American servicewomen experienced during and after the war. The memorial both succumbs to and resists patriarchal ideals of authenticity in order to legitimize military women's service in and responses to war.

The second section of Chapter Three considers representations of the war's psychological affects on both American and Viet Nameese civilian women. Although the founders of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Fund hoped to provide a memorial for all women with any connection to the war, its sculpted figures characterize only military servicewomen who served in Viet Nam. Yet memories of the war also hold a profound psychological affect on American and Viet Nameese civilian women, especially women who were married to servicemen and women who later married Vietnam veterans. Therefore, the second section of Chapter Three examines two representative fictional texts, Sandie Frazier's novel *I Married Vietnam* (1992) and Oliver Stone's film *Heaven and Earth* (1993). Frazier's post-war *I Married Vietnam* represents a small genre of sentimental novels by female authors who write of American women's lives after the war and center on their characters' relationships with American male veterans of the war. However, *I Married Vietnam* is unique in its treatment of memory, especially the power of traumatic memory transference and prosthetic

memory. Like Frazier's novel, Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* explores the commingling of memory between husband and wife. However, Stone portrays the psychological impact of the war on a civilian Viet Nameese woman. Like Frazier's character Sam, Oliver Stone's Le Ly acquires prosthetic memories from her veteran husband's memories of the war; yet she also possesses her own direct memories of the war. Moreover, she serves—like the VWM's sculpted servicewomen—as a reconciliatory mediator between civilians and veterans, between Viet Nameese and Americans, and between Viet Nameese immigrant-refugees and those who remained in Viet Nam.

Together, these three narratives—the Vietnam Women's Memorial (VWM), Sandie Frazier's *I Married Vietnam*, and Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth*—seek reconciliation between soldiers and civilians via recognition of women's wartime and post-war experiences. Moreover, they contribute to a collected cultural memory of the war resultant from both direct and prosthetic memories. These narratives reject forgetfulness by recognizing the psychological consequences of the war, beyond the battlefield, on American and Viet Nameese service and civilian women.

Chapter Four, “Private Sites of Memory and Reconciliation in Viet Nam,” examines individual memorial performances situated in Viet Nam. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial may provide a democratic space for shared memories; however, it remains a national space and a place where, unavoidably, national memory is one of many contending narratives. Private sites of memorial performances offer sanctuary from master narratives of national remembrance. The chapter pairs two Viet Nameese novels, Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* (1993) and Huong Thu Duong's *Novel Without a Name* (1995), with selections from Tim

O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1998) and Sidney Furie's film *Going Back* (2001). All veterans of the war, the protagonists in these narratives visit specific sites of personal memory, usually the locale of particular deaths in the war. At these particular memory sites, memorial enactments, remembrances of the dead, and sometimes communion with the spirits of the dead provide invocations through which past and present merge. In the American narratives, witnesses with no direct access to memories of the war observe prosthetically mediated representations of the war through the memorial performances war veterans enact. Their newly attained memories reject relegating the war to the forgotten past. Moreover, each narrative, especially the Viet Nameese novels, portrays sites of memory as potential locations of reconciliation between the Viet Nameese DRVN and RVN and between the Viet Nameese and Americans. Thus, memories of the war in these turn-to-the-twenty-first-century narratives emphasize shared experience across enemy and soldier-civilian divisions.

Revision and Remembrance

In *Race and Reunion* (2001), historian David Blight argues that historical memory consists of deflections, evasions, and embittered and irreconcilable versions of experience.²⁰ The phenomenon of regeneration and reconciliation that Blight identifies in the literature and culture of the fifty years after the Civil War relies on various modes of remembrance and forgetfulness that the following chapters address. In *Mystic Chords of Memory* (1991), Michael Kammen contends that forgetfulness induces reconciliation and that contestation

²⁰ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2001).

activates memory.²¹ Blight's and Kammen's work on memory and reconciliation provide models and theories for approaching the various modes of revision, forgetfulness, and remembrance of the American War in Viet Nam addressed in the following chapters. For example, Blight's understanding of the "Plantation School" of literature as presenting a more pleasing past informs my examination of the proliferation of World War II films in the 1990s. In addition, Blight's study of forgetfulness uncovers American traditions of making remembering safe. Remembering the war dead is easier than confronting the causes of war, particularly for the American Civil War and the American War in Viet Nam.

A collected cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam unavoidably includes countless attempts to reframe the war as a noble cause. Therefore, Chapter Five, "Forgetting the American War in Viet Nam: *We Were Soldiers*," argues that Randall Wallace's cinematic adaptation of Harold Moore and Joseph Galloway's memoir *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young* (1992) relies on the traditional generic conventions of the World War II combat film—battle tactics, leaders, and heroics—in order to recast the American War in Viet Nam as a "good war." The chapter begins by discussing the proliferation of American cultural remembrance of World War II at the turn-to-the-twenty-first century. As the New Vietnam Syndrome emerged and the battle over collective attitudes toward the "War on Terror" escalated, remembrance of the "good war," World War II, supplanted the desire to remember or forget the American War in Viet Nam.

²¹ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991).

Although Wallace's film is unique in its inclusive portrayal of civilian women on the American home-front and proffers a more developed depiction of the PAVN than nearly any other American narrative of the war, he overlooks the cultural and political causes and consequences of the war in favor of representing the war as a fight for survival among "brothers in arms." By emphasizing the early battles and success stories of particular units, the film holds the potential to influence audiences to regard favorably the prospect of war. Moreover, Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* veils its revision and forgetfulness by attesting to its historical accuracy and the authenticity of experience. However, Moore and Galloway's subsequent memoir, *We Are Soldiers Still: A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam* (2008), rejects forgetfulness in favor of encouraging a post-war reconciliation based on mutual recognition between former American and Viet Nameese foes. In addition, *We Are Soldiers Still* further clarifies the authors' negative assessment of the war as politically misguided, a parallel to their regard of the Iraq War. The book thus reclaims a twenty-first century remembrance of the war's aftermath in the shadow of the film's forgetfulness. Thus, even among narratives originating from the same authors, a collected cultural memory of the war is a contentious memory.

Chapter Six, "Unfinished Remembrance: Beyond the United States and Viet Nam, Jessica Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle*," argues that the memory of the American War in Viet Nam exceeds the time, place, and space of the war. Situating memories of the war beyond America and Viet Nam contributes to the collected cultural memories of the war. The chapter pairs Jessica Hagedorn's novel *Dream Jungle* (2003) with Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2001). *Dream Jungle* interweaves fictional accounts of two

1970s controversies—the filming of *Apocalypse Now* and Manuel Elizalde Jr.’s 1971 “discovery” of a primitive tribe, the Tasaday, in the Philippines. Hagedorn’s narrative primarily addresses Philippine colonial legacy wherein the memory of the American War in Viet Nam, via the filming *Napalm Sunset*, her fictional double for *Apocalypse Now*, encroaches on the Philippines as an act of neocolonialism. In addition, *Dream Jungle* interrogates the meaning of *Apocalypse Now* and thereby questions the American War in Viet Nam.

Chapter Six also examines Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now: Redux* (2001) not merely for its twenty-first century release date, but more importantly because it, like Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle*, visits intertextual imperialist repetition on the twenty-first century. Hagedorn reminds audiences of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines that preceded American colonization in order to reveal American neocolonialism in the Philippines. Similarly, Coppola’s *Redux* reminds audiences of the French colonization of Viet Nam before American militarism in Viet Nam. These two twenty-first century narratives engage with the enduring memory of the American War in Viet Nam by exploring the cycle of telling and retelling colonial and neocolonial corruption. Their repetitive need to retell the narratives of colonialism emphasizes the multifaceted memories of the American War in Viet Nam that exist well beyond the literal and cultural battlefields of Viet Nam and the United States.

The conclusion of “Beyond the Battlefield,” Chapter 7, “Exit Strategy,” imagines the possibilities and limitations of a future collected cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam in the broader context of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The chapter addresses cultural memory’s influence on the interrelationship between these wars and what I term the

New Vietnam Syndrome—American reluctance to, and seeming impossibility of, withdrawing from twenty-first century wars for fear of reenacting the outcome of the American War in Viet Nam. Thus, the conclusion aims to demonstrate that the United States has not “kicked the Vietnam Syndrome,” but that the war continues to resonate politically and militarily in the current —War on Terror.”

Although several earlier studies explore legacies of the American War in Viet Nam, no work published to date examines narratives, poetry, and memorials of the war published or dedicated between the Persian Gulf War (1990) and the —War on Terror” that began in 2001 as a means of examining the influence of contemporary war on remembrance of the war in Viet Nam. Most works examine representations of and political responses that appeared and occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, John Hellmann’s *American Myth and the Legacy of the Vietnam War* (1986) addresses the war in Viet Nam as an experience that called into question American myths of exceptionalism.²² Still other texts examine the literary or cinematic tradition of representing the war from the 1970s through the 1980s, emphasizing veteran characters, trauma, gender, or the revenge-plot revisionism of the 1980s.²³

Few scholarly texts address post-1990 representations of the American War in Viet Nam. Although Guy Westwell’s *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line* (2006) discusses the emergence and dominance of World War II films in the 1990s, he dedicates only one chapter

²² John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986).

²³ See Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe, *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), Jeffery Walsh and James Aulich, *Vietnam Images: War and Representation* (London: Macmillan, 1989), and Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1996).

to contemporary films.²⁴ Westwell's treatment of Vietnam War films, however, is limited to his discussion of *We Were Soldiers*. He does not include *Heaven and Earth* (Oliver Stone, 1993) and *Going Back* (Sidney Furie, 2001), texts essential to the understanding of cultural memory treated in the following chapters. This study examines representations of both American and Viet Nameese memory, as well as the possibilities of prosthetic memory. Moreover, the following chapters provide a contemporary perspective on recent narratives, poetry, and memorials that have received minimal attention in the field of Vietnam War studies.

Despite efforts at healing from the American War in Viet Nam, disillusionment with the myth of American exceptionalism continues to accompany a collected cultural memory of the war. Reconciliation, recognition, and recuperation fail to relegate the war to the forgotten past. Contemporary memorials, poetry, prose narratives, and cinematic narratives participate in a collected cultural remembrance of the war and continue to generate prosthetic memories of the American War in Viet Nam.

²⁴ Guy Westwell, *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line* (London: Wallflower, 2006).

Chapter Two

Reflections of Memory:

Past Presence and Present Absence at The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

My clouded reflection eyes me . . .

I turn this way—the stone lets me go.

I turn that way—I'm inside

the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

again, depending on the light to make a difference.

Yusef Komunyakaa, "Facing It"²⁵

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) in Washington, D.C. serves as the nation's central symbolic memory location of the American War in Viet Nam. Situated on the National Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, also known as the Wall, provides a democratic space of remembrance. Dedicated in 1982 and designed by architect Maya Lin, the VVM lists the names of the 58,253 American servicemen and servicewomen killed in the American War in Viet Nam. Since its dedication, over four million annual visitors have deposited over 50,000 objects of remembrance at the VVM. In leaving and viewing these objects visitors contribute to and actively engage in an ongoing collected cultural memory of the war that broadens memories of the war to include personal memories in public space. These interactions with the VVM

²⁵ Yusef Komunyakaa, "Facing It," *Dien Cai Dau* (Middletown, C.T.: Wesleyan UP, 1988).

result in the possibility of attaining prosthetic memory—newly acquired, individually-felt, memories of the war for those with no direct memories of or hereditary connection to the war.²⁶ In addition, the memorial's design and material memory, poems written by Vietnam veterans about the VVM, instruct visitors about these possibilities as the poets meditate on the memorial as an impetus of memory and thereby engage in and evaluate the modes of memory making at the VVM.

The statement of purpose for the VVM, created by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), includes the following:

The purpose of the Vietnam veterans memorial is to recognize and honor those who served and died The Memorial will make no political statement regarding the war or its conduct. It will transcend those issues. The hope is that the creation of the Memorial will begin a healing process. (Scruggs and Swerdlow 53)

The statement's emphasis on healing indicates the perceived need on behalf of the VVMF for recuperation and reconciliation. Together, recuperation and reconciliation help to reestablish national cohesion. The VVMF hoped that the memorial would “transcend” divisions over the war and “its conduct,” and would not only recognize service and sacrifice but also reconcile veterans with civilians, especially those who participated in the anti-war movement. The desire for recuperation and reconciliation occurs within a specific historical

²⁶ See Chapter One for a developed discussion of prosthetic memory.

context, during the Reagan administration and the age of the “Vietnam Syndrome”—a misnomer coined by President Ronald Reagan that categorizes anti-war sentiments as an “illness” in need of a “cure” and has come to define the national post-war unwillingness to intervene militarily in the Third World.²⁷ While, for some, the VVM’s emphasis on healing, recuperation, and recognition may indeed succeed in transcending divisions over the war, the memorial’s abstract design ultimately resists closure of the past. The VVM is a catalyst that encourages visitor participation in a collected cultural memory—a culturally mediated collection of multifaceted memories. More importantly, the memorial encourages the formation of prosthetic memories—newly acquired memories by those with no experiential or hereditary connection to the war. Prosthetic memories encourage ongoing memories that refuse to relegate the war to the forgotten past.

Maya Lin’s abstract design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial participates in and encourages a collected cultural memory via its reflective surface, its visceral imperative of the engraved names, and its non-linear chronological approaches to representing time and memory. At the VVM visitors respond to and interact with the memorial’s design through individual and communal acts of remembrance, thus participating in collected cultural and prosthetic memory. Enacting memorial performances, visitors make speeches, mount protest, take photos of or make charcoal rubbings on paper of the engraved names, and leave letters or other material items. The objects visitors deposit at the VVM serve as material memory—objects that come to signify the continued presence of absent individuals. Visitors

²⁷ See Chapter One for a more thorough analysis of the origin and implications of the term “Vietnam Syndrome.”

leave a varied collection of material memory objects that range from representing the American War in Viet Nam as futile to those representing the war as honorable sacrifice. These material memories and the names engraved on the VVM invoke the dead and possess, for some visitors, the possibility of communication with the dead. They hold the potential of dissolving the distance between past and present. Although these memorial performances take place at a national place of remembrance, a collected cultural memory emerges wherein multifaceted material and performative memories deny the possibility of a unified memory of the war. Moreover, visitors with no direct connection to the war who observe material and performative memories sometimes acquire prosthetic memories—in this case, an emotional connection to the war and the war dead.

In addition to the memorial itself, poetic responses to the VVM self-consciously engage with collected cultural and prosthetic memories. This poetry serves as both a set of mediated representations of the war and reflections on the VVM as mediated representation of the war. The poems engage with the memorial's design—material, form, structure—and visitor interaction with the memorial. Seemingly inspired by Yusef Komunyakaa's "Facing It" (1988) the poems, written by W.D. Ehrhart, Eugene Grollmes, Doug Anderson, and Lamont B. Steptoe, were all published in the decade following the dedication of the VVM. Often written from the perspective of a Vietnam veteran speaker, the poems didactically demonstrate the memorial's ability to reflect simultaneously the past and the present, present absence and absent presence. Written within close historical proximity and sharing an understanding of memory as an active process, the poems also range in their examinations of

the possibilities and limitations of achieving collected cultural and prosthetic memory at the experiential site of the VVM.

The memorial's dynamic design, visitors' memorial performances, and poetry about the VVM enter into a discourse of memory making that results in a multifaceted collected cultural memory of the war that encourages prosthetic memory. The design, performances, and poetry interconnectedly reflect one another and culminate in the creation of a new narrative approach to remembering the American War in Viet Nam. This narrative approach engages with recuperation, reconciliation, and ultimately emphasizes memory of the war, refusing to relegate the war to the forgotten past.

Material Memories

Like the American War in Viet Nam, the memorial's abstract concept provoked controversy.²⁸ For example, Fredrick Hart's *Three Fighting Men* sculpture dedicated in 1984 was included in the memorial design before groundbreaking in order to compromise with those who felt the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was too abstract. Moreover, Hart criticized the VVM's encouragement of visitor participation. He claimed, "people say you can bring whatever you want to Lin's memorial. But I call that brown bag aesthetics. I mean you better bring something, because there ain't nothing being served" (Hess 274). Yet what Hart calls "brown bag aesthetics" is precisely the reason to privilege the VVM as a memorial that

²⁸ For a detailed account of the memorial debate, see Jan C. Scruggs and Joel L. Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

encourages ongoing memory. By urging visitors to engage actively with memory making via the material objects they bring to the memorial, the VVM effectively engages collected cultural and prosthetic memory. The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial compels visitor interaction and participation, thereby prompting memory making via the creation of new memories, prosthetic memories. Like the names on the memorial, material memory objects addressed below come to signify individuals from among the collective and encourage observers to create new meaning and memories of the war and the war dead.

Both the polished surface and the engraved names of the VVM possess a tactile quality that encourages visitors to touch the memorial. Touching an engraved name allows visitors to feel a sense of contact with the person that the name represents. According to Lin's written description of the memorial, "these names, seemingly infinite in number, convey the sense of overwhelming numbers while unifying those individuals into a whole" (*Boundaries* 27). She has also said that the VVM "focuses on individual loss" to emphasize a private experience (*Grounds* 11, 9). Thus the VVM proffers a tension between an individual name and the collected names. Furthermore, visitors who make rubbings of the names take mementos of the memorial and the named dead soldier with them when they leave. Through the rubbings, the VVM and the memories of the war and war dead transcend the physical space of the memorial. For example, visitors often make rubbings of names to share with others who have not or cannot visit the VVM. Philosophical theory critic Karen S. Feldman understands the rubbings and their tactile properties as "evidence that the names are not just designations. The name is the presence . . . of the person" (300).

Unlike the usual protocol of leaving flowers and flags, the range of memory objects deposited at the VVM constitutes competing personal memories intended to be shared and thereby create a collected, rather than collective, cultural memory—a mediated gathering of polysemic memories.²⁹ While some objects suggest that the American War in Vietnam wasted lives, others signify sacrifice and purpose. Representing a collected cultural memory, objects comprise individual possessions once belonging to the dead: popular culture icons such as teddy bears or sports memorabilia, photographic images of the dead or their personal possessions (e.g., automobiles, clothing, watches, or jewelry). Some objects represent past written reflections of those who are dead such as copies of their letters sent home during the war. Visitors also leave objects as means of communication with the dead; these range from schoolchildren's assignments to write "dear dead soldier" letters, to tourists' or friends' notes scrawled on hotel stationary, to family members' highly personal letters filled with sorrow, anger, regret, apologies, and final farewells. Some objects are familiar military memorabilia that signify military service. These items include service badges, dog tags, prisoner of war (POW) / missing in action (MIA) remembrance bracelets, and combat boots.³⁰ While other objects such as commemorative pins, bumper stickers, or coins celebrate the memorial itself. Still other objects left at the VVM, such as rocks and handcrafted mementoes, are obscure

²⁹ Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998) conducts an in-depth analysis of items deposited at the VVM.

³⁰ By 1973 between four and ten million Americans were wearing bracelets engraved with the names of POWs and MIAs. Emotional ties with the POW/MIA named on the bracelet easily formed because those wearing the bracelet promised to never remove the bracelet until the POW/MIA was returned home or was found to be dead. For a more detailed account of the origin of the bracelets see Bruce H. Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America* (Lawrence Hill, 1992).

items left by anonymous visitors.³¹ Furthermore, some visitors leave the VVM with commodified memories, souvenirs purchased from nearby vendors; these include replicas of P.O.W. bracelets or commemorative items.

Material memory objects constitute something like an objective correlative for the emotions called up in visitors by the VVM.³² Individual possessions, cultural icons, and efforts of communication deposited at the VVM engage with the pre-war past by signifying the hopes, likes, loves, and habits of the dead soldier, to whom they once belonged. However, the material memories inexorably invoke the absence of that person. As cultural anthropologists Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey explain, memory objects summon characteristics of their owners and thus serve as substitutes for the absent body (14, 78). For example, objects left at a child's grave, such as toys, —maintain the material culture of childhood” (Hallam and Hockey 88). These objects evoke emotions associated with the play or innocence of childhood and the loss of a particular child. At the VVM, memory objects correlate with the absent body and signify an individual from among the collective.

Moreover, material memory objects placed at the VVM call attention to an individual from among the collected names. For example, in *Carried to The Wall* (1998), Kristin Hass identifies the objects as —markers against the threat of the erasure of the memories of the war and its soldiers” (93). The material markers draws attention to one name among many on the

³¹ See “Unidentified Objects,” National Parks Museum Resource Center's Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection <http://www.nps.gov/mrc/indexvvm.html>

³² T.S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems,” *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920) defines the objective correlative as follows: “the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (100).

memorial and, as Hass argues, ~~in~~“insistently work to recast the soldiers’ identities” (93).

Recasting identity allows the absent dead to become present. Consider Hallam and Hockey’s explanation of the dual nature of memories as ~~past~~ “past presence [and] present absence” (85): memories have the potential to dissolve the distance and duality between then and now, creating a fused perspective—simultaneity.

Material memories also create a convergence of private and public memorials. Memory objects simultaneously communicate individual and collective memory, or a collected cultural memory. Leaving material memory objects at the VVM enables visitors to share and transcend personal memory. Spilling over into the space of the public, material memories support the creation of new memories both for those who leave them, participants, and for those who see them, observers. Material memories compel observers to piece together a narrative memory, implicating them in remembering. Private memories of the war and the war dead thereby enter the domain of the public psyche.

Moreover, material remembrances deposited at the VVM generate prosthetic memories and encourage ~~post~~“post-memories,” the term Marianne Hirsch uses when writing of Holocaust memories acquired by post-war generations (3). As Hass explains, visitors encountering material memories at the VVM attach narrative meaning to the object.³³ The meanings of the objects to those who leave the items are accessible to observers insofar as the meaning is constituted by the discourse it enters, the context of remembering the American War in Viet Nam and the American war dead. Encountering material memories at the VVM as mediated

³³ Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998).

representations of the war allows observers who have no “natural” or hereditary claim to the war’s memory to incorporate that memory into their own archive of experience. Moreover, objects deposited at the VVM, such as letters to the dead from post-war generations with no direct organic or hereditary connection to the war, attest to the formation of prosthetic memory. In leaving memory objects, these visitors have formed a personal connection with the war dead, thus visitors form post-memories of the war. In leaving memory objects, those who were once observers now become participants in memory making. Participants and observers sometimes engage equally with memory at the VVM, and many visitors acquire the dual perspective of participant and observer.

Through material memory the VVM becomes what memory theorist Pierre Nora identifies as a *lieux de mémoire*, a site of memory, on two levels—the memorial itself and the objects left at the memorial. The objects deposited at the VVM constitute a meta-memorial, a memorial within, or one that arises from a memorial. Nora describes a site of memory as a principal place or site in which collective memory is rooted where one can study “national feeling.”³⁴ This sense of national feeling takes on an amalgamated form of multifaceted collective and individual memories. Material remembrances contend with one another, each representing diverse narratives to participants and to observers.

³⁴ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7.

Aesthetic Memory: A Living Memorial

Evoking emotions of loss and suffering rather than representing heroism, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial differs greatly from hallmark, Classical Greek and Roman architectural styles associated with the Commission of Fine Art and the American Battle Monuments Commission (Piehler 174). For example, historian Kurt Piehler asserts that the VVM's focus on individual names breaks with Classical memorial imagery that most often includes an ~~heroic-style statuary~~" (174). The VVM consists of two horizontal walls sloped into the earth, meeting at an angle of 125 degrees. Each wall or arm of the memorial contains seventy polished black granite panels engraved with the names of the dead. The panels range in height from a few inches at each end, to just above ten feet where the two sides meet in the shape of an inverted V. The panels bear the names of the 58,253 war dead. Names engraved on the reflective panels are arranged not alphabetically but in chronological order according to date of death.

The inverted V shape of the memorial, the numbered panels, and the inscription of names culminate to create a book of the dead. As Maya Lin understands the design, ~~the~~ panels open like a book...[they] are numbered like the pages in a book" (*Grounds* 13). Like a book, the memorial's two inscriptions on the far eastern and western panels serve as a prologue and epilogue to the memorial.³⁵ Along with these inscriptions, the text of the VVM culminates

³⁵ The inscription on Panel 1 East reads: ~~IN~~ HONOR OF THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES WHO SERVED IN THE VIETNAM WAR. THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES AND OF THOSE WHO REMAIN MISSING ARE INSCRIBED IN THE ORDER THEY WERE TAKEN FROM US." The epilogue on Panel 1 West reads: ~~OUR~~ NATION HONORS THE COURAGE, SACRIFICE, AND DEVOTION TO DUTY AND COUNTRY OF ITS VIETNAM

with the names, material, and form of the memorial in a “convergence between the notions of text and art and content” (13). Literary scholar Stephen Greenblatt further understands “to cut words into matter, to transform matter into a book to be read, is the central memorializing act” (27). Creating a narrative of the war in stone from the names of the dead and missing holds a permanency that is there for all to read. The act of reading produces the possibility of forming prosthetic memories. Moreover, the chronological listing of names creates a relationship between past and present time, place, and memory inscribed in the names. The memorial lists the names of those who died together next to one another. Thus veterans visiting the memorial will likely encounter the names of several individuals they once knew on a singular panel that, in turn, signifies a particular place and time in memory.

Despite the familiar, Freytagian pyramid, narrative structural appearance of the inverted V-shaped memorial, the chronological listing of names does not follow that seemingly predictable order; alternately, it disrupts a Western narrative order (see Fig. 1). Rather than beginning with the date of the first American military death in 1959, the outermost ends of the memorial walls begin with the war’s climax of 1968. The west wall of the memorial rises from the year 1968 to the year the war ended in 1975, while the east wall descends from 1959 to 1968. Each outermost end of the memorial’s walls begins in *medias res* and the memorial reaches its greatest height and narrative climax with the beginning and the end of the American War in Viet Nam. The memorial’s chronology is in counterdistinction to Western expectations of chronological ordering by starting at 1968 and moving upward

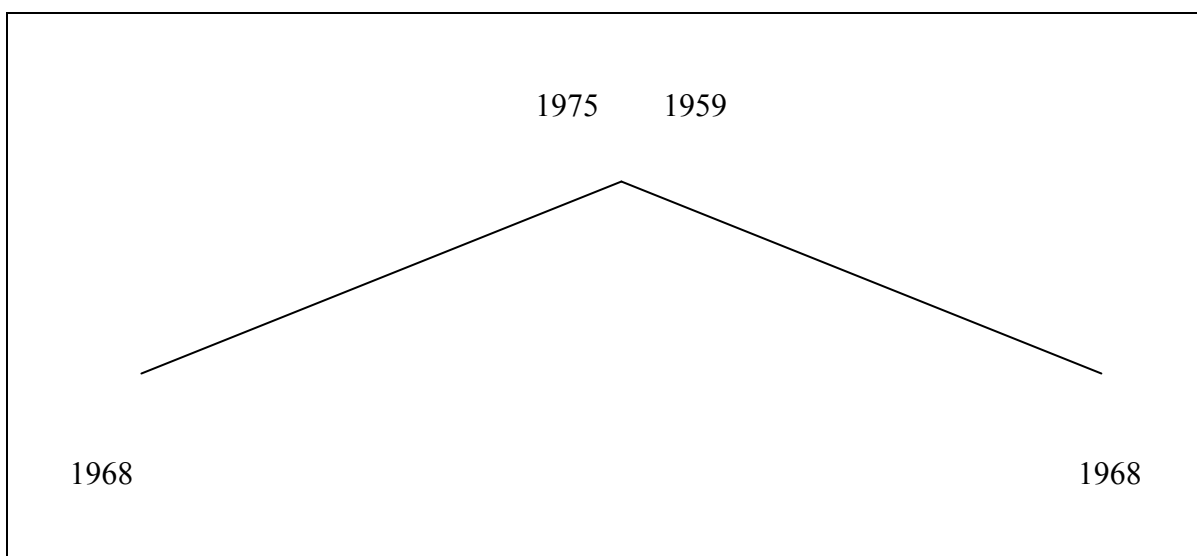


Fig. 1. Chronological Listing at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

toward the culmination of 1975/1959 at the height of the memorial and then descending back down toward 1968.

Because the memorial's chronological display does not follow an expected Western linear plot of development, visitors experience a fusion of time, a simultaneity of past and present that exists both in the VVM's reflective material, enveloping structure, and ordering of dates. While visitors may choose to enter the memorial at either end of the memorial, designated with the date(s) 1968, they unavoidably encounter a circular narrative arc. This circularity seems to reject closure and finality and to encourage continued remembrance of the war by influencing visitor interaction with the memorial. The apex of the memorial signals both the first and last American military deaths of the war, invoking the fusion of historical moments nearly a decade apart. The dates and names of the first and last deaths reflect onto and into one another via the memorial's reflective panels (see Fig. 2). The VVM's apex also reflects the east and west walls onto and into one another, symbolically reflecting the joining of the East, Viet Nam, and the West, the United States, by the war.

Circular chronology induces visitors to participate in an ancient, non-western form of memorialization. In her *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa* (2008), literary scholar La Vinia Delois Jennings analyzes a “four moments of the sun” cosmogram, in order to explore a non-western spatialization of time “as governed by nature, from east to west or right to left” (3,18). She explains, “The counterclockwise spiral of the solar moments suggests a backward movement that spatializes time as it recedes into the past” (19). African in origin, the cosmogram connects with Eastern philosophy. Engaging with this spatialized time, and thereby the past made present, visitors at the VVM must “read” the memorial, by not simply

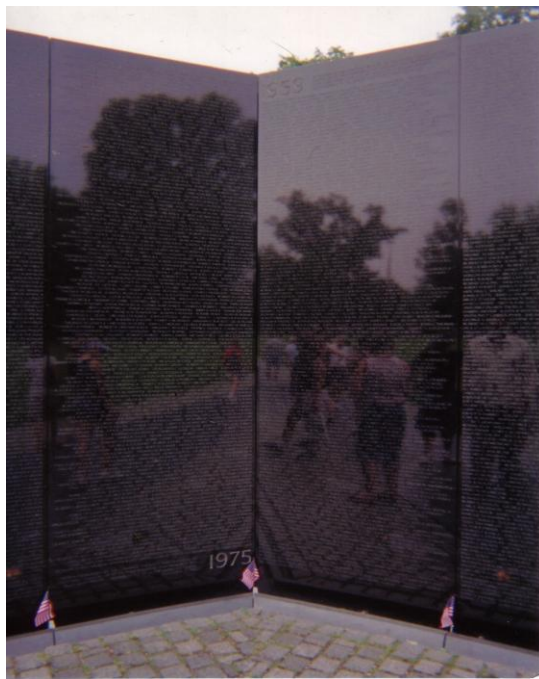


Fig. 2. Vertex: Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Photograph by Scott Henshaw, 2003

reading the engraved names, but by interpreting the material, form, and space of the memorial. As literary critic Donald Ringnalda suggests, visitors wishing to read the memorial from the first death in 1959 to the last death in 1975 must start at the mirrored apex of the monument at 1959; move east toward 1968; cross the green to the west side of the monument, again encountering 1968; and proceed toward 1975 returning to the center of the memorial (236-37). To read, or experience, the memorial in Western chronological order, visitors must actively interpret the chronology to make sense of it against the form, the incline and decline of the inverted V-shaped monument and encounter a non-Western cosmology.

As the chronological ordering of the VVM denotes the circularity of past and present, so too does visitors' relation to the memorial. For example, Jan Scruggs and Joel Swerdlow, founders of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), describe the two sides of the memorial as part of a circle which the "living person who visits...through his presence fills in the part of the circle that has been omitted" (77). Designer of the VVM, Maya Lin, agrees; she does not think of the memorial as V-shaped, but rather as a circle "to be completed by the thoughts and feelings people bring" (Palmer xviii). The visitor's physical reflections in and mental reflections on the memorial become part of the chronology or narrative memory of the war. They are the living half of the memorial.

Maya Lin's Chinese ancestry influenced her design of the memorial to incorporate elements of Eastern philosophy's conceptions of time, death, and memory.³⁶ Her inclusions of these elements illustrate that the memorial comprises subliminal cultural markers of what many of its critics, including Donald Ringnalda, say it lacks—representations of the Viet Nameese (240). The VVM's inscription makes no reference to the Viet Nameese; the memorial is dedicated to the living, the dead, and the missing Americans who served in the war. The memorial's design, however, does include a subtle reference to the Viet Nameese. According to Scruggs and Swerdlow, East-Asian philosophy regards time as cyclical, informing the memorial's depiction of life and death as part of a continuous circle (77). For example, "[Lin] describes [the memorial] as a boundary between the living and the dead" (Palmer xviii). Lin's understanding of the memorial as a liminal space supports the possibility of communication with the dead and continued remembrance of the war.

According to Lin's eastern aesthetic, time is inseparable from this circle at the VVM where we enter a "dialogue [not just with the contemporary, but also] with those before and beyond our time" (Lin, *Strong Clear Vision*). Lin's description of visitor connection to those "before and beyond" their time indicates her desire to encourage prosthetic memories. The VVM encourages visitors to participate in a collective cultural memory by piecing the narrative together and filling in the void of the circle of the life and memory cycle. With time and history unbound, memory radiates like sound waves, not in a linear direction but refracting in multiple directions as it encounters other memories. Lin continues explaining,

³⁶ For example, Lin noted that white, not black, is the Eastern color of mourning. See *Maya Lin: Strong Clear Vision*, dir. Frieda Lee Mock, American Film Foundation, 1995.

—although we can be defined by our brief physical time, we have the ability to make that time extend far beyond our physical existence... We are part of a collective consciousness connected through time by works, images, thoughts, and writings” (*Strong Clear Vision*). The reflective surface of the memorial effectively realizes Lin’s extension of time, unbounded reflection and refraction. For example, as Ringnalda argues, the scope of the memorial reflects its surroundings, particularly the Washington and Lincoln Monuments, in a compression of history (236-39). The two sides of the memorial reflect each other and their surroundings—other memorials, the flag, and visitors—into one another, and infinitely into the apex of the memorial creating an illusion that one can walk into the apex, penetrate the wall, and be enfolded into a book of the dead. The engulfing reflection of the VVM invites visitors to realize their participation in living remembrance. The image is especially poignant at night when the walkway’s subtle light reflects into and up the center walls, creating a reflection of the walkway into and beyond the surface of the memorial (see Fig. 3).

The reflective surface of the polished granite invokes the qualities of a living memorial apropos of Maya Lin’s description in the passage above. The reflection envelops visitors as they encounter the VVM. They become part of the memorial via their own living image reflected on its surface. The memorial’s reflective panels create a composition that includes both the names of the dead and reflections of the living, creating a vibrant reciprocity and unity between the living and the dead that again reinforces the expansion of time Lin discusses above. Literary scholar, Grant F. Scott remarks that “whereas the other monuments [Washington and Lincoln] are eerily self-sufficient, boasting forms that are clearly closed, the VVM necessitates our existence and our gaze for the completion of its aesthetic” (39). A



Fig. 3. Night View of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in foreground. Washington Monument illuminated in background. <http://www.vwam.com>

visitor's gaze completes the memorial's reflective aesthetic when a visitor sees his or her body reflected onto the memorial. At the VVM, visitors see their bodies reflected on the walls seemingly behind the names of the dead. Thus visitors are inscribed, if only momentarily, with the names of the dead; therefore, the dead transcend the static permanence of engraving. They become enveloped in the memorial and thereby merge with a collected cultural memory of the war. Visitors' memories, like Scott determines of the memorial, are not self-sufficient, closed, or final.

In *Window or Mirror*, artist Levi Smith contends that regarding the memorial's reflective surface as a mirror brings the past via the names to the present (106). Alternatively, as a window to the past, the surface allows viewers to see the names beyond their reflections (106). Smith refers to those who visit a specific individual name listed on the memorial as belonging to the category of those who consider the surface as a window, arguing that they "often ignore or resist broader interpretations" of the VVM's reflective qualities (111). Some of this group who come to view specific name(s) are the Vietnam veterans who tend to visit the memorial at night where "they find comfort in the presence of their dead comrades" (111). Smith identifies a second group of visitors—those who experience a "release from the past" when they see their present surroundings reflected in the memorial (111). Smith's distinctions are not as clear as he might hope, however. As Lin argues, because of its reflective surface, the memorial is not static, but a "moving composition" (*Strong Clear Vision*). As a moving composition, the memorial, the dead it memorializes, and the war it remembers refuse to be relegated to the forgotten past. The memorial therefore may, in a singular moment, reflect both past and present. Indeed, in what I distinguish as a "cycle of

poetry” about the VVM, its reflective surface simultaneously functions as both window and mirror.

Depending on the Light

Poetry about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial self-consciously contemplates the memorial’s materials, form, structure, as well as individual and group interaction with the memorial and memory objects that visitors leave at the VVM. Vietnam veterans often write these poems, and they frequently employ a veteran as speaker. Vietnam veteran Yusef Komunyakaa’s widely anthologized poem —“Facing It” (1988) seems to have inspired a “cycle of poetry” about visiting the VVM. The cycle of VVM poems includes major contributors to Vietnam War poetry: W.D. Ehrhart’s better known —“The Invasion of Grenada” (1984), his lesser known —“Midnight at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial” (1993), and Doug Anderson’s 1991 —“The Wall.” It also consists of Eugene Grollmes’s obscure collection, *At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C.: Between the Lines* (1988), and Lamonte B. Steptoe’s —“A Second Wall” (1990). All published in the decade following the 1982 dedication of Vietnam Veterans Memorial, these poems remember the war at a time when President Ronald Reagan termed the —“Vietnam Syndrome” and called on Americans to reevaluate their attitudes toward the American War in Viet Nam. In the midst of Reganesque Cold-War certitudes American memories of the war took on amalgamated forms ranging from emphasis on the misunderstood renegade Vietnam veteran portrayed by John Rambo (Sylvester

Stallone) in *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982) to Regan's "noble cause." While the poems treat the same historical event, and each responds to remembrance at the VVM, they too demonstrate varying attitudes about the war and its contemporary legacies. Some poems reject sentimental closure, while others indict prosthetic memory as insincere. Thus the cycle of poems participates in a multifaceted collected cultural memory.

While the poets self-consciously explore the possibilities and limitations of achieving a collected cultural memory, the poems they write serve as mediated representations of the war that provide opportunities for prosthetic memory. The poems are often didactic; they demonstrate for their audiences means of interacting with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Speakers in their poems visit the memorial in pilgrimage fashion in order to confront their memories and to commune with the dead. Often the poems describe sensory memories, those arousing sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch. The most powerful poems include a sixth sense that resides in the mind's eye. Set in the shared space of the memorial, poetry about the VVM engages with a collected cultural memory by emphasizing the commingling of individual and collected memories.

Vietnam veteran Yusef Komunyakaa's "Facing It," written more than decade after the end of the war, renders an image-laden retrospective account of the American War in Viet Nam. Komunyakaa writes somberly of "a clouded reflection . . . / like a bird of prey, the profile of night" (6-7). The poem appears in his *Dien Cai Dau* (1988), which literally means "crazy," a Viet Nameese phrase used to describe American soldiers during the war. In fact, the bravado of some American soldiers led them to consider the description a compliment. "Facing It" is the final poem of the *Dien Cai Dau* collection, but it was the first Komunyakaa wrote, and it

prompted him to write other memory poems about his experiences as a soldier in Viet Nam (Houghtaling). The final poem in the collection, prompted by an encounter with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, serves as the beginning of memory.

“Facing It” enacts a collected cultural memory that the VVM’s design encourages.

Brimming with sensory images, the poem contains thirty-one lines of free verse in a single stanza describing a Vietnam veteran’s visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The Vietnam veteran speaker, often associated with Komunyakaa, describes visitors interacting with the memorial, the nature of the memorial’s reflection in relation to identity and memory, and the possibilities and failures of remembrance that the memorial holds. He has a heightened awareness of his reflection; he observes other visitors and surroundings in the reflection; he sees a name and then experiences a flashback; he reflects on the memorial as a “moving composition”; and he fluctuates between past and present via the reflection.

Through a series of juxtapositions—past and present, stone and flesh, the dead and the living, night and day, and self and other—the speaker in “Facing It” engages with the past presence and present absence that visitors encounter at the VVM. Komunyakaa’s chosen binaries call attention to the paradoxical nature of the VVM; it reflects the past war and the war dead while simultaneously reflecting present visitors. In the poem, the VVM signifies loss and the trauma of the past at the same moment that it encourages visitors to become a present part of that void when confronted with their living reflection in the memorial.

Komunyakaa’s choice to write the poem in the present tense enhances the reader’s sense of immediacy. In the poem, as at the VVM, public and private histories collide while time collapses and expands. Inviting the reader to associate with his position as a Vietnam veteran

standing before the VVM, the speaker shares his memorial experience with generations who have no direct access to memories of the war. The poem functions as a mediated representation of remembering the war, thereby encouraging prosthetic memory. In the context President Ronald Reagan's so-called Vietnam Syndrome and "noble cause" revisionism and the popular culture of the 1980s, Komunyakaa writes against forgetful revision.

Like the VVM, "Facing It" invokes the past while reflecting the present. The poem begins with the speaker being absorbed into the past, into the memorial: "My black face fades, / hiding inside the black granite" (1-2). Present identity succumbs to memorial memory. Writing in a series of juxtapositions, the speaker enters into a dialogue with self; "I said I wouldn't . . . no tears. / I'm stone. / I'm flesh" (3-5). In these lines, the literal denial and acceptance of emotions commingles with the metaphorical memorial past. The speaker reflects the experiences of visitors to the VVM. Seeing themselves reflected in the memorial, they complete Maya Lin's circle of remembrance.

The speaker becomes engulfed in the memorial when the reflection creates a distance between observer and the observed. Komunyakaa writes, "My clouded reflection eyes me" (6). Observed by his reflection in the memorial, the speaker, becomes aware of his participation in the memorial. He is both inside and outside the memorial, in the past and in the present. Komunyakaa writes, "I turn / this way—the stone lets me go, / I turn that way—I'm inside / the Vietnam Veterans Memorial / again, *depending on the light to make a difference*" (emphasis added 8-13). He constructs a fused perspective for his speaker. Depending on the light, he is in the memorial—or in the past—or he is reflected by the

memorial—in the present. Emphasizing immediacy, Komunyakaa positions readers with him at the VVM when he writes, “—thisway” and “~~that~~ way,” rather than one way and another way.

Like many Vietnam veteran visitors, Komunyakaa’s speaker ~~half~~-expect[s] to find [his] own “~~letters~~ like smoke” on the memorial (15-16). The expectation represents a common theme in post-war representations, survivor’s guilt and a symbolic death of the self—*I died over there*. Still, the speaker does not achieve a definitive sense of unity with the dead or the living. Seemingly held in limbo between past and present, death and life, the speaker’s experience at the memorial duplicates the effect of the VVM’s reflection.

Enacting the memorial’s visceral imperative, the speaker touches a name and past becomes present. However, the speaker does not experience a pre-war memory of the living, but rather a memory of the wartime past, the moment of death in a “~~booby~~ trap’s white flash” (18). Sensory memory takes hold; visual and tactile senses at the memorial prompt the senses of the mind’s eye, creating a memory that is faceless, consumed by the violent image of the booby trap. The image of a flash invokes a traumatic flashback, a fusion of time. Contributing to new memories of the war’s aftermath, the speaker’s momentary traumatic flashback breaks with the 1980s stereotype of the crazed veteran becoming violently enraged when experiencing a flashback as John Rambo does in *First Blood* (Ted Kottcheff, 1982). In the following line of “~~F~~acing It,” boundaries between past and present fluctuate as speaker returns to the present where “~~n~~ames shimmer on a woman’s blouse” (19). Depending on the light, the names shimmer dynamically, as if they are not permanently fixed on the memorial’s panels; however, when the woman walks away, the names return to their static

position. Between the flashback and return to the present, the speaker encounters Maya Lin's "moving composition" (*Strong Clear Vision*). The poem's meta-composition in response to the moving composition of the VVM calls attention to the moving and static position of the names and memory, thereby emphasizing the textual and artistic composition of the memorial.

Komunyakaa further explores fusion at the memorial—its simultaneous reflection of past and present, the dead and the living—and the duality of meaning in his textual composition by raising questions of identity when he introduces a white veteran. Readers might wonder what the two veterans share, or if the speaker and white veteran reconcile racial tensions that were exported from the United States via the war to Viet Nam. One answer is that the two share a common position as Vietnam veteran visitors at the VVM. Yet the white vet functions as "Other" on several levels. Komunyakaa writes that "a white vet's image floats / closer to me, then his pale eyes / look through mine. I'm a window" (25-27). Critics reference these lines most frequently when trying to determine the sense of or lack of unity in "Facing It." Thomas Marvin, for example, acknowledges that it may appear, at least for a moment, that the two veterans—white and black—look through the same eyes and share the same perspective (7). However, Marvin contends that in light of the racial tensions throughout the poems in *Dien Cai Dau* that Komunyakaa is invisible to the white veteran (7).

Komunyakaa instructs his audience that veterans who visit the memorial may confront the traumas and tensions they experienced during the war, whether it be the "booby trap's white flash," racial tensions or amputation. Thus the memorial, for Komunyakaa's speaker, is a window to the past. According to Levi Smith's account of the window and mirror previously

discussed, regarding the black veteran as a window might place the white veteran among the group of visitors who regard the reflective surface of the memorial as a window to the past. The white veteran could simply represent a veteran of the war who is lost in his own memories and active engagement with the memorial. It is also possible to read the white veteran as a dead other. His ~~image~~ floats” like that of a ghost. At a minimum, the white veteran haunts the poem with the image of amputation. Komunyakaa writes that —~~he~~s lost his right arm / inside the stone” (28-29). The memorial dismembers the image or, at least, depicts the dismembered veteran through reflection. Like the speaker of the poem, the white veteran holds a binary position—he is both inside the memorial, in the past, and a reflection of the memorial, in the present.

During a November 2006 reading at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Komunyakaa spoke of his forthcoming work, noting that he is writing poetry from the perspective of a white veteran, a speaker he considers his alter ego. The alter ego may be a double that informs the reading of the white vet in ~~“Facing It.”~~ Depending on the light, both speaker and white veteran are inside or outside the memorial; depending on the light, they are self or other; or depending on the light they are both part of the same moving composition.

Although critics often do not see much hope for healing from the war in ~~“Facing It,”~~ citing either a lack of recovery or a pattern of promise and disappointment, some regard the conclusion of the poem as an ~~“act of love”~~ (Stein 10). In the final lines of the poem, the speaker encounters a woman and a boy visiting the memorial. The woman, ~~“trying to erase names,”~~ elicits fears of forgetfulness (30). Immediately, however, in the next and final line of the poem, Komunyakaa writes, —~~no~~he’s brushing a boy’s hair” (31). According to some

critics, Komunyakaa brings his reader back to the everyday, and back to the active present moment of observation, in the mother's gesture ~~to~~affirm[ing] sanity and life in the face of the insanity of war" (Goter 299). He certainly invokes the future of remembrance, however uncertain, through the figure of the boy. However, the hope some critics read in the poem is not assured because ~~to~~Facing It" lacks final punctuation.³⁷ The poem's open ending reflects the VVM's lack of closure, its refusal to relegate the war to the forgotten past. In addition, Komunyakaa states that the last line is meant to be an ~~to~~open ended release" (*Blue Notes* 37).

The narrative movement of ~~to~~Facing It" shifts from individual to communal experience at the VVM, again, suggesting that memories of the war are not isolated and will not necessarily fade with the passing of a generation. The poem represents the self-reflection that a visitor experiences when standing at the VVM's apex. They infinitely reflect onto and thereby into each other. ~~to~~Facing It" begins with the individual facing himself in the memorial's reflection, shifts to observing others in the memorial's reflection, and ends with the speaker and white veteran commingling in the memorial's reflection. The poem enacts cultural memory, engages in sensory memory, prompts artistic response, and contemplates the positions of self and other in remembrance. Komunyakaa faces the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a mediated representation of the war and the war dead, and creates his own poetically mediated representation of remembrance. The poem functions for its readers as the memorial does for the poet; it creates a memory of the war by encouraging visitors to

³⁷ In *Dien Cai Dau*, (1988), the last line in the first edition of ~~to~~Facing It" does not include final end punctuation; however, later collections and anthologized versions of the poems includes a final period.

interact with the memorial and confront their direct or prosthetic memories of the war and the war dead.

One of the reasons “Facing It” is one of the most memorable poems about visiting the VVM is because it articulates the boundless qualities of time in the memorial. The poem includes reflection, flashback, dismembering, re-membering, a veteran visitor, and civilian visitors—features present in every one of the poems that emerges in response to the VVM and Komunyakaa’s poem. The cycle of poems often sentimentalize, reenact, or extend Komunyakaa’s exploration of memory at the VVM. Indeed, one might say that the reinvention of Komunyakaa’s “Facing It” illustrates the multifaceted nature of a collected cultural memory.

The array of responses to the memorial is difficult to capture in a single poem. Friends of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial published Eugene Grollmes’s ambitious yet relatively obscure collection *At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C.: Between the Lines* in 1988, the same year as Komunyakaa’s *Dien Cai Dau*. Grollmes’s poems attempt to represent the wide range of visitors and responses to the VVM. The assemblage of poems attests to representational challenges that most poems about the VVM encounter: how to represent the successes and failures of collected cultural and prosthetic memory that the memorial encourages. Grollmes found it necessary to compile cultural memories in thirty poems. The collection includes descriptions of visitors participating in remembrance, loss and sorrow, communion with the dead, and healing. Grollmes catalogues the numbers and types of visitors to the memorial, thus depicting the VVM as a memory destination. Poetry about the VVM predicates the active process of memory on the journey to the memorial.

The VVM serves as a place of memory. Maya Lin said of the memorial, “I don’t make objects; I make places” (*Grounds* 13). Grollmes’s collection reflects themes of Komunyakaa’s “Facing It” and those that the following poetry about the VVM address—flashbacks, the need for continued memorialization and remembering, and the possibilities and limitations of prosthetic memory, hope, and healing.

Poetry about visiting the VVM engages with the memorial’s invocation of a fused past and present via the names of the dead. In Doug Anderson’s “The Wall” (1991), a visit to the VVM transports Anderson’s Vietnam veteran speaker to the past. After enacting the ritual of finding a name in the memorial’s directory index, the speaker experiences a flashback. The memory is highly personal; the name is that of “the first man / [He] could not help,” yet the flashback occurs upon seeing the name in the index, not on the memorial’s panels (11-12). The name invokes a memory associated with the loss of that individual. As in Komunyakaa’s “Facing It,” the name conjures a visual memory. Anderson’s flashback, however, transcends the visual, including memories of smell and sound. He writes, “for a moment, the tree splintering / in front of me, smell of blood and cordite, his lips turning blue, / the gasp of a lung filling with blood” (12-14). Thus the name, placed chronologically according to the personal moment of death conjures a precise memory of place and circumstance of violent imagery. For the Vietnam veteran speaker, the memory conjures the visceral, sensuous nature of past becoming momentarily present. Yet Anderson also suggests that memories of the war transcend the war’s historically delineated ending. He depicts veterans’ homecoming as a realization that “for us the war / had just begun, that for years we would be picking through the shards, / the war pursuing us everywhere, our dreams, our lives

... chasing us” (20-23). In the poem, as at the VVM, past and present are continuous and fluctuating.

Poetry about visiting the VVM not only illustrates the fusion of past and present that occurs at the VVM and offers audiences immediate moments of veterans bearing witness to trauma, the poems also communicate a narrative of ongoing remembrance that the VVM encourages. For example, in “~~The~~ Wall,” Anderson invokes the ~~three~~ million Vietnamese, [and] four million [names of] Cambodians,” civilians and allies, absent from the memorial asking, ~~How~~ long a wall?” if more death and suffering of the war were memorialized (25-26). Again, he summons the war’s violent and psychological consequences beyond its historical ending by alluding to post-war consequences of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.³⁸

Lamont Steptoe’s “A Second Wall” (1990) also calls for further memorialization, not of the Viet Nameese, however, but of surviving American veterans. Textually similar, although much shorter and less image laden than Komunyakaa’s “Facing It,” Steptoe’s poem of twenty short, abrupt lines resembles Komunyakaa’s open verse, truncated lines, and lack of final end punctuation. Writing in military metaphor, Steptoe invokes veterans’ psychological suffering. His opening line calls for “A / second wall for those who cracked...by the knife of memory and nightmare” (1-8). Among the poems, Steptoe’s “~~knife~~ of memory” is the most explicit depiction of memory as painful. Like Doug Anderson, Steptoe suggests the surprise at returning home to realize there was still a ~~most~~ concealed ambush...wait[ing] / secretly for years...the one that hid / in the tunnels of the spirit” (14-

³⁸ After U.S. and South Viet Nameese incursions into Cambodia turned the country into a war zone, the Khmer Rouge communist revolution succeeded in 1975. The Khmer Rouge’s concept of an agrarian utopia resulted in mass extermination, forced labor, the deaths of nearly two million Cambodians, and what has come to be known as the Cambodian Holocaust. See Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking P, 1983).

20). Steptoe points to the unending psychological effects of the war. Haunting memories of the war—for these Vietnam veteran poets, their speakers, and some visitors to the memorial in their poems—corresponds to the VVM’s rejection of closure and forgetfulness.

Nonetheless, the poets address concerns of forgetfulness and interrogate the possibilities and limitations of prosthetic memory at the VVM. Grollmes, for example, criticizes some who visit the VVM in “Tourists.” He describes visitors in summer outfitted with “colorful / Maps of other monuments in town” (21-22) who see “History. Mere history soon fading into... / Nice weather to be out” (20-21). Grollmes rejects prosthetic memory among observer-visitors; he hastily assumes they have forgotten the war and the dead as “mere history.” However, Grollmes rightly identifies that some observer-visitors are tourists simply pausing at the VVM only to “Tell their friends they ‘...saw ‘The Wall’ Yet all they see is names / And marble...” (3-5). This touristic goal is not unusual at any of the memorials on the Washington Mall and is certainly explicitly visible at the *Three Fighting Men* sculpture where it is not uncommon for groups of families or children to file in front of the sculpture for a scrapbook photograph. Interestingly, Grollmes’s tourists see marble rather than granite, attesting to Grollmes’s accusations that these visitors are not very observant or reflective. Grollmes’s example exposes the limitations of prosthetic memory. There remains a cultural “you had to be there” argument about remembering the war. As Grollmes represents them, these visitors see only the empirical names and dates; they do not experience the memories that he likely considers appropriate and authentic. The authenticity of experience continues to hold sway over the authority of memory. Grollmes’s poem attests to the fear of misremembering: simply encountering a mediated memory, or experiential site, does not

guarantee that individuals acquire prosthetic memories. Nor does the attainment of prosthetic memory satisfy requirements held by some for authentic memory.

Engaging with the positive possibilities of prosthetic memory, however, Doug Anderson's "The Wall" describes tourists with a more sympathetic understanding than Grollmes's poem. Anderson regards visitors' actions as products of the memorial. He characterizes the VVM as a place of uncertainty, memory, and potential rebirth. Describing visitors' reactions to the memorial, Anderson writes:

A place of whispers, and tourists
wander confused, are hesitant to photograph, seeing themselves
reflected so. How are we to be, they seem to ask, and what is this?
The young ask especially, threatened by this invitation to grieve. (3-5)

Unlike Grollmes, Anderson recognizes confusion and hesitancy not as ignorance or forgetfulness, but as encountering an "invitation to grieve." He continues, revealing the memorial's powerful implication of visitors in its reflection, describing a "stone [that] draws the surrounding monuments / into contention, [and] shames them with the suggestion that we are not stone, / but reflections of the earth, before and behind these names" (8-10). Engaging with Komunyakaa's "I'm stone / I'm flesh" (3), Anderson stresses the human element of memorialization at the VVM: "we are not stone." He also takes care to instruct visitors to understand their liminal position in relation to the memorial. They, "we," are "before and

behind these names.” Reflected into the memorial, visitors in the poem and at the VVM see their likeness on and behind the engraved names.

Anderson acknowledges the intermingling of personal and historical memory at the VVM that allows those who have no personal, direct connection to the war to form their own prosthetic memories. The most poignant example follows when Anderson describes “A girl too young to know this war, / [who] sobs nonetheless, so precise are these fifty-eight thousand facts” (17-18). Unlike Grollmes and Ehrhart, Anderson denies that the empirical alienates visitors with no direct connection to the war. Rather, Anderson calls attention to the power of the number of names to represent loss. He champions prosthetic memories enabled by the mediated representation of the war and the war dead at the VVM.

In addition to exploring prosthetic memory, poetry about the VVM also meditates on the tensions between hope and healing and a false sense of closure. Anderson’s “The Wall,” despite its emphasis on psychological suffering, sorrow, and prosthetic memory, contains hope and ends with potential redemption. The memorial that “from a distance seems a scar, / [is rather] the crook of an arm to cradle a head” (1-2). Here, Anderson engages with the debate over the monument’s efficacy directly responding to Vietnam veteran, and former Vietnam Veteran Memorial Fund volunteer, Tom Carhart, who in his Fine Arts Commission hearing statement critiqued the VVM as a “black gash of shame” (Scruggs and Swerdlow 82). In the final lines of the poem, the memorial becomes a “gazing stone of possibility, / womb of Kali, and not least, the night we wander in becoming whole” (29-30). Although an

ambiguous figure, for Anderson, Kali signifies creation, healing, and wholeness.³⁹ Anderson further emphasizes the healing possibilities of the memorial while avoiding simplistic sentimentality by pairing wholeness with the night, rather than the expected pairing with morning. Like Komunyakaa, Anderson complicates the ending of his poem.

Unlike these other poems, W.D. Ehrhart's poem —"Midnight at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial" (1993) avoids Ehrhart's own psychological suffering as a consequence of the war, sentimentality, and a hopeful ending. Known as the renegade Vietnam veteran poet, Ehrhart upholds his reputation in his blunt critique of the war and his implied critique of the VVM. He writes a sparse narrative of eighteen lines beginning with —"fifty-eight thousand American dead, / average age: nineteen years, six months. Get a driver's license, / graduate from high school, / die" (1-5). Like Grollmes and Anderson, Ehrhart employs the empirical to transmit his message. He describes lives as short-lived. Moreover, when he writes of loss—"What they never got to be / grows dimmer by the year"—he describes not just the loss of possibilities, hopes, and dreams, but an inevitable failure of remembrance (8-9). He portrays the memorial as a place of fleeting memory; he writes, —"All that's left of them / we've turned to stone" (6-7). Yet Ehrhart does not champion forgetfulness. Like Steptoe, Ehrhart reminds his audience of the consequences of the war that he believes are not explicitly memorialized at the VVM.

Setting his poem at midnight, Ehrhart engages with the memorial's gravesite qualities. He invokes the ghosts of the dead at midnight when —"the names rise up, step down / and start the

³⁹ Kali, the Hindu —"great mother" goddess, is associated with blackness and death. It is said that she carries away the spirits of slain warriors. Yet, Kali is also considered the goddess of creation. She represents the beginning and end of time, an appropriate choice considering the circle of life represented by the memorial's chronology. In the West, Kali is often appropriated as a symbol of wholeness and healing.

long procession home” (12-13). For Ehrhart, as for some visitors to the VVM, the names signify the individual and take on a ghostly quality. However, unlike an expected sentimental journey toward peace, the names flee ~~to~~ anywhere / that’s not this silent / wall of kids, this / smell of rotting dreams” (15-18). Invoking senseless loss, Ehrhart utilizes a sparse and simple language, ~~silent~~” and ~~kids~~.” Calling attention to the possibility that war memorials offer false healing, Ehrhart unabashedly condemns maintaining a sacred attitude toward the VVM, describing it as a place that ~~smell[s]~~ of rotting dreams.”

For Ehrhart, The VVM is not a site for sorrowful remembrance of the dead; it is a place of cold, hard numbers, silence, and ~~rotting~~ dreams.” Ehrhart refuses to allow cultural expectations of war memorials to influence his anti-war stance. Like Grollmes’s excessive critique of tourists, Ehrhart rejects what he considers the memorial’s false healing, arguing as he does in his 1984 ~~Invasion of Grenada~~” that he did not ~~want~~ a monument / not even one as sober as that / vast black wall of broken lives” (1-2) but rather an ~~end~~ to monuments,” an end to war (15).

Poems set at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial reflect the many tensions implicit in a collected cultural memory associated with the memorial. Seemingly influenced by Yusef Komunyakaa’s ~~Facing It~~,” the cycle of poems that emerge in response to the memorial and modes of memorialization and memory at the VVM represents the memorial as a nexus of multifaceted emotions and memories. Anderson’s ~~The Wall~~,” praises the memorial arguing that ~~we~~ are not stone / but reflections of earth, before and behind these names” (9-10), whereas Ehrhart maintains that the memories of the dead are ~~turned~~ to stone” (7). Grollmes exhibits disdain for ignorant tourists, while Anderson recognizes the emotional impact of

prosthetic memory. Anderson and Steptoe each encourage further memorialization of the psychological impact of the war on civilians and post-war life. All these poems each represent the memorial's power to engage visitors—both participants and observers—in memory making. That the poems take place and memories converge at the VVM demonstrate that the memorial, and these poems serve as markers against forgetfulness. The poets self-consciously depict memory as an active process of performance and heightened awareness that engages with past presence and present absence. The poems and the memorial function as mediated representations of the war and the war dead. They encourage readers and visitors to engage with memories of the war and to form prosthetic memories; understood together, they reveal the multifaceted, rather than unitary, nature of a collected cultural memory. Moreover, differing memories of the war engage with contentions over the war itself as well as fears of misremembering and even forgetting the American War in Viet Nam.

A People's Memorial

Memorials do not provide remembrance by their mere existence. They should not simply remain in their material space, but should somehow transcend that —space” so that observers are invited to participate in memory making. Because the Vietnam Veterans Memorial encourages the participation of visitors, it is highly effective in invoking and creating memories. Just as memories of the American war in Viet Nam are not static, the VVM encourages continual participation in memory making. The VVM truly is a people's

memorial from conception and funding, to visitors' interaction with and reaction to the memorial, through poetry written in response to the memorial. The memorial encourages material and performative memories from a variety of visitors, ranging from those with direct memories of the war, to those with direct memories of the Viet Nam generation experience, those with hereditary, familial memories, and those with no direct or hereditary memory of the war. The memorial design, visitors' responses to the VVM, and poetry about the memorial fulfill Jan Scruggs' hope for a "people's memorial."

In 1979 when Scruggs determined to build a memorial in memory of his fallen comrades his concern was with forgetfulness. *To Heal a Nation* (1985) recounts Scruggs' inspiration for the memorial as stemming from a flashback of the war that he experienced after he went to see the film *The Deer Hunter* (1979).⁴⁰ The narrative explains that "The flashbacks ended, but the faces continued to pile up in front of him. The names, he thought. The names. No one remembers their names" (Scruggs and Swerdlow 7). The inspiration for the VVM was an attempt to combat the collective amnesia that set in upon the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973, two years before the fall of Saigon. For America the war "officially" ended in 1973 and by 1975, the end of the Viet Nameese Civil War, most Americans avoided memories of the war that divided the United States. Preventing complete government control over the creation of the memorial was also of importance for Scruggs and those involved with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF).

⁴⁰ *The Deer Hunter*, dir. Michael Cimino, Universal Pictures, 1978.

The VVMF's efforts to acquire the necessary funds for the memorial reflect its emphasis on individual citizen participation. An early letter from the mass mailings asking for donations includes the following passage:

All of us, regardless of how we felt about the war, can participate in building this memorial that says we care about the men and women who fought in Vietnam. If you give \$20, it will sponsor the name of one Vietnam War veteran who gave his life in service to our country. (Scruggs and Swerdlow 23)

The very nature of mass mailings used for the solicitation of funds indicates the desire for the VVM to be a "people's memorial." Providing the opportunity to sponsor a name on the VVM creates a sense of participation for donors and particular individual remembrance.

The emphasis on reconciliation and a "people's memorial" explains the VVMF's willingness to compromise with dissenters by adding Fredrick Hart's *Three Fighting Men* sculpture in order to break ground on the memorial. Conciliation was in accordance with the VVMF's reconciliatory objective. Controversy concerning memorials, and war memorials in particular, are not new and the VVM was not unique in this respect (Piehler 2). The Vietnam Women's Memorial dedicated just over a decade later also faced adversity. In *Race and Reunion* David Blight explains that historical memory consists of deflections, evasions, careful remembering, necessary forgetting, and embittered and irreconcilable versions of experience (5). Although many hoped the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would be the final chapter on the war, a need for further recognition arose among American civilian and

servicewomen who participated in the war. Due to the accommodation and final agreement to include Fredrick Hart's *Three Fighting Men* sculpture to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, servicewomen found that their participation in the war went unrecognized. They sought their own recognition and recuperation via a women's memorial.

Chapter Three

Remembering Women:

Servicewomen and Civilian Women, American and Viet Name⁴¹

In response to the fissures in the American mythic exceptionalism brought about by the American War in Viet Nam and the “Vietnam Syndrome”—a post-war national unwillingness to pursue military intervention in the third world—Americans sought recuperation via reconciliation and healing.⁴² The Vietnam Veterans Memorial serves as the cultural and national site for post-war recuperation for veterans of the war and for reconciliation between veterans and civilians. However, the American reconciliationist narrative movement coalesced with the inclusion of women’s experiences and perspectives established at the 1993 dedication of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial (VWM).

At the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century, memorial, cinematic, and written narratives depicting women’s experiences in the American War in Viet Nam encourage recuperation and reconciliation. Recognition of American servicewomen’s participation in the war is the primary mission for the female, Vietnam veteran founders of the Vietnam Women’s

⁴¹ The first section of this chapter about the Vietnam Women’s Memorial is a revised version of the following essay. —“Aesthetic Limbo: Memory Making at the Vietnam Women’s Memorial,” *Thirty Years After: New Essays on Vietnam War Literature, Film, and Art* ed. Mark Heberle (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009) 342-53.

⁴² The term, Vietnam Syndrome, is often attributed to Ronald Reagan. See Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday 1996) and Donald E. Pease, “Post-National Spectacles,” *Cultures of United States Imperialism* eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 557-80.

Memorial Project (VWMP).⁴³ Their vision of a memorial recognizing women's military service during the American War in Viet Nam arose in response to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) and the *Three Fighting Men* (1984) sculpture situated at the memorial site. Recuperation, however, is not simply achieved via recognition, but also through reconciliation. In addition to recognition, reconciliationist narratives promote the perception that "everyone"—servicemen, servicewomen, and civilians—suffers in war. Moreover, in reconciliationist narratives of the war, wartime and post-war psychological suffering extends beyond Americans to include those from the North Viet Nam's Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN) and those from South Viet Nam's Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DVN). Reconciliationist representations of women affected by the war also materialize beyond the battlefield, thus encompassing the war and post-war experiences of American servicemen and American and Viet Nameese civilian women.

While the Vietnam Women's Memorial figures the war experiences of American servicewomen with direct experience and memories of the war, other written and cinematic narratives focus on both the direct war memories and prosthetic war memories—memories acquired via mediated representation by those with no direct experience in or hereditary connection to the war—of civilian women in both America and Viet Nam.⁴⁴ Sandie Frazier's novel *I Married Vietnam* (1992) explores the post-war experiences and prosthetic memory of a civilian American woman who marries a Vietnam veteran after the war. Oliver Stone's narrative film *Heaven and Earth* (1993) presents the direct memories of a civilian Viet

⁴³ Diane Carlson Evans, in Founder of the VWMP, discusses, in detail, information about the founding and implementation of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project in "Moving a Vision" available at www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org/pdf/dcevens.pdf.

⁴⁴ See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of prosthetic memory.

Nameless woman who marries an American serviceman. Each considers the memories of women who do not directly participate in warfare. Just as earlier war narratives, films, and memorials engage in the search for meaning in the face of overwhelming death, these narratives serve as examples of reconciliation that elude the causes of the war in favor of examining the wide range of psychological and cultural effects of war. However, unlike their predecessors, these narratives examine women's memories of the war. Ultimately, these representations of the war—the VWM, *I Married Vietnam*, and *Heaven and Earth*—remember women's experiences and explore women's remembering in order to encourage reconciliation between servicemen and servicewomen, between servicemen and civilian women, and between Americans and the Viet Nameless. Together, recuperation and reconciliation as represented in the Vietnam Women's Memorial, *I Married Vietnam*, and *Heaven and Earth* culminate in a collected cultural memory of the war equally derived from direct and prosthetic memories.

The Vietnam Women's Memorial

During the American War in Viet Nam between 10,000 and 11,000 American women served “in country”—in Viet Nam—in military and civilian roles. All volunteers, military servicewomen cared for the wounded during medical evacuations, in the Army Nurse Corps, and as medical specialists and support staff in mobile army surgical hospitals (MASH units). Civilian women served in the Red Cross providing welfare services—counseling,

recreational activities, and drug-abuse treatment—for the injured and able-bodied alike. Civilian women worked as journalists covering the war, and as appointees of the Department of Defense Special Services attended to troop morale and recreation. From the first category, eight military servicewomen died in the war and their names are engraved on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall (Evans 16). Of the second category, more than fifty civilian women, including journalists, died in Viet Nam between 1964 and 1975 (16). Although American servicewomen experienced fewer casualties than servicemen, they shared the same wide-ranging war experiences.

Women's military service in Viet Nam exposed them to both the dangers and carnage of war. Like male soldiers, servicewomen completed their tours of duty abruptly returning to civilian life where they found it difficult to readjust to civilian life. Before the 1990s, few studies existed on the connection between death exposure, dangers of the combat zone, and psychological distress among military servicewomen (Fontana, Schwartz, and Rosenheck 169). It was not until after a 1990 report of a National Vietnam Veterans' Readjustment Study resulting from a 1983 congressionally mandated investigation into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Vietnam veterans, including women, that findings concluded a connection between exposure to death and combat among servicewomen frequently resulted in PTSD.⁴⁵ Moreover, women veterans received little to no support from the Veterans Administration —whose hospitals often lacked the facilities to give women the most basic health care” (Mithers 78, Bonior, Champlin and Kolly 159-60).

⁴⁵ Richard A. Kulka et al., *Trauma and the Vietnam War Generation: Report of Findings from the National Vietnam Veterans' Readjustment Study* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1990).

After returning from Viet Nam to America servicewomen experienced isolation akin to that commonly associated with alienated male combat veterans.⁴⁶ Women's war and post-war memoirs and oral histories, for example, often represent their post-war stateside experiences as rife with hostility from the anti-war movement or indifference to their service and war experiences from family and friends.⁴⁷ In the mid-1980s the silence about women veterans seemed to break with the publication of several memoirs, oral histories, and the 1988 premiere of the stereotypically suspect television series *China Beach*, whose main characters included a combat nurse, a Red Cross volunteer, a USO entertainer, and a "prostitute/black marketer" (Mithers 87). However, according to Vietnam Veteran and VWMP founder, Diane Carlson Evans, until the dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial in 1993, American servicewomen felt alienated, and ignored, and were ultimately unrecognized for their participation in the war and the psychological effects that they had suffered (2). Despite efforts to broaden their recorded experiences, servicewomen remain significantly underrepresented in sculptural memorial locations, celluloid memorials, and written narratives. Moreover, the availability of women's accounts of the American War in Viet Nam declined further when their recorded recollections turn to their post-war experiences and their responses to the Vietnam Veterans Memorials.

⁴⁶ While cultural examples abound in fictional narratives, especially films, David Bonior, Steven Champlin, and Timothy Kolly, *The Vietnam Veteran: A History of Neglect* (New York: Praeger, 1984) historically investigate institutional failure to constructively reintegrate Vietnam veterans into American society on behalf of American presidents, from Lyndon Johnson through Ronald Reagan, veterans organizations, Congress, and the Veterans Administration and by examining the history of television, newspaper, and film coverage of the soldier and veterans.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Lynda Van Devanter, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (New York: Beaufort, 1983); Keith Walker, *A Piece of My Heart: The Stories of 26 American Women Who Served in Vietnam* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1985); Winnie Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War: On the Front Lines With an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (New York: Morrow, 1992).

Based on the sequence of official approval for and dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorials on the Mall in Washington, D.C. they form a political memorial triage. The three memorials reflect the practice in disaster medical emergencies of sorting patients by the seriousness and type of injury in order to prioritize treatment. With respect to the Vietnam Veterans Memorials dedications, women are the last to receive treatment. Dedicated in 1982, Maya Lin's inverted V-shaped design, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM), engraved with the names of the dead, continues to receive the most critical attention from scholars in the fields of memorial architecture, military history, cultural studies, and Vietnam War studies. Fredrick Hart's sculpture of the *Three Fighting Men* (1984) supplements Lin's design by figuring servicemen and placating those who deemed the VVM too abstract and depressing.⁴⁸ Dedicated in 1993, Glenna Goodacre's sculpture in-the-round, the *Vietnam Women's Memorial* (VWM), represents the untold history of American servicewomen in the war (see Fig. 4).

The VWM has received little critical attention from scholars in the fields of memorial architecture, military history, cultural studies, and Vietnam War studies.⁴⁹ Perhaps this

⁴⁸ For a detailed account of the memorial debate and "compromise," see Jan C. Scruggs and Joel L. Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985).

⁴⁹ Short pieces promoting the Vietnam Women's Memorial appeared in nursing journals in the late 1980s. Two such examples include Marlene Jezierski, "Vietnam Women's Memorial Project: Donna Marie Boulay Highlights Women's Wartime Roles," *Journal of Emergency Nursing* 13:2 (1987): 122-24 and Elizabeth Paul, "Wounded Healers: A Summary of the Vietnam Nurse Veteran Project," *Military Medicine* 150 (1985): 571-76. Mass publications included articles about the memorial's dedication in 1993. See, for example, Cindy Loose, "Vietnam Women's Memorial Dedicated before 25,000" *The Washington Post* 12 Nov. 1993: 2. Founder of the VWMP, Diane Carlson Evans, has written about the history of the memorial in "Moving a Vision" found at www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org/pdf/dcevens.pdf. However, scholarly examination of the memorial appears to be limited to Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall, "The Sexual Politics of Memory: The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project and 'The Wall,'" *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* ed. Jack Salzman. (Cambridge: UP, 1989) 341-72 and Donald Ringnalda, *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1994).



Fig. 4. Glenna Goodacre's Vietnam Women's Memorial, Washington D.C. 2009

oversight will be corrected as the VWM emerges as a principal site for exploring American aesthetic representations of women and war. The VWM engages the political and historical failures to recognize women's military service in the war, while its sculptural narrative—which calls attention to nurses' endeavors to provide relief for dying soldiers—evokes the central trauma that most American servicewomen experienced during and after the war. At times resisting and conceding to patriarchal ideals of authenticity and work in order to legitimize military women's service in and responses to war, the VWM's feminist origins, careful promotion, and the design itself engage the recuperative work of feminism.

Legitimation

The history of the Vietnam Women's Memorial's creation delineates the legitimizing work necessary for Congressional legislation, the Secretary of Interior's authorization, and approval from federal regulatory commissions: the Fine Arts Commission, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the National Capital Memorial Commission (Evans 7). Promotional materials and public support for the Vietnam Women's Memorial, established in human interest articles and produced by the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project (VWMP), asserted that history had repeatedly disregarded the roles of women in war and specified that the women's memorial would fill the void of silenced stories.⁵⁰ In response to post-war lack of recognition and the subsequent isolation grown out of that deficiency, Vietnam veteran

⁵⁰ Some examples include Lillie Wilson, "Women Campaign for War Monument," *The Post-Standard* [Syracuse] 18 July 1998: A5; Linda Kramer, "Women Veterans Seek Recognition: Statue Proposed for Wall to Honor those who Served at the Real China Beach," *The Sunday Oregonian* [Portland] 1 May 1988: B1.

nurse Diane Carlson Evans founded the VWMP. The necessity of validating women's military service in Viet Nam surfaced in the recuperative, feminist project at work in the controversy over the memorial proposal.

When Evans established the VWMP in 1984, it was discovered that the Department of Defense had not kept a definitive, official record of the number of women who served in the American War in Viet Nam, and that post-war psychological support structures and veterans groups for women veterans were virtually non-existent. Women veterans were physically isolated from each other and psychologically detached from the general public that were not aware of the women's participation in the war. Evans believed that a memorial would not only recognize women's military service during the American War in Viet Nam, but would also provide an impetus for women to gather, create support systems, and share stories. The stated objectives of the VWMP were to locate the women who had served, to facilitate research on women's service in the war, to educate the American public about women's military service in Viet Nam, and to erect a monument for female Vietnam veterans on Vietnam Veterans Memorial grounds (Evans 3-4). For the VWMP, activism, information gathering, and education became the means of countering political and historical neglect and achieving recognition for servicewomen.

In addition to educating the public about women's roles during the war, the VWMP emphasized women's post-war experiences of psychological detachment from family and friends and physical isolation from each other. Ultimately rejected by the Fine Arts Commission, the initial memorial design figured a sculpted female nurse known as *The Lady* or *The Nurse* carrying her helmet and medical supplies. Evans and sculptor Roger Brodin

intended to sculpt a face on the statue that projected a look of “tiredness, strength, and compassion” that would represent a nurse returned from Viet Nam, rather than the heightened alertness of a nurse in combat (Marling and Wetenhall 353). Sharing similarities with Hart’s mimetic *Three Fighting Men* sculpture at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, *The Nurse* was weary, in uniform, and carrying authentic military paraphernalia.

The Nurse proposal was unique for a war memorial in its aim to represent post-war experience in a sculpted body. Washington D.C. is riddled with memorials figuring a heroic posture of a once great man deemed worthy of a post-mortem memorial. Examples include, but are not limited to, equestrian sculptures of former presidents, and figurative sculptures of Christopher Columbus, George Thomas, and Winfield Scott Hancock. American war memorials commonly emphasize the dead by listing names, as the VVM does, or by employing symbols to represent the number of American war dead: i.e., gold stars at the World War II memorial and combat boots in the *Eyes Wide Open* Iraq War memorial project. Such memorials do not embody the post-war experience of the living and, therefore, do not figure the living body as a vehicle of memorial communication. To some extent, symbolic memorials may provide alternatives to the falsely authentic, historically specific, mimetic sculptures of the body figured in the *Three Fighting Men*. However, encouraging representations of post-war experiences at war memorials permits memorials to speak not only for the past, but the present and future as well.

The Nurse proposal, however, was not rejected for its aesthetic implications but for the very idea of a Vietnam Women’s Memorial. Objections to the VWM, led by Robert Doubek, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund project director, and J. Carter Brown, former chairman of

the Fine Arts Commission during the vetting process of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, argued against the women's memorial on the basis that it would only encourage other ethnic and specialized veterans groups to seek a memorial of their own. Their line of thinking took popular hold, appearing in numerous testimonies, interviews, and newspaper commentaries.⁵¹ Opponents shared Brown's concern that the Mall in D.C. would be overrun with statues and monuments becoming as Brown suggested, "Disneyfied" or "ghettoized" (Marling and Wetenhall 358). To use these words perpetuates patriarchal hierarchies. Brown unequivocally asserts that a women's memorial would be child's play, postmodern kitsch, unworthy of the Mall's hallowed, white, upper-class, patriarchal ground. Brown further argued that special interest groups such as those representing military Scout Dogs were mounting support for a memorial of their own. While Scout Dogs served a variety of roles in Viet Nam ranging from mine detection, to tracking the enemy, to locating cadavers, the VWMP members were understandably outraged at the comparison of women's military service to that of service dogs.⁵² The equation undermines women's roles in war and speaks to the VWMP's primary concerns with recuperation of women's military history and recognition of women's military service in Viet Nam.

Those who opposed the women's memorial understood that a recuperative, feminist undertaking was at stake. As designer of the *Three Fighting Men* and a member of the Fine Arts Commission, Fredrick Hart, appropriately disqualified himself from voting on the

⁵¹ See, for example, Tom Carhart, "Insulting Vietnam Vets," *New York Times* 24 Oct. 1981: sec. 1, Benjamin Forgey, "Women and the Wall Memorial Proposal: Honor Without Integrity," *Washington Post* 22 Oct. 1987: E11; George F. Will, "The Statue Sweepstakes," *Newsweek* 26 Aug. 1991: 61.

⁵² Elaine Viets, "A Bureaucrat To Pick A Bone With: Official Links Canine Corps with Valor of Servicewomen," *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* 26 Jan. 1988: 3D.

VWM proposal (Evans 8). He did not, however, refrain from arguing against a women's memorial on the grounds that his *Three Fighting Men* represents all veterans regardless of gender. Brown agreed, deeming Hart's sculpture "symbolic of humankind and everyone who served" (Evans 8). Yet Hart's sculpture unsuccessfully symbolizes *everyone*; it fails to include women. It depicts three male soldiers: a Latino American, an Anglo-American, and an African American. Because Hart's realist sculpture figures only male soldiers, members of the VWMP maintained that a sculpture of a woman was a necessary addition to the Vietnam Veterans Memorials. In addition to Hart's comments, a letter from Maya Lin was read at the Fine Arts Commission hearing as final resistance to the proposed women's memorial. Because she considered her design, commonly known as The Wall, as complete and inclusive, Lin objected to "individual concessions" and any further additions to The Wall noting that she had consistently opposed any supplements to her design including Hart's sculpture (8).

Proponents of the women's memorial responded to opposition by engaging with Hart's description of his design as "consistent with history" (2). For example, Evans argues that American servicewomen "slip into history unrecognized and forgotten" and that Hart's male-centered *consistent history* leads the public to believe erroneously that only men serve in war (Evans 2). Furthermore, Karal Marling and John Wetenhall, in *The Sexual Politics of Memory*, defend the women's memorial on the grounds that the *Three Fighting Men* "already compromise The Wall's inclusive embrace by its omission of women" (362). In 1987, after much debate, the Fine Arts Commission rejected the women's memorial proposal. After this initial rejection, the VWMP opened a design contest and continued to promote the project.

Emphasizing a recuperative mission, rhetoric of recognition and honor pervade the VWMP's promotional material. For example, Evans's VWMP interviews debunk the myth that women do not serve, or *significantly* serve, in war. She recalls that —~~th~~ most predictable question was “were you ever rocketed or attacked?” We would negate the myth and defy the stereotype on both counts. Yes, women were there, and yes, they were wounded and killed” (6). To combat forgetfulness, denial, or ignorance, Evans argued that the VWM would fulfill a ~~tr~~emendous responsibility to the people of America,” to share servicewomen's war experiences with the public (Evans 9).

Although the VWMP aimed to discredit myths that women did not significantly serve during the war, the project's rhetoric is not consistently reconciliatory. In 1989, as part of a Congressional lobbying effort, the VWMP released a promotional poster illustrated with a woman's name on a dog tag and the divisive statement, “Not all women wore love beads in the ‘60s” (Evans 12). Unfortunately, the poster's rhetoric revives old battles over the war by segregating servicewomen from anti-war activists. The poster may be an attempt to discredit cultural myths that all women were opposed to, and therefore enemies of, male soldiers who served in the war.⁵³ However, the poster undermines the purported goal of the VWM as a memorial for all women with *any* connection to war (Ringnalda 235). The conciliatory endeavor inherent in the women's memorial project fails by relying on patriarchal ideals of authenticity in experience. The poster is aggressive in its claims of female sacrifice and “real work” by demeaning the anti-war movement. In effect, the poster encourages an inconsistent

⁵³ Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York UP, 1998) 27-70, suggests that the image of the spat-upon veteran is a cultural myth wherein feminized “hippie” men or women are accused of spitting on veterans returned from the war.

history by failing to recognize anti-war groups with close ties to the war, such as G.I.s Against the War, Gold Star Mothers Against the War and Vietnam Veterans Against the War.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the VWMP continues to sell the image on t-shirts and coffee mugs, prolonging division among service and civilian women of the war era and perpetuating negative myths associated with the anti-war movement.⁵⁵ Regrettably, the poster undermines the recuperative and reconciliatory goals of the memorial. The poster's consistency with history—the patriarchal order—excludes women, especially women from the anti-war movement, from the community of veterans. Despite, or perhaps because of, the poster's failings, legislators responded positively to the VWMP. In 1991 the memorial was fully approved by the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Memorial Commission, and the National Capital Planning Commission.

Memorial Memory

The winning design of the VWMP contest, Glenna Goodacre's sculpture-in-the-round (VWM) figures three female nurses and a wounded male soldier. Goodacre's sculpture of a nurse kneeling over medical supplies and a helmet looks as though she may be praying or is despairing over the uselessness of her supplies to save the wounded serviceman. A second nurse looking to the sky seemingly searches for a helicopter or spiritual help. She grasps the elbow of a third nurse who cradles the head of the male soldier who lies prostrate with a

⁵⁴ For more on the GI movement against the war see, Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York UP, 1998) 27-70.

⁵⁵ See "Market Place" at www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org

bandage over his eyes on a pile of sandbags. In its sculpted figures, the VWM presents a narrative that tenuously represents hope and despair. The figures call attention to the challenges of saving dying soldiers—the central psychological trauma that many American servicewomen experienced during the war that continues to haunt their post-war memories. The women do not appear to fear their possibility of attack, but rather sacrifice their own safety in efforts to help the wounded male soldier.

The sculptural narrative of the Vietnam Women's Memorial provides a feminine aesthetic within the larger framework of traditional masculine, heroic war memorials. In conjunction with postmodern aesthetics, feminism provides narrative tools to begin changing gendered representations of war in a manner that permits multiple positions for the individual and the community. Yet the VWM both resists and concedes to patriarchal ideologies of universal truths in war. Just as the history of the memorial's creation reveals the legitimizing work necessary for its acceptance, so does the sculpture itself, insofar as it mimetically figures women's bodies and the *work* those bodies perform—caring for wounded or dying *male* soldiers in an attempt to authenticate women's wartime service.

The VWM negotiates recognition, recuperative feminism, political agency, memory, and postmodernism's crisis of representation. Scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Barbara Creed raise important questions concerning the possibilities and limitations of feminist recuperation in the age of postmodernism. In *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1993), Hutcheon understands postmodernism as disruptive yet complicit in its critique, whereas feminism calls for change and political agency (151-52). In applying her assessment against the VWM, however, the risks of accommodation in feminism's recuperative work emerge. Is

it possible that recuperative work at the VWM, because it relies on legitimation, undermines recuperative feminism? Although postmodernism and feminism deal directly with the crisis of representation (Creed 398), feminism's project of telling history through women's experiences can, as it does at the VWM, find itself overwhelmed by a grand narrative impulse, or *consistent history*, laden with patriarchal ideologies of authenticity (truth) and progress (work).

In keeping with traditional heroic memorial aesthetics, the VWM consists of realistic figures cast in bronze. Yet Donald Ringnalda, in *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War*, (1994) maintains that despite the realism of the bronze figures, the memorial —~~leads~~ itself in no way to the conventional validation of war" (235). He directs attention to the sculpted faces, explaining that their expressions indicate helplessness:

A nurse holding a dying soldier looks on him tenderly, but she is saddened beyond language. The soldier himself has a Goya-like expression of terror and pain Instead of protecting him from ~~in~~coming," the sandbags he lies on will likely be his deathbed. Another woman looks off to the horizon, mouth agape, as if screaming for help that won't help the soldier even if it comes. Behind these three figures—invisible, from a one-unidimensional perspective—a third woman kneels prayerfully; but in view of the memorial's totality, these would seem to be unanswerable prayers. (235)

Ringnalda offers a compelling reading of the powerlessness operating in the VWM that has come to signify the American War in Viet Nam. However, he overlooks the authenticity trap

of the memorial's legitimizing figuring of the work that servicewomen perform in war. A striking disparity exists between representing servicemen and servicewomen's active participation in war. For example, Hart's *Three Fighting Men*, cast realistically in bronze, are not figured at work but seem to stand in waiting. Critics agree that the men are returning from the battlefield exhausted. The realistic figuring of the male soldiers fulfills demands of authenticity; however, the servicewomen must be at *work*. Here emerges a feminist recuperative project trampled by legitimation. Servicewomen must justify their service and memory, even in the memorial.

Although the VWM "avoid[s] overt allusions to motherhood" by breaking with the tradition of figuring gown-donned women of wartime memorials (Piehler 178), the memorial does exhibit Josephine Donovan's "conditions that appear to have shaped traditional women's experience and practice in the past" (100). These conditions include: a colonized mentality that tends to silence women; a domestic sphere accounting for the repetitive, cyclical, interruptible nature of women's work; a creation for use rather than exchange; an emphasis on physiological experiences, especially childrearing, a practice of holding and waiting; and a psychological maturation of relationships (100-04). The VWM's sculpted women engage in the work of holding, waiting, and praying. One nurse holds the injured soldier, while the others seem to wait and pray. The memorial represents the physiological and psychological experiences of injury and healing of the past in the present. It signifies a moment suspended in time. In accordance with psychological maturation, the memorial emphasizes community. The woman searching the sky engages in mutual support by placing her hand on the shoulder of the woman holding the prostrate soldier.

The positioning of the prostrate soldier and the attending nurse's embrace at the VWM invokes Michelangelo's *Pietà* and its attendant sentiments of glorious sacrifice (see Fig. 5). Goodacre's male soldier lays prostrate, with one arm dangling, in the nurse's arms while she despairingly gazes down upon him. The pose is reminiscent of Michelangelo's Mary gaze of resignation as she holds the body of Jesus after his crucifixion. Goodacre's nurse duplicates Mary's silent, maternal suffering. As caretaker, the nurse alleviates suffering and soothes the passage between life and death. The VWM thereby feminizes the liminal space between life and death. Regardless of the similarities between the two sculptures, Michelangelo's youthful Madonna has a serene facial expression as opposed to the weary furrowed brow of the attending nurse and the distress of her companions. Although the VWM figures sacrifice as central to its representation of the war, it does not necessarily validate that sacrifice. The women are not simply maternally feminized; they move beyond Michelangelo's Jesus and Mary by offering a sense of interconnectedness, in the circular form of the VWM. In fact, the memorial has come to be called the "Circle of Healing."⁵⁶ The memorial's circular narrative joins feminist and postmodern aesthetic rejection of linear master narratives. The sculpture forms a circular narrative with no clear starting point and, most importantly, no end (Ringnalda 235). Because the memorial narrative has no end, it encourages a continuous open narrative akin Maya Lin's circular chronology at Vietnam Veterans Memorial.⁵⁷

The open narrative of the VWM further surpasses patriarchal memorial traditions by encouraging visitors to enter the space of the memorial in order to view all three women.

⁵⁶ The VWM is referred to as a "Circle of Healing" throughout *Vietnam Women's Memorial: A Commemorative* ed. Julie Agnew Thomas (Paducah KY: Turner Publishing, 1996).

⁵⁷ See Chapter Two.



Fig. 5. Michelangelo's *Pietà* at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome

This is especially true of the kneeling nurse, often unseen in photographs of the memorial (see Fig 4). It is impossible to view the entire memorial without viewing it from all vantage points. Thus visitors walk around the memorial stepping beyond their comfortable place on the boundary as observers into the space of the memorial. The relationship between the VWM and visitors transcends object/observer positioning because the memorial involves the viewer in a kinetic relationship to the sculpted bodies of its female subjects. The postures and facial expressions of sculptured female figures of the VWM denote their confrontations with traumatic physical injury and their ensuing psychological trauma. As literary critic Carol Acton explains, nurses are both observers and participants in warfare's trauma of injury (65). So too Goodacre's sculpted servicewomen metaphorically mediate between participant and observer. They participate in attempts at healing and observe the wounded male soldier, while experiencing their own psychological wounds. The figures serve as a mediated representation of the physical and psychological traumas of the American War in Viet Nam. Acton further understands the three women of the VWM as looking at unseen trauma, that is —~~deliberately~~ placed outside the gaze of" the visitor (62). Although invited to follow her skyward gaze, visitors do not know if the standing nurse awaits assistance from humans—a med-evac helicopter—or the divine. The kneeling nurse, whose distraught face is obscured unless the visitor also kneels, stares helplessly at her medical equipment. According to Goodacre in her "Statement on the Women's Memorial," the kneeling nurse's posture "reflect[s] her despair, frustrations, and all the horrors of war" (39). The central nurse looking down upon the prostrate male soldier sees a condition to which visitors have no clear narrative access. Although Goodacre explains that she "want[s] this to be a

monument to the living” insisting that the wounded male soldier ~~will~~ live,” his fate is not necessarily clear to visitors who have not read her statement (39). The bandage that covers much of wounded soldier’s face creates an ~~every~~man” identity and conceals narrative access to his condition, leaving visitors uncertain if he is wounded, dying, or dead. Despite her narrative intent, Goodacre also wrote of the memorial that —the figures and their roles are intentionally vague, creating opportunities for interpretation for each viewer” (39). A multiple and tenuous aesthetic emerges in Goodacre’s positioning of these servicewomen as paradoxically exposing and shrouding the trauma beyond their gaze. The VWM servicewomen thus simultaneously reveal and conceal the extent of trauma injuries servicewomen witnessed during the war and psychological traumas they experienced during and after the war. Although the memorial represents servicewomen in their wartime roles, the postures and expressions of the sculpted figures invoke the memory of war, thus providing one possibility for the memorial to transcend its historical specificity.

In addition to the VWM’s sculptural narrative of women’s war experiences, the Annual Storytelling Project at the VWM encourages further narrative accounts, including post-war experiences. A typical ceremony at VWM’s Annual Veterans Day service includes a daylong educational service entitled, ~~V~~ietnam: In Their Own Words; Storytelling at the Vietnam Woman’s Memorial.” Speakers range from servicewomen of the American War in Viet Nam, to women who served with the Red Cross in Viet Nam, and to civilian women—schoolteachers, filmmakers, and writers. The importance of the title, ~~In~~ Their Own Words,” reveals the recuperative feminist aims of the sharing of women’s stories. In spite of the many possible ambiguous readings of the memorial design, political agency emerges in the

shared narratives of these women. The Storytelling Project generates alternate voices to the patriarchal traditions. By joining the VWM with larger issues of women and war, these narratives provide a means for women's war experiences to transcend historical and memorial specificity. The women's shared stories and the Vietnam Women's Memorial thus become mediated memories accessible to the larger cultural community.

The ten-year battle for the VWM's creation calls attention to the ambiguous nature of political agency for women. The VWMP and the VWM confront political and historical failures to recognize women's military service in the war. Aesthetically, the memorial both relies on *and* transcends patriarchal values of authenticity and work. Utilizing a traditional bronze material and realistic figuring of bodies at work, the VWM invokes patriarchal tradition. The memorial thus authenticates women's military service in the war via the tradition's dictates. However, the VWM's sculptural narrative maintains an aesthetic limbo between healing and closure and an ongoing remembrance. The circular narrative and emphasis on community allows for a joining of feminist and postmodernist aesthetics at the memorial that operate, in part, to overcome the perceived validation necessary for memorializing women's military service in the war. Finally, the memorial ultimately contests patriarchal means of legitimation in its encouragement of an ongoing women's narrative through storytelling. Thus the VWM participates in a collected cultural memory that makes memories of the war more accessible to those with no direct experience in the war.

American Women, Married to Vietnam

Although the Vietnam Women's Memorial hoped to provide a memorial for all women with any connection to the war, its sculpted figures characterize only military servicewomen who served in Viet Nam. It does not figure civilian women journalists and morale contingents. Nor does the memorial allude to American and Viet Nameese civilian women on the home-fronts. Yet memories of the war also hold a profound psychological effect on civilian women, especially women who were married to servicemen and women who later married Vietnam veterans. Moreover, the war also obviously altered the lives of Viet Nameese civilian women. Sandie Frazier's *I Married Vietnam* (1992) and Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* (1993) participate in a collected cultural memory of the war by exploring civilian women's prosthetic and direct memories of the war. The main female characters in these narratives also operate as audience to veterans' confessions and thus as reconciliatory mediators between veterans and civilians via the women's own prosthetic and direct memories of the war.

I Married Vietnam represents a small genre of sentimental novels and memoirs written by women about women's lives during and after the war that center on their relationships with male soldiers. Like others of its kind, Frazier's novel offers a narrative through which to understand the suffering and sacrifices of the post-war wives of Vietnam veterans. However, *I Married Vietnam* is significant in its treatment of memory, especially the power of traumatic memory transference, or prosthetic memory—individually-felt cultural memory.

Unlike nurses' memoirs and most narratives about wives' experiences, however, Frazier's novel does not follow her main character, or her relationship with her husband, through the changes of war. Frazier's female character, Sam, meets Vietnam veteran Jeremy Freeman, an African American, after his tour of duty in Viet Nam. The war and his veteran status serve as Jeremy's post-war identity and thus Sam —~~m~~aries Vietnam."

The novel chronicles Jeremy's life beginning with his birth, sketches a childhood of familial, economic, and racial challenges in Mississippi, includes accounts of his enlistment and military training, incorporates a stream of consciousness montage of his combat experiences in Vietnam, details his return home, and depicts his addiction to heroin as a result of his physical and psychological injuries during the war. In many respects, the narrative is conventional in its recounting of Freeman's challenges finding employment due to his veteran status, its presentation of the Veterans Administration as incompetent, and its depiction of Freeman as a prisoner of his memories and self-preserving isolation. The novel details Jeremy's difficulties with addiction, violence, and severely physical flashbacks.

Jeremy is a stereotypically isolated veteran. Concerning stereotypes of Vietnam veterans, literary critic Toby Herzog asserts —Americans attempting to reconcile with traumatized Vietnam Veterans construct images of these individuals to fit myths, stereotypes, reality, or social, political, ideological, and literary agendas" (113-14). Thus representations of Vietnam veterans often fall into one, or a combination, of three stereotypes that Herzog outlines: the Blank Page, the Tripwire, and the Interstate Nomad (113-14). The Blank Page is all things to all people; a survivor who is completely void of any self-identity. The

Tripwire veteran keeps a distance from the community, the tripwire signifying a noisemaker as distant warning. This stereotype can also be considered a “bunkered in” veteran. The Interstate Nomad is the type of veteran who lacks community and continuously wanders in search of this impossibility. Jeremy’s detached character constitutes a combination of the distancing Tripwire and wandering Interstate Nomad veteran.

However, *I Married Vietnam* is unique in its emphasis on Sam’s experiences and its depiction of Sam’s prosthetic memories of the war. The first third of the novel employs a third-person narrator. These chapters begin with Jeremy’s name, noted as “Freeman” during his military service. It is in the last third of the novel that Sam gives voice to her life with Freeman. Sam’s narration begins with, “I was nothing when I met Freeman” (159). The following chapters begin with “I was” and “our.” The shift in opening lines of each chapter is important for the central theme of the novel, that Sam “married Vietnam.” Sam and Freeman develop a conjoined identity deeply associated with their fused memories of the war.

Although Freeman is reluctant to divulge his memories of the war, twenty years after the war he begins to share his memories with Sam and she thereby experiences prosthetic memories. Trauma and literary scholar, Kali Tal’s influential *Worlds of Hurt* (1996) addresses this desire to communicate to others traumatic memories in what she terms a “Literature of Trauma,” a literature “written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it ‘real’ both to the victim and to the community” that does not directly experience the trauma (21). Although Freeman performs a confessional speech act, he and Sam do not fall into what Foucault would identify as a power relationship between

confessant—the person confessing their wrongs—and confessor—authority who hears the confession—because the act does not inscribe Sam as authoritative power. Not only does Sam —~~take~~ the burden off [Freeman's] back as he begins to talk to [her] and [she] listen[s]. [She] take[s] his sins on as [her] own" (210). As audience to Freeman's confessions and memories, Sam encounters her own prosthetic memories of the war. She narrates, "I know Freeman's pain so intensely that it has become my own. When he suffers, I suffer" (201). Taking on Freeman's memories and sins as her own, Sam serves as a reconciliatory mediator between Freeman and Frazier's audience.

When Freeman repeatedly shares his memories of the war, Sam experiences memory sensations acquiring a proximity induced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is generally defined as a ~~response~~, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event" (Caruth 4). For example, when Freeman shares his memories with Sam, she begins to ~~smell~~, taste, and see what he [repeatedly] was telling" (201). Sam also experiences the war via Freeman's memories and dreams. She ~~can~~ feel his dreams, in [her] subconscious" (208). "PTSD, battle fatigue, shell shocked, whatever you call it, affects not only Freeman but me as well. We are both products of Vietnam" (201). When Sam explains that she and Freeman are ~~products~~ of Vietnam" she speaks of their status as part of the so-called Vietnam generation; however, she also attests to the power of prosthetic memory. Sam and Freeman are irrevocably haunted by the war; the war is part of them. Although the novel figures Freeman as Viet Nam, as the war and memories Sam married, she too is Viet Nam.

When she attends a belated “Coming Home” parade, Sam attempts, like the sculpted women of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial, to fulfill the role of reconciliatory mediator between veterans and civilians. Although she cannot convince Jeremy to attend, Sam attends the parade, applauds the veterans, and fantasizes about Freeman marching with the others. The parade signifies recognition and a collective, momentary, living memorial. Freeman later confesses that he was uneasy about participating in the parade because “He was afraid of the names *you* would call him again, ‘baby killer, monster, murderer’” (emphasis added 218). At times, Frazier, directly addresses her audience, as above, with accusations and lessons. Here, the novel confronts the old divisions between soldiers and the anti-war movement that the Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project took advantage of with their “love beads” poster. Sam reveals her anger with the civilian population; she lays blame on them for Jeremy’s ongoing lack of recuperation, recognition, and reconciliation. However, to Freeman, Sam describes the parade as a time of reconciliation and recognition. She explains that there was no derision, but rather “a lot of love in the air” (218). Thus the novel itself participates in a collected cultural memory of reconciliation. It gives voice to past anger toward the anti-war movement and represents the present parade as a holding the potential to heal divisions between veterans and civilians.

Although the parade was intended to offer healing and Sam’s presence might have helped both Freeman and herself to feel a sense of recuperation, it holds only a momentary sense of reconciliation. Like the Vietnam Women’s Memorial, *I Married Vietnam* does not impart a clear answers or a closed narrative. The novel ends with Freeman deserting Sam, as he often did. He leaves her with the memories of the war and the uncertainty of her future with

Freeman. Upon hearing of the death of another Vietnam veteran, the novel closes with Sam wondering when she will “bury Vietnam” (222). Sam, however, will never “bury Vietnam” as it has become part of her life experience. She has acquired individually-felt memories of the war, a proximity induced PTSD that constitutes her prosthetic memory. Despite Sam’s mediating role between veteran and civilians, the novel rejects recuperation for Freeman located in the recognition of the parade. Freeman and Sam are still irrevocably psychologically affected by the memories of the war. Frazier thus explores the effects of prosthetic memories and the cultural impossibility of relegating the war to the forgotten past.

Viet Nameese Women, Reconciliatory Mediator

Like Frazier, Oliver Stone cinematically explores the commingling of memory between husband and wife in *Heaven and Earth* (1993). Both narratives call attention to the post-war lives of those married to American veterans of the war. The veteran characters in each narrative experience PTSD and through sharing their memories of the war so too their wives acquire indirect, but individually-felt, prosthetic memories of their husbands’ war experiences. The wives also undergo a proximity induced PTSD. As in Frazier’s *I Married Vietnam*, husband and wife in *Heaven and Earth* share in the traumas and memories of war. Stone, however, addresses the impact of the war on a civilian Viet Nameese, woman, Le Ly. Like Frazier’s character Sam, Ly acquires prosthetic memories from her veteran husband’s memories of the war. However, Ly also possess her own direct memories of the war.

Moreover, she operates—like the sculpted servicewomen of the VWM—as a reconciliatory mediator between civilians and veterans, between Viet Nameese and Americans, and between Viet Nameese immigrant-refugees and those who remained in Viet Nam.

Following Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *Heaven and Earth* (1993) is the third of an informal Vietnam War trilogy.⁵⁸ *Heaven and Earth* presents a mediated representation of a Viet Nameese woman's experiences in its adaptation of Le Ly Haslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (1989) and *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (1993).⁵⁹ Like many of Stone's films, *Heaven and Earth* remembers the war with Stone's trademark emphasis on historical breadth and authenticity. The film participates in the culture wars concerning how best to remember the war. Stone said he hoped the film would respond to "the blind militarism and mindless revisionism of the Vietnam War...that has snaked its way into our culture over the past decade or so, in which the conflict is refought in comic book style with a brand-new ending...we win!" (Kagan 208). Rejecting a narrow, revisionist memory of the war, Stone broadens a collected cultural memory of the war to include representations of Viet Nameese memory. However, in broadening collected cultural memory, Stone employs the story of only one woman, Le Ly, who symbolically bears the collective pain of the Viet Nameese.

⁵⁸ *Born on the Fourth of July*, dir. Oliver Stone, Universal Pictures, 1989. *Platoon*, dir. Oliver Stone, Orion, 1986.

⁵⁹ Le Ly Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: a Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1989). Le Ly Hayslip and James Hayslip, *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

True to Stone's typical epic structure, the narrative spans several decades, from the pre-war years to post-war life while creating a circuitous journey from Viet Nam to America and ending with a return to Viet Nam. The film contains both the micro, Le Ly's life, and the macro, history of Viet Nam from the 1950s French colonial rule to the late 1980s. Stone frames the film with text noting that the film is based on the true events of Le Ly Hayslip's life mentioning both her creation of the East Meets West Foundation and her war and post-war memoirs.⁶⁰

Heaven and Earth is also an evacuee-immigration narrative. The film explores the successes and failures of the American dream from a Viet Nameese woman's perspective. Ly is initially overwhelmed and later disillusioned with America. She does not immediately find a happy land of opportunity and acceptance upon her arrival in the United States. Instead, she encounters alienation, rejection, strife, and abuse. Often the film is about Ly's loss of identity. However, by the end of the film, Ly has come into her own independence and now has the strength to confront her pre-war past and the familial obligation she feels toward her ancestors when she makes a return visit to Viet Nam.

Although the story originates from a woman, and is dedicated to Stone's mother, the film, like *Platoon*, "reshape[s] a Vietnamese women's story as one of an American veteran's struggle with guilt" (Sturken 121). In keeping with the 1970s and 1980s mainstream cinematic narrative representations of the war, Stone's film offers yet another negative

⁶⁰ Le Ly Hayslip founded the East Meets West Foundation in Quang Nam Province, Viet Nam in 1988. The foundation builds educational and healthcare programs for Viet Nameese children in addition to clean water and sanitation programs in an effort to heal the wounds of the war.

representation of a disturbed Vietnam veteran. The American War in Viet Nam comes home to America through the character of Steve Butler and his domestic violence.

Nonetheless, the film depicts a Viet Nameese woman in a more positive and complex manner than previous negatively stereotypical fictional representations. For example, Kalí Tal in “The Mind at War: Images of Women in Vietnam Novels by Combat Veterans” demonstrates that in many novels about the war

the Asian woman character has no real life before she meets her soldier and none that is pursued after; these women seem to fade painlessly (through death, desertion, or transfer of affection) out of existence. Asian women are mirrored as whore, or whore-with-a-heart-of-gold, or inscrutable lover, or will-less mistress. (77)

Alternatively, *Heaven and Earth* portrays Le Ly’s life before and after the war and before and after her relationship with Steve. The film is very much about her problematical experiences as a civilian woman during the war, her post-war life in America, her memories of the war, and her position as reconciliatory mediator.

The film’s theme of liminal identity, as the title indicates, places Ly in the position of reconciliatory mediator between veterans and civilians, and between Americans and the Viet Nameese. Like the sculpted women of the Vietnam Women’s Memorial and Frazier’s female character, Ly mediates between spheres of war and peace. Throughout the narrative Ly finds

herself caught between Viet Nam—family, ancestors, loyalties, land, home, violence, war, and ultimately peace—and America—Steve, peace, a new life, opportunity, and more violence. Ly's character represents potential psychological and spiritual healing for the Viet Nameese thereby providing possible recuperation for Americans and reconciliation between Viet Nameese and Americans. She serves as the means of reconciliation between these worlds and between the United States and Viet Nam. Early in the film, and in her life, Ly comes to understand her liminal position. For example, in the opening sequence of the film, Ly explains that in Viet Nameese Buddhist tradition heaven is the father, earth the mother, and the people live in between. As war encroaches, Ly, her family, and her village in the Central Highlands find themselves caught in a civil war. After the arrival of Americans and the challenges of being under South Viet Nam's Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) and American control during the day, and Viet Cong control at night, Ly and her mother leave the village for the then South Viet Nameese capital, Saigon.⁶¹

War disrupts and ultimately destroys the pastoral ideal and thus the ancestral memorial binds of Ly's childhood creating a disjuncture in Ly's life. The destruction of the pastoral is twofold; it is familial and it is ancestral. As Ly's father explains, the family plants rice near the cemetery so that the following generations will eat the rice that contains the wisdom of the ancestors. Thus, destruction of the land dishonors the memory of the ancestors and fractures the connection between past and present. When Ly leaves the village, she is severed from her past, her ancestors, and much of her family. It is that devastation to those

⁶¹ The Viet Cong, or VC for short, is a disparaging term used to identify Viet Nameese Communists in Southern Viet Nam.

connections, to her village, to its people, and to her brothers who joined the Viet Cong that haunts Ly's dreams and memory-visions.

Ly's memory visions threaded throughout the film represent both direct and prosthetic memories. Figured in black and white and suspending narrative movement, Ly's dreams and memory visions occur both while she is sleeping and awake. Often recurring and repetitive, her dreams and memory visions indicate traumatic memory or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ly's memory visions parallel Cathy Caruth's understanding of PTSD in that they are recurring, and acquire ~~the~~ "the form repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors" (4). Ly's memory visions further correlate with Caruth's Freudian understanding of traumatic memory in that they are belated and refuse ~~to~~ be simply located in [their] insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (9). For example, Ly experiences a repeated memory vision wherein she witnesses her brother's death, a death she does not witness in waking life. Her family was not officially informed of his death; however, a local ~~wizard~~ "wizard" confirms the family's fears after examining her brother's umbilical cords. The wizard informs the family of one brother's restless spirit, but not the nature of his death. Ly's memory visions, however, represent the death of that brother. In these visions, Ly and her brother are in a flying helicopter being tortured by American soldiers. Her brother will not acquiesce and is thrown from the helicopter.

The helicopter signifies American encroachment early in the film. When American troops first arrive in Ly's village, she and her father are in the rice paddies. The camera, positioned from the perspective of the helicopter, frames Ly from above. As the wind from the

chopper's blades whips the grass and water, Ly is uncertain whether to crouch or stand as she gazes up at the helicopter. It is a frightening moment. Ly's father protectively runs to her and pulls her away. As Vietnam veteran and war scholar Philip Biedler in "The Last Huey" argues, in American memory, second only to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the helicopter operates as "the image of American performance [in the war] . . . a way of constructing a history out of the twinned resources of memory and imagination" (5). As Michael Herr describes in his novel *Dispatches* (1977), it is a "saver-destroyer, provider-waster" (8). In *Heaven and Earth* the helicopter signals the arrival of Americans and the ensuing destruction of Ly's village yet later rescues her from a battle zone beginning her escape journey to Saigon at the end of the war.

Across genres the helicopter functions as a material memory and is a significant symbol of collected cultural memories.⁶² In popular American films of the war, it serves as John Wayne's taxi in *The Green Berets* (1968); it is accompanied by a score of Richard Wagner's musical composition the "Ride of the Valkyries" (1870) in an attack on a village in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1978); it rescues Chris Taylor from being overrun by enemy forces in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986); it is the historical focus of the new cavalry in Randall Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* (2002).⁶³ In memoirs and novels of the war, echoes of the helicopter's whump-whump operates as an archetype of the war, and encroaches upon veterans' nightmares and waking memories in *Bamboo Bed* (William Eastlake 1969), *Dog*

⁶² Philip Biedler, "The Last Huey." *Vietnam War and Postmodernity* ed. Michael Bibby (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1999) 2-16 provides a closer examination of the last *Huey* as a primal scene of U.S. cultural history that repeatedly returns in film and literature about the war.

⁶³ *The Green Berets*, dir. John Wayne, Warner Bros., 1968. *Apocalypse Now*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, United Artists, 1979. *We Were Soldiers*, dir. Randall Wallace, Paramount Pictures, 2002. *Platoon*, dir. Oliver Stone, Orion, 1986.

Soldiers (Robert Stone 1974), *Mediations in Green* (Stephen Wright 1983), and *Machine Dreams* (Jayne Phillips 1999) among many others.⁶⁴ The photograph of the last helicopter evacuating Americans and Viet Nameese during the fall of Saigon in 1975 resonates as an official and unforgettable memory of the war in the American consciousness (see Fig. 6).⁶⁵

This phantom chopper, known as the last *Huey*, is compulsively reproduced in narratives, photographs, and in documentary, narrative, and art films. In *Heaven and Earth* Oliver Stone contributes to a collected cultural memory of the war broadening the saver-destroyer memory of the helicopter to include a civilian Viet Nameese response to the memory machine.

In addition to her helicopter memory-visions, Ly repetitively returns to her former village in her memory-visions. Also presented in black and white, Ly's village is a wasteland of the pastoral destroyed. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell observes that wars take place within nature and therefore representations of war are necessarily antipastoral (231). Riddled with images of amputatation, Ly's memory-visions invoke T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922). The scene, although rural, recalls Eliot's "Unreal City" as though Ly is thinking, "I had not thought death had undone so many. / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, / And each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (63-65). The people Ly observes move slowly, if at all, and, without expression, rarely meet her gaze.

⁶⁴ William Eastlake, *The Bamboo Bed* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969). Robert Stone, *Dog Soldiers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Jayne Anne Phillips, *Machine Dreams* (New York: Vintage, 1999). Stephen Wright, *Mediations in Green* (New York: Scribner, 1983).

⁶⁵ While the famous photograph taken by Hubert van Es was actually a helicopter atop a CIA building near the U.S. embassy in Saigon, the image has been replayed in cinematic and fictional accounts alike as the last Huey leaving the embassy. In the meantime, on the aircraft carriers in the South China Sea, a similar image of defeat and American waste was taking place, pushing helicopters overboard to make room for more evacuees. See James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly P, 1986).



Fig. 6. U.S. Evacuation of Saigon, Hubert van Es April, 29 1975

East meets West in *Heaven and Earth* when Ly encounters Steve, her future American husband, and their nightmare memories intermingle. Soon after they meet, Steve stays the night in Ly's room in Da Nang and experiences a nightmare about the atrocities he has committed in the war. His dream, also black and white, is comprised of his experiences as a Black Ops assassin, Ly's memory-visions of amputees in her village, and an image of Ly's bleeding face. Here, Steve confronts his dual position as what Vietnam veteran authors Jan Barry, Basil Paquet, and Larry Rottmann have termed "agent-victim" of the war (iii). Although Steve participated in violence and atrocity, he also suffers the consequences of his brutal actions and the difficulty of identifying the enemy during the war. As viewers learn later, he had, in his own words, "assassinated" women as well as men.⁶⁶ Like Sam and Freeman in Frazier's novel, Ly's and Steve's memories meld, coming together as one memory. Ly and Steve are opposing sides of the same coin of violence and trauma, a theme that becomes apparent later in the film.

Like Frazier's Freeman, Steve is a stereotypically disturbed veteran. According to Toby Herzog's delineation of the Interstate Nomad, the Trip Wire, and the Black Page veteran, outlined above, Steve falls into the latter category. The Black Page as "all things to all people" results in a limitless "collage of conflicting images and labels" ranging from the "heroic" to "cybabies" to "agents of violence" (Herzog 115). Steve's troubled character contributes to a collected cultural memory of the war's violent consequences. He drinks

⁶⁶ Stone seems to be referring to the controversial CIA Phoenix Program regarded by some as an "assassination program" wherein the CIA, U.S. Military Intelligence, and South Viet Nameese military, police, and civilian officials, conducted an anti-Viet Cong campaign. The campaign consisted of infiltrating the peasant populations in search of Communist cadres in order to "neutralize" them. See Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983) 601-02.

heavily, is obsessed with guns, and is violent. Throughout their turbulent marriage, Ly and Steve often fight. During one particular argument about his purchase and ownership of guns and a disagreement about exposing their sons to firearms, the fight escalates. Steve puts a gun to Ly's head. A black and white flashback of previous violence in her life ensues. When these visions occur time is suspended as Ly's past traumas and memories collides with the present violence. Her memory visions have the power to make the past present.

Immediately, in a tearful apology, Steve confesses his wartime atrocities to Ly. His memories, figured in black and white, punctuate his confessions. Like Freeman telling Sam of his war experiences, Steve's confessions serve to accentuate the widening circle of the war's effects beyond the battlefield.

After recounting his crimes, Steve puts the gun in his mouth; Ly stops him. She tries to explain that they are the same, saying they have ~~different~~ "different skin, same suffering." She explains that she was a soldier in past lives and, just as Steve, has bad karma. Moments such as these figure Ly as a victim who carries the burden of forgiving American veterans. Ly and Steve suffer psychologically as a consequence of the war; each suffers from PTSD. Both Ly and Steve experience the repetition of memory visions and flashbacks. Ultimately, in the midst of divorce and a custody battle, Steve commits suicide, yet another indicator of PTSD.

The melding of Ly's and Steve's memories in the film represent the collected nature of memory. They are always figured in black and white and include the repetitive images of PTSD. Ly's memory visions, threaded throughout the film include actual memories, dreams, and hallucinations. The aesthetic quality of these memory visions indicates the non-linear quality of memory. As they are presented in a film that is a retrospective of the war, both the

memory visions and the film participate in an ongoing a collected cultural memory of the war emphasizes a commingling of past and present.

During these troubled times, Ly consults a Buddhist monk who emphasizes the necessity of forgiveness. He reinforces Ly's self-perception as mediator and potential healer. If she as victim carries the burden of forgiveness, then it is through the Viet Nameese experience that America might achieve reconciliation with Viet Nam. The monk further reinforces the film's rendering of time and memory when he instructs Ly concerning the cyclical nature of life. He advises that the future and past are the same and thus provides the philosophical frame for the ending of the film where Ly returns to Viet Nam.

While many memory representations of the war addressed here extend beyond the end of the war, as does *Heaven and Earth*, the film also reaches into the ancestral past bringing it forward as part of present life and memory. When Ly returns to her village she continues to feel a sense of alienation. Her surviving brother punctuates this disjuncture when he recounts how the end of the war did not bring peace, but more fighting and suffering. In 1978 The People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) invaded and occupied Cambodia in response to Khmer Rouge attacks and in 1979 China invaded northern Viet Nam in reaction to a perceived threat to the security of southeast Asia resulting from a Viet Nameese and USSR Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.⁶⁷ Despite her brother's recriminations, Ly visits the graves of her ancestors, and finds peace with her father's spirit. She is no longer haunted by memory visions. Ly's mother grants her forgiveness, understanding Ly's return as a completion of an

⁶⁷ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983).

ancestral circle. Her mother says that the circle, the past, is now complete. Thus, the end of the film achieves as sense of reconciliatory closure.

Stone frames the end of the film with Ly narrating that the ~~B~~Buddhist masters were right. Nothing happens without cause...The gift of suffering is to bring us closer to god, to teach us to be strong when we are weak; to be brave when we are afraid; to be wise in the midst of confusion and to let go of that which we can no longer hold.” *Heaven and Earth* instructs that reconciliation is possible because contending parties endure mutual psychological suffering. In part, the ending of the film shares similarities with post-American Civil War sentimental literature. As historian David Blight in *Race and Reunion* argues, sentimental reconciliationist Civil War literature attempts to return to a romanticized past (217). Blight contends that the ~~P~~lantation School,” for example, replaces the realities of the war with intersectional marriages of reconciliation, thus transforming the war into a romance (217). Ly and Steve’s marriage signifies reconciliation between American and Viet Nam. However, their reconciliationist marriage does not end the narrative and does not permit forgetfulness, but rather heightens memories of the war for each. Furthermore, their marriage ends in disaster. Finally, Ly also understands that although she ~~h~~ad come home . . . home had changed and [she] would always be in between . . . heaven and earth . . . it is [her] fate.” While Ly’s narration attempts to desimplify the film’s easy ending, the narrative movement leaves a powerful impression of peace fulfilled.

Ultimately, the film leaves audiences with the idea that reconciliation and recuperation depend on recognizing the suffering in war beyond the American experience. The film adds to a collected cultural memory of the war in its response to the revision of the war that Stone

identified—overlooking the Viet Nameese experience. Although it tends to reinforce the stereotypical suffering Vietnam veteran, the film also offers a representation of a Viet Nameese woman's memories of the war. Ly serves as a mediator; she provides a potential cure for the Vietnam Syndrome—reconciliation between Americans and the Viet Nameese, between the Viet Nameese from the northern Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN) and those from the southern Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), and between Viet Nameese refugees and their country.

Against and Within the Tradition

Because they explore representations of civilian and servicewomen's war and post-war experiences, the narratives of the Vietnam Women's Memorial (VWM), Sandie Frazier's *I Married Vietnam*, and Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* participate in an ongoing collected cultural memory of the war equally derived from direct and prosthetic memories—individually-felt cultural memories. These narratives reject forgetfulness by recognizing the psychological consequences of the war, beyond the battlefield, on American and Viet Nameese servicewomen and civilian women. All three seek recuperation via recognition.

While sometimes sentimental, Sandie Frazier's *I Married Vietnam* depicts ongoing remembrance in its recuperative recognition of the post-war memories of a Vietnam veteran and the fusion of his memories with his wife's prosthetic memories of the war. *Heaven and Earth* recognizes the psychological affects of war on a Viet Nameese woman via her direct

and prosthetic memories of the war and their fusion with her Vietnam veteran husband's memories. The Vietnam Women's Memorial's primary achievement and contribution to the memory of the war includes recognizing servicewomen's participation in the war. Although the VWM legitimizes and mimetically represents recognition for women's participation and military service in the war in patriarchal terms, the memorial's aesthetic also transcends those terms. Like the VWM, it is possible to view *Heaven and Earth* as limited in a similar manner. As Pat Dowell in *Cineaste* noted, Stone also risked simplifying Hayslip's account, Eastern philosophy, and Buddhism —~~se~~[ing] to Americanize the story by taming its more uncertain ideological moments" (56). Le Ly Hayslip identifies two deficiencies in the film. The first relates to limited portrayal of Viet Nameese daily life (184). Her second disappointment concerns cut scenes depicting incidents of American brutality she witnessed that ~~so~~iled the American military's record in" Viet Nam (185). Nonetheless, Hayslip defends the film claiming, ~~b~~etter than any other feature film from Hollywood, Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* shows a Vietnamese perspective of the Vietnam War" (178).

While the film has its sometimes ~~A~~mericanized" limitations, just as the VWM and *I Married Vietnam* have patriarchal-centered shortcomings, each contributes to a collected cultural memory of the war that suggest community, circularity, and ongoing remembrance. Moreover, these three works—a memorial, a novel, and a narrative film—each originating from women's experiences and narratives participate in an ongoing collected cultural memory by figuring the memories of women and the Viet Nameese as vital to a more inclusive and transnational memory of the American War in Viet Nam.

Ly's return to Viet Nam at the end of *Heaven and Earth* indicates a return to Viet Nam in literature and film of the war at the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century. In search of private locations of memory in Viet Nam, American and Viet Nameese veterans find themselves confronted with a commingling of past and present.

Chapter Four

Place, Private Memorial Performance, and Reconciliation

There was a map of Vietnam on the wall of my apartment in Saigon That map was a marvel, especially now that it wasn't real anymore It had been left there years before by another tenant, probably a Frenchman Vietnam was divided into its older territories If dead ground could come back and haunt you the way dead people do, they'd have been able to mark my map CURRENT and burn the ones they'd been using since '64, but count on it, nothing like that was ever going to happen. It was late '67 now, even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind. We knew that the uses of information were flexible, different pieces of ground told different stories to different people. We also knew that for years now there had been no country here but the war. —Michael Herr, *Dispatches* 3

While America's national sites of memory, specifically the Vietnam Veterans Memorials, serve as mediated representations of the war that encourage collected cultural and prosthetic memories of the American War in Viet Nam, so too do specific locations in Viet Nam. Moreover, representations of Viet Nameese memories of the war are not limited to immigrant-refugee narratives. At the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century English translations of works

produced by veterans of North Viet Nam's Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN) North Viet Nameese Army (NVA), also explore direct and prosthetic memories of the war. In mediated representations of war memories, American and NVA veterans alike illustrate that memory and the possibility of communication with the dead surface at particularly specific sites of private memory in Viet Nam. Thus these veterans return to locations in Viet Nam, not officially designated as sites of memory, to enact memorial performances—tactile, bodily, or material engagement with the symbolic past.

American cultural constructs of the American War in Viet Nam delineate Michael Herr's "there had been no country here but the war" with the singular word "Vietnam." The word Vietnam has come to signify a war that affected America rather than identifying a country that has a long history of wars fought for and over the independence and unification of the country.⁶⁸ Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967), for example, understands the so-called "Vietnam experience" as a national consciousness of impending calamity.⁶⁹ While memory always negotiates a relationship with the past meaning diverse things to people in different times, places, and cultures, "Vietnam" consistently evokes the American War in Viet Nam from the American perspective. At the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century, narratives

⁶⁸ As early as 40 A.C.E the Trung Sisters led an insurrection against the Chinese. In 967 Viet Nam claimed independence from China that was formerly recognized by China in 1428. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw civil strife divide the country punctuated by further wars with China. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the French gained colonial control of Indo-China—Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos—again, punctuated by Vietminh revolt. During World War II, Japan occupied Viet Nam and transferred power to the Vietminh after the United States dropped Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Ho Chi Minh then declared independence and British forces in Viet Nam returned control of the country to the French. War between the Vietminh and France ensued leading to the Geneva Accords and division of the country in 1954 pending elections that never took place. The United States then began to aid the Saigon government. Thus, the American War in Viet Nam escalated, officially ending with the Paris Peace Treaty in 1973 and confirmed with the fall of Saigon in 1975. For a more detailed chronology see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983).

⁶⁹ Norman Mailer, *Why Are We in Vietnam* (New York, Putnam 1967).

that promote reconciliation, however, complicate America's collected cultural memory of the war. As reconciliationist cinematic and written narratives of the American War in Viet Nam begin to portray experiences of the Viet Nameese in the northern DRVN and southern Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), "Vietnam" transforms from a war into a country, Viet Nam, a place where the United States was once at war, a place that was and is home to Viet Nameese veterans, and a place that has since changed. Moreover, reconciliationist narratives by Viet Nameese authors perpetuate the perception that "everyone" suffers in war, even those who "won" the war, the North Viet Nameese Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN). Seeking recuperation via recognition and participating in an ongoing collected cultural memory, American and Viet Nameese reconciliationist narratives figure depictions and memories of Viet Nam and the Viet Nameese as vital to a collected cultural memory of the war.

Tim O'Brien's meta-fictional novel *The Things They Carried* (1998), Sidney Furie's narrative film *Going Back* (2001), Bao Ninh's meta-fictional memoir *The Sorrow of War* (1993), and Huong Thu Duong's fictional *Novel Without a Name* (1995) explore private memorial performances in Viet Nam enacted by American and NVA veterans of the war. Located beyond America's physical borders, private memorial sites and performances in these works transcend American national sites of remembrance. Narratives addressed here, by American and Vietnamese directors and authors, emphasize return—going back to specific places in Viet Nam. These sites of memory transform into private memorials through the return visits, the memorial performances veterans enact, and material memory—objects that come to signify individuals—with which visitors engage. Thus, it seems Michael Herr's "dead ground" can haunt the living. At private sites of memory, memories of

and communication with the dead provide invocations through which past and present merge. Although reliant on a specific site of private memory closely associated with the dead, private memorial performances encourage prosthetic memory—individually-felt cultural memories acquired by those with no direct memory of the war. Memorial performances also advance reconciliation between former enemies or reconciliation between those who directly participated in the fighting with civilians.⁷⁰ In American reconciliationist works, witnesses with no direct memory of the war accompany the veterans to locales of private memory and witness veterans' enactments of private memorial performances. Witnesses to the post-war memorial performances include American women and children, and Viet Nameese veterans and civilians. The American narratives thus explicitly explore the possibilities and limitations of prosthetic memory. While The Viet Nameese novels do not include witnesses to private memorial performances, they alternately explore direct memory that emphasizes reconciliation between the living and the dead as well as encourages reconciliation between former enemies, NVA soldiers and soldiers of South Viet Nam's Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) soldiers as well as between NVA soldiers and Americans.

Narratives from both the American and the NVA perspectives include both private memorial enactments and encounters between enemies and former enemies that promote reconciliation. For example, in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, a pair of Native American moccasins, returned to the soil where a soldier died, signify his body in a symbolic burial. The American veteran conducts his memorial performance while his daughter and Viet Nameese farmers observe. O'Brien thus engages with the possibilities of prosthetic

⁷⁰ See Chapter One for a developed discussion of prosthetic memory and reconciliation.

memory and reconciliation. In Sidney Furie's *Going Back* American soldiers return to the site of a friendly fire incident to reenact their memories; again, American and Viet Nameese civilian witnesses accompany them. In Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, the "Jungle of Screaming Souls" makes communication with the dead unavoidable while encounters with the enemy promote reconciliation. Duong Huong's *Novel Without a Name* also depicts place—specifically the "Gorge of Lost Souls" and the "Valley of Seven Innocents"—as a fluid boundary between the living and the dead. While Ninh implicitly encourages reconciliation between former enemies via his protagonist's empathy for the enemy, Duong is the most explicit advocate of reconciliation because her novel unequivocally critiques the reasons for fighting in the war on behalf of all parties, North Viet Nam's Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN), South Viet Nam's Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), and the United States.

Private memorial performances may appear, at first, to be highly individualized; however, these carefully situated moments encourage prosthetic memory via civilian witnesses. Audiences to the veterans' memorial enactments include those with no direct memories of the war. Their presence during private memorial performances allows witnesses to acquire new memories of the war. The narratives also either implicitly or explicitly petition for reconciliation among the living and the dead and among former wartime enemies. In these reconciliatory works communication with the dead generates a fusion of past and present, past presence and present absence. Private memorial performances that occur at private memorial sites in Viet Nam, as represented in American and Viet Nameese cinematic and written narratives, encourage reconciliation between the past and present, between American

servicemen and civilians, between Americans and the Viet Nameese, between the living and the dead, and between the Northern DRVN and Southern RVN. Moreover, private memorial performances augment master narratives of American and Viet Nameese national remembrance, thus creating not a collective, nor a cultural memory, but a collected cultural memory of the war.

(Re)visiting Viet Nam

Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990) resists generic categorization. The collected stories in *The Things They Carried* present the war experiences of Tim O'Brien, the author's fictional double referred to simply as "Tim," and his fellow soldiers. O'Brien emphasizes the importance of the text as a "work of fiction" in an informal subtitle. This fictional distinction is of great import for O'Brien as is evident in his widely anthologized "How to Tell a True War Story," from *The Things They Carried* wherein he writes, "In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen" (71).

Immediately, and continuously throughout the novel, O'Brien forefronts the relationship between truth, memory, and the limits of writing war. The various stories in *The Things They Carried* are linked but not necessarily interdependent; it is possible to read the stories in any order. An example of their interconnectivity, however, centers on narrations of deaths. Often a depiction of a character's death is rewritten in several different stories in the work. Sometimes the occurrence is retold from a different point of view or the story changes—

details may be added, or the narrator may revise the account, explaining that the event did not occur as previously narrated. Literary critic Catherine Calloway, argues for the importance of this —technique that actively engages the readers in the process of textual creation” (253). As in the circular chronology of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, O’Brien’s narrative structure does not reward passive observation, but encourages readers to participate actively in reconstructing memories of the war.⁷¹ As such, *The Things They Carried* is one of O’Brien’s most self-conscious explorations of writing war and rendering memory. Although his entire work meditates on the rendering of memory, private memorial performance insistent on place, out of which an encouragement of prosthetic memory arises, will provide the focus of what follows.

The most vital private site of memory in *The Things They Carried* is the location of the death of Kiowa—an American soldier in Viet Nam. O’Brien’s audience, according to chapter chronology, first learns of Kiowa’s death in —Speaking of Courage” via Vietnam veteran Norman Bowker’s internal recollection of the incident. Norman’s post-war longing to communicate his memory of Kiowa’s death motivates him to envision an intimate conversation with his father wherein Norman describes his own sense of failure for not saving Kiowa. The soldiers had set up camp on what appeared to be a muddy field, on the bank of the Song Tra Bong River. The mud was actually the village toilet—a sewage field. That night, as mortar shells pounded the field, the sludge shifted and swelled enveloping the men.

⁷¹ See Chapter Two.

The field was boiling all those years of waste [Norman] heard somebody screaming. It was Kiowa in the glow he saw Kiowa's wide-open eyes settling down into the scum He could not describe what happened next, not ever, but he would've tried anyway. He would've spoken carefully so as to make it real for anyone who would listen. There were bubbles where Kiowa's head should've been He pulled hard but Kiowa was gone, and then suddenly he felt himself going, too . . . the stink was everywhere—it was inside him, in his lungs—and he could no longer tolerate it He released Kiowa's boot and watched it slide away He was alone. (149)

In order to bear witness, to remember Kiowa's death, Norman imagines the challenges and obligation of communicating that which eludes articulation: —~~H~~ could not describe what happened next, not ever, but he would've tried anyway" (149). Norman's memory requires an audience, if imaginary. He reflects that, —~~H~~ would've spoken carefully so as to make it real for anyone who would listen" (149). Literary and trauma scholar Kalí Tal's seminal *Worlds of Hurt* (1996) examines the necessity of communicating traumatic memories in what she terms a ~~L~~iterature of Trauma" (21). According to Tal, this literature of trauma is "written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it real both to the victim and to the community" (21). The need to make memories —~~real~~" for an audience recurs in turn-to-the-twenty-first-century American memorial, cinematic and written narratives of the war. Concerned with truth and accuracy the war veteran characters also worry about forgetfulness. Hoping to make the memory ~~real~~" for the audience is not

simply a matter of making it believable; it is about creating a felt experience. Some Vietnam veteran characters, such as Norman, are consumed with creating a mediated memory that will encourage prosthetic memory.

Perhaps because of the difficulty of communicating the emotional and symbolic significance of Kiowa's death, O'Brien revisits the memory two chapters later in ~~"In the~~ "Field" where he recounts the search for Kiowa's body. While the men search for Kiowa, an unnamed soldier internally recalls witnessing Kiowa's death. Like Bowker, this anonymous soldier saw the arm, wristwatch, boot, and ~~the~~ bubbles where Kiowa's head should have been" (O'Brien 171). Just as Bowker, he ~~remembered~~ grabbing the boot . . . pulling hard . . . and how finally he had to whisper his friend's name and let go and watch the boot slide away" (171). Both men feel responsible for Kiowa's death. Both men remember pulling on Kiowa against the impossible suction of the sludge. Both see the bubbles of his last breath. They share the same mutable memory. This very same memory affects O'Brien's fictional double, Tim, as well. The site of Kiowa's death signifies the senselessness of the war. Kiowa dies by drowning in a field of human waste, not from engaging the enemy. As American soldiers during the war would term it, Kiowa is ~~wasted~~ "wasted." The lack of sacrifice creates a meaningless death except that it is precisely very meaningful for O'Brien's purpose, to reveal the futility, negligence, and absurdity of the war. The field becomes symbolic of the war and thus the site of Kiowa's death beckons Tim back to Viet Nam to conduct a private memorial performance.

Near the end of *The Things They Carried*, in the chapter entitled ~~"Field Trip,"~~ "Field Trip," Tim returns to Viet Nam with his ten-year old daughter Kathleen hoping to share with her ~~a~~ small piece

of her father's history" (182). They visit the requisite organized tourist sites of the war: The mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh—former President of North Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, from 1945 until his death in 1969. They also visit the underground tunnel complex at Củ Chi in Ho Chi Minh City—formerly Saigon, the capital of South Viet Nam's RVN—that represent the ingenuity, perseverance, and insurgency of the "Viet Cong," in South Viet Nam.⁷² Kathleen is the second-generation audience through which her Vietnam veteran father hopes to convey his memories. Kathleen's presence makes prosthetic memory possible, yet she also serves as a foil to Tim's remembrance of place because "the war was as remote to her as cavemen and dinosaurs" (183). Here, then, resides the same difficulty Norman imagines, making distressing memories of the war "real" for those with no direct memory of the war. After they visit public memorial sites and near the end of their trip, Tim takes his daughter to his private site of memory, the field where Kiowa died. He brings her there to "show her the Vietnam that kept [him] awake at night" (184).

However, the site with "no ghosts" fails to conjure spontaneous remembrance as it does in other narratives addressed in this chapter (181). The field is not how Tim remembers it. Surprised at the "too ordinary," non-threatening atmosphere of the field, Tim encounters a disturbing distinction between the Viet Nam of the past and the Viet Nam of the present. Tim encounters what literary scholar Julia Bleakney distinguishes as the disruption between "Nam," the physical place where the war occurred and the place of their memories, and Viet Nam, the country that exists before and after the American War (147-48). The disruption of

⁷² The Viet Cong, or VC for short, is a disparaging term used to identify Viet Nameese Communists in Southern Viet Nam.

place, time, and memory creates in Tim a self-conscious ~~awkwardness~~ "awkwardness of remembering" (O'Brien 184). He encounters the difficulty of conjuring emotion; ~~it~~ "it simply wasn't there" (184). The emotion is absent, as is the war. However, the war is a present absence and absent presence. It is impossible to escape ~~Nam~~ "Nam" because it is within Tim's memories and therefore ubiquitous. Thus true to O'Brien's contradictory form, the site, despite its initial failures, provides a place for private memorial performance. The field embodies memory; it serves as a kind of archeological site. Tim reflects, ~~Blow~~ "Blow the earth, the relics of our presence were no doubt still there, the canteens and bandoliers and mess kits" (184). The United States military relics buried in the land signify the hidden presence of material memories. These relics of the war not only serve as subterranean material memories but also signify the land's power to devour the both tangible and intangible ~~things~~ "things" the soldiers carried: pride, belief in self, courage, and dignity (184).

Tim conducts a reenactment of Kiowa's death in a private memorial performance at this private site of memory. Immersing himself in the marshland stream in a baptismal scene, Tim pushes Kiowa's moccasins into the sludge, ~~letting~~ "letting them slide away [as] tiny bubbles broke along the surface" (186). Tim's memorial performance reenacts Kiowa's death by duplicating the bubbles on the surface that formed when Kiowa himself drowned beneath the mud. The moccasins serve as material memory—objects that invoke the present absence of occurrences, places, and people of the past. In this instance the moccasins signify the body of Kiowa returned to the place of his death.

In this private memorial performance O'Brien invokes the limitations of memory and language. During the memorial performance, Tim ~~tried~~ "tried to think of something decent to say,

something meaningful and right, but nothing came” (186). Finally, he utters, —~~the~~ it is,” the same phrase Tim and his fellow soldiers repeatedly used to explain death during the war (186). Despite Tim’s inability to say anything more ~~—~~meaningful,” this simple phrase, in its repetition, is significant because it demonstrates the limits of language and rejects simplistic sentimentality. He ~~—~~wanted to tell Kiowa that he’d been a great friend . . . but all [he] could do was slap hands with the water” (187). Although O’Brien suggests the failure of memorialization, perhaps these limitations of memory and language serve as the impetus for Tim’s memorial performance.

The memorial performance joins the past, present, and future through Kathleen’s presence. The moccasins, as material memory, invoke the past. Tim’s memories and his memorial enactment signify simultaneously the past and present. As witness to her father’s private memorial performance, Kathleen acquires a prosthetic memory of the war. Thus she holds what Marianne Hirsch, when writing of the Holocaust, calls —~~past~~-memories,” which represents both the present and future remembrance of the war (3). Yet her newly acquired memory of the war makes her ~~—~~nervous”; she does not fully understand her father’s actions or memories (186). Kathleen, however, is not the only witness of the memorial performance.

The Viet Nameese farmers who witness Tim’s memorial enactment provide an opportunity for reconciliation between Americans and the Viet Nameese. As one farmer solemnly watches from a distance, Tim —~~felt~~ something go shut in [his] heart while something else swung open” (187). Tim feels a sense of kinship with the farmer, thinking that the farmer may wish to exchange war stories. They do not speak, but Tim feels that the farmer understands the memorial performance. The farmer stands watch with shovel raised ~~—~~grimly,

like a flag” in a moment of reverence, before continuing with his work (187). There is, however, a sense of closure. When Kathleen asks her father if the farmer is angry, Tim responds saying, “No . . . all that’s finished” (188). The memorial performance provides an end to an era for Tim. He reflects, “I’d gone under with Kiowa, and now after two decades I’d finally worked my way out . . . the war was over” (187). Yet, because of Kathleen’s presence and her prosthetic memory, the memorial performance does not simply relegate the war to the forgotten past.

Tim’s memorial performance is simultaneously temporal and permanent. The act itself is momentary and located in a place of flux—marshland water that transmutes into swelling sludge in the rainy season. The memorial performance is one of the many mutable memories of Kiowa’s death. However, the memorial site is also permanent in that it is the origin of Kiowa’s death. Moreover, the moccasins create a symbolic burial for Kiowa; they have been added to the archeological site of memory that contains both the tangible objects and intangible emotions of memory. As a private *lieux de mémoire*, or site of memory, the field does not provide a national site of remembrance but rather mingles with the memories of Tim, the Viet Nameese farmers and the second-generation, prosthetic memory of Kathleen.⁷³

In the American narratives of the war at the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century, mediating memory is nearly as important as the return to the site of memory. In both *The Things They Carried* and in Sidney Furie’s film *Going Back* (2001), veterans’ memorial performances require witnesses that previously had no direct access to that particular memory and also often those with no direct memory of the war. Yet these two narratives are distinct in that

⁷³ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7.

Tim's memorial performance in *The Things They Carried* fails to transport him to the past, whereas in *Going Back* returning to sites of memory and memorial performance often do blur distinctions between past and present.

Going Back presents, as the title suggests, American veterans of the war on a return visit to Viet Nam. The film was later renamed *Under Heavy Fire* for television and DVD distribution. The revised title was likely an attempt to increase audience appeal for the independent film from Canada. Despite directorial experience—Sidney Furie wrote and directed one of the earliest films about the American War in Vietnam, *The Boys in Company C* (1978)—*Going Back* was not distributed in the United States.⁷⁴ Likely because of its minimal distribution, and because it is riddled with acting and cinematic weaknesses, the film received little attention from film reviewers. The minor attention *Going Back* did garner was primarily negative. For example, Jeet Heer of the *National Post* understands the film as a “well-meaning but ultimately unengaging melodrama” (PM7) and *Toronto Star* reviewer Peter Howell’s straightforward critique saw the film “suffer[ing] from bad acting, slack directing and a melodramatic script, but . . . not a complete waste of time [because] Furie also attempts to show the Viet Cong’s side of the story, which is fascinating but too ambitious for this film” (E05). In the film, former Marines of Echo Company revisit Viet Nam at the invitation of a television network that covered Echo Company during the war. Their journey serves as a kind of fact-finding mission, to dissipate the fog of war and memory surrounding a particular battle. This battle ended in friendly fire because of incorrect bombing coordinates that the main character, Captain Ramsey, was falsely accused

⁷⁴ *The Boys in Company C*. dir. Sidney Furie, Columbia Pictures, 1978.

of calling in erroneously. The purpose of the return visit is to reconcile divergent memories of the day in question. Despite unenthusiastic reviews, the film participates in a collected cultural memory of the war in its exploration of memory and its entanglement with truth, place as imperative for reenacting accurate memory, and reconciliation between Americans and the Viet Nameese.

Going Back contains several aesthetic layers as a means of suggesting the elusive nature of accurate memory. It includes a fictional documentary film set in the present, fictional wartime footage, characters' interior memories of the war, a black and white nightmare scene, and a black and white opening sequence depicting the battle in question. Furie renders all other memories in color. Using these various cinematic formats to signify multiple modes of memory and representation, *Going Back* distinguishes the battle in question from other memories while also placing great emphasis on place, memory, and truth.

Going Back delineates genre, purpose, audience, and memory as an active process in an early moment in the film wherein viewers are introduced to the main female character, journalist Kathleen Martin, who explains the truth-seeking impetus of the American veterans' return visit. Walking beside a camera recording the returning veterans' arrival in Viet Nam, Kathleen's introductory monologue explains that, during the war, her television network conducted a series of nightly visits with Echo Company and that they are now bringing back the "remnants" of what was the "hardest hit" company of the war. She invites her viewers, and Furie's audience, to participate in the return visit explaining, "we will walk beside them and so will you" on their first visit to Viet Nam since the war. The fictional documentary is a self-conscious, mediated memory that aims to make memories of the war more accessible to

its audience. Thus, like *Going Back*, the documentary within the film invites audiences to re-experience Viet Nam with the veterans, thereby encouraging prosthetic memory.

Kathleen's character signifies civilian audience, facilitator, and mediator for the Vietnam veterans' memories. Like Sam in Sandie Frazier's *I Married Vietnam* and female nurses during the war, Kathleen and the documentary medium perform reconciliatory purposes by mediating positions between veterans and a civilian audience.⁷⁵ She encourages the veterans to explore their past and their present reasons for being in Viet Nam and she recommends they reenact the friendly fire incident as a means of discovering the truth behind the veterans' memories. In response, everyone except Captain Ramsey repeatedly and enthusiastically chant for ~~the~~ "truth." Due to the inconclusive court martial, differing accounts of the incident, and the fog of war that shrouds memories, the men determine to conduct their own ~~in~~ "investigation" via reenactment. Their memory journey through Viet Nam will culminate in their return to the location of the friendly fire incident.

Besides calling attention to mediated memory and the search for truth via reenactment, *Going Back* accentuates reconciliation between Americans and the Viet Nameese. Immediately following the veterans' arrival to Viet Nam, they attend a welcoming reception in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. During the welcoming speech, a Viet Nameese dignitary invites reconciliation between the United States and Viet Nam explaining that ~~for~~ "life, for peace, for the future, we must try to *forget the past* and greet each other with open arms" (emphasis added). Here, the key to peace and reconciliation is forgetfulness. The Viet Nameese dignitary's advancement of closure complements the Americans' search for truth.

⁷⁵ See the discussion of these female figures in Chapter Three.

Captain Ramsey responds, speaking of his desire for peace, saying, “war destroys everything.” His encompassing statement reflects the basis of reconciliation—“everyone” suffers in war.

In their search for closure, the American veterans revisit officially designated sites of remembrance that provide opportunities for reconciliation between American and Vietnamese veterans of the war. Their geo-memory tour of Viet Nam comprises what tourism expert and professor, John Lennon, terms “~~dark~~ tourism”—travel to sites of death and disaster.⁷⁶ The veterans revisit the Củ Chi tunnels, their former base, and the city of Huế, just South of the wartime border between the northern DRVN and southern RVN, where they fought during the 1968 TET Offensive, the Communist attack on the RVN during the lunar New Year cease-fire.⁷⁷ The narrative unrealistically, yet purposefully, locates their memories of the war at official sites of memory in Viet Nam in order to construct episodes of reconciliation. For example, at the Củ Chi tunnels the American veterans meet a Vietnamese woman who was one of only three survivors of her battalion. She recognizes two of the former Marines because, according to the subsequent memory scene, during the war the Americans provided her with medical treatment and spared her life, coincidentally, during a battle at these very tunnels. She expresses her gratitude and the men feel a sense of recognition in seeing the living embodiment of their wartime compassion. Their

⁷⁶ John Lennon, and Malcom Foley, *Dark Tourism: the Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000).

⁷⁷ During the 1968 TET Offensive, Communist soldiers coordinated pre-planned surprise attacks during the lunar New Year cease-fire agreement on over a hundred cities including Huế and Saigon, where they held the U.S. Embassy for several hours. At Huế, they stormed the Citadel, an ancient fortress. They controlled much of Huế for nearly a month meanwhile conducting home searches and killing nearly three thousand Vietnamese. The battle for Huế lasted twenty-six days and is considered one of the bloodiest battles of the war. For a detailed account of the TET Offensive and the Battle for Huế, see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983).

reconciliation with the Viet Nameese woman recognizes wartime affliction on behalf of both the Viet Nameese and American veterans and acknowledges one of the more compassionate moments and memories of the war.

Another such reconciliatory episode attempts to incorporate a Viet Nameese perspective into the film's rendering of memory. One of the former Marines returns a diary he found on an enemy corpse to the wife of that fallen Viet Nameese soldier. The wife voices the Viet Nameese perspective on the war, explaining that they fought for "love of country," whereas she believed that the Americans fought out of "hatred," presumably for her people. The return of the diary, however, seemingly reconciles these differences with the American veterans' gesture of compassion. However, the scene is more ambiguous and open to interpretation. The film gives voice to a negative Viet Nameese view of the United States military presence during the war. The film breaks with most American fictional representations of the Viet Nameese as cruelly inhuman.⁷⁸ While, the film primarily depicts the Viet Nameese in a positive, reconciliatory manner, this scene complicates the film's simplistic rendering of reconciliation.

Official sites of remembrance also conjure private memories, encourage catharsis, and provide wartime context for the friendly fire incident. Memory scenes evoked by visiting particular locations in Viet Nam demonstrate that, during the war, the men encountered a multitude of challenging wartime situations, including the deaths of their "brothers in arms" and the torture and killing of civilians committed by their allies, the Army of the Republic of

⁷⁸ See for example, Robin Moore, *The Green Berets* (New York: Avon, 1965), *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, dir. George P. Cosmatos, TriStar, 1985, *Missing in Action*, dir. Joseph Zito, Cannon, 1984. For historical accounts, see David Hunt, "Images of the Viet Cong," *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace* ed. Robert M. Slabey (Jefferson: McFarland, 1996) 51-63.

Viet Nam (ARVN) soldiers. To excavate the truth behind their memories, the characters stress the importance of chronologically revisiting sites and recalling events that led to the friendly fire incident. They self-consciously engage with memory as an active process of narration.

As the veterans approach their reenactment destination, anger and resentment builds, erupting in an argument about whether they should leave the village via the road or by crossing nearby rice paddies. The argument parallels their dispute on the day in question during the war. The film cuts between the present reenactment and color memory as some men refuse Captain Ramsey's order to leave the village by way of the road. They no longer trust his judgment and begin to cross the rice paddies.

In the present post-war setting, the men in the rice paddy conduct private memorials for their fallen fellow soldiers. Ray, who is now a preacher, creates a makeshift memorial that replicates a Battlefield Cross Memorial erected for wartime ceremonies honoring the dead. The Battlefield Cross Memorial consists of the fallen soldier's helmet hung from a standing firearm with boots placed at the base (see Fig. 7). In these wartime ceremonies material objects correspond to parts of the body. The boots at its base signify feet; the helmet denotes the head; and the firearm suggests an upright body. Ray reproduces a similar battlefield memorial when he places a branch into the ground from which to hang the dog tags of the fallen. Here, as in O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, material objects represent the lost. Ray then calls the names of his fallen comrades, apologizes for their deaths, and asks for their forgiveness. Ray's memorial enactment resembles the Vietnam Veterans Memorial,



Fig. 7. Battlefield Memorial Cross Tim Page, 1967

where the names, like material objects, come to signify individuals.⁷⁹ Ray's performative utterance commemorates the dead and allows Ray to bear witness to his survival guilt. Like Tim in O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, Ray's memorial performance takes place at the origin of death. The place of death is a site of memory that holds the possibility of communicating with the dead because it is implicitly where the soul or spirit resides. Ray's invocation of the dead creates a present absence, wherein past and present merge.

In the present reenactment, past and present merge psychologically and cinematically. Furie inter-cuts scenes of the here-and-now with wartime scenes. Place soon transports the men to the past. When the film cuts to the memory scene of the day in question, Captain Ramsey learns that an enemy ambush is waiting for his men on the other side of the rice paddy. As he tries to warn his men of the danger, Ramsey relays bombing coordinates to the radioman who, in the confusion of the battle, calls in the wrong coordinates. Before the men crossing the paddies in the present reenactment discover that the friendly fire incident was not Captain Ramsey's fault, things fall apart and emotions of guilt and anger transport the men into the past. Yet their reenactment occurs in a limbo between past and present. As with O'Brien's character, Tim, they experience what Julia Bleakney considers a disruption between "Nam," the place where the war occurred and the place of their memories, and Viet Nam, the country (147-48). One of the men anguishes over the reenactment not being "right" because there should be "a leg there . . . an arm here." The veterans' present distress overwhelms them as they lament the loss of their fellow soldiers by crying out the names of the dead and angrily scream accusations at Ramsey. Violence ensues as two of the men in

⁷⁹ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

the rice paddy begin to fire on Ramsey and the men who remained by his side on the road. Several men are wounded and the journalist, Kathleen, screams for a ~~h~~hopper.” Just as it was during the war, the helicopter is once again their savior.

The reenactment of memory creates a prosthetic memory for civilian witnesses as the past overwhelms the present. The new memory now includes Kathleen and the son of one of the fallen American soldiers, who signifies a second-generation audience yet receives very little attention in the film despite living in Viet Nam and accompanying the veterans throughout their return visit. Due to the lack of attention this second-generation character receives, it is no wonder that *National Review* film critic, Jeet Heer, found the film’s ~~t~~onal disharmony is increased by the introduction of unnecessary subplots about . . . a young man searching for information about his [dead] father” (PM7). Nonetheless, Kathleen and the son experience a mediated memory in the reenactment, and a direct memory of the present violence that erupts during the reenactment. In the next scene the veterans confess their remorse for blaming Ramsey for the deaths of their comrades and for their violent flashback. Kathleen cries with them. In post-catharsis moments, veterans and civilians suffer alike, creating a new understanding and reconciliation between them.

Now that Kathleen shares a direct memory with the men, they regard her as part of their experiential, authoritative, ~~y~~ou-had-to-be there” veterans’ circle. In the production of the memories of the war a pervasive problematic of privileging authenticity of personal experience that precludes prosthetic memory is thus reinforced when Kathleen, now having

her own personal experiences, is welcomed into the veterans' group.⁸⁰ She also participates in the erasure of truth. As she explains, the tape of the reenactment gone awry was ~~–~~“accidentally” placed on a magnet. Just as the initial incident in the rice paddies eluded the truth, so do the present day shootings. Since no one was killed and the occurrence reunites the veterans, there are no legal consequences and the memory remains accessible only for those who directly experienced the incident. Moreover, the present-day violence ironically reestablishes order for the veterans. Ramsey, now exonerated, regains among his fellow veterans, his rank, his authority, his men's trust and belief in him, and his position as a figurative father. The men are no longer upset that the bombing coordinates were incorrect, but rather that their once-respected leader was suspected of the error. As feminist critic and Vietnam War scholar Susan Jeffords suggests, images of the figurative father in ~~—~~“Vietnam-oriented” narratives portray ~~–~~“decisive and active father-figures who are able to protect and reunite and a frayed domestic scenario” (138). The exoneration of Ramsey and disregard for others' mistakes unifies the men and reestablishes their socio-domestic order. Thus Sidney Furie's *Going Back* exemplifies a limiting discourse of sentimental closure.

The closing montage of the film sentimentally attempts to encapsulate the American War in Viet Nam both as it was and as it is remembered. The overriding theme, past and present, is that of ~~–~~“brothers in arms.” The film's closing shots cut between images of the Viet

⁸⁰ While many scholars of the war address the exclusionary verisimilitude of experience phenomenon in the literary and cultural production of representing the American War in Viet Nam, a few include: Maria S. Bonn, ~~–~~“New Battles: Cultural Signification in Contemporary American Narrative,” *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace*, ed. Robert M. Slabey (Jefferson: McFarland, 1996), 208; Carol Lynn Mithers, ~~–~~“Missing in Action: Women Warriors in Vietnam,” *The Vietnam War and American Culture* eds. John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg (New York: Columbia UP) 82; and Donald Ringnalda, *Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War* (Jackson: Mississippi UP, 1994) x.

Nameese agrarian lifestyle and the former Marines drinking in bars, carousing with women, and playing basketball. Yet the montage also depicts memorial performances enacted during and after the war. Perhaps in order to clarify Ray's construction of the private memorial in the rice paddy, *Going Back* depicts a Battlefield Memorial Cross of a helmet resting on top of a rifle supported with combat boots. Further still, in the post-war present, Captain Ramsey, accompanied by Kathleen, visits a temple and reads the names of the American dead from Echo Company. Ramsey's performative memorial utterance in Viet Nam shares similarities with the reading of the names of the dead on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. His private memorial reflects the fusion between Eastern and Western modes of memorialization that occurs at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.⁸¹ Finally, his memorial performance reinforces the film's emphasis on memory sites and the location of death as a place where souls reside.

Viet Nameese Memorial Performances and Reconciliation

Like O'Brien's collection and Furie's film, two Viet Nameese novels—Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* (1991 English translation 1993) and Thu Huong Duong's *Novel Without a Name* (1990 English translation 1995)—figure the locality of death as both a site of memory and as a location where souls reside and will remain despite survivors' efforts to complete funerary rites. Ninh and Duong share similar backgrounds: both are North Viet Nameese, and each participated in the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) war efforts during the American War in Viet Nam. Ninh served with the “Glorious 27th Youth Brigade” that later came to be

⁸¹ See Chapter Two for more about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

known as the “Lost Battalion” of whose original five hundred members, only ten survived. Duong’s service in the Communist Youth Brigade, entertaining front-line soldiers as a theatrical performer, exposed her to life among the NVA troops and to U.S. bombing raids. Like Ninh, Duong survived the war while her unit endured many casualties; she is one of three survivors of her original unit of forty members (Searle 227). Often paired and written at nearly the same time, *The Sorrow of War* and *Novel Without a Name*, both express the point of view of their protagonist NVA soldiers, both novels include memory sites and address reconciliation, and both novels appeared during the *Doi Moi*, or “Renovation,” period in Viet Nam, a time of economic liberalization and internationalization as well as relaxation in cultural policy. In Duong’s earlier *Paradise of the Blind* (1988), a satire of the Communist Party in Viet Nam and the first Viet Nameese novel translated into English and published in the United States, a “Note about the Author” explains,

In 1987 the Vietnamese Communist Party called on writers and journalists to shake off the stiff, official Marxist style that had been imposed on them and encouraged them to reassert their traditional roles as social critics. (*Paradise* 268)⁸²

Writers, intellectuals and artists, including Duong and Ninh responded; however, the work that surfaced, because it critiqued Viet Nameese government and society, proved more than the Communist Party anticipated.

⁸² *Những thiên đường mù* (*Paradise of The Blind*) (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Phụ nữ, 1988); translated by Phan Huy Đường as *Les Paradis Aveugles* (Paris, Editions des Femmes, 1992); translated by Nina McPherson into English as *Paradise of the Blind* (New York: William Morrow, 1993).

Although Ninh's and Duong's wartime service secured their post-war lives in Communist-ruled Viet Nam, they chose to question their government's policies through war literature. Duong's writing bitterly depicting Viet Nameese society in addition to her human rights activism in the 1980s led to her expulsion from the Communist Party (270). In 1991 she spent over six months in prison for smuggling "secret documents"—likely her manuscripts—out of the country (270). Despite her release from prison, her novels are no longer published nor circulated in Viet Nam (Searle 226). Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* was, at first, widely circulated in Viet Nam and is now "under a de-facto interdict—not officially proscribed, not reprintable" (Horner 51).

Rather than portraying reconciliation between former enemies or veterans and civilians, *The Sorrow of War* suggests that site-specific private memorial performances provide opportunity for reconciliation between the living and the dead. Ninh thus posits the possibilities of communication with "wandering souls." As Kien, the main character, attempts to "put the dead to rest," he likewise hopes to bring closure to his survivor guilt. Similarly, *Novel Without a Name*, although less reliant on place, depicts communion with the dead in an effort to encourage reconciliation between the living and the dead. Furthermore, Duong explicitly advances reconciliation between those who lived in the northern DRVN and the southern RVN, and between the Viet Nameese and Americans. In addition to engaging with relations between the living and the dead and promoting reconciliation, *The Sorrow of War* and *Novel Without a Name* serve as narrative memories of the war, and thus provide the possibility for those with no direct experience in or connection to the war to form prosthetic memories of the war. Moreover, examining the work of those who fought against the United

States and the RVN adds an interesting new perspective to a collected cultural memory of the war. Because the novels present the memories and perspectives of “~~e~~nemy” NVA soldiers, the potential for prosthetic memory not only reaches those with “no direct access” to the war but also includes American veterans of the war (Landsberg 2).

Ninh’s *The Sorrow of War* follows Kien, an NVA infantry veteran who served from 1965 to 1975. Like Ninh, the novel’s metafictional protagonist Kien fought with the “Lost Battalion” and lives as one of ten survivors of five hundred. The novel’s non-linear narrative comprises Kien’s memories of his most recent ten years, remembrances of his pre-war past and the war itself, his encounters with “wandering souls,” and his disillusionment with the future for which he thought he was fighting.

Place is vital to memory in *The Sorrow of War*, because it prompts spontaneous memories associated with the site and provides the locations of the living dead, souls that simultaneously occupy the past and present. The novel begins in 1975 with Kien working with a group seeking the remains of soldiers missing in action in the “Jungle of Screaming Souls,” a site of memory, “where his battalion met its tragic end” in 1969 (86). Since the battle, the jungle remained unchanged despite the typical vigor with which jungle foliage conceals scars on the land: “No jungle grew again in this clearing” (5). This site clearly displays topographical memory and is the dwelling for “numerous souls of ghosts and devils were born in that deadly defeat. They were still loose, wandering . . . drifting . . . refusing to depart for the Other World” (6). Ninh describes and Kien holds, a generally indigenous, Animistic belief that multitudes of spirits inhabit the natural world (McLeod and Thi Dieu 43-44). Viet Nameese Animism, also known as a “cult of spirits” and closely

associated with ancestor worship is a pre-colonial belief that in its flexibility often blends with, and at a minimum coexists with, other major religions in Viet Nam including Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Catholicism (43). In a mid-1990s ethnographic study, sociologist Mai Lan Gustafsson ascertains that “many Vietnamese had not been *permitted* to forget the war because of an unforgiving presence in their lives: ghosts” (57). Viet Nameese who die near home receive proper burial rites that thus transform the dead into *linh hon*, ancestral spirits regarded as part of the family for generations (62). If, however, someone dies a “bad” death they become *con ma*, an angry ghost (63). “*Con ma* inhabit the Vietnamese version of hell,” Gustafsson writes. It’s “not a place, but a condition of homelessness and eternal hunger” (63). Due to their battlefield deaths, the spirits of Kien’s fellow soldiers wander eternally through the jungle as *con ma*.

Kien’s encounters with the *con ma* transport him to the past. When he returns to the “Jungle of Screaming Souls” on a missing in action (MIA) Remains Gathering mission he hears an “echo from another world. The eerie sounds [that] come from somewhere in a remote past” (4). This is not his first return to this site. When Kien’s regiment returned in 1974, he and others erected an altar “honoring and recalling the wandering souls” (7). Kien conducts two memorial performances at this site, establishing an altar during the war, and returning with the MIA team finding and burying remains.

Although the Viet Nameese government may intend to promote a national sense of closure through the burial of remains, for Kien, his obligation to appease the dead exposes him to the dangers of encountering the disembodied souls of the *con ma*. At the moment of burial “the final breath of [the] souls were released . . . penetrat[ing] Kien’s mind . . . becoming a dark

shadow overhanging his own soul” (25). Kien’s second burial encounter with and imposed observances for the dead correlates with Durkheimian anthropologist Robert Hertz’s demarcation of the two phases of death which proffers an understanding of death, not as a singular act or moment, but as a lasting two-phase process that affects body, soul, and survivors (29). The first, intermediary phase of death is wet, biological, and the second phase of death is dry, spiritual (77). Hertz compares the wet temporary burial phase to mummification, embalming, and cremation and the dry phase to ceremony and final burial. Hertz’s understanding of these two phases of death parallels Kien’s burial of the MIA remains. For example, the final breaths that Kien witnesses releasing the souls of the dead at the moment of burial completes the first temporal disintegration of the material body, or corporeal soul, allowing for the release of another type of soul that Hertz identifies as the “essential element of the personality” (34). Ideally, in the Indonesian culture Hertz studied and in Viet Nameese belief, the two souls converge again in the second burial and peacefully enter the land of the dead alongside ancestors (54).

However, for some souls —the death has no end” (85). Such is the case with the many “wandering souls” Kien encounters. According to the Viet Nameese belief that Gustafsson outlines, alluded to above, the wandering souls of the *con ma* cannot transform into ancestral spirits because they are not buried at home alongside their ancestors. The “wandering souls” thus continue to trouble Kien just as the *con ma* haunt the “hundreds of people” Gustafsson encountered in Viet Nam, those who despite erecting altars in or near the home or at the place of death, “suffered from a variety of ailments and attributed them to spirits on the basis of dreams, visions, episodes of dissociative speaking or writing, and auditory hallucinations”

(61). Again, this psycho-social phenomenon is not singularly Viet Nameese. Hertz, too, found that the ~~g~~reatest calamity that can befall an individual is to die far away and thus be separated from his kin forever” (70). Moreover, like Gustafson’s study, Hertz determined that those who die violently become ~~un~~quiet and spiteful souls roam[ing] the earth forever” (85).

In addition to the presence of ~~w~~andering souls,” the ~~J~~ungle of Screaming Souls” itself serves as a site of memory that holds the possibility for communication between the living and the dead. For example, the truck driver who accompanies Kien on the MIA gathering mission’s describes his uneasiness with ~~the~~ passengers who come out of their graves to talk to [him] You can look at each other, understand each other, but you can’t do anything for each other” (41). Despite communion with the dead, there is no closure of the past. The spirits ~~w~~ill remain with Kien beyond all political consequences of the war” (63). And they do remain with him beyond the locale of their death, continuing to visit Kien during his post-war years in Viet Nam’s capital, Hanoi. When they ~~r~~eappeared before him in the room the air vibrating with images of the past,” his room becomes a liminal space between past and present (86). As with the American narratives addressed in the previous section, place in *The Sorrow of War* holds the possibility of transporting visitors to the past. Like Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, Ninh’s *The Sorrow of War* rejects a limiting discourse of sentimental closure exemplified in Sidney Furie’s *Going Back*. Rather, Ninh explores ongoing remembrance.

While *The Sorrow of War* shares similarities with American representations of memory, national reconciliation in the novel is not the generational or veteran soldiers with civilians

reconciliation of *The Things They Carried* and *Going Back*. For example, there are no civilian witnesses to Kien's private memorial performances. Thus Ninh does not directly stage the possibility for prosthetic memory, or experiential reconciliation between soldiers and civilians at sites of memory or in private memorial enactments. However, Ninh's critique of communism as "m̄ politics" and indoctrination implicitly encourages a unifying reconciliation between the northern DRVN and southern RVN (8). For example, during a train ride home at the end of the war Kien and his fellow soldiers, confronted with "loudspeakers blar[ing] . . . ironic teachings" against reconciliation between former enemies urging the NVA veterans to "guard against the idea of the South having fought valiantly or been meritorious in any way," the soldiers "made fun of the loudspeaker's admonishments, turning their speeches into jokes, ridiculing them" (80). Moreover, Ninh does depict the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) as courageous, worthy opponents. Kien's friend Phan recounts a story revealing the courage and strength of an ARVN Commando whom Phan encounters on the battlefield. Phan explains that the ARVN soldier was gravely wounded, believing that "if it had been anyone else, not someone so strong and healthy, he would have died right then" (92). But the "Saigonese" did not die and Phan went to find some bandages, not realizing until his return the impossibility of finding the wounded enemy in the dark, rainy night. The memory of his encounter with the ARVN soldier haunts Phan years later. Typically in war literature and film, this type of regret and survivors guilt centers on the inability to save a comrade, not an enemy. He explains his sympathy for the ARVN soldier saying, "no human being deserved the torture I left him to suffer" (94).

A more poignant example of the novel encouraging a unifying reconciliation between northern DRVN and southern RVN combatants occurs when Kien decides not to kill the enemy. Kien and his men discover that ARVN soldiers have raped and executed three farm girls who had romantic relationships with several of Kien's men. Despite the brutality of the enemy's attack on civilians and Kien's intense anger, he permits them to live after forcing them to dig their own graves. The memory of Phuong, Kien's boyhood love, serves as a moralizing influence in this moment. Kien's decision —~~as~~ not because of their pleading, nor because of prompting from his colleagues. No, it was because Phuong's words had come to him like an inner voice: "So you will kill lots of men? That'll make you a hero, I suppose?" (140). Kien's compassion toward the enemy centers on his connection, through the memory of Phuong and thus love, to the civilian world. Phuong, as Kien's inner-voice, functions as mediator between the civilian world and the realm of war. She fulfills a mediating, moralizing role similar to that of other women discussed in this and preceding chapters.⁸³ Kien's decision not to kill the "commandos" reflects the possibility of rejecting vengeance in favor of reconciliation between the DRVN and the RVN and between the realms of war and civilian life. Moreover, audiences in the United States, especially Vietnam veterans, will glimpse the humanity of a former enemy in Kien, an NVA officer. *The Sorrow of War* thus implicitly encourages a unifying reconciliation between former enemies, especially the DRVN and the RVN.

Huong Thu Duong's *Novel Without a Name* is more explicit than *The Sorrow of War* in its political, national, and transnational reconciliatory aims. Duong's novel, written more

⁸³ See also women in Chapter Three.

clearly for a broader audience that includes Americans, encourages reconciliation not only between the DRVN and the RVN, but also between the Viet Nameese and Americans. However, *Novel Without a Name*, unlike *The Sorrow of War*, does not rely on or explore memory sites as the impetus for communion with the dead. Still, Duong does examine communication with the dead, specifically the spirit of an ancestor, interestingly as an influence of reconciliation.

Quan, the main character and narrator of *Novel Without a Name*, like Kien in *The Sorrow of War*, serves in the NVA from 1965 to 1975. The central narrative follows Quan's journey home while on leave, his subsequent return to the front, and his experiences in the war through the fall of the southern RVN's capital, Saigon, at the end of the war. Through Quan's pre-war memories, dream sequences, and communication with the dead, the audience learns of important events in Quan's life: his pre-war past, his undying love for his mother who died when he was a boy, his boyhood love Hoa, his initial enthusiasm for the Revolution, the death of his brother in the war, and his strained relationship with his father, a veteran of the Viet Minh revolt against French colonial rule, who encouraged Quan's brother to join the NVA. Again, like *The Sorrow of War* and many American narratives of the war, *Novel Without a Name* recounts a soldier's transformation from innocence to experience, from enthusiasm to disillusionment. Once an idealistic volunteer, Quan has come to distrust the "*Noble Mission*," realizing that "*lies are common currency*" (85, 83).

Novel Without a Name draws on interconnected traditional Viet Nameese conventions of storytelling that often include a close relationship between life and the other world seen in nature (Horner 51) and Animistic belief that spirits inhabit the natural world, also evident

Bao Ninh's "Jungle of Screaming Souls." In *Novel Without a Name*, Duong constructs an Animistic landscape that joins the animate and inanimate through her portrayal of both nature and man-made objects as having something akin to souls. Moreover, like Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, Duong's *Novel Without a Name* depicts distinctions between life and death as indefinite. For example, the dedication in *Novel Without a Name* indicates that the dead reside in the memories of the living. The dedication reads, "For my friends who died, who live on in me." Corporeal memory is a recurrent theme throughout the novel, as is communication with the dead.

Strikingly similar to the opening of Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, Duong's *Novel Without a Name* commences in the "Gorge of Lost Souls." However, during war, not in the post-war years, Quan hears "endless moans punctuated by sobs . . . sweeping through the countryside in a macabre symphony of sound" (1). Quan often refers to spirits as "wandering souls," a direct translation from the Viet Nameese *vong hon*, spirits of those who die far from home. Similar to the *con ma*—angry spirits of those who died and were buried apart from their ancestors—the *vong hon* may cause illness or accidents; therefore, the annual Viet Nameese "Feast of Wandering Souls" includes offerings to appease the spirits (McLeod and Thi Dieu 45). Quan understands that the sounds of distress in the "Gorge of Lost Souls" originate from the souls of six girls who had been raped, mutilated, and killed whose bodies he and his men had recently found and buried. In response to the presence of the wandering souls, Quan prays "Dear sisters, you who have lived and died here . . . Do not haunt us any longer. Protect us . . . When victory comes, when peace comes to our country; we will

carry you back to the land of your ancestors” (1-2). In an attempt to appease the spirits of the dead Quan promises to return one day and complete funerary rites.

Quan not only encounters wandering souls but also is compelled to serve their needs. While on his journey home during a leave, Quan becomes lost, disoriented, and is near starvation in the *“Valley of Seven Innocents”*—a valley so named when a group of soldiers discovered a lost soldier lying before a cave with seven skeletons. While also wandering lost in the valley, Quan determines the valley’s *“hunted labyrinth”* is *“spirit-haunted,”* because there is an energy that will not permit him to leave (50). Quan then discovers a skeleton of an NVA soldier suspended in a hammock. The soldier had created a temporary tomb for himself, replete with a tombstone. Quan presumes the man *“must have made one final effort to preserve his body from the animals, to leave it intact, if only in the shape of some distant memory”* (52). Similar to Robert Hertz’s demarcation of two souls, the material and the spiritual, Animism delineates two types of souls, the *hon*, or spiritual, and the *via*, the material (McLeod and Thi Dieu 44). Thus, at death, the material *via* remains in the corpses’ vicinity and the spirit *hon* departs (45). Because *“people’s spirits survived the host body’s death, they . . . were capable of acting in the world of the living . . . they were asked for advice, protection, and material benefits”* (45). The wandering soul of the dead soldier accordingly compels Quan to discover his entombed body. Quan reflects, *“So it was you, companion, who held me back here”* (51). Quan offers a prayer, but he still cannot leave, believing *“there is still something more, some unfulfilled wish . . . surely [he] left behind a few relics”* (54). Under the tombstone Quan discovers the dead man’s belongings: clothing, a flute, a diary, a photograph of a girl, a photograph of a young man in an NVA uniform, and

a note written by the young man requesting whoever finds the belongings to return them to his mother. These material memories—objects that come to signify individuals—may bring comfort to his family and will certainly appease the wandering soul. Quan vows to fulfill the soldier's dying wish promising *"I'll bring your belongings to your mother. If by some misfortune she has left us, I'll visit her tomb, light incense, and read your diary to her from beginning to end At least her soul will taste this sweetness, this solace"* (58). Although he had no personal relationship with the man, Quan's actions and pledge reflect the importance of honoring the dead and the hope of healing and closure. He later fulfills his pledge and, in a scene reminiscent of those in the American films *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989) and *We Were Soldiers* (Randall Wallace, 2004), returns the relics to the dead man's mother.

While Quan encounters wandering souls and thereby communicates with the dead, his contact with his ancestor spirit, a ~~wraith~~, connects Duong's two primary goals in the novel—exploration of memory and reconciliation. The wraith visits Quan, whose ~~hatred~~ *has raised [the wraith] from the tomb,* "so that he can communicate a ~~truth~~" to Quan (254-55). He warns Quan not to curse his ancestors, advising, *"No one can choose his own history"* (257). But Quan is angry and believes that the ~~triumphal~~ arches" his ancestors left are worthless. He reflects, *"My poor ancestors. Wretched architects of glory"* (258). Yet when the wraith again visits Quan, the wraith is filled with sorrow because his generation ~~fought~~ *to defend the altar of the ancestors, the future of the country never fought for the cheers and applause of others"* (265). Quan thus comes to believe that the purpose of his

war is corrupt, that soldiers fight for the applause of others under the name of a fabricated ideal.

Quan's realization that he is fighting for a false political ideal imparts the foundation for reconciliation between both the DRVN and RVN and between the Viet Nameese and Americans in the novel. Quan continually questions the purpose of the war, examining the distinction between those who sacrifice and those who benefit from the war. One memorable scene critiquing the Viet Nameese Communist Party in order to expose fabrication of political ideals depicts two Party dignitaries aboard the same train Quan is traveling. He observes their demeanor, "like masters in the middle of the crowd," they came to "see with [their] own eyes" the common people (158). The dignitaries debate the progress of the Revolution, the manipulation of power, and how best to satiate and persuade the "nation of imbeciles" while simultaneously mocking the political system they promote (167). For example, one of the dignitaries relishes the simplistic, purposeful manipulation of the people: "an ideal . . . the kids need it. And it's all we need to turn them into monks, soldiers, or cops. And it worked, whether it was the revolutionary uniform or the Nationalist police cap" (160). This attitude toward government posturing is not uncommon among American literary, cinematic, and popular culture representations of the war. For example, the rock band Credence Clearwater Revival's song "Fortunate Son" (1970) poses an argument akin to Duong's in its lyrics that argue, "Some folks inherit star spangled eyes / Ooh, they send you down to war." They attack the American patriotic ideal just as Duong ultimately argues that the DRVN Communist Party is corrupt, incompetent, and avaricious.

In addition to critiquing the Communist Party as a means of promoting reconciliation between former enemies—the NVA and ARVN and the NVA and Americans—Duong is especially explicit in her endeavor to advance reconciliation between DRVN and RVN soldiers. While holding prisoner ARVN soldiers, Quan asks one detainee about his reasons for fighting. Quan inquires, —Why did you enlist?’ [the captive responds] ‘duty’ ‘the nationalist ideal’” (242). Quan then remembers the Party dignitaries on the train and begins to provide answers to his questions. He lists, as questions, both his and his enemy’s reasons for fighting. —To defend the motherland?’ ‘To fulfill the patriot’s duties ?’ ‘To serve the country, swearing to spill the last drop of your blood?’” (243). The prisoner answers yes to each question. Each man fights for the same reasons. Duong reflects:

On both sides you screamed, you killed in mad, frenzied bursts, shrieking for joy when the blood gushed, the brains shattered; you went at one another like savages Then the survivors limped off the battlefields to swell the reserves, to join the ranks of future combatants On both sides you died believing that you had attained your ideal. (247)

Duong unequivocally critiques the bloodlust, sentiments of sacrifice, and myth of righteousness in the war.

While clearly promoting reconciliation between NVA and ARVN soldiers and veterans, Duong also encourages reconciliation between the Viet Nameese and Americans. Near the

close of the novel, after the fall of Saigon, Quan's men bring him an American prisoner. Based on the man's appearance and gestures, Quan determines he is not a soldier, but a photographer. The American's "foreign features," however, "designated him as the target of . . . ancestral hatred [of] the foreign invader" (284). Surprising even to himself, Quan's hatred wanes and he begins to imagine the man's life before the war sharing similarities with Quan's own pre-war, pastoral ideal. He "imagined a green hill, this young man embracing his lover . . . Perhaps he too had stretched out beside a friend . . . and dreamed of the gods" as Quan and his boyhood friends had before the war (285). While his comrades encourage killing the prisoner, Quan reflects that the American may have "left it all behind to put on a soldier's uniform, to defend freedom . . . He too must have been drunk on a vision of himself marching till dawn with his medals across his chest against a horizon of fire and flames" (285). Just as Quan, his comrades, and the ARVN soldiers fought for an "ideal," so too had the Americans. Here, as with the ARVN prisoners, Duong argues that both sides fought for an ideal, an ideal that disenchanting Quan.

Through Quan's evenhanded treatment of the American prisoner of war (POW), Duong responds to American cultural memory of the POW/MIA controversy that began with the signing of Paris Peace agreements in 1973 and later reinforced by popular rescue-return films of the 1980s such as *Rambo II* (George Cosmatos, 1985), *Missing in Action* (Joseph Zito, 1984), and *Uncommon Valor* (Ted Kotcheff, 1983).⁸⁴ The POW/MIA mythology and disagreement continued to be a source of contention among veterans concerning normalizing

⁸⁴ For a detailed examination of the POW/MIA mythology see Bruce H. Franklin, *MIA: Mythmaking in America* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1992).

relations with Viet Nam in the 1990s. As recently as 2007 the United States Pentagon continued to send search teams to Southeast Asia (Weiner). Quan refuses to allow the execution of the prisoner, explaining “we’re not in the jungle anymore. Anybody, including me, who doesn’t respect the policy toward prisoners goes before court-martial” (286). Moreover, the men lead the American POW “off in silence, *gently*, trying not to jostle him” (emphasis added 286). With Quan’s words, the NVA soldiers’ adherence to POW policy, and the gentle treatment of the American POW, Duong tries to dispel popular American belief in the mistreatment of American POWs in Viet Nam after the war’s end. Thus Duong further encourages reconciliation between the Viet Nameese and Americans.

Novel Without a Name is a reconciliationist novel of the highest order. Duong not only explores communication with the dead as a means of promoting reconciliation but also attempts to destabilize the many cultural mythological remembrances of the war on behalf of former NVA, ARVN, and American soldiers, as well as civilians in both countries. Her intrepid depiction of a failed “ideal,” her critique the Communist Party, and her non-celebratory depiction of the fall of Saigon petition for reconciliation. Together Duong’s position as past member of the Viet Nameese Communist Party and former participant in the NVA who now criticizes the war, form an appeal for former enemy audiences—members of the southern ARVN and the United States military. Yet Duong does not only criticize the ideal of the Communist Revolution as misguided. She depicts the ideals of all who participated in the war—the DRVN, the RVN, and the United States—as flawed. The novel thus participates in a collected cultural memory—a culturally mediated collection of multifaceted memories—of the American War in Viet Nam.

The Viet Nameese novels, especially *The Sorrow of War*, share similarities not only with the American narratives discussed above, but also with earlier traditional American narratives of the war of the 1970s and 1980s. For example, the novel's main character, Kien, moves from innocence to experience and from enthusiasm to disillusionment. According to literary scholar of the war William Searle, the novel parallels American narratives of the war in its "familiar litany of the horrors of war—disillusionment, drug use, racism, desertion, loss of moral compass, bloodlust, conflicts within ranks, soldiers cracking under stress, sexual assault, and a breakdown of discipline" (237). However, Searle posits a distinction between Viet Nameese novels and their American counterparts concerning transnational reconciliation. He recognizes a promotion of reconciliation in the Viet Nameese novels that he believes is absent in American novels. While his turn-to-the-twenty-first-century American narratives of the war examined earlier in this chapter not only encourage reconciliation among Americans but also begin to seek reconciliation with the Viet Nameese in their depictions of the psychological suffering of the Viet Nameese, usually women.⁸⁵ Still, as Searle suggests, Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* and Thu Huong Duong's *Novel Without a Name* certainly depict the suffering of Viet Nameese women, and hopes for reconciliation between the northern DRVN and the southern RVN, and the Viet Nameese and Americans (237).

The four reconciliatory narratives discussed in this chapter, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, Sidney Furie's *Going Back*, Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, and Thu Huong Duong's *Novel Without a Name*, demarcate the possibilities individual sites of memory and

⁸⁵ American works of reconciliation include, but are not limited to, those discussed elsewhere in preceding chapters: selections from the cycle of poetry about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Chapter Two and Sandie Frazier, *I Married Vietnam* (New York: George Braziller, 1992) and *Heaven and Earth* dir. Oliver Stone, Warner Bros., 1993 discussed in Chapter Three.

private memorial performances encompass for communication with the dead and reconciliation between opposing sides of the war. While the possibilities and limitations of memory, communication with the dead, and prosthetic memory vary, each narrative's characters encounter sites of memory where the dead reside. Tim in *The Things They Carried* returns to what appears to be an ordinary locale, but what possesses the memory of Kiowa's death. Moreover, this site of memory holds the possibility for prosthetic memories—those acquired by individuals with no direct experience in the war. American veterans return to Viet Nam in *Going Back* seeking the truth beyond their mutable memories. While they visit several officially designated memorial sites, their search for truth, their private memorials, and their reenactment of the past takes place in what is now a common field, but for them a private site of memory and now a site of private memorial reenactment performance. In the Viet Nameese novels, wandering souls haunt specific locales and by their absent presence obligate Kien's memorial performances in *The Sorrow of War*. Quan's communication with the dead in *Novel Without a Name* provides opportunities for him to encounter sites of memory that are not always part of his direct memory. However, Quan's communication with his ancestor wraith provides the novel's impetus for reconciliation.

Furthermore, these narratives depict sites of memory as potential locations of reconciliation. In the American narratives, *The Things They Carried* and *Going Back*, observers with no direct access to memories of the war observe mediated representations of the war through the memorial performances war veterans enact. Civilian witnesses thus acquire prosthetic memories of the war, and their newly obtained memories refuse to relegate the war to the forgotten past. The Viet Nameese narratives, *The Sorrow of War* and *Novel*

Without a Name, are often more explicit and politically minded in encouraging reconciliation between the DRVN and RVN and between the Viet Nameese and Americans. Because these two novels critique, whether implicitly or explicitly, the Viet Nameese Communist Party, they refuse to portray post-war Viet Nam as a country that has recovered from the war, despite the official posturing in Viet Nam today that the war is over and belongs to the past. Regardless of effort, official government policy, in both countries, cannot erase memories of the war or traditional religious understandings of life and death. While each narrative discussed in this chapter explores the possibilities of reconciliation between former foes, each also confronts the limits of sentimental, forgetful reconciliation. Neither memorial performance nor reconciliation creates assured closure; certainly, prosthetic memory denies closure in its unavoidable ongoing remembrance. Moreover, the narratives engage with American and Viet Nameese cultural memory of the war, thus contributing to a multifaceted collected cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam.

Chapter Five
Forgetting the American War in Viet Nam:
We Were Soldiers

American soldiers in battle don't fight for what some president says on T.V.;
 they don't fight for mom, apple pie, the American flag; they fight for one another.

—Moore, —Getting it Right‘ Behind the Scenes” *We Were Soldiers*

A collected cultural memory—a mediated gathering of multifaceted memories—of the American War in Viet Nam will inevitably include innumerable attempts to reframe the war.⁸⁶ Although those who remember the war through direct experience created many of the cinematic and textual narrative representations of the war produced during the 1990's, they began to explore more broadly remembrances of the war by representing prosthetic memories held by those with no direct connection to the war. However, what might be called the seminal twenty-first century depiction of the war, Randall Wallace's film *We Were Soldiers* (2002), explores only the memories of those with a direct connection to the war, soldiers and their families.⁸⁷ In addition, instead of focusing on the cultural and political causes and consequences of the war, the film concentrates on representing the war as a fight for survival among —brothers in arms.”

⁸⁶ See Chapter One for more about collected cultural memory.

⁸⁷ See Chapter One for a developed definition of prosthetic memory.

Moreover, Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* veils its revision and forgetfulness by attesting to its historical accuracy and the authenticity of experience. The film ultimately recasts America's longest war as a sole three-day battle and thus delineates the war in terms of a micro-historical location of time and place. While the film does not aim to address the political causes and consequences of the American War in Viet Nam, *We Were Soldiers* ultimately recasts memory of the war within a framework of heroism and sacrifice. Thus *We Were Soldiers* remembers the war by forgetting it. However, Moore and Galloway's subsequent memoir *We Are Soldiers Still: A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam* (2008) serves as a significant addendum to Wallace's film. As a corrective to the film, *We Are Soldiers Still* rejects forgetfulness in favor of encouraging a post-war reconciliation based on mutual recognition between North Viet Nam's Peoples Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) veterans and American veterans of the American War in Viet Nam. In addition to encouraging twenty-first century reconciliation, Moore and Galloway attempt to engage with and make peace with the past by exploring battlefield sites of memory. Finally, *We Are Soldiers Still* further clarifies the authors' negative assessment of the war as politically misguided, a parallel to their regard of the Iraq War. The book thus reclaims a twenty-first century remembrance of the war's aftermath in the shadow of the film's forgetfulness.

Circumventing American cultural remembrance of the war, *We Were Soldiers* reverts to the revisionism of President Ronald Reagan's 1980's declaration that the American War in Viet Nam was a "noble cause." Reagan further asserted that "for too long, we have lived with the 'Vietnam Syndrome'"—a misnomer for American post-war unwillingness to

intervene militarily in the Third World.⁸⁸ In a similar vein, in the post-Cold War American context of small-scale localized conflicts, president George Herbert Walker Bush claimed, during the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), that there would be ~~no~~ “no more Vietnams” and declared that ~~We~~ “We have finally kicked the Vietnam Syndrome.” Thus Americans believed they could now relegate the American War in Viet Nam to the forgotten past.

The turn-to-the-twenty-first-century became a time in American cultural remembrance that favored remembering the ~~good war~~ “good war”—World War II—while ignoring the American War in Viet Nam. During this period, journalist Tom Brokaw coined the term ~~the~~ “the Greatest Generation” from the title of his 1998 book containing personal accounts American men and women, soldiers and civilians about their experiences and values during World War II. Thus America nostalgically turned to admire and to commemorate a pre-Viet Nam generation. Shortly thereafter, the national World War II Memorial was under construction on the Mall in Washington D.C., and dedicated in 2005. Meanwhile, established in 2002, the Veterans History Project with the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress collected personal accounts from World War II veterans and civilians actively involved in the war effort. In addition, the acclaimed historical film documentarian Ken Burns and his longtime colleague Lynn Novick recollected World War II in their epic PBS documentary series *The War* (2007) with a title that suggests there is only one war to remember. As a result of the renewed concern with preserving memories of the war, the resurrection of the World War II combat film was well underway. In 2003, historian Frank Wetta and film scholar Martin

⁸⁸ See Chapter One for a more thorough analysis of the origin and implications of the term —~~Vietnam~~ Syndrome.”

Bookli, suggested that the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in the 1990's of the war's events ~~provided~~ a way to revive the notion of patriotism in public life, and as a natural consequence in films" and thus ~~Vietnam~~ "Vietnam could be forgotten" (866).

Numerous films about World War II produced at the turn-to-the-twenty-first-century attested to the resurgence of interest in remembering the war. They include but are not limited to *Memphis Belle* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1991), *A Midnight Clear* (Keith Gordon, 1992), *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), *Stalingrad* (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993), *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998), *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, 1998), *U-571* (Jonathan Mostow, 2000), *Enemy at the Gates* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 2001), *Hart's War* (Gregory Hoblit, 2001), *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001), Steven Spielberg and Tom Hank's widely popular HBO mini-series *Band of Brothers* (2001), *Windtalkers* (John Woo, 2002), *Saints and Soldiers* (Ryan Little, 2003), *The Great Raid* (John Dahl, 2005), *Flags of Our Fathers* (Clint Eastwood, 2006), *Letters From Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, 2006), and *Valkyrie* (Bryan Singer, 2008).

In response to the reemergence of World War II combat films, Jeanine Basinger, the leading authority on the combat genre, published a new edition of *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (2003); in it she adds a discussion of the World War II combat film's survival of the ~~Vietnam~~ Vietnam combat film [which] had a desperation, an ambivalence, and a madness that suggested the last hurrah for the old combat format" (xi). Basinger attributes the regeneration of the combat genre to the box-office triumph of *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998). Film scholar Guy Westwell, interpreting the cultural impact of the combat film revival on contemporary war cinema (1989-2006) goes a step beyond

Basinger. He claims that the resurgence chronicles a “shift in the cultural imagination of war” that has “fostered a sense of World War II as a ‘just war’ fought by a ‘greatest generation’” ultimately culminating in a “justification and endorsement of war” (84, 107).

Out of this cultural climate of sanctioning war, and a resurgence in financing for combat films, likely a result of the success of *Saving Private Ryan*, Randall Wallace’s film *We Were Soldiers* soared in popularity, becoming the twenty-first century’s most prominent representation of the American War in Viet Nam. The film was not nearly as successful, grossing only \$114,660,784 world-wide compared to *Saving Private Ryan* reaching \$481,840,909 world-wide. However, one of the only other films about the American War in Viet Nam to appear at the beginning of the twenty-first century, *Tigerland* (Joel Shumaker, 2001) in limited release, grossed only \$139,692. Unlike earlier narratives of the war, *We Were Soldiers* encourages prosthetic memories of the war that revert to Reagan’s “noble cause.” The film is an adaptation of the *New York Times* best-seller *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young* (1992) a memoir of the American War in Viet Nam by retired Lieutenant General Harold Moore and photojournalist Joseph Galloway. While Randall Wallace’s sole previous directorial debut was *The Man in the Iron Mask* (1998), he also wrote screenplays for *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001) and *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995). The latter two films each serve as precursors for the revisionism and heroic action that Wallace employs in writing and directing *We Were Soldiers*.

Unfortunately, Wallace reframes and thereby disregards others’ remembrances of the American War in Viet Nam by ignoring the political causes of the war. Rather he focuses on courage, bravery, sacrifice, brotherhood, and victory over the enemy in a singular, early

battle. The film thus represents —American military strategy in Viet Nam as credible, heroic, and morally right” (Westwell 107). It reverts to the maps, tactics, and commanders themes common in World War II narratives wherein the troops, under the command of a heroic, competent leader, successfully accomplish a specific military mission. Recasting the American War in Viet Nam within the generic conventions of World War II narratives circumvents the socio-political causes, complications, and consequences of the war in favor of portraying the American war in Viet Nam as a “good war.”

We Were Soldiers recounts a singular, three-day battle in Central Highlands of Viet Nam, specifically the Ia Drang Valley in 1965. The film’s narrative chronicles the formation, training, and family life of the officers of the First Battalion, Seventh Cavalry, an air mobile Division at the United States Army Post, Fort Benning, in Columbus Georgia. During the war, General Westmoreland ordered the first Cavalry, under the Plieku Campaign,⁸⁹ to “search and destroy” PAVN forces in the Ia Drang Valley, an area of about 1,500 squares miles, in Viet Nam’s Central Highlands (Moss 215-16). The book *We Were Soldiers* describes the battles at two sites in the Ia Drang Valley, “Landing Zone X-Ray” (LZ X-Ray) at the base of Chu Pong mountain and “Landing Zone Albany,” two miles north of LZ X-Ray.

Wallace, however, does not include in the film the battle fought by the Second Battalion at LZ Albany that resulted in 151 American soldiers killed in action (KIA) and 130 wounded in action (WIA), a far greater loss of American life in a one-day battle than the three-day

⁸⁹ The Plieku Campaign, what the Viet Nameese call the Tay Nguyen Campaign, was a series of engagements between PAVN and American forces between October and November 1965 in the Ia Drang Valley of Viet Nam’s Central Highlands.

battle at LZ-X Ray (Moore and Galloway, *We Are Soldiers Still* 206). It is cinematically understandable that Wallace chose not to incorporate the battle at LZ Albany in the film due to time constraints; however, his decision is ironic considering the U.S. Military also chose to repress media coverage of the battle in favor of reporting the more “successful” battle at LZ X-Ray.⁹⁰ Together the estimated loss of life between the battles total 234 American soldiers KIA and 2,403 PAVN soldiers KIA resulting in a so-called “favorable ratio of U.S. to enemy losses . . . fixed at 12:1” (Murray 40 and Moss 217). The perceived American military victory at LZ X-Ray greatly contributed to legitimizing a protracted strategy of attrition—a style of fighting wars based on material superiority, casualty rates, and a gradual reduction of enemy forces via constant harassment—employed by the United States military throughout the war.

Just as the battle erroneously bolstered a wartime strategy of attrition based on “kill ratios,” the film seeks to shape twenty-first-century American attitudes in favor of the war. Moreover, the release of *We Were Soldiers* in March 2002 positions it as one among many films inexorably, symbolically linked to the attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11) and the ensuing “War on Terror.” According to American studies scholar Christina Rickli, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Hollywood postponed the release of several films because of a perceived impropriety within the vengeance plots of *Windtalkers* (John Woo, 2002), *Training Day* (Antoine Fuqua, 2001), and *Spygame* (Tony Scott, 2001) (par. 7). Although most of these films were likely conceived and shot before 9/11, including *We Were Soldiers*, *Behind*

⁹⁰ For more on the cover-up of the battle at LZ Albany see Harold Moore and Joseph Galloway, *We Are Soldiers Still: A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008) 123-4.

Enemy Lines (John Moore, 2001) and *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001), each a narrative about soldier's survival, reached theatres ahead of schedule (Lowenstein 178).

At the time of its release, *We Were Soldiers* culturally engaged a post 9/11 American audience whose country was embarking on a war in Afghanistan that had begun only five months earlier in October 2001, and whose country would, in the year following the film's release, unleash a preemptive war in Iraq. Some reviewers, however, contest that if ~~H~~Hollywood intended *We Were Soldiers* to promote a prospective war of which it approves, the horror subverts that" (Coatney 313). Despite its gruesome portrayal of battle, many audiences will view, and have viewed, the film ~~in~~ in the context of the current political climate as a coincidental but nonetheless remarkable symbol of we've-got-a-job-to-do-style patriotism" (McCarthy 69). The 2002 graduating class at West Point, for example, ~~had~~ had the highest number of infantry applications in many years after the film premiered there" (Coatney 313). The graduates' decisions to enter the infantry rather than Combat support branches, or one of the other six Combat arms branches such as Armor, Artillery, or the Corps of Engineers, demonstrate the film's power to rally positive attitudes regarding infantry combat, and possibly the prospect of war.

The film's persuasion centers on Wallace's depiction of the valiant leadership of then Colonel, soon-to-be General, Hal Moore. A West Point graduate, Moore commanded infantry units in the Korean War, and as the film portrays, the First Battalion, Seventh Calvary in Viet Nam, soon after which he became a general. The film's tagline honors Moore without naming him and imparts the film's emphasis on humanizing the soldiers. It reads:

Fathers, Brothers, Husbands & Sons.

We were . . . young, brave, husbands, wives, sons, mothers, daughters, soldiers.

400 U.S paratroopers. 2000 Vietnamese soldiers. 12,000 miles away from home. 1 man led them into battle.

This movie advertisement introduces the film's primary concerns: the family, the challenging conditions of Americans outnumbered in battle, and the heroic father figure. The emphasis on family humanizes the American soldiers in the film and calls attention to the concern, worry, suffering, and loss that over three million American families endured during the war. The description thus also acknowledges family members on the home-front as part of the inner circle of the so-called Vietnam experience. Yet the film proffers a broader depiction of "family" than the traditional family to include the military family, especially "brothers in arms," with Moore as the father figure. Finally, the "man" is Colonel Hal Moore, played by Mel Gibson, who "has the closest thing to a John Wayne part that anyone's played since the Duke himself rode into the sunset" (McCarthy 69). As one of Moore's most famous lines from the film designates, he will valorously be the "first to set foot on the field, and . . . the last to step off." The film's narrative arc thus suggests that if every military leader were a tough, dedicated hero like Moore, America might have won the war.

Although the heroic character of Moore serves as the focus of the film, *We Were Soldiers* also participates in a collected cultural memory—a culturally mediated collection of multifaceted memories—of the American War in Viet Nam by way of its inclusive portrayal of civilian women on the American home-front and more developed representation of the

PAVN than nearly any other American narrative of the war. Thus *We Were Soldiers* participates in a collected cultural memory of limited reconciliation between former foes via the recognition of mutual military competence and an acknowledgement of individual sorrow. Although the film limits representation to direct experience, it remains one of the more inclusive representations of the American War in Viet Nam. Still, prosthetic memory is not proffered as a possibility in either Moore and Galloway's first book, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*, or Wallace's film. Primarily, the lack or impossibility of prosthetic memory stems from the narratives' emphasis on authenticity of experience. Despite reaching publication nearly twenty years after the war, and movie theaters over twenty-five years later, the book and film privilege only the memories of those directly connected to the war.

Concession: Remembering the Home-front

Although *We Were Soldiers* reframes the American War in Viet Nam as a “good war,” it does present a fairly inclusive portrayal of the war because it represents the families of American soldiers fighting the war. Wallace treats distressing home-front experiences of confusion, anxiety, sorrow, and loss in more detail and with more sympathy and sentiment than Moore and Galloway's first book. For example, in the memoir, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young* Moore's youngest daughter asks him, “Daddy, what's a war?” (Moore 25). His reply is stark; he recounts, “I tried my best to explain, but her look of bewilderment only grew” (25). In Wallace's film, Moore responds to his daughter explaining, “It's something

that shouldn't happen, but it does when some people try to take lives of other people it's my job to go over there and stop _em." His answer, and thereby the film's, repositions the war as a humanitarian mission with Moore figured as the hero. As opposed to the film, Moore and Galloway dedicate a single chapter of their book to the wives and families of the fallen soldiers entitled —The Secretary of the Army Regrets " that consists of only fifteen of the book's three hundred and seventy-two pages.

Meanwhile, Wallace's film *We Were Soldiers* devotes a narrative thread of the home-front, crosscut with battle scenes, that follows Moore's wife, Julia. She serves as the courageous female counterpart to her male hero husband. Just as her husband fearlessly leads his men in battle, Julia unflinchingly delivers telegrams to the wives on base informing them of their husband's deaths. She distributes the death notices in an effort to correct the impersonal form of delivery by a stranger, a taxi cab driver, imparting the announcements. Julia provides comfort for the women and, in effect as the film suggests, she too endures her own battle on the home-front; she confronts death while also fearing the prospect of her own husband's death. These scenes of Julia and the other wives mourning the loss of the men in battle impart sympathetic cathartic moments for the film's audience.

Unlike the film, Moore and Galloway's book further depicts intergenerational psychological effects of the war on American children of veterans and those who died in the battle. For example, they include a quote from an interview with the daughter of one of the soldiers. She stresses the impersonality of taxi drivers delivering the notifications. She explains —today it almost sounds unbelievable the knock came at out door at 4 A.M. My Mom collapsed completely as this stranger handed the telegram to us. How cold and

inhuman, I thought"" (Betty Jivens Mapson qtd in Moore 323). Moore and Galloway also include family members' accounts of the dead ~~in~~ hopes that their words might somehow comfort other families who have lost loved ones in war" (326). While the book encourages healing, the varied collection of stories included in that chapter portray a range of emotions from pride, to sorrow and loss, and represent an assortment of attitudes toward the war from questions and accusations, to justifications about the war and the soldiers' deaths. Moore and Galloway's incorporation of intergenerational American narratives acknowledges the enduring psychological effects of loss on the home-front. However, recognition of the war's effects on memory remains limited to those with a direct or hereditary ~~claim~~ "claim" to the so-called Vietnam experience. The possibility of prosthetic memory—memories acquired by individuals with no direct connection to the war—is nonexistent in the narratives of the book and film.

Recognizing the "Enemy"

Just as Wallace's incorporation of American home-front experiences in *We Were Soldiers* is more inclusive than most American narratives of the war, so too is his demythologized rendering of People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) soldiers. Wallace's portrayal of PAVN soldiers is threefold: it creates a more inclusive, less American-centered, representation of the American War in Viet Nam, it emphasizes the perspectives of battlefield commanders, yet it further accentuates the limited authenticity of direct experience—the memory of the

war that the film's narrative privileges. Despite the film's inclusionary depiction of PAVN soldiers, some reviewers and scholars criticize the film as Roger Ebert predicted, as representing the Viet Nameese as "faceless, non-white enemies" (29). Only two PAVN soldiers garner any specific attention from among the massive onslaught of PAVN troops. However, neither is typically vilified as the "enemy" usually is in combat films. The first and more developed Viet Nameese character is Moore's counterpart, Viet Nameese Colonel An. Aligning Moore and An in the film serves to accentuate their leadership skills and militarily strategic prowess.

The film's second Viet Nameese character is a silent, seemingly sensitive soldier, designated as such via costume and props. He wears eyeglasses, writes in a diary, and carries a photograph of a Viet Nameese woman, presumably his wife, since the film's narrative constructs only marital relationships across genders. Like the American soldiers audiences are supposed to identify and sympathize with, the Viet Nameese soldier has a life beyond the battlefield signified by the photograph of a woman he carries. Interestingly, the photograph of this Viet Nameese woman strikingly resembles Moore's wife Julia. Thus the film attempts to humanize America's former foes, if only fleetingly, compared to the development of American characters. Yet the PAVN soldier plays a further role in the film because he tries to kill Moore when, after running out of ammunition for his gun, he charges Moore with a bayonet only to be shot by Moore at the very last possible moment. The scene casts Moore as a reluctant warrior, one who takes action only to defend himself and others, and only when necessary.

The PAVN soldier's desperate charge at Moore and Colonel An's military proficiency contribute to Wallace's attempts and failures to portray of the PAVN as a militarily worthy adversary. The scene represents the charging PAVN soldier as complicit in and even resigned to his death. Nonetheless, crosscut scenes between Moore and An illustrate a parallel PAVN and American proficiency with the use of maps and battle tactics. The film first introduces An in the ambush of French Troops in the opening sequence and when Moore prepares for battle before leaving home; he studies the French failure and An's leadership capabilities. Moreover, in battle against Moore, An quickly and decisively evaluates and attacks the American troops. Equally resolute, Moore intuits An's tactics and orders counterattacks. The binary of Moore and An serves to further reinforce the view of the war from the commanders' positions; this is a perspective characteristic of World War II combat films but atypical among films about the American War in Viet Nam.

However, the commander's outlook is not entirely uncommon among memoirs of the war. Moore and Galloway invoke the determination of the PAVN in an attempt to assess the lessons of the war, an endeavor shared by several wartime officials, historians, and scholars of the war, among them Johnson administration Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's memoirs and Errol Morris's more recent documentary of McNamara, *The Fog of War* (2004), wherein McNamara outlines his eleven lessons of the war.⁹¹ In their assessment of the battle and its attendant lessons, Moore and Galloway determine that American troops "could stand against the finest light infantry troops in the world and hold [their] ground"

⁹¹ *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, dir. Errol Morris, Sony Pictures Classics, 2004.

(345). Although couched within congratulations for American troops, and limited by the “light infantry” specification, the praise is atypical among American representations of the war. As American scholars of the war often remark, American representations of the war, both narrative and historical, habitually marginalize “enemy” Vietnamese subject status in their own history” (Vlastos 54). However, the subject status of the Viet Nameese is not clearly marginalized in the film because it is one of the first, if not the first, to depict the PAVN as a worthy foe, rather than an aggressive menace.

“Good War”

Despite creating a more inclusive representation of the American War in Viet Nam by portraying the wartime experiences of American families and the PAVN, Randall Wallace’s *We Were Soldiers* reframes and thus disregards the political and cultural causes and consequences of the American War in Viet Nam by depicting it, drawing on the conventions of the World War II combat film genre, as a “good war.” By doing so, Wallace purposefully disregards the socio-political and cultural origins and consequences of the war in his reversion to the map and tactics of the World War II combat film genre. He further veils the narrative’s forgetfulness in historical specificity and authentic military iconography.

The film portrays the war, and the battle, within Jeanine Basinger’s framework for the World War II combat film. Basinger designates seventeen narrative elements of the World War II combat film. They include the film’s credits “unfold[ing] against a military reference”; a statement or “dedication”; a group of men, led by a hero, “undertak[ing] a

mission which will accomplish an important military objective”; the presence of an observer or commentator; a ~~hero~~ [who] has leadership forced upon him in dire circumstances”; the ~~undertak~~[ing] of a military objective”; unfolding action; the enemy’s presence; military iconography; conflict within the group; ~~rituals~~ enacted from the past and present”; death; a climatic battle; utilization of the ~~tools~~ of the cinema”; resolution of the situation; an ending ~~roll call~~”; and finally, the film should leave the audience feeling ~~ennobled~~” (67-69).

The narrative of *We Were Soldiers* correlates with Basinger’s outline of the World War II combat genre almost perfectly. The Air Cavalry insignia seen during the title sequence accomplishes Basinger’s ~~military reference~~” in the opening credits (see Fig. 8). Galloway’s character, who also serves as Basinger’s observer-commentator, narrates what Basinger would identify as the opening ~~dedication~~” that frames the film. In this statement Galloway grounds the narrative in historical specificity:

these are the true events of November, 1965, the Ia Drang Valley of Vietnam, a place our country does not remember, in a war it does not understand. This story is a testament to the young Americans who died in the valley of death, and a tribute to the young men of the People's Army of Vietnam who died by our hand in that place. To tell this story, I must start at the beginning. But where does it begin? Maybe in June of 1954 when French Group Mobile 100 moved into the same Central Highlands of Vietnam where we would go 11 years later.



Fig. 8. First Cavalry Division Insignia

The film then illustrates Viet Minh soldiers ambushing French troops.⁹² Thus the film seemingly endeavors to explore the causes of the American War in Viet Nam, yet ultimately glosses over the specific political history of the war, instead creating an historical narrative arc that focuses on massacre. The film's invocation of massacre through representations of the French battle and Custer's "last stand" at Little Bighorn, and Moore's studies of these events, creates a sense of impending doom by linking both place—The Central Highlands in Viet Nam—and name—"Seventh Calvary," Custer's regiment—with Moore and his troops.

While military historians may disagree as to whether there was a clear military objective in the "Search and Destroy" tactics American troops in Viet Nam employed, the film fulfills Basinger's "definitive objectives" of the battle. The first military objective the film portrays is the military's assessment of the helicopter's efficacy in troop transport, medical evacuation, and re-supply. The helicopter, while not entirely without its disadvantages, successfully transports rested troops to LZ X-Ray, as opposed to sending in march-weary soldiers. Moore and his men accomplish the second objective to "find and destroy" the "enemy" insofar as the American armed forces maintained the so-called "positive" kill ratio, and overran the PAVN base.

Because Moore believes he is fulfilling his duty, Basinger's hero under duress might not be readily apparent in *We Were Soldiers*. However, as Basinger qualifies, "enforced responsibility, however willingly or unwillingly accepted," fulfills this category (68). As film reviewer Todd McCarthy notes, "since it's not Moore's job to question orders, only to

⁹² The Viet Minh (Viet Nameese League for Independence) was an anti-colonial movement created in 1941 under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh.

“find the enemy and kill him, ‘ he does the best he can” (69). Although Moore questions the wisdom of the mission—fighting in an unfamiliar terrain with inexperienced soldiers—Moore willingly accepts responsibility despite being under-staffed and engaged with capable adversaries in overwhelming numbers.

Basinger’s unfolding action transpires in several places: at LZ X-Ray, in the PAVN bunker complex, at the American base, and on the American home-front. Although the home-front element is quite unusual for a combat film, *We Were Soldiers* otherwise steadily parallels Basinger’s list. Her requirement of “enemy presence” is met in Wallace’s film in overwhelming, endless, and often faceless waves of attack. In addition to the helicopter discussed above, the M-16 rifle fulfills Basinger’s “military iconography.” The M-16 garners attention in the film that signifies long-held criticism of the weapon. Sergeant Plumley, doubtful of the M-16’s worth, describes it to Moore as “lotsa plastic. Feels like a BB gun.”

One seeming exception from Basinger’s list in *We Were Soldiers* concerns “conflict within the group”; however, a fight between helicopter pilots occurs, as does an ongoing conflict between Moore, who refuses to leave the battlefield, and the military intelligence back on the base, who make several requests for his evacuation from the battlefield, because as one of them said, “I call losing a lot of draftees a bad week. Losing a colonel’s a massacre.”

Basinger’s requirement of death certainly occurs in overwhelming numbers. The figures designate seventy-nine American soldiers killed, one hundred and twenty-one American soldiers wounded, and an estimated 1,215 of PAVN soldiers killed in the battle (Moore and

Galloway 199). Wallace's cinematic portrayal of death, while gruesome at times, serves to bolster the film's emphasis on noble sacrifice. For example, the first American soldier to die smiles and says, "I'm glad I could die for my country." The soldier's dying words direct audiences to regard American deaths in the battle not as senseless, but rather as a noble sacrifice. In addition, the deaths provide an occasion for Moore, when he prays over the American dead, to enact Basinger's "ritual." Otherwise rituals are non-existent on the battlefield because the soldiers have little time for repose or reflection. Moore, however, enacts other pre-war prayer rituals with his family at home, with another soldier in the chapel at Fort Benning, and a post-war ritual in visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM).

Much of the film, because it represents a singular battle, fulfills Basinger's "climatic battle." The scene of Moore leading the final charge for the hill, developed in the following section, serves as the ultimate climax of the battle. Wallace employs Basinger's requirement of the "tools of the cinema" to "create and release tension" by crosscutting between battlefield scenes and the American home-front, between PAVN Colonel An and Colonel Moore, and between PAVN encroachment and American response. Stylistically, Wallace further employs music, framing, acting, and lighting to emphasize tension and suspense.

A seeming victory in battle and Moore's return home provide Basinger's "resolution of the situation" for both the American soldiers and their wives on the home-front. Images of Moore's character, his face reflected behind names on the wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, invokes resolution and healing. The film then explicitly includes Basinger's "roll call" of those who actually died in the battle at LZ X-Ray by listing their names, hometown, and state in a black and white aesthetic reminiscent of the names listed on the VVM. A

caption informs viewers of the exact location of the names on the memorial, Panel 3 East, where to —~~the~~ir left and right are the names of 58,000 of their brothers-in-arms.” The film thereby encourages audiences to visit the VVM and view the names. In essence the film’s closing sequence positions the film as a celluloid memorial that may inspire viewers to engage further in remembering the American War in Viet Nam by visiting the VVM. While the narrative of the film privileges authenticity of experience and memories of the war on behalf of those who either directly experienced the war, or have a hereditary ~~claim~~ to that remembrance, the film’s inclusion of the VVM encourages audiences to participate in a collected cultural memory of the war.

As with any combat film, it is difficult to determine if the audience acquires Basinger’s ~~ennobled~~” feeling from their cinematic experience. However, *We Were Soldiers*, in reverting to the conventions of the World War II narrative, attempts to reshape the American War in Viet Nam as a ~~good~~ war” fought between equally capable armies. Wallace portrays the American military leadership as some of the most capable heroes the American military can produce. Thus the film holds the suggestive power of leaving American audiences feeling patriotic and exceptional.

In Wallace’s director commentary in the DVD special features about a deleted scene that would have been at the end of the film, he defends his choice to circumvent the politics of the war. The cut scene, ~~Moore Debriefed by McNamara and Westmoreland~~,” represents a meeting in Saigon that actually occurred between Moore, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and General Westmoreland wherein Westmoreland and McNamara convey that the American success in the Ia Drang valley ~~inspired~~” certain victory in the broader war. In

order to convey the real-life McNamara's number-conscious, corporate strategy for war, his character boasts, "seventy-nine dead against 1,800-2,000, that's in the range of 22.8-26.2 to one." Westmoreland further discusses an escalation of American troops, and thereby the war, that he hopes will "run these little bastards back home." Moore tries to express their adversaries' patriotism by reading from the diary of the PAVN soldier who tried to bayonet Moore. He reads, "Oh my dear young wife, when the troops come home after the victory and you do not see me, please look at the proud colors, you will see me there." This selection demonstrates the patriotism of the PAVN soldier; he, like the first American to die in the film, is proud to die for his country. Moore then evaluates the battle as only a momentary success only for the Americans explaining, "we won. We slaughtered an [but] we won't run the little bastards back home" Sir. They are home." Although Wallace believes the real-life meeting holds historical significance, he explains his choice to cut the filmed scene as a consequence of his primary goal to humanize the soldiers.

The movie is not about politics, I did not want to raise an intellectual issue at the end. I wanted this movie to say, ultimately, that soldiers are human beings no matter what we thought about the Vietnam War, no matter how it divided us. Those arguments over politics ultimately obscured for us a much more immediate reality which was the men who died on both sides of this conflict are human beings . . . this scene took us away from that moment, that reality, that truth. (Director's Commentary *We Were Soldiers*)

Wallace aims to encourage a unifying reconciliation between those who supported and those who opposed the war, as well as between veterans and civilians. However, Wallace's evasion of politics, while not unique among combat films, ultimately creates a limited memory of the American War in Viet Nam as a "good war" fought valiantly on both sides. Unfortunately, in cutting the meeting scene between Moore, Westmoreland and McNamara, Wallace evades the historical and political consequences of the war and the battle at LZ X-Ray. For example, setting policy for the remainder of the war, the battle confirmed commander General Westmoreland's commitment to "Search and Destroy" strategies, to the implementation air mobility, and to conducting a war of attrition. Despite efforts to avoid politics, Wallace unavoidably makes a political statement about the war by ignoring the military and political consequences of the battle that led to further escalation and protraction of the war. Moreover, his efforts to create an historically accurate, mimetic, rendering of the Battle at LZ X-Ray could mislead audiences to believe that this accuracy extends to the broader war, including its causes and consequences. Thus the film as mediated representation encourages a limited, "brothers in arms," prosthetic memory of the war.

Wallace certainly seems to hope that the audience gains a sense of healing from the war by watching the film. Concerning audience, Wallace said, "soldiers who came back from Viet Nam were never given gratitude and the respect that their country owed them . . . we give that to them and then we've all moved toward being whole . . . my hope is that the American family can heal the wounds that have been there since Viet Nam" (Director's Commentary *We Were Soldiers*). Thus Wallace determines that still, in the twenty-first century, there exists a need to salve old wounds from the country's division over the war. It

is likely that Wallace successfully impresses upon audiences a sense of sympathy for American soldiers and thus their families. However, it is a strange, late time for Wallace to feel obligated to make an argument that humanizes American soldiers who participated in the war because they are no longer seriously stereotyped as brutal or alienated miscreants in the Rambo prototype of the 1970's and 1980's.⁹³ Rather, the repetitious stereotype of the alienated or violent American Vietnam veteran is a twenty-first century cliché ripe for satire. For example, *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008), a meta-fictional comedy about the filming of a movie about the war, employs several layers of stereotypical American soldiers in a farce so inconsequential that cliché itself becomes the memory of the war.⁹⁴

In addition to correlating with Basinger's listed elements of the World War II combat genre, *We Were Soldiers* dehistoricizes the American War in Viet Nam under the guise of historical specificity. Wallace endeavors to create an historical framework for the battle at LZ X-Ray in Galloway's opening narrative by invoking the context of the 1954 massacre of French troops at Dien Bien Phu in the same region. Yet the film otherwise broadly encompasses the battle at LZ X-Ray in transhistorical terms, evoking Custer's last stand in the regiment's shared name—Seventh Cavalry—with Custer's regiment, rendering Moore's study of that massacre at Little Big Horn, and illustrating Moore's self-comparison with Custer, which is finally put to rest when Sergeant Plumley reassures Moore, –Sir, Custer was

⁹³ Such characters include, but are not limited to: Jack Falen in *Tracks*, dir. Henry Jaglom, Trio, 1976; Major Charles Rane in *Rolling Thunder*, dir. John Flynn, American International Pictures, 1977; Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, United Artists, 1979; John Rambo in *First Blood*, dir. Ted Kotcheff, Orion, 1982; Wilkes in *Uncommon Valor*, dir. Ted Kotcheff, Paramount, 1983; Sergeant Barnes in *Platoon*, dir. Oliver Stone, Orion, 1986; and Ron Kovic's character in *Born on the Fourth of July*, dir. Oliver Stone, Universal Pictures, 1989.

⁹⁴ *Tropic Thunder*, dir. Ben Stiller, Dreamworks, 2008.

a pussy. You ain't." Finally, the film's soundtrack, specifically the mournful —Sgt MacKenzie" played during battle scenes, further encourages a transhistorical view of the war. The song's lyrics about a Scottish soldier's courageous yet resigned attitude toward war and battle exude sentiments of sacrifice. The refrain, "lay me down, in the cold, cold, ground, wheretofores many men have gone . . . when they come, I'll stand my ground," is a fitting choice for the film's argument because it invokes a tradition of heroism, courage, and a willingness to die for country.

American Hero

Wallace primarily achieves his portrayal of the American War in Viet Nam as a noble cause in *We Were Soldiers* through the leadership of the battlefield commanders, especially Colonel Moore. The film's generous rendering of Moore's character suggests that if every soldier were a tough, dedicated hero like Moore, America might have won the war. Quite unusual for a colonel in the narrative tradition of representing the American War in Viet Nam, Moore automatically garners the trust and respect of his men. *We Were Soldiers* thereby stands in opposition to the majority of American narratives of the war because it portrays a colonel as a father figure, a leader with experience to be trusted. One of the hallmarks of American representations of the war is the turning away from official narratives of commanders toward narratives of common soldiers' or "grunts" experiences in war. Typically, in these narratives, a sergeant earns the confidence of his men over a lieutenant because of his battlefield experience or time spent "in country," in Viet Nam. Sergeants

Burns and Elias in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) are among the most famous sergeants who fulfill the father-figure role and challenge the authority of their lieutenant, because his inexperience often requires that the battle hardened sergeants lead and protect him.⁹⁵ In narratives of the war, officers are nearly always suspect because they are most often products of Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). Their commission often creates a hierarchical divide between enlisted soldiers and officers, as well as between the uneducated and educated, thus calling into question the value of battlefield education versus formal education.⁹⁶ Counter to negative portrayals of officers in these other representations, Moore, at age forty-two, has a fourteen-month combat tour in Korea on his record and, before leaving for Viet Nam, studies the military history of the French War in Viet Nam (Moore and Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young* 18). Moore's character and his rank as colonel deviate to a near polar opposite of this attitude and tradition, aligning more closely with the World War II combat narrative.

Moore's idealistic, rallying speech to his men just before deployment to Viet Nam serves to highlight his leadership qualities and the film's themes of brotherhood, danger, and heroism:

Look around you. In the Seventh Cavalry, we've got a captain from the Ukraine,

another from Puerto Rico. We've got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanics,

Cherokee Indians. Jews and Gentiles. All Americans. Now here in the states, some

⁹⁵ *Platoon*, dir. Oliver Stone, Orion, 1986.

⁹⁶ The divide between officers and draftees is only further exacerbated; however, I do not discuss draftees here because *We Were Soldiers* emphasizes that every American soldier in the battle voluntarily enlisted.

of you in this unit may have experienced discrimination because of race or creed. But for you and me now, all that is gone. We're moving into the valley of the shadow of death, where you will watch the back of the man next to you, as he will watch yours. And you won't care what color he is, or by what name he calls God. They say we're leaving home. We're going to what home was always supposed to be. Now let us understand the situation. We are going into battle against a tough and determined enemy.

[Pause]

I can't promise you that I will bring you all home alive. But this I swear, before you and before Almighty God, that when we go into battle, I will be the first to set foot on the field, and I will be the last to step off, and I will leave no one behind. Dead or alive, we will all come home together. So help me, God.

Moore's address emphasizes equality, democracy, and erasure of divisive difference. Noting the international and interracial composition of the group of officers, Moore declares that in battle differences in heritage, nationality, race, and religion disappear. He asserts that the men will achieve equality and will become "brothers in arms," fighting for each other, the film's ultimate message. In addition, Moore dedicates himself as the heroic leader promising to be the first and last on the battlefield. The final lines of his statement promising to "leave no man behind" may also remind contemporary audiences of the prisoner of war and missing in action (POW/ MIA) controversy that began with the signing of Paris Peace Accords in

1973 between the United States and North Viet Nam.⁹⁷ American cultural contestation, later reinforced by popular rescue-return films of the 1980's such as *Rambo II* (George Cosmatos, 1985), *Missing in Action* (Joseph Zito, 1984), and *Uncommon Valor* (Ted Kotcheff, 1983), endured as a source of contention among Vietnam veterans concerning normalizing relations with Viet Nam in the 1990's. The debate persisted in influencing cinematic memory of the war in the, inspired by a true story, POW escape film *Rescue Dawn* (Werner Herzog, 2006), and continued to influence U.S.-Viet Nam relations as recently as 2007 when the Pentagon sent MIA search teams to Southeast Asia (Weiner).⁹⁸

Again, deviating from typical narratives of the war that unflinchingly depict soldiers' fears in battle, Moore intrepidly fulfills his heroic promises on the battlefield. The film's iconic moments show Moore's combat boots, in slow motion, touching the battlefield first and leaving it last, as a visual frame to the combat. Throughout the three-day conflict Moore fulfills his role as an audacious neo-John Wayne. While other soldiers duck and crouch amid incoming fire, Moore, appearing invincible, unflinchingly stands upright. He decisively directs his troops; he always correctly anticipates the PAVN's next mode of attack or retreat; he employs successful attacks and counterattacks; he refuses to leave the battlefield, and he has to be pulled back from fire-fights by his trusty Sergeant Plumley, who reminds him, —if you go down, we all go down.” Finally, Moore implausibly turns at the last moment to shoot, point-blank, the PAVN foot soldier who is about to bayonet him.

⁹⁷ One of the provisions of the January 27, 1973 Paris Accords provided that Hanoi would return all American Prisoners of War within sixty days. George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* (4th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002) 399.

⁹⁸ *Rescue Dawn*, dir. Werner Herzog, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2006. For a detailed examination of the POW/MIA controversy, see Bruce H. Franklin, *MIA: Mythmaking in America* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1992).

The film fantastically portrays Moore as the ultimate leader. He is fearless, unrelenting, and quick-witted; he seems to be everywhere at once, directing and encouraging his troops. In the final charge up the hill, Moore, with one arm raised, leads his troops in a slow-motion battle charge, an image reminiscent of soldiers in World War I charging out of the trenches. Just as he is about to be shot by his enemies, a helicopter climatically swoops in to shoot the PAVN soldiers holding the hill, and with that the Americans “win” the battle. Moore’s heroism and courage, coupled with the casting of Mel Gibson, does not go unnoticed by critics. For example, historian Michael Schaller views Moore as a “new age ‘George Patton’” and the film as reminiscent of “such ‘classics’ as *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941) and *Fort Apache* (1948)” (1173-74). Thus a war once commonly depicted as rife with the confusion of youth and overwhelming violence, now through Wallace’s lens, becomes a war fought between competent, capable, courageous military leaders.

Aftermath

After the battle, *We Were Soldiers* juxtaposes the media in two distinct fashions thus reinforcing the authenticity of experience and contributing to the debate over the media’s role in America’s loss of the war in Viet Nam. The sympathetic portrayal of Joe Galloway, a United Press International (UPI) reporter, stands in counterdistinction to the film’s depiction of the mass of journalists who descend upon LZ X-Ray after the battle. The film dedicates a large role to Galloway, coauthor of the book *We Were Soldiers*. His character arrives on the battlefield early in the battle and, like Moore, he does not leave until the battle is over. When

Moore asks Galloway why he is not a soldier, Galloway speaks of family tradition: ~~the~~ Galloway's have been in every war this country's ever fought." He further defends his noncombatant status, explaining, ~~I~~ didn't think I could stop the war . . . I just thought maybe I'd try to understand one, maybe help the folks back home understand. I just figured I could do that better shootin' a camera than I could shootin' a rifle." Despite Galloway's self-identification as a noncombatant, the coarse Sergeant Plumley toughly determines, after the battle becomes especially heated, ~~ain't~~ no such thing today son," and hands Galloway a rifle. With that Galloway transforms from a peaceful civilian into a proficient warrior.

Galloway's authenticity of experience, his incorporation into the battle as a combatant, heightens the film's theme of privileging direct memories. Not only does Galloway observe much of the battle, he also directly participates in the fighting, ~~only~~ later returning to his camera and performing the function of witness for the audience" (Badsey 257). Because of his combative actions in battle, he is no longer a detached, outside observer. Galloway eventually served four tours as a war correspondent in Viet Nam between 1965 and 1975. He continued his work as a war correspondent during the Gulf War 1990-1991, and in the Iraq War in 2003 and from 2005 to 2006, in addition to serving as a special consultant to General Colin Powell at the State Department from 2001 to 2002 (Moore and Galloway, *We Are Soldiers Still* xviii and www.huffingtonpost.com/joegalloway). Moreover, Galloway, the only American civilian awarded a medal of valor ~~for~~ actions during the American War in Viet Nam," also received a Bronze Star Medal in 1998 for ~~rescuing~~ wounded soldiers under fire in the Ia Drang Valley" (www.huffingtonpost.com/joegalloway). His editorial writing on war continues.

In the film, Galloway, distanced from other reporters by his battlefield experiences, will not or cannot answer their questions. They ask —“Je, what happened here,” but Galloway does not reply, appearing contemptuous of their lack of experience. For example, when the other reporters crouch in fear at the thunder of artillery, Galloway, standing upright, clarifies that they hear —“American artillery,” then in military jargon, —“friendly fire.” His use of soldiers’ language serves to create a distinction between himself and the other journalists. The journalists then turn to Moore, pummeling him with questions that begin with military strategy, asking him about the —“key to victory” and his assessment of the PAVN’s military prowess, and end in questions about the number of American casualties and about if families have been notified. Again, they get no response and Moore walks away. Here the film heightens the divide between those who were on the battlefield and those who were not. The film thus privileges the authenticity of experience, thereby rejecting the possibility of prosthetic memory—cultural memory held by those with no direct memory of, or access to, the war.

Although *We Were Soldiers* primarily focuses on the American soldiers’ experiences in the battle at LZ X-Ray, PAVN Colonel An has the final word after the Americans leave the battlefield. As Roger Ebert notes when discussing the film’s patriotism, when An approaches a small, battered American flag —even . . . [he] looks at the stars and stripes with enigmatic thoughtfulness” (29). An reflects, —“such a tragedy. They will think it’s their victory. So this will become an American war. And the end will be the same . . . except the numbers who will die before we get there.” He then replaces the flag and walks away. Despite Wallace’s choice to cut the scene of Moore’s debriefing with McNamara and

Westmoreland, Colonel An's comments reflect the false sense of American victory gleaned from the battle and alludes to the impending escalation and protraction of the war. Thus it becomes apparent why some might claim that *We Were Soldiers* is not a film about victory, but about "survival"—as Hal Moore does in the "Getting it Right: Behind-the-Scenes" special feature on the *We Were Soldiers* DVD.

While some might argue that the film does not glorify war or celebrate American military might because of its gruesome portrayal of battle, or its depictions of sorrowful reactions of loss of life on the home-front, or because of Colonel An's sobering reflection on the battle, the film unarguably dedicates most of its one hundred and thirty-eight minutes to valorizing the "reluctant warrior," especially Moore, his strategic prowess, and American military technology. Considering the film's rendering of Moore's character as a fearless, militarily superior, heroic leader, it is rather difficult to understand Colonel An's words about the ensuing protracted war and attendant loss of life as the sacrificial message of the film.

Beyond the Battlefield

The post-battle, home-front scenes that close the film serve to reinforce the forgetful, "brothers in arms," "noble cause" focus of Randall Wallace's *We Were Soldiers*. Galloway narrates the veterans' homecoming experiences while simultaneously reinforcing the soldiers' apolitical positions in the war. He explains that upon the soldiers' return to the United States

some had families waiting. For others, their only family would be the men they bled beside. There were no bands, no flags, no Honor Guards to welcome them home.

They went to war because their country ordered them to. But in the end, they fought not for their country or their flag, they fought for each other.

Galloway's account speaks to American cultural perception of the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans upon their return to the United States. The lack of a "Welcome Home" celebration, coupled with veterans' claims of being neglected by the government and being despised by civilians of the anti-war movement, left a generation of veterans feeling alienated from their country and their fellow citizens.⁹⁹ Moreover, Galloway's commentary reinforces the film's evasion of the politics of the war by claiming that the soldiers did not fight, as Moore reiterates, for "mom, apple pie, [or] the American flag," but rather "for one another" (Moore, "Getting it Right: Behind the Scenes" *We Were Soldiers*). Because of this shared message, film critics often compare *We Were Soldiers* to another twenty-first century war film, *Black Hawk Down*, about a 1993 attempted raid turned rescue mission during the Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia (Ridley Scott, 2001). For example, Ebert writing about *We Were Soldiers* explains, "the narration tells us, 'In the end, they fought for each other.' This is an echo of the *Black Hawk Down* line, 'It's about the men next to you. That's all it is'" (29). In fact, the similarities in message indicate a trend among twenty-first-century war films to recast defeat, or at minimum military debacles, not as a fight against foes, but as a victory of

⁹⁹ For more about claims of veteran mistreatment, see David E. Bonior, Steven M. Champlin, and Timothy S. Kolly, *The Vietnam Veteran: A History of Neglect* (New York: Praeger, 1984) and Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York UP, 2000).

solidarity among American soldiers. The trend of recasting military purpose obscures—psychologically and culturally erases—the reasons America entered the war in the first place.

Despite the film's revision of the war, postwar reflection in *We Were Soldiers* also possesses a positive value in that it contributes to an ever-broadening collected cultural memory of the war. In addition to direct commentary on the homecoming experiences of Vietnam veterans, the film also addresses two women—one American and the other, briefly, Viet Nameese—whose husbands died in the battle at LZ X-Ray. Moore's character narrates a letter to the American wife, while Wallace crosscuts scenes of her reading the letter and clutching the baby's name bracelet her husband wore in battle with a Viet Nameese woman reading what appears to be a similar note Moore inscribed at the end of her husband's diary. Moore narrates:

Dear Barbara, I have no words to express to you my sadness at the loss of Jack. The world is a lesser place without him. But I know he is with God and the angels and I know even Heaven is improved by his presence there. I know you too are sure of this and yet this knowledge can't diminish his loss and your grief. With abiding respect and affection, Hal Moore.

This scene correlates the loss of an American soldier with that of a PAVN soldier and indicates the significance of material memory—personal objects that, in this case, signify the dead and their pre-war lives. It is the bracelet that brings Barbara to tears and the photograph in the diary that the Viet Nameese woman handles most lovingly. Both objects—the baby's

bracelet and the photograph of the wife—also signify the soldiers' love of family. Thus the film, like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, reinforces the human loss as a consequence of the battle.¹⁰⁰ It is possible, however, that as cinema scholar Guy Westwell asserts, the film employs family as a motivation for the war—in the contemporary war cinema's most simplistic articulation of war and war's purpose" (108). In addition, memory, specifically direct memory, gains final narrative attention in Galloway's concluding narration. While writing through his tears in a newsroom Galloway, in voice-over, explains that —~~w~~ who have seen war never stop seeing. In the sounds of the night we will always hear the screams. So this is our story, for we were soldiers once, and young." This final narration indicates the ongoing memory of war for those who participated in the fighting. Again, Wallace remembers and privileges the memories of those who fought, those who died, and their families and thereby recasts the war in terms of personal, rather than national, suffering, sacrifice, and loss.

Soldiers Still

Six years after Wallace's *We Were Soldiers*, five years into the Iraq War, and on the eve of the historically momentous 2008 American presidential election, Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway's *We Are Soldiers Still: A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam* (2008) circulated. It consists of a more ambiguous rendering of the war than their first minutiae-laden book *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*. As opposed to Wallace's film,

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

We Were Soldiers, Moore and Galloway's subsequent *We Are Soldiers Still* extends a remembrance of the American War in Viet Nam that rejects the forgetfulness of "noble cause" revisionism. The book should be a corrective for audiences who agree that Wallace's film renders a false authenticity in its zealous portrayal of heroism and its failure to consider the cultural and political causes and effects of the war. The subtitle, *A Journey Back to the Battlefields of Vietnam*, suggests *We Are Soldiers Still* accentuates an exploration of the memory of the war through return visits to specifically located private memory sites in Viet Nam. Through their journeys, Moore and Galloway experience and encourage post-war reconciliation between the Peoples Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) veterans and American veterans of the war. Moreover, the book further clarifies the authors' disapproval of the war as politically misguided, a belief that corresponds to their assessment of the Iraq War. *We Are Soldiers Still* thus reclaims a twenty-first century remembrance of the war's aftermath in the shadow of the film's forgetfulness.

Writing of the "artistic license" in Wallace's *We Were Soldiers*, Moore and Galloway only explicitly clarify minor and specific points regarding the home-front experiences of the American wives of the soldiers. An appendix that serves, in part, as a tribute to Moore's deceased wife Julia describes her role in petitioning for changes to the film. For example, she influenced the choice of cast to include more racially diverse actresses to play the roles of the wives. However, she was unable to overturn decisions concerning illustrating military families' living conditions. When soldiers were deployed, their wives and families were ordered to vacate their living quarters on base. Yet the film wrongly depicted all the wives and families of [Moore's] battalion living in . . . nice two-story bungalows on Colonel's

Row at Fort Benning” (Moore and Galloway, *We Are Soldiers Still* 218-19). Julia would have preferred the film depict the reality of “women and children crammed into those little trailer houses” (222). While this is nearly all Moore and Galloway directly write about the film *We Were Soldiers*, the book *We Are Soldiers Still* serves as an implicit yet significant addendum to the “noble cause” memory of the war that the film promotes.

We Are Soldiers Still recounts and encourages post-war reconciliation via recognition among former foes. Reconciliation may, at first, appear too easily attained when Moore and Galloway recapitulate their discussions with the Viet Nameese: the former Colonel, then General An—the PAVN battlefield commander at LZ X-Ray and LZ Albany—General Chu Huy Man—the division commander in the Central Highlands in 1965—Viet Nameese military historians, and other PAVN veterans of the war (21). However, Moore and Galloway are quick to clarify that the easy relationship evolved over several return visits to Viet Nam during a fifteen-year period, between 1990 and 2005. Nonetheless, it was no small feat that Moore and Galloway accomplished by meeting Generals An and Man in 1991, three years before the 1994 normalization of economic and diplomatic relations between the United States and Viet Nam.¹⁰¹ In fact, Moore underscores that it has not been since World War II that Americans discussed any battles in detail with former enemies, and that it was only possible then because German commanders were prisoners of war (20). In noting the rarity of detailed discussions between former wartime foes, Moore and Galloway can further emphasize of both parties the desire to reconcile.

¹⁰¹ In 1994, under the leadership of President William Jefferson Clinton’s administration, Congress lifted the trade embargo with Viet Nam and in 1995 the Viet Nameese reinstated the United States embassy in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon, the southern Republic of Viet Nam’s capital). Later that same year, President Clinton extended formal diplomatic recognition to the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam.

Moore and Galloway additionally explicate that the post-war reconciliation between Moore and An results from devastating loss of life on both sides, as well as their shared leadership qualities gained over the course of their respective lifetime military careers. Just as they recapitulate Moore's military career, Moore and Galloway also relate An's military experience that begins with joining the Viet Minh guerrilla army in 1945 to fight against the French in Viet Nam (68). Ten years later, in 1954, An commanded a regiment in the battle of Dien Bien Phu where the French surrendered and from that ended their war in and colonization of Viet Nam (68). Describing common experiences between PAVN and American soldiers and commanders, as well as Moore's and An's mutual respect for each other as opposing battlefield commanders, Moore and Galloway determine that "perhaps we have much more in common with such men as these, our old enemies, men like ourselves" than the average person (40). Here, they reinforce a "brothers in arms message," but expand it, as Galloway suggested, by regarding their former foes as "blood brothers" (40). In explaining their own sense of reconciliation with their past adversaries, Moore and Galloway implicitly encourage feelings of recognition and reconciliation toward the PAVN veterans among other American veterans of the war, a large part of their intended audience.

In addition to shared experiences, the passage of time eases Moore and An's reconciliation. For example, Moore believes that time created a mutual understanding between An and himself that "there were no victors in the battle—only the fortunate who had somehow survived" (99). Rather than recasting the war as a fight for survival only among American soldiers as Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* suggests, Moore conveys a mutual fight for survival for both the American and PAVN soldiers. Moreover, upon Moore and

Galloway's first meeting with General An, he stressed peace and forgetfulness pronouncing, ~~there's~~ "no hatred between our two peoples. Let the past bury the past. Now we look to the future" (38). An voices the Viet Nameese official policy that encourages forgetting the past; however, it seems by his choice of words, especially ~~hatred~~, that he is not posturing, but is sincere.

As opposed to Moore and An achieving reconciliation via the passage of time, exploration of memory in *We Are Soldiers Still* centers on returning to the past by visiting particular sites of memory, specifically former battlefields. Although Moore and Galloway faced diplomatic challenges in obtaining permission from Viet Nameese authorities to visit their former battlefields, Moore and Galloway, along with General An and other American and PAVN veterans, finally achieved their goal. Near the end of their day at what was once LZ X-Ray, and what the Viet Nameese now call the ~~Forest~~ of Screaming Souls,"¹⁰² Moore gathered everyone into a circle (xix). As they stood with arms around each other and heads bowed Moore offered an informal prayer in memory of all—Americans and Viet Nameese—who died in the battle at LZ X-Ray. For years Moore hoped to spend a night at LZ X-Ray ~~to~~ commune with fallen comrades so that they and [he] could finally be at peace" (102). Serendipity grants Moore that wish. After the first group of primarily Viet Nameese veterans and officials leaves the former battlefield, an incoming storm prevents the return of the rented helicopter from extracting the remaining Americans and translators from the site. During the night, Moore walks the perimeter, explores his memories, and mourns the dead. Upon leaving his former battlefield Moore optimistically believes that those who died ~~were~~

¹⁰² See Chapter Four for a discussion of the ~~Jungle~~ of Screaming Souls" in Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*.

finally at peace and this place could at last be blessed with silence” and that the veterans “could go home with [their] own measure of peace as well” (111). Revisiting sites of memory in *We Are Soldiers Still* holds the possibility of healing psychological wounds.

Although the authors encourage reconciliation among former enemies, acknowledge gaining a sense of peace, and note the passage of forty-two years since their battles in the Ia Drang valley, they reject forgetfulness. Moore and Galloway write:

If we had come here seeking closure, seeking to consign those memories to some hidden dustbin of history, we had failed. Some things are not meant to be forgotten or easily tucked away There is no such thing as closure for soldiers who have survived a war. They have an obligation, a sacred duty, to remember those who fell in battle beside them all their days and to bear witness to the insanity that is war.
(155)

Clarifying that survival does not necessarily equal victimization, Moore and Galloway explain that survival, rather, carries with it an obligation to remember. Their book participates in bearing witness to the war as a reflection on memory that provides the possibility for their audiences to acquire individually felt prosthetic memories of the war. Moreover, the compulsion to remember and thus the impossibility of forgetting impel their desire to commemorate more publicly the war and the battles of the Ia Drang valley. For example, Moore and An planned to erect a “small monument” at LZ X-Ray in memory of both the American and Viet Nameese soldiers who died there (149). Because he would have

been the primary Viet Nameese advocate of the memorial, General An's death seems to have prevented that hope from becoming a reality. Still other memorial sites in Viet Nam attract Moore and Galloway's attention. For example, they make note of the many military cemeteries in Viet Nam; they discuss the rumor of one such cemetery being near LZ X-Ray; they describe, in detail, the family shrine for General An in his wife's home, and they visit the historic markers and memorials at Dien Bien Phu—the location of the last French battle in Viet Nam in 1954.

The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the broader French experience in fighting a war against the Viet Minh provide the impetus for Moore and Galloway to delineate lessons America failed to learn from the French and American wars in Viet Nam that further translate, according to the authors, to the Iraq War. For example, the authors agree with the Viet Nameese that if America had more closely considered the French War in Viet Nam, and specifically the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, then America would have realized that the Viet Nameese Communist war effort could outlast the inevitable weakening political motivation of another country over time.

Moore and Galloway also finally and openly critique the American War in Viet Nam. They begin by questioning the loss of life asking, “What did all of this mean? Was all this suffering and dying worth it? Even then [1965] our political leadership could not explain coherently why we were fighting” (107-08). They further comment on Ronald Reagan's 1980 revision of the war as a “noble cause,”¹⁰³ writing “he was wrong. There's

¹⁰³ At the 1980 Veterans of Foreign Wars convention during a campaign speech, Ronald Reagan purported that “for too long, we have lived with the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ . . . [claiming that the war] was, in truth, a noble cause . . . [and that] we dishonor the [memory of the dead] when we give way to feelings of guilt as if we were

never been a noble war except in the history books and propaganda movies” (108). Thus Moore and Galloway respond to the cultural revisions of the American War in Viet Nam that attempted to ~~are~~ “the ~~V~~ietnam Syndrome”—a misnomer for the national post-war unwillingness to intervene militarily in the Third-World.¹⁰⁴ Truth and accuracy are always extremely important to Moore and Galloway in recounting the battles of the Ia Drang valley in 1965. For example, in the prologue to their first book *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young*, they write ~~H~~ollywood got [the war] wrong every damned time” (xvi). This is the very same line that inspired Randall Wallace to create the film *We Were Soldiers*.

Furthermore, in the DVD special feature, ~~—~~Getting it Right ‘ Behind the Scenes,” Moore attests to his belief that Wallace’s film did accurately portray the American War in Viet Nam when he said ~~the~~ message of the movie [pause] hate war but love the American warrior. They finally got it right, they finally got it right.” Yet as an addendum to the film *We Were Soldiers* Moore and Galloway finally seem to get it right themselves when, in the final chapter of *We Are Soldiers Still*, they explicitly denounce the American War in Viet Nam, writing, ~~it~~ was the wrong war, in the wrong place, against the wrong people” (193).

Although they critique the war and cultural revisions of the war, in *We Are Soldiers Still* Moore and Galloway also endeavor to explain the soldiers’ perspective. They emphasize, ~~it~~ wasn’t [the soldiers’] place to question. We were soldiers and we followed their orders” (108). Finally, Moore and Galloway underscore, explain, and defend their previous ~~brothers~~ in arms” message that the film *We Were Soldiers* enthusiastically embraces. They write, ~~in~~

doing something shameful.” See Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War in American Memory* (Anchor/Doubleday: New York, 1996) 73. See also Chapter One for more on the ~~—~~Vietnam Syndrome.”

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter One for a more thorough analysis of the origin and implications of the term ~~—~~Vietnam Syndrome.”

times and places like this, where the reasons for war are lacking, soldiers fight and die for each other” (108). The statement evokes Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854).

Someone had blunder'd:
 Theirs not to make reply,
 Theirs not to reason why,
 Theirs but to do & die, (12-15)

According to Moore’s understanding, in dire political circumstances soldiers who are essentially ordered not to question, fight for what they can, in this case, each other.

Despite defending soldiers’ apolitical position, Moore and Galloway fearlessly and explicitly critique ~~pre~~“preemptive” war and thereby the Iraq War. They suggest that the Iraq War is a consequence of ignoring the lessons of the American War in Vietnam when they write,

a generation of political leaders who studiously avoided service in [the] war seemingly learned nothing from that history and thus consign a new generation of soldiers to preemptive wars of choice . . . most wars are a confession of failure—the failure of diplomacy and negotiation and common sense, and in most cases, of leadership. (xx)

Clearly, they are addressing the Iraq War and the George Walker Bush administration's preemptive war strategy that has come to be called the ~~B~~ush Doctrine." Developing a distinct argument specifically against the Iraq War, they deem the war an ~~un~~necessary misadventure" especially because they believe it diverted resources away from finding Osama bin Laden, and dangerously depleted American military equipment and strategic reserves (194). Moreover, Moore and Galloway critically assess the military and foreign policy leadership of former president George Walker Bush and his former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, comparing him to Johnson administration Defense Secretary Robert McNamara as others have, but further claiming that McNamara ~~look[s]~~ good" by comparison (196). Concerning Bush, they scathingly suggest that he should have ~~these~~ words from Erasmus: *Dulce bellum inexpertis* (War is delightful to those who have no experience of it) carved over the entrance to the planned \$500 million George Walker Bush Presidential Library in Dallas" (195).

Continued Remembrance

Both of Moore and Galloway's books and Wallace's film contribute to a collected cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam even among and between the multifaceted memories of the war with which each narrative engages. The film is certainly one of the most inclusive representations of the war in its depictions of the home-front, the People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) soldiers, journalists, range of rank, and allusions to a pre-war historical context. Unlike earlier narrative films about the war, the film encompasses

American civilian women's military base and home-front experiences. It also deviates from typical representations that vilify the Viet Nameese. The variety of perspectives contributes to an ongoing collected cultural memory of the war. Regrettably, despite being one of the most inclusive representations of the war, the film remains distinct from other remembrances of the war in that it reverts to the World War II combat genre conventions and attempts to authentically recast the war as a noble cause. It evades the socio-political causes, complications, and consequences of the war in favor of directing cultural and prosthetic memory of the war toward the moments of the war that demonstrate courage, bravery, sacrifice, brotherhood, and victory over the enemy in a singular battle. Wallace thus relies on the conventions of the World War II combat film genre to recast the American War in Viet Nam as a "good war." It reverts to the maps, tactics, and commanders focus common in World War II narratives wherein the troops, under the command of a heroic, competent leader, successfully accomplish a specific mission. In consequence, the film falls into a category of twenty-first century combat films that, in Guy Westwell's words, promotes "a myopic view of the past—predicated on . . . nostalgia for a mythologized version of World War II—[that] has become justification for war in the present" (115).

Conversely, *We Are Soldiers Still* serves as a response to revisionary narratives by elucidating contemporary cultural, political, and military implications of forgetting the American War in Viet Nam in Moore and Galloway's explicit critique of both the American War in Viet Nam and of the Iraq War. *We Are Soldiers Still* clarifies the "artistic license" and potential audience interpretation of Randall Wallace's film *We Were Soldiers* insofar as the book critiques the glorification of war, illuminates the authors' views on the wrongs of

“preemptive” war, especially in Iraq, and both develops and encourages reconciliation between former enemies, a reconciliation only obliquely implied in Wallace’s film.

Both Wallace’s film and Moore and Galloway’s two books participate in a broader remembrance of the American War in Viet Nam that includes representations of American civilian women and Viet Nameese soldiers. Inclusiveness of remembrance will expand further into the Philippines as the following chapter seeks to demonstrate by examining Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle* (2003). In addition, *We Are Soldiers Still* will likely serve as a precursor to imaginative representations of the American War in Viet Nam that create parallels with the Iraq War, one of the issues the concluding chapter aims to explore.

Chapter Six

Unfinished Remembrance:

Beyond the United States and Viet Nam,

Jessica Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle*

Memories of the American War in Viet Nam do not solely affect Americans and the Viet Nameese, but also the culture, politics, and citizens of other countries. Often American and Viet Nameese narratives of the war promote post-war reconciliation between former foes in addition to exploring, demonstrating, and encouraging prosthetic memories—memories acquired by individuals with no direct experience in the war.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, direct and prosthetic memories of the war surface beyond the literal and figurative battlefields of Viet Nam and the United States. For example, South Korean and Australian military personnel directly participated in the war. After the United States military, South Korean soldiers constituted the second largest military contingent during the war with 50,000 troops in 1968 alone and over 260,000 troops in Viet Nam between 1964 and 1970 (Larsen and Collins 23). The War Memorial of Korea in Seoul, dedicated in 1994, includes monuments inscribed with the names of Korean soldiers who died in Viet Nam. According to the Australian Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 61,000 Australians served in the war between 1962 and 1975 (Australia). The Australians experienced mounting anti-war protests during the war, have since conducted studies on the post-war physical and psychological effects of

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter One for a detailed examination of prosthetic memory.

the war on veterans, and they, too, have memorialized those who died in the war at the Australian War Memorial.

Furthermore, memories of the war materialize in the Philippines, a country not typically associated with remembrance of the American War in Viet Nam. However, during the American War in Viet Nam the United States maintained its two largest overseas military bases in the Philippines—Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Complex—under President Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1986). Although the Philippines was an American colony for forty-seven years (1899-1946), American ~~national~~ ignorance of the Philippines” renders the two countries’ entangled colonial history, a forgotten memory (Kirk v). Yet the history of the Philippines encompasses Spanish and American colonialism, numerous rebellions, and the protracted presence of United States military installations that resulted not in a post-colonial, but rather a complex neocolonial relationship between the Philippines and the United States.

Engaging with the memories of the American War in Viet Nam, Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle* (2003) addresses neocolonialism in the 1970s Philippines. Hagedorn writes out of a transnational perspective; she is a Filipina American who moved to the United States in 1963 at age fourteen. *Dream Jungle* begins in 1971, before the end of the American War in Viet Nam, and concludes in 2000. Hagedorn’s fragmented narrative, intended to be ~~epic~~” (Hagedorn qtd in Aguilar-San Juan 6), intertwines two actual occurrences in the Philippines in the 1970s: the filming of Francis Ford Coppola’s own war epic, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and Manuel Elizalde Jr.’s 1971 discovery of a primitive tribe, the Tasaday, subsequently alleged to be a scam. Hagedorn’s novel appeared in the early twenty-first century after the death of Elizalde and after Coppola released a reworking of the 1979 film, *Apocalypse Now*

Redux (2001). In her fictional account of these events, *Napalm Sunset* denotes Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*; Tony Pierce represents Coppola; Zamora López de Lagazpi, descendant of Spanish colonialists, stands in for Manuel Elizalde, Jr.; and the “lost” mountain tribe, the Taobo, represents the Tasaday. Discussing her combination of the filming of *Napalm Sunset* with the controversy over Zamora’s “discovery” of the Taobo, Hagedorn explains,

as legend goes, the filming of *Apocalypse Now* was a grueling, crazy process that had an impact on the Philippine landscape and on the filmmakers themselves. A conquistador like Magellan or the fictional Zamora has to be obsessed in order to do what he does. The same goes for a genius director like Coppola or my fictional Tony Pierce. (Hagedorn “A Conversation”)

The pairing highlights the novel’s central themes: “Discovery and Conquest,” the title of Part One; and “cultural mythmaking” (Hagedorn “A Conversation”).

Reworking the American and Philippine cultural mythology of the *Apocalypse Now* (1979) filming and the controversy over the Tasaday tribe discovery, Hagedorn weaves an intertextual story of colonial memory blending Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* and *Apocalypse Now: Redux* about American militarism in Viet Nam, and her own *Dream Jungle* about neocolonialism in the Philippines. Hagedorn’s contribution to a collected cultural memory—a mediated gathering of multifaceted memories—of the war transports Coppola’s films, and thus memories of the American War in Viet Nam, intertextually into the twenty-first century. Coppola invokes Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) about Belgian imperialism in

the African Congo, Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1922), and T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) and "The Hollow Men" (1925) to create a narrative that moves metaphorically into the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century past. Beginning in 1960s Saigon, the capital of South Viet Nam's Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), his characters travel upriver and into Cambodia toward the ancient temple at Kurtz's compound. As Coppola reflects on the pre-war past, the narrative simultaneously progresses forward, up the river to Kurtz and further still into the 1970s by the creation of the film in the Philippines. Yet another retelling, *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991), compiles Eleanor Coppola's documentary movie footage, photographs, and a diary that describe the making of *Apocalypse Now* in 1976 and 1977. The 1991 release of the documentary reinvigorated the legends and controversies surrounding Coppola's filming. Further revitalizing these controversies and memories of the American War in Viet Nam, Hagedorn's twenty-first century novel invokes Coppola's film and thereby Conrad, the making of the film, American militarism and neocolonialism, and the American and the Spanish colonizations of the Philippines. Both Hagedorn's and Coppola's allusions and adaptations represent "neocolonialism [as] a movable horror prone to displacement and repetition" (Norris 735). Hagedorn's narrative primarily addresses the colonial legacy of the Philippines wherein the memory of the American War in Viet Nam, via the filming *Napalm Sunset*, encroaches on the Philippines as an act of neocolonialism. Hagedorn creates a mediated representation of the war that depicts prosthetic memory of the war in the filming of *Napalm Sunset* and her novel. Memory of the war thus extends far beyond the literal and cultural battlefields of Viet Nam and the United States.

Colonial Contexts

Reminding audiences of the colonial context out of which she writes, Hagedorn begins *Dream Jungle* with a passage from Antonio Pigafetta's journal about Magellan's 1521 travels in the Philippines under the Spanish monarchy. Magellan's arrival in the Philippines brought with it requirements for baptism in the Catholic Church, demands for tribute to the Spanish monarchy, the first armed resistance to Spanish control in the Philippines, and Magellan's death in the battle of Mactan (Nadeau 24-26).¹⁰⁶ Subsequent Spanish expeditions, throughout the following fifty years, culminated in Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's 1565 settlement expedition of and dominion over the island of Cebu (26). Hagedorn interweaves this colonial history into *Dream Jungle* to demonstrate the active vestiges of colonialism at work in the Philippine archipelago. For example, Zamora, descendant of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, maintains a colonial hierarchy at his compound through the subservience of his hired help. He also revives and relives his ancestors' colonial discovery and conquest in his relationships with the Taobo.

Spain's official colonial rule in the Philippines endured from 1565 to 1899 while the concept of Filipino nationalism continued to evolve, manifesting in protests and rebellions punctuating the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries (39, 45). The growing revolutionary movement between 1896 and 1898, coupled with American support during the Spanish-American War, resulted in Filipino control of much of the country just before the United

¹⁰⁶ King Lapu Lapu of Mactan Island refused Magellan's demands that he be baptized. Thus the battle of Mactan ensued, culminating in Magellan's death.

States took Manila during the Spanish-American War (43). Despite a Filipino proclamation of independence, the establishment of the First Philippine Republic, and revolutionary liberation of much of the country, Spanish surrender to the United States in Manila translated into American control of the Philippines (43). Thus the Philippine revolution against Spain became a revolution against the United States that continued from Philippine declaration of war in 1899 through the 1901 capture of Emilio Aguinaldo, president of the First Philippine Republic, the surrender of General Miguel Malvar in 1902, and President Roosevelt's declaration of an end to the war (111, 44, xix). Nevertheless, Filipino resistance continued throughout American colonization.

American colonization of the Philippines persisted from 1899 to 1946. In addition, the Philippines became a Japanese occupied battleground during World War II. Finally, in 1946 the United States relinquished colonial power, granting Philippines independence officially recognizing the Republic of the Philippines. Yet military and economic associations with the United States persisted. The United States military maintained large military bases in the Philippines that played a vital, strategic role throughout the American War in Viet Nam. In fact, the bases were well established until a breakdown occurred in the political agreement within and between the Philippine and the United States governments concerning lease renewals for the bases; the United States withdrew in 1991 (Kirk 8-10). Nonetheless, military exercises in the Philippines between the United States and Philippine militaries continued. More recently, in 2003 the Philippines, the so-called "Second Front" in the "War on Terror," joined the George Walker Bush administration's "Coalition of the Willing" in the Iraq War (Tyner 9). In a speech at the White House in 2003, Philippine President Gloria

Macapagal-Arroyo solidified the Philippine-American alliance when she spoke of unwavering Philippine commitment (1). However, in 2004, the Philippines withdrew from the war under the demands of a hostage agreement (1).¹⁰⁷ Hagedorn calls attention to a colonial, post-colonial, and neocolonial Philippines that resides “at a geo-political and cultural juncture between East and West” (Bankof and Weekley 6).

Hagedorn employs the experiences of Vincent Moody, an American actor cast in *Napalm Sunset* and a substantial character in *Dream Jungle*, to accentuate the Philippines as a juncture between East and West. Moody encounters a Philippines reminiscent of American cinematic representations of Viet Nam during the war. Upon his arrival at the Manila airport, Filipino children surround Moody asking, “Carry your bags, Joe?” His interaction with the children parallels that of many, although certainly not all, cinematic representations of American soldiers in Viet Nam.¹⁰⁸ He “marveled at the children—stunning in their sad-eyed beauty, skinny, anxious, hungry. Little hands flapped in his face. Moody gave the children money. They demanded more, shoving and pushing to get closers to him. *Me, me, gimme Joe!*” (133). The children, too, correlate with their counterpart representations in American films of the war; they are desperate, hungry, crowding, and demanding. This scene not only suggests the poor economic conditions in the Philippines and Filipino reactions to Western visitors but also alludes to American soldiers’ interactions with Viet Nameese children who, during the war, surrounded the, soldiers seeking to sell black-market cigarettes, alcohol, and other sundries. Moreover, the thriving American-run black market depicted in *Apocalypse*

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed examination of Philippine participation in the Iraq War see James A. Tyner, *Iraq, Terror, and the Philippines’ Will to War* (Landham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ While it is most common to portray soldiers’ friendly interactions with Viet Nameese children, some films depict soldiers’ impatience with or suspicion of the children.

Now, at the munitions depot where the United Service Organizations (USO)¹⁰⁹ playboy bunny scene takes place, suggests war profiteering ~~align~~[ing] the ideologies of anti-Communist war with those of colonialism” (Norris 738). Thus both Hagedorn and Coppola expose United States cultural imperialism’s ~~importation~~ of Western values and habits into Eastern colonial contexts” (Norris 739) of the Philippines and Viet Nam respectively.

In addition to reminding audiences of Philippine colonial history and incorporating subtle reminders of the American War in Viet Nam, *Dream Jungle* also calls attention to the ongoing United States military presence in the Philippines. In 1971, when Moody arrives in the Philippines, United States military bases were still central in the geo-politics of South East Asia and the war in Viet Nam. Again, in *Dream Jungle*, Moody reminds audiences of the American military presence in the Philippines. In another moment reminiscent of American cinematic representation of the war in Viet Nam Moody encounters ~~crowdy~~ American soldiers on leave, strolling with their girls” (139). Further still, Moody sees a sun-burned man, likely a western tourist, wearing a t-shirt imprinted with the words ~~MISSING~~ IN ACTION” (134). Here, Hagedorn cleverly alludes to the prisoner of war / missing in action (POW/MIA) controversy¹¹⁰ that began with the signing of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords between the United States and Viet Nam.¹¹¹ Cultural memory of the POW/MIA cinematic mythology reached American audiences most broadly in the 1980s with such films

¹⁰⁹ The United Service Organizations (USO) provides morale and recreational to the American military at home and abroad.

¹¹⁰ For a detailed examination of the POW/MIA controversy see Bruce H. Franklin, *MIA: Mythmaking in America* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992).

¹¹¹ One of the provisions of the January 27, 1973 Paris Accords provided that Hanoi would return all American Prisoners of War within sixty days. George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* (4th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002) 399.

as *Rambo First Blood Part II* (George Cosmotos, 1985), *Uncommon Valor* (Ted Kotcheff, 1983), and *Missing in Action* (Joseph Zito, 1984). The debate continues to plague twenty-first century American cultural memory of the war. Yet, Hagedorn also capitalizes on the transformation of that memory in the popular culture adaptation of the phrase that has come to identify the pleasures of vacationing or empty-headedness. Hagedorn thus aligns United States militarism, neocolonialism, and the ongoing westernization of the Philippines.

Hagedorn's (Neo)Colonial Arc

Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* examines a transnational colonial trajectory by creating distinct parallels between Joseph Conrad's *Hearts of Darkness* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* portrayals of the renegade colonizer, Kurtz, with her colonial and neocolonial characters—Zamora, Pierce, and the corrupt government officials ranging from the president to the local mayor. Hagedorn constructs an argument quite like the one literary scholar Margot Norris identifies in Conrad's and Coppola's narratives. As Norris understands it, —thefolly both Conrad and Coppola underline in their criticism of colonial adventurism is the senseless brutality, waste, and destructiveness of enterprises with misguided and hypocritical goals and inept and ill-conceived strategies” (741). Hagedorn composes the very same critique by recasting Zamora and Pierce as Kurtz figures.

Hagedorn's Zamora and Pierce, like Conrad's and Coppola's Kurtzes, take on a commanding presence. They position themselves in a symbolic station as colonial —ather” in order to create a following among tribal peoples. Resembling the earlier Kurtzes, Zamora

positions himself as a father figure. He identifies himself to the Taobo as “Amo Dato” or “Spirit Father” (52). He also “adopts” a Taobo boy, Bobadil, who comes to live with Zamora; however, “the boss’s pet” (32) stays in one of the outbuildings near the dog kennel. By comparison, Pierce does not appear as subjugating; however, he too constructs his own following among the cast and crew of *Napalm Sunset*. Each colonizing character controls an enclosed environment that functions for his pleasure. Pierce and Zamora incessantly talk about themselves and desire attentive admiring audiences, as evidenced by each man’s large dinner parties, their acceptance of interview offers during periods of success, and their refusal of interviews during phases of failure.

Hagedorn seems to have taken her inspiration for the unsympathetic Pierce character from the following excerpt in Eleanor Coppola’s diary entry about her husband. In it, Eleanor Coppola perceives a direct parallel between Coppola’s proceedings in the Philippines and American corruption of Viet Nam. She wrote of her husband, “he was setting up his own Vietnam with his supply lines of wine and steaks and air conditioners. Creating the very situation he went there to expose . . . with his staff of hundreds of people carrying out his every request, he was turning into Kurtz—going too far” (Eleanor Coppola 177). Reflecting both Kurtz’s and Coppola’s exclusivity, Pierce’s establishment of a private lunch tent, where cast and crew may dine by invitation only, exudes the extravagance of his “own cook and a personal waiter” (Hagedorn 179). Inviting a cast member to “partake of [his] sumptuous bounty,” Pierce boasts of his “chef who travels with [him] everywhere” (182). In fact, when the Coppolas arrived in the Philippines in 1976, a housekeeper and a nanny attended them; in addition, the Marcos government immediately appointed Coppola a bodyguard (Cowie 49).

Hagedorn portrays Pierce's excessiveness as a means of revealing his neocolonial interactions with the people and government of the Philippines. He hires locals to work food service for his cast and crew; in his own words, they provide "cheap labor" (Hagedorn 247). Even Hagedorn's Billy Hernandez, an American actor cast in *Napalm Sunset*, complains, "You see the way the cast and crew walk around here like they own the place? Pierce is the worst. Thinks this country's nothing but a backdrop for his movie. The people don't matter, except when they service him and his family" (179). Hagedorn's examination of Pierce's acts of neocolonialism reveals a further truth in a Coppola statement at the 1979 Cannes film festival wherein he said, "My film is not a movie; it's not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam. It's what it was really like; it was crazy" (qtd. in Goodwin and Wise 263). Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* suggests that like the war in Viet Nam, the filming of *Napalm Sunset*, and by association *Apocalypse Now*, further exports American cultural imperialism into the Philippines. The films, according to *Dream Jungle*, thereby recreate in the Philippines the neocolonial conditions of Viet Nam during the war.

Pierce, Hagedorn's fictional mirror of Coppola, bribes Philippine government officials and thereby contributes to the corruption of those in power. For example, an interviewer suggests, to no response, that the local mayor is Pierce's "protector, [his] fixer, [his] landlord, [his] biggest fan" (247). More importantly, Pierce has no qualms paying the government large sums of money for the use of helicopters, a direct parallel to Coppola's payment of thousands of dollars a day to the Marcos government for their use (Cowie 49). Pierce refuses to recognize his implicit participation in funding the government's suppression of political uprising. Hagedorn, however, does not ignore Pierce's passive participation. She employs

actor Vincent Moody as her critical voice during one of Pierce's dinner parties with the local mayor in attendance. Moody questions Pierce and the mayor about the helicopters being called away from filming by the military because of ~~guerilla~~ "guerilla sightings" (Hagedorn 202). Moody unabashedly asks, to no avail, "How many people were killed?" (202). Again, Hagedorn took her inspiration from Coppola's dealings with the Marcos authoritarian regime. In her diary, Eleanor Coppola comments on the uprising during the filming of *Apocalypse Now*. She calls the incident part of a ~~civil~~ "civil war," but explains, ~~It~~ "it is hard to know what is going on. There is no news of the war in the government-controlled press" but that a Filipino crewman clarified that the predominantly Muslim southern islands ~~are~~ "fighting for independence" (Coppola 26).

Francis Coppola's transactions did not go unnoticed by critics who believed he was essentially underwriting the Marcos regime and thereby endorsing the government's corruption, human rights violations, cronyism, and repressive martial law that continued from 1972 until it was lifted in 1981 (Nadeau 90). Some critics found Coppola's dealings with Marcos more reprehensible than the United States' endorsement of corrupt South Vietnamese governments. For example, cinema scholar Jeffery Chown, author of *Hollywood Auteur: Francis Coppola* deems that ~~—in paying~~ "in paying the Marcos government for use of its military equipment, Coppola was supporting a government possibly more repressive than the South Vietnamese government of Diem" (126). Ngo Dinh Diem, president of South Vietnam's Republic of Viet Nam, infamously rejected national elections as prescribed in the

1954 Geneva agreement,¹¹² openly oppressed Buddhism in favor of Catholicism, committed electoral fraud among other corruptions, and was overthrown and killed by his own generals in a 1963 coup that is widely believed the United States government endorsed (Karnow 689). Yet Coppola, his critics, and Hagedorn alike attempt to expose the repetition of entangled corruption. Coppola parallels the Belgian colonialism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to the United States' militarism in Viet Nam. Coppola's critics perceive the same errors the United States military engaged in during the war in Viet Nam repeated in the Philippines. Hagedorn coalesces recurrent colonial, military, and neocolonial corruptions in her Zamora and Pierce characters.

While Pierce's and Coppola's dealings with the Marcos's government and Filipino people generally merit these critiques, Coppola's decisions should be taken in context. Coppola's fifteen-month production provided much needed, although temporary, employment for thousands of Filipinos and infused the national economy with the millions of dollars he spent in the Philippines (Crowie 47). Nonetheless, such spending is not without consequences. For example, *Newsweek's* film critic, Maureen Orth, charges Coppola of corrupting Filipinos with his disproportionate spending. She wrote, "although the local wage was less than \$10 a week, for nine months the company had been spending \$100,000 a week" (qtd. in Goodwin and Wise 226). However, local Philippine dignitaries felt differently. During a farewell party hosted by Coppola they said "the millions of dollars [the production] brought to the

¹¹² As a conclusion to the French Indo-China War in Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos, the Geneva accords included a cease-fire and an interim division of Viet Nam in anticipation of a 1956 nationwide election.

local economy were more help to them than any government economic aid program had ever been” (qtd in Eleanor Coppola 200).

Still, Coppola believed that he had no choice. The United States’ Department of Defense (DOD) refused to support the film because, they alleged, the film’s narrative did not depict the American War in Viet Nam accurately and maintained that the loan of United States military aircraft would be denied unless there were changes in the script (Crowie 49). Coppola took issue with the DOD’s decisions and voiced them in a cable sent to then Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. Coppola wrote that since the DOD assisted John Wayne’s *The Green Berets* (1968), yet refused to assist *Apocalypse Now*, he could —only assume that the military uses its control of these aircraft as a means of dictating which films can be made and which films cannot be made. Perhaps this is the reason there has been no motion picture dealing with the subject of Vietnam” (qtd in Cowie 50). In her diary, Eleanor commiserates, adding, “a film about World War II gets all sorts of cooperation” (35). The DOD does in fact have a long history of assisting, requiring changes in scripts, and denying assistance to war film productions.¹¹³

Although Coppola may have had better intentions than critics concede, Hagedorn’s title for the film, *Napalm Sunset*, calls attention to the destruction of the environment and landscape occasioned by the filming of *Apocalypse Now*. For example, the opening sequence of *Apocalypse Now* revels in the devastation of napalm on the jungle. In slow motion helicopters move across the screen as a palm-tree lined horizon explodes in an overwhelming

¹¹³ For more on the symbiotic relationship between the military and Hollywood see Lawrence L. Suid, *Guts and Glory: The Making of American Military Image in Film* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2002) and David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004).

cacophony of flames devouring the foliage. *Dream Jungle* eradicates all the romanticism and awe of destruction. Her Filipina-American character, Paz Marlowe, reflects on

the stink of dying fish washed ashore, stunned by all the explosives They were always blowing things up. Building elaborate sets only to blow them all up. . . . coconut trees on the shoreline of Lake Ramayyah ablaze with fire and smoke. The noise had been deafening The older townspeople kept their distance. (219)

Francis Coppola, also aware but appearing unconcerned about the environmental impact, commented that “There aren’t too many places in the world you could even do it; they’d never let you in the United States. The environmentalists would kill you,” yet ironically added, “But in a war, it’s okay” (Eleanor Coppola 189). Coppola and Pierce replicate the United States military’s destruction of the land in Viet Nam with bomb craters, napalm, and defoliating agents. Thus the American War in Viet Nam holds not only the capacity to return to the United States via violence, the memories of veterans, and Viet Nameese refugees and immigrants, but is also visited upon the Philippines.¹¹⁴

Hagedorn pairs the destruction of the landscape with Pierce’s and other colonizing figures’ attempts to control nature. In a chapter entitled “The Tiger” Hagedorn further portrays Pierce’s attempts to reveal the power of, yet simultaneously to control, nature. Here, Hagedorn reimagines the filming of the tiger scene in Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. In the

¹¹⁴ See Chapters One through Five for examples of the war being exported back to the United States.

film's only jungle sequence, Captain Willard, accompanied by ~~C~~hef," forays into the wilderness in search of mangoes. The tiger springs at them, and although it is not the suspected Viet Nameese ~~e~~nemy," the tiger represents the dangerous unpredictability of the jungle. The sympathetic ~~C~~hef," a reluctant draftee and would-be saucier from New Orleans, runs in terror back to the boat repeatedly screaming, ~~n~~ever get out of the boat." The tiger signifies the unknown danger in nature; the land itself, Viet Nam, is a hazard. Coppola's cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro, understood the tiger as ~~the~~symbol of nature, an unconscious fear" (qtd in Crowie 61).

Hagedorn, too, regards the tiger as emblematic of unconscious fear that holds the possibilities of ~~f~~erocious beauty and power" (Hagedorn 263). Rather than adopting the tiger's actual name, Gambi (Crowie 61), Hagedorn renames the tiger Shiva after the ~~H~~indu god of destruction" (Hagedorn 263). The creature ~~a~~ssume[s] supernatural powers and dimensions" especially for Lina,¹¹⁵ Hagedorn's central Filipina character (263). Lina's fascination with the tiger commences before its arrival in her repetitive dreams. After filming the tiger scene, Lina ~~s~~tared at the tiger, riveted. She was looking for a sign" to help her decide whether or not she would leave the Philippines (270). She believes the tiger's roar provides her answer. Even after she sees it, the tiger continues to hold a mystical power over Lina ~~d~~isturb[ing] every waking moment, every attempt at sleep. In her dreams his scowling face peered out at her" (271). Obsessed, Lina repeatedly draws the tiger and cannot escape ~~i~~ts multiplying visions . . . her nightmare of tigers" (272).

¹¹⁵ Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* follows Lina from childhood through adulthood. She works as a servant in Zamora's home and she has a romantic relationship with Moody

Lina eventually leaves the Philippines to live in the United States and once there seems to have gained an independence from her colonial and neocolonial past. Perhaps Lina's renunciation of the nightmare jungle of her youth is the only possible answer to recurrent colonialism. However, Vincent Moody remains in the Philippines rather than returning to the United States. Hagedorn renders an ambiguous dream jungle that Eleanor Coppola's reflections might best explain. She writes, —~~ma~~ay unreasonable things have happened to me since I have been in the Philippines, I no longer try to make them all fit a reasonable linear context Here, the waking world and the dream world have many things in common. The line between the two is not abrupt and definitive” (132). This is true of both Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* and Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.

In addition to figuring the filming of *Napalm Sunset* as an act of neocolonialism, *Dream Jungle* interrogates the meaning of *Apocalypse Now* and thereby questions the American War in Viet Nam. While participating in a one of the ~~read~~-throughs of the ever-evolving script” for *Napalm Sunset*, Moody reflects, —~~What~~, ultimately, was this damn movie about? That war made men crazy?” (177). An interviewer directly asks Pierce why he chose to make a film about the war. He begins with a vague, —~~Because~~ war fascinates me. And this particular war . . . well, it's so very intimate and ambiguous” (214). However, his response evolves during their interview and he later explains, —The Vietnam War makes us uneasy. It's a dirty little war, full of dirty little secrets This particular war is not heroic, not simple, and that's why I'm obsessed by it” (215).

Hagedorn's Pierce reflects the answers one might expect from Coppola based on his film's portrayal of the ~~dirty~~ little secrets” of the war and his avoidance of rendering the war

as a noble cause. Some of Coppola's critics believe that he produced an apolitical, ahistorical account of the war. For example, Joel Zuker contended, ~~the~~ "the matters of American colonialism in a war we could never win are passed over" (31). Hagedorn, seemingly aware of that general critical consensus, has her Pierce insist that he has no political agenda" (215). Cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, however, maintained that Coppola ~~wanted~~ to express the main idea of Joseph Conrad, which is the imposition of one culture on top of another culture" (qtd in Cowie 133). The ambiguity of political message in *Apocalypse Now* renders the film open for contending interpretations that often depend on audience.

Coppola's brash, gun-ho Kilgore character who ~~loves~~ "the smell of napalm in the morning" will lead some audiences and scholars to believe that the film relishes the reckless destruction of war. Still others will view Kilgore as satirical hyperbole. For example, his cavalry hat and his name ~~Kill-gore~~ "calls attention to the exaggerations of character. So too a Viet Nameese woman tossing a grenade into an American helicopter may direct viewers to deem the film an examination of a devious, unpredictable ~~enemy~~." Simultaneously, however, Coppola depicts the chaos and destruction that the United States military thrust upon the people and landscape of Viet Nam. In addition, Willard's voice-over narration relays that the narrative is a ~~confession~~ "of his own ~~sins~~" and ~~like~~ "Kurtz's extremism, they are product, effect, and confession of the American corporate violence that was Vietnam" (Norris 757). While the political message in the film may remain uncertain, Viet Nam's historical colonial context as portrayed in Coppola's *Apocalypse Now Redux* helps to clarify Coppola's intentions.

Redux

Hagedorn is not alone in her persistent memory of the intertextual colonial context of contemporary neocolonialism. Still, in the twenty-first century, Francis Ford Coppola is unable to forget *Apocalypse Now* and thereby the American War in Viet Nam as evidenced by his reimagining of the original film in *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2001). Twenty-one years after *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola feels compelled to retell the story, thus inducing audiences to revisit the war. More than a simple director's cut, Coppola and his editor Walter Murch "re-edited the film from the original unedited raw footage—the dailies" (Murch qtd in Ebert *—Rev. of Apocalypse Now Redux*). *Redux* includes an additional forty-nine minutes, twenty-five of those devoted to a scene on a French plantation in Viet Nam. Coppola's inclusion of the French colonialists creates a more historically responsible narrative framework for the American War in Viet Nam and counters critics who deemed the original film recklessly ahistorical and apolitical.¹¹⁶ The French Plantation scene did not appear in the 1979 theatrical release of *Apocalypse Now*; it was cut rather late in post-production editing, in the spring of 1979, because Coppola and Murch believed it slowed the narrative momentum of the journey upriver to Kurtz (Cowie 111). Nonetheless, the intention of the scene was, according to Murch, to construct "an interlude to give [audiences] some emotional, political background as to why the Americans were there in Vietnam Because the French had been there before and had come to this tragic end" (qtd in Cowie 110).

¹¹⁶ For an overview of critical responses to *Apocalypse Now* see Joel Zuker, *Francis Ford Coppola: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984).

Thus the reinsertion of the French Plantation sequences into *Redux* provides colonial context and reinvigorates the film's intertextual rendering of imperialist recurrence. In addition, the release of *Redux* in 2001, like Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle*, visits intertextual imperialist repetition on the twenty-first-century. Hagedorn reminds audiences of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines that preceded American colonization, in order to reveal the neocolonialism at work in the filming of *Napalm Sunset*; correspondingly, Coppola recalls French colonization of Viet Nam before American militarism in Viet Nam.

As early as 1627 French missionaries populated Viet Nam, making commercial and trade privileges possible for France (Karnow 671). As the French presence in Viet Nam increased to include troops, eventual conflicts arose between French forces and the Viet Nameese. By 1861 French forces controlled Saigon in South Viet Nam and by 1863 their control extended into Cambodia (671). Establishing a French civilian government in 1879, the French solidified control over Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos with the 1887 formation of what the French called the "Indochina Union" (672). French colonialism profoundly altered Viet Nameese culture, society, politics, and economics. In addition to replacing Viet Nameese political leadership, colonization stifled the literature, culture, religions, and peasant sustainability in Viet Nam (Anderson 11). The French plantation economy resulted in economic exploitation that could not, however, subdue the Viet Nameese resistance that evolved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Revolution eventually successfully defeated the French, who withdrew from Viet Nam in 1954.

Coppola's *Redux* reminds audiences of the French colonization of Viet Nam when Willard and his crew encounter a vestige of that history at a French plantation. Here, they experience

temporal disruption wherein time seems to have stopped during the French colonial rule in Viet Nam of the 1950s. In the dinner scene, Coppola composes a cinema verité that invokes the nostalgia of his French characters for colonial “civilization.” He adamantly selected actors from Paris, the furnishings exude authenticity, and his set dressers assembled detailed props such as the food and wine with precision (Cowie 73-74). In the documentary film *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* Coppola tells the cast and crew that he wants even French audiences to wonder, “My God, how did they do that?”

Enclosed in familiar yet surreal Western surroundings of the past, Willard is subjected to an impassioned debate in answer to his inquiries. He asks, “how long can you possibly stay here? When will you go back to France, to your home?” The French respond with laughter over the word “home” and the men, representing three generations, proceed to explain to Willard their political, economical, and emotional positions. They begin and end by reproaching the Americans. First, they recount the historical context of the Japanese occupation of Viet Nam during World War II and the initial United States military personnel support of the Viet Minh, which declared independence in 1945. The Viet Minh, otherwise known as the Viet Nameese League for Independence, formed in 1941 under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. Their anti-colonial movement gained momentum throughout the Japanese occupation of Viet Nam during World War II.

Similar to occurrences in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, the Viet Minh declared independence when the Japanese surrendered to the United States in 1945 and established the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (Moss 21-28). Despite support from United States military personnel and advisors in Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, leaders in

Washington D.C. were more concerned with maintaining alliances with France and thus supported reinstating French colonial rule in Indo-China (Moss 29-30). The Viet Minh eventually became part of the National Liberation Front (NLF)—a South Viet Nameese resistance to American military forces throughout the American War in Viet Nam (Moss 106-07). Because of this history, the French men in Coppola's dinner scene accuse the Americans of ~~in~~venting" the ~~V~~iet Cong"—a derogatory term for the Viet Nameese communists who fought against the South Viet Nameese government and the United States military. While Coppola's Philippe De Marais, the spokesman for the French family, might be right in accusing the Americans of ~~in~~venting the Viet Cong," their predecessors, the Viet Minh successfully revolted against and ousted French colonial rule.

In further response to Willard's inquiries, Marais, vehemently defends his family's right to stay in Viet Nam, explaining that

we lose in Dien Bien Phu, we lose in Indochina. In Algeria, we lose we do not lose here, never. This small piece of earth, we do not lose When my grandfather came here, there was nothing—the Viet Nameese were nothing. We work hard, we bring the rubber from Brazil, and implant it here and we make something We stay because this is ours; it belongs to us. We fight to keep what is ours. You Americans fight for the biggest nothing in history.

At the end of Marais's colonialist tirade, audiences hear a representational French critique of the American War in Viet Nam as a senseless war. However, Marais begins by recounting

the military losses France has experienced, including their protracted war in Algeria, commonly ironically referred to as France's equivalent of America's War in Viet Nam. France's invasion of Algeria in the 1830s led to colonial rule and an eventual war for Algerian independence that lasted from 1954—the same year as French defeat in Viet Nam at the battle of Dien Bien Phu—to 1962. Despite devastating losses, Marais's —dismissal of the Vietnamese as “nothing” before the [arrival of the] French” demonstrates that he endorses imperialists' beliefs (Demory 347), regarding the French colonizers as intrinsically more intelligent and cultured than the “natives” they “civilize”—colonize. Unsurprisingly, Marais also invokes ownership. Despite his imperialist rant, the French, too, seem near victims of colonialism.

While the French men speak, Willard passively listens providing no narrative voice-over as he does through most of the film. The lack of Willard's interpretive narrative voice-over heightens the scene's surrealism. As Coppola suggested, the French resemble ghosts (Ebert —Rev. of *Apocalypse Now Redux*”). Like Hagedorn's Zamora, the French live in a sheltered time capsule of colonialism; they are the vestige specters and spectacles of the colonial past.

Coppola's characters, on their journey toward and encounter with Kurtz, experience a wondrous, surreal, and nightmarish dream jungle much like the characters of Hagedorn's novel. Both Coppola's *Apocalypse Now Redux* and Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* figure characters entwined in a complicated, intertextual, colonial and neocolonial history. Resembling Conrad, Marlow, Coppola, and Willard, Hagedorn feels compelled to retell the story. Hagedorn concludes her novel with an epilogue set in 2000 wherein the now dead Zamora narrates from the confines of his funeral urn. Like the ending of T.S. Eliot's —The

Hollow Men” that Coppola’s Kurtz reads, each narrative—Coppola’s and Hagedorn’s—ends ~~not~~ with a bang, but a whimper.” Hagedorn parallels the final words of *Apocalypse Now*, Kurtz whispering, ~~the~~ horror . . . the horror,” with Zamora’s ghostly voice from beyond the grave mourning an end to his colonial era, ~~not~~ once does my name come up. Not once” (325).

Hagedorn transhistoricizes yet simultaneously repoliticizes as neocolonial Philippine memory the imperialist trajectory in Viet Nam that critics accuse Coppola of dehistoricizing and thus depoliticizing. Her *Dream Jungle*, like the *Hearts of Darkness* documentary, reveals that ~~the~~ habits of imperialism are so ingrained that they extend beyond governments to civilian organizations—to individuals” (Demory 348). The cyclic telling and retelling of colonial and neocolonial corruption reveals that the memory of the American War in Viet Nam exists in the Philippines. These two twenty-first century narratives engage with the enduring memory of the American War in Viet Nam and thereby contribute to a continuous and continual collected cultural memory of the war. Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, his *Redux*, the texts surrounding the film, and especially Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle* call attention to the multifaceted memories of the American War in Viet Nam that exist well beyond the literal and cultural battlefields of Viet Nam and the United States.

Chapter 7

Exit Strategy:

The New Vietnam Syndrome

Three decades later there is a legitimate debate about how we got into the Vietnam War and how we left . . . one unmistakable legacy of Vietnam is that the price of America's withdrawal was paid by millions of innocent citizens whose agonies would add to our vocabulary new terms like boat people, ' re-education camps, ' and killing fields. ' There was another price to our withdrawal from Vietnam, and we can hear it in the worlds of the enemy we face in today's struggle . . .

—President George Walker Bush at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention, August 18, 2007

The American War in Viet Nam remains a specter in the debate over American withdrawal from protracted twenty-first century wars. As President George Walker Bush defended his administration's refusal to withdraw from the Iraq War three decades later, he invoked the "legacy" of the American War in Viet Nam as one of disaster for Viet Nameese and Cambodian civilians.¹¹⁷ He further connects the outcome of the war to bolstering

¹¹⁷ Cambodia shares a long entangled history with Viet Nam as it was part of colonial French Indo-China, was at different times throughout the American War in Viet Nam neutral and not, it was subject to U.S. bombings, a Civil War, and U.S. troop invasion in the early 1970s. Certainly, the American War in Viet Nam contributed to destabilizing Cambodia. The Communist Khmer Rouge genocidal attacks on Cambodia's civilians continues to symbolize yet another disaster associated with the American War in Viet Nam; however, former President Bush tries to reframe the "killing fields" of Cambodia as resultant of American withdrawal from Viet Nam rather than

terrorism in the twenty-first century. Bush cites Osama bin Laden's and his number two man, Zawahiri's] references to the American War in Viet Nam as demonstrative of a credibility problem. According to Bush, bin Laden pointed to American anti-war movements and lack of political will to sustain a protracted war when he said, "the American people had risen against their government's war in Vietnam. And they must do the same today." In addition, Bush quotes Zawahiri summoning the outcome of the American War in Viet Nam when he wrote of the aftermath of the collapse of the American power in Vietnam and how they ran and left their agents." Thus, Bush contends that U.S. withdrawal from the war in Viet Nam continues to damage American military credibility. In doing so, Bush invokes the "shame" and "guilt" that former President Ronald Reagan associated with the "Vietnam Syndrome" in his 1980 Veterans of Foreign War Convention speech. Former President Bush not only employed the memory of the American War in Viet Nam as a reason to continue the Iraq War but also believed that America's withdrawal from Viet Nam emboldened enemy resistance. Ultimately, he argues that withdraw from the American War in Viet Nam was a mistake.

In the 1990s, the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) seemed to place a bookend on America's "shame" associated with the "Vietnam Syndrome" when upon achieving military objective in the Persian Gulf, former President George Herbert Walker Bush declared that Americans had finally "kicked the Vietnam Syndrome." However, the twenty-first century "War on Terror," especially the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, renewed American political remembrance of the

rooted in the American military presence in Viet Nam. In 1978 The People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) invaded and occupied Cambodia in response to Khmer Rouge attacks.

war in Viet Nam. —~~By~~ond the Battlefield” is a product of that remembrance among other cultural and more personal memories of the war’s aftermath. This study explores the range of public and private memories of the American War in Viet Nam, between the Persian Gulf War and the —War on Terror” that began in 2000, in order to demonstrate that the war in Viet Nam has not and cannot be relegated to the forgotten past.

A multifaceted and ongoing collected cultural memory of the American War in Viet Nam rests at the center of the memorial, poetic, cinematic, and prose narratives examined herein. Although direct memories continue to inspire representations of the war, memories of the war are no longer solely the domain of those who directly participated in the war, nor do they belong only to the so-called Vietnam Generation, nor are they limited to direct intergenerational memories held by those descending from participants in the war; instead, memories of the war have taken on a transgenerational, transnational prosthetic value. They are moveable and supplemental additions to direct, experiential memories of the war. Prosthetic memories unbound memory and make remembrance viable for those who have no direct experience with or connection to the events remembered. Tensions among and the multiplicity of official, public, direct, private, material, and performative memorialization existent in collected cultural and prosthetic memories expand insight into twenty-first century modes of remembrance.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) in Washington D.C. serves as an impetus to these multifaceted, turn-to-the-twenty-first-century remembrances of the American War in Viet Nam. The memorial design incited controversy over how Americans would memorialize the war. The memorial encourages a collected cultural memory of the war in

the public and private memorial performances in addition to the material memories deposited at the memorial. The VVM became a democratic space of multifaceted memories that inspires and encourages further remembrance. For example, poetic responses to and representations of remembrance at the VVM illustrate means of interacting with the memorial. Although the poems often originate from the direct memories of the war that the Vietnam veteran poets hold, the poems also explore the possibilities and limitations of prosthetic memories in their representations of non-veteran visitors to the memorial.

In the shadow of the VVM's dedication, new voices of direct memory had yet to be heard. Thus, servicewomen who participated in the war initiated a women's memorial fund. With the dedication of the national Vietnam Women's Memorial (VWM), in 1993, a new moment of more inclusively remembering the American War in Viet Nam began. The VWM attempts to memorialize women's vital participation in the war. Its narrative representation of that service in the sculpted figures legitimizes women's service in the war. Unfortunately, the project of legitimation succumbs to patriarchal, mimetic modes of representation. Importantly, the VWM contributes new perspectives and memories to a collected cultural memory of the war. The VWM serves as a significant representation of American women's direct experiences in and memories of the war. American cinematic and literary narratives broaden this spectrum to include American and Viet Nameese civilian women's war and post-war direct and prosthetic memories. These narratives represent a reality that wives of Vietnam veterans also often acquire proximity induced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Wives of Vietnam veterans remain underrepresented in cultural memories of the war. Perhaps, humanities and psychological scholars will now reconsider the importance of

women's and spouses' experiences for memory, cultural, political, historical, and military studies, especially in the context of twenty-first century wars.

These new memories, contending with a desire to forget the misnamed "Vietnam Syndrome," seek recognition of service at the VWM and reconciliation between former foes—both veteran and civilian and Americans and the Viet Nameese in American and Viet Nameese narratives. Thus, Viet Nameese literature, beyond that of the State-sanctioned celebratory patriotism, arrived in English translation in the 1990s. Finally, American memories of the war began to include the direct memories of the Viet Nameese, specifically those of America's and the southern Republic of Viet Nam's past adversaries—veterans of the northern People's Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (PAVN), also known as the North Viet Nameese Army (NVA). Imaginative representations of the war written by America's former foes broaden a collected cultural memory of the war, and makes possible further prosthetic memories of the war. Moreover, these works encourage Viet Nameese unity beyond official propaganda and reconciliation between Viet Nameese and American veterans of the war. The study of Viet Nameese imaginative representations of the war is the newest burgeoning area of interest in the field of Vietnam War studies.

Viet Nam is evolving in the American imagination into a country rather than a war. Twenty-first century American narratives explore returning to Viet Nam as a means of demarcating the country from veterans' memories of the war. Place, in these narratives, becomes vital for private memorial performance as it does in other literatures. The simultaneity of past and present at private sites of memory holds the potential for the living to confront the present absence of the dead.

Despite women's and Viet Nameese voices broadening representations and memories of the war, American turn-to-the-twenty-first-century remembrance of war preferred to recall, reenact, and memorialize the ~~—good~~ war," World War II, fought by the ~~—greatest~~ generation." Thus, twenty-first century response to the ~~—Vietnam Syndrome~~" in the aftershocks of attacks on the World Trade Center and the United States Pentagon on September 11, 2000 (9/11) resulted in popular response to Randall Wallace's *We Were Soldiers* (2002). The film returns to direct memories of the American male soldier in Viet Nam. More importantly, however, the film reverts to the generic conventions of World War II combat films in part to reframe the American War in Viet Nam as Reagan's ~~—noble~~ cause." As one of the most recent, and certainly the most frequently recalled, narrative films about the American War in Viet Nam, *We Were Soldiers* influences some audiences to regard favorably the prospect of war.

Yet in the twenty-first century, Viet Nam and the United States are not the only places of remembrance. Memories of the American War in Viet Nam haunt such locations as the Philippines. The Philippines as a site for prosthetic memories of the American War in Viet Nam, as depicted in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* (2003), reveals the recurrence of colonialism and neocolonialism. The novel also demonstrates transnational memories of the war, that may be found elsewhere, such as in South Korea and Australia—two countries that contributed the greatest ground troop support in aid to the United States military during the war.

A New “Vietnam Syndrome”

The specter of the American War in Vietnam continues to haunt twenty-first century American consciousness, militarism, politics, and foreign policy. It remains necessary to confront fully the effects of fighting a war of counter-insurgency and sectarian violence on a nation's ideology and the disillusionment of those who participate in war. However, American attitudes toward the Iraq War is further entangled with the legacies of the American War in Viet Nam that results in what I define as a New Vietnam Syndrome—the seeming impossibility of withdrawal or formulating an exit strategy in the midst of war. The New Vietnam Syndrome, reliant on cultural memory of the war in Viet Nam, entails a reluctance to withdraw troops from Iraq and Afghanistan before achieving elusive “victory.” Partial American perceived necessity of continuing to wage these wars is borne from fears of repeating the failures of the war in Viet Nam and its aftermath, particularly the defeat and chaos associated with the 1975 Fall of South Viet Nam’s capital, Saigon, after American troop withdrawal from Viet Nam.

The New Vietnam Syndrome first surfaced within the context of the War in Iraq. At the core of the New Vietnam Syndrome, unwillingness on the part of American neoconservatives to determine terms of “victory” and to create a regional diplomatic solution, and a refusal to withdraw troops from Iraq reverberated with fears of reenacting the war in Viet Nam. In addition, the syndrome accompanied rhetorical debates that framed the war in Iraq as a good war synonymous with World War II, or a bad war similar to the American War in Viet Nam. Ironically, the New Vietnam Syndrome requires a poignant remembrance of the “shame” and

~~guilt~~” at the core of Reagan’s understanding of the ~~“Vietnam Syndrome”~~ and former president George Walker Bush’s 2007 Veterans of Foreign Wars convention speech. It also insists on amnesia concerning America’s conduct during the war in Viet Nam. America’s response to guerilla warfare and sectarian hostility in Viet Nam entailed violence against civilians and a continuous escalation of American troop levels. Concerning the Iraq War, withdrawal, in the dominant rhetorical strategy during the George Walker Bush administration (2000-2008), would cause defeat, and defeat would signify ~~another~~ Vietnam.” Withdrawing troops from Iraq threatens George Herbert Walker Bush’s 1990 promise of ~~no~~ more Vietnams.” If the ~~“Vietnam Syndrome”~~ of the 1970s was isolationist, indicating a reluctance to engage militarily in international affairs, the New Vietnam Syndrome of the twenty-first century requires that the United States maintain a military presence in protracted wars. In other words, America must not withdraw troops from Iraq. The echo of failure, defeat, guilt, and admittance in Iraq reminds some Americans of an unbearable reenactment of the American War in Vietnam. Still, Americans continue to wage war in the name of an old myth—American historical destiny of exceptionalist benevolence. America, in the Iraq War, has imported American myths of progress, technological superiority, and moral legitimacy into a new desert frontier and a destructed urban jungle, Baghdad. And, yet the United States is caught in a bind reminiscent of the American War in Viet Nam.

Although 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan garner most American’s attention in the early twenty-first century, American anti-war movements against the Iraq War harkened back to the anti-war movement of the 1960s. Some of the faces of the earlier anti-war

movement reappeared in the media and the anti-war movement had learned a very crucial lesson, as Harold G. Moore would have them think of the American War in Viet Nam: ~~hate~~ war but love the American warrior.”¹¹⁸ In order to avoid the negative connotations associated with the 1960s anti-war movement, members of the Iraq War anti-war movement very carefully reminded the public that they were supporting the soldiers in their call to end the war.

Some Americans called into question the purpose of the Iraq War. They questioned the misinformation presented to the world at the outset of the war; they questioned motives for continuing to fight a war that seemed to have no good cause. As the war in Iraq protracted into a war longer than World War II with little improvement militarily, politically, or physically for the lives of Iraqis, the anti-war movement continued to be concerned that Americans and Iraqis will persistently be embroiled in violence for years to come.

Politically and militarily, the American War in Viet Nam also unavoidably haunts the War in Afghanistan. During implementation of the President Barack Obama administration’s plan for a protracted withdrawal from the Iraq War, America’s attention turned toward the War in Afghanistan. Soon after President Obama’s inauguration, *Newsweek* dubbed the war “Obama’s Vietnam” in its February 9, 2009 cover story. President Obama’s inheritance of protracted wars recalled former presidents Lyndon Johnson’s and Richard Nixon’s inheritances of the American War in Viet Nam.

¹¹⁸ Harold Moore, ~~—~~Getting it Right‘ Behind the Scenes,” *We Were Soldiers* dir. Randall Wallace, Paramount, 2002, DVD.

In his December 2009 Address to the Nation, “On the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan” at West Point Military Academy, President Barack Obama directly addressed comparisons between the war in Viet Nam with the War in Afghanistan. Speaking of ~~those~~ who suggest that Afghanistan is another Vietnam,” President Obama emphasized their call for withdrawal explaining,

They argue that [Afghanistan] cannot be stabilized and we’re better off cutting our losses and rapidly withdrawing. I believe this argument depends on a false reading of history. Unlike Vietnam, we are joined by a broad coalition of 43 nations that recognizes the legitimacy of our action. Unlike Vietnam, we are not facing a broad-based popular insurgency. And most importantly, unlike Vietnam, the American people were viciously attacked from Afghanistan, and remain a target.

Unlike his negative assessment of the U.S. military invasion of Iraq, President Obama differentiates the War in Afghanistan as a necessary war. Unfortunately, his distinctions between the American War in Viet Nam and the War in Afghanistan depend on that ~~false~~ reading of history” he accuses opposition to the war employing. In fact, during the American War in Viet Nam the United States garnered a coalition of seven countries that supplied ground troops and thirty-nine nations that provided non-military aid to Viet Nam.¹¹⁹ Certainly both wars share counter-insurgency military tactics. Just how ~~broad-based~~” the

¹¹⁹ Larsen, Stanley Robert Lt. Gen., and Brig. Gen. James Lawton Collins Jr., *Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Dept. of the Army. Washington D.C., 1985, n. pag.) *U.S. Army Center for Military History* 18 Dec. 2002. Web. 28 Oct. 2009. < <http://www.history.army.mil/books/Vietnam/allied/>>

insurgency in Afghanistan is rests at the center of many debates about the war and remains to be seen. While a perceived and unsuccessful attack on a ship in foreign waters does not suffice as a comparison today with the attacks on 9/11, most believed that the United States military had been attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin off the Viet Nameese coastline in 1964.¹²⁰ In addition, prospects of broadening the “War on Terror” in Pakistan and Yemen seem to exhaust an American public and military. Once again, the United States is war weary. As wounded soldiers return from wars in the Middle East with amputations, brain injuries, and Post-Traumatic Stress, the United States and much of the world encounters new vestiges of war. The ways in which we memorialize and remember twenty-first century wars will be influenced by remembrances and memorialization of the American War in Viet Nam.

Since its dedication in 1982 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial continues to influence modes of memorialization for other wars. For example, black granite is no longer taboo in war memorials. In addition, memorials proliferate that name or enumerate loss of life. Other war memorials emphasize loss of life by either listing the names as the VVM does, by means of gold stars as seen in the World War II memorial, or by using combat boots to represent the number dead as the anti-war *Eyes Wide Open* traveling memorial project does for the ongoing Iraq War. This memorial, in particular, employs the absent body as the primary

¹²⁰ The Gulf of Tonkin incident, preceded by both the North Viet Nameese and American forces engaging in covert warfare in violation of the Geneva Accords, occurred in August 1964. Two destroyer-class ships, the USS *Maddox* and USS *Turner Joy*, reported that they were under attack and President Johnson ordered aircraft reprisal raids against North Vietnamese targets. Days later the U.S. Congress enacted the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution granting President Lyndon Johnson authority to repel and prevent further aggression. Johnson later used the resolution as a postdated declaration of war. It was later discovered that there were no attacks. Many have since argued that America entered the war under false pretenses.

means of memorialization. The present absence located in the empty combat boots attempts to communicate simultaneously individual and mass loss of life.

Whenever acquaintances ask what this dissertation is about, I tell them that I am writing about the way ~~we~~” remember the American War in Viet Nam since 1990, between the Persian Gulf War and the ~~War~~ on Terror.” Their initial response is silence, quickly followed by a variety of reactions that range from ~~that was a bad war,~~” to some quasi-personal story about someone they knew who was drafted or luckily missed the draft for a variety of reasons, to blaming Jane Fonda for losing the war. The recall of Jane Fonda exposes continuing contestation over the war’s outcome and thereby memories of the war. In addition, whenever I further explain that twenty-first century remembrance of the war differs greatly from the 1980s Ramboesque version of the war everyone turns their attention to the ~~War~~ on Terror.” In the twenty-first century the American War in Viet Nam becomes the specter of protracted war, of counter-insurgency, and of loss of life. Thus while the war may become ~~ancient history~~” for many of my future students, I have also recently taught students whose fathers participated in the war. Still, most students hold prosthetic memories of the war based on either their interest in the 1960s generation and the anti-war movement, or their memories of watching movies about the war, or further still from cultural sound bites played on the radio from *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979). They all seem to know that Coppola’s Colonel Kilgore ~~love[s]~~ the smell of napalm in the morning.” Still other students hold an interest in studying the American War in Viet Nam in the context of twenty-

first century wars. Although the inspiration for the preceding chapters stems from personal, intergenerational, and cultural memories of the war, prosthetic memories of the war exhibit the impossibility of relegating the American War in Viet Nam to the forgotten past and the future possibilities of broader remembrance.

Afterword

The memory of the American War in Viet Nam has been an integral part of my identity since childhood. How could someone born the year after the Fall of Saigon hold memories of the war? Why would someone even want to embrace memories of a war that most Americans try to forget? By and large, my memories of the war are cultural memories; they are American memories; and they are the memories of a Vietnam veteran's daughter. They are memories of American cultural and familial legend and mythology. They are memories of Sylvester Stallone as John Rambo in *First Blood*—they are echoes of family members reciting Rambo's famous "one man dead, not my fault" line. They are memories of my little sister and I crawling through the woods playing Rambo. They are memories of acting tough and of playing survival. They are memories of Chuck Norris as Colonel James Braddock going back to Viet Nam long after the war was over to rescue American POWs in *Missing in Action*. My memories of the war intermingled with *Platoon*, and later *Full Metal Jacket* from which I acquired one of my nicknames—Jelly—from my brother and his best-friend; they called the tall, gangly, "too skinny" girl that I was "Jelly Doughnut," or "Jelly" for short.

The war was also a mystery, an inaccessible secrecy. I remember sitting on the living room floor watching my father looking at his photo albums which had the gold outline of the borders of Viet Nam embossed on the cover. But Viet Nam was not then a country for me; it was a war; it was a disaster; it was something we could have won; it was my father. I wondered why or how a war could have stolen the man who I thought my father might have been without it. Vietnam was a reason and an excuse.

Later, while attending college, I took a course called *Art and Disaster*. Under the guidance of my professor, Bruno Chaouat, I discovered that I *could*, after all, write about the war. Since then, my memories of the war have evolved from equating the word Vietnam with war, disaster, loss, and lingering emotional consequences to regarding Viet Nam as a country where the United States engaged in a war. Yes, that war still haunts my family and my country. Today, memories of the American War in Viet Nam continue to be of loss, failure, and disappointment; however, these memories in American cinema, literature, and memorials have transformed into a broader reflection on memory and memorialization. Thus, the modes of memory and means of memorialization over thirty years after the end of the war becomes the focus of the preceding. What was once a private memory is now a public, intergenerational, and transnational memory.

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