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Ambiguity as Persuasion: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

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Visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial generally are deeply moved by it—regardless of their positions on the Vietnam War itself. In this essay, five visual features of the memorial are identified that enable it to appeal to virtually all visitors: (a) It violates the conventional form of war memorials; (b) It assumes a welcoming stance; (c) It provides little information to the visitor; (d) It focuses attention on those who did not survive the war; and (e) It generates multiple referents for its visual components. The effectiveness of the memorial suggests that it may serve as a model for contemporary anti-war rhetoric.

KEY CONCEPTS Vietnam Veterans Memorial, ambiguity, aesthetic response, meaning, intentionality, form, multiple referents, anti-war rhetoric.

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> **A long and a painful process has brought us to this moment today. Our Nation, as you all know, was divided by this war. For too long we tried to put that division behind us by forgetting the Vietnam war and, in the process, we ignored those who bravely answered their Nation's call, adding to their pain the additional burden of our Nation's own inner conflict.** (Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bill, 1982, p. 1268)

With these words, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the legislation that authorized the construction of a memorial in Washington, D.C., for those who fought in the Vietnam War. The result of the legislation is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, set in a park in sight of the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the dome of the Capitol. It is a V formed by two black granite walls that diminish in height as they extend outward, making the monument appear to descend into the earth. Chiseled into the walls are the names of the ~~57,930 men and 9 women~~ who died or are listed as missing in the Vietnam War. The names are arranged chronologically according to date of death, beginning with July 8, 1959, when two military advisors were killed.

The monument bears two inscriptions. On the first panel are the words, "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." On the final panel, an inscription notes that the memorial was built with private contributions (Clarke, 1983).

A memorial to honor those who fought in the Vietnam War was the idea of Jan Scruggs, a Vietnam veteran who was seriously wounded during the war. In 1979, he organized and become president of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, founded to erect a national monument to those who had died in the Vietnam War. Legislation authorizing the memorial passed Congress on January 3, 1980, with all 100 members of the Senate co-sponsoring the resolution. It was signed into law by President Carter on July 1, 1980.

In October, 1980, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund members announced a juried competition to select a design for the memorial; seed money to launch the contest was provided by Texas millionaire H. Ross Perot. Two design requirements were stipulated: The names of the 57,939 Americans who died or are missing in Vietnam had to be engraved on the memorial, and contestants were required to be sensitive to the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, which bracket the site (Hess, 1983, p. 122). Jurors for the competition were landscape architects Hideo Sasaki and Garrett Eckbo; architects Harry Weese and Pietro Belluschi; sculptors Constantino Nivola, James Rosati, and Richard Hunt; and Grady Clay, editor of *Landscape Architecture* (Wolfe, 1982, p. 13). In May, 1981, the design selected as the winner of the competition was that of Maya Lin, a twenty-two-year-old, Chinese-American undergraduate majoring in architecture at Yale University.

After the design had won the approval of the National Capital Planning Commission, the Fine Arts Commission, and the Department of the Interior, opposition to the design surfaced. It began when Tom Carhart, a Vietnam veteran and lawyer in the Pentagon, called Lin's design "a black gash of shame and sorrow" (McCombs, March 1982, p. 14). He was joined in opposition by Perot, who had funded the competition, and James Webb, a Vietnam veteran and former counsel to the House Veterans Affairs Committee. The opposition gained momentum, and two dozen Republican Congressional representatives wrote President Reagan demanding reconsideration of the design. In January, 1981, Interior Secretary James Watt withdrew his support for the design just six weeks before the scheduled groundbreaking.

In March, after sponsors of the memorial agreed to incorporate the American flag and a statue of an infantryman in the design and the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission approved the changes, Watt gave approval and cleared the way for the memorial's groundbreaking and construction. In October, 1982, the Commission on Fine Arts ruled that the statue and flagpole must be separated from and not intrude on Lin's original design (Shannon, 1982). Lin's memorial was dedicated on November 13, 1982; the statue, *Three Fightingmen,* was dedicated on November 9, 1984. Designed by Frederick Hart, a Washington, D.C., sculptor, it is a seven-foot-high, realistic depiction of three soldiers—one Caucasian, one Black, and one Hispanic—dressed in fatigues and carrying guns and ammunition. The statue now creates an entrance, with an American flag, to the park in which the memorial designed by Lin is located.

Since the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982, visitors have responded to it positively and with great emotion. Regardless of one's opinion on the war or the role one assumed during it, the monument has the

capacity for strong appeal. "Breathtaking" was the description of it by one veteran, who was moved to tears by his visit to it (Thornton, 1982). Those who did not participate in or who protested against the war, however, are similarly moved. "It just pulls you in. It's incredible as a monument," explained a former protester of the war. She admitted that she was completely unprepared for the emotional experience of seeing the memorial for the first time (Schmidt, 1982). The opposition and negative reaction to Lin's design that surfaced prior to the construction of the memorial has quieted as a consequence of its overwhelming favorable reception by visitors.

The capacity of an object such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to appeal to audiences of diverse and often opposing perspectives offers the opportunity to study rhetoric of exceptional breadth and force. A truism in speech communication is the need to tailor rhetoric to appeal to a particular audience and particular circumstances if it is to be effective. This memorial represents a case in which a rhetorical work is confronted by very different audiences who experienced the Vietnam War differently; nonetheless, it manages to transcend the differences and appeal to virtually all audience members. My purpose in this essay is to identify the characteristics of the memorial that enable it to perform this function and thus to serve both as a symbol of the opposition to the Vietnam War and as a symbol of honor to those who participated in it.

Rhetoric of the Visual Image

My analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is based on a number of assumptions concerning the relationship between the visual arts and rhetoric. I believe that the visual image is a form of rhetoric, a view congruent with Burke's view of symbolicity as encompassing not only talk, but "all other human symbol systems, such as mathematics, music, sculpture, painting, dance, architectural styles, and so on" (Burke, 1966, p. 28). As the conscious production or arrangement of sounds, colors, forms, movements, and other elements in a manner that affects or evokes a response, visual art is included in the definition of rhetoric suggested by Ehninger—"all of the ways in which men may influence each other's thinking and behavior through the strategic use of symbols" (Ehninger, 1972, p. 3). A building provides an example of just how a visual structure influences those who use it or look at it. The building not only "tells" us about the people who designed and chose it, but its features can modify our own reactions, encouraging us to feel, for example, more courtly when we enter a palace, more pious when we enter a church, more studious when we enter a library, or more businesslike when we enter an office (Mumford, 1968, p. 265).

The definition of art as rhetoric, admittedly, requires the acceptance of still other assumptions. I am presupposing, in a work of art, intentionality, which is a concept that is problematic in discursive and even more so in non-discursive rhetoric. While beliefs, fears, hopes, desires, perceptual experiences, and the words we use to describe them are intrinsically intentional in that they are directed at objects, events, and conditions, visual objects are not intrinsically

intentional in the same way; they exist simply as physical phenomena in the world (Searle, 1980, pp. 250–251). A work of art can be seen as representing the intentionality of its creator, however, in that the creator's intention or purpose exists only in terms of the formal matter of the work. The actual art object is not merely the end result of an initial purpose, but it is itself the purpose from the very beginning of the creative act. The image first held in the artist's mind had to be conceived in terms of materials and processes to become the matter of the work (Dewey, 1934, pp. 276–277). Thus, the art object itself *is* intended meaning, and it contained intention to be what it is from the moment of its conception (Nemerov, 1980, p. 9).

Visual works of art, then, may be considered rhetoric in that they produce effects and are intentional and purposive objects. To study visual works of art *only* as rhetoric, however, is to ignore important features of the works that distinguish them in significant ways from discursive rhetoric—their aesthetic qualities and the aesthetic responses they may evoke. I propose that a useful way to conceptualize a viewer's response to a visual object is that it assumes two forms or occurs in two steps—the aesthetic and the rhetorical. While these will be described more fully in the discussion that follows, in short, the aesthetic precedes the rhetorical response and consists of a direct perceptual encounter with the sensory aspects of the object. The rhetorical response that follows constitutes the processing of the aesthetic experience and thus the attribution of meaning to the object.

Certainly, there is no general agreement as to the nature of the aesthetic experience, but it tends to be seen as the apprehension or perception of the sensory elements of an art object. Of primary consideration in this experience is the recognition that the form of the art object itself is interesting or significant. Experience of a work at an aesthetic level might mean, for example, enjoying its color, sensing its form, valuing its texture, or responding to its complexity. Because an aesthetic response requires that we pay attention to and contemplate an art object simply for the sake of enjoying the way it looks, the aesthetic response is not functional or instrumental; we do not view an object out of concern for any purpose it may serve. When we apprehend a color, for example, its significance consists simply in the way it looks to us; it has no meaning beyond itself. There is no purpose governing the experience other than that of simply having the experience (Stolnitz, 1960, pp. 34, 35).

A work comes to mean more than what we directly perceive as a result of a rhetorical response to it. At this stage, the aesthetic components are processed by the viewer, using symbols, so that an interpretation of the aesthetic experience results. A rhetorical response, in other words, involves a critical, reflective analysis of the work or a cognitive apprehension of it. With a rhetorical response, the colors, lines, textures, and rhythms of the work no longer are apprehended for their own sake, but their presence provides a basis for the viewer to infer the existence of something else; they begin to refer to images, emotions, and ideas beyond themselves. A blue color, for example, may be interpreted by the viewer as representative of the sky, adventure, or freedom.

In an art object's function as a symbol for other elements, however, no one true meaning or interpretation can be made. To say that an art object has meaning does not mean that it signifies some fixed referent. Rather, meaning results only from a viewer's creation of an interpretation of the visual object. Different meanings are attributed to a work of art, then, by different viewers as a result of the different endowments and experiences brought to the work. Their varying observational abilities, knowledge about and familiarity with the object, beliefs, values, and emotional predispositions serve as filters for them as they experience and interpret the work.

An audience remains a crucial variable in the process of interpretation even when an artists does not show a work of art to anyone, creating it only to serve as a focus for his or her personal images. The artist is an active perceiver and interpreter of the art and thus serves as his or her own audience for the work (Berleant, 1970, p. 61). The artist is subject to the same processes of interaction with the work as is the external viewer, attributing some meaning to it and experiencing its effects. As Kaelin explains, "the artist learns as much from his work as does his audience. The artist is his first appreciator, . . . the first one surprised to discover 'his' idea" (1970, p. 38).

The predominant role of the audience in the establishment of the meaning for a work of art, however, does not mean that a viewer has total freedom to attribute any meaning at all to the work. A viewer's interpretation is limited by the actual object itself. I do not intend to suggest that meaning is a constituent part of the object and that there is something about the object itself that is responsible for the meaning attributed to it. For if meaning were intrinsic to the object, of course, all those who perceived it would apprehend the same meaning. Yet, the solid physical presence of a work of art makes possible the work's aesthetic and rhetorical effects and, more important, renders one rhetorical interpretation more likely to occur than another.

The boundaries imposed on interpretation by the physical object do not determine specific meanings for the work but rather discourage certain interpretations and encourage others by providing experiential limits to the range of interpretation open to a viewer. Even when the meaning attributed by a viewer is far removed from the contemplation of a physical element of a work, that meaning ultimately can be traced back to that element of the work itself. Thus, the pointillism of Seurat provides a material starting point for interpretation that is distinctly different from the cubism of Picasso, and these physical forms themselves are likely to lead to different attributions of meaning by viewers (Berleant, 1970, p. 53). The attribution of meaning in the rhetorical response, then, has a basis in the formed matter of the work. The various interpretations viewers bring to it are grounded in the material or physical aspects of the work. Individual experience alone is not a reliable clue to the meaning of a work; to be considered valid, meaning must be shown to be grounded in the material characteristics of the work.

Although I have discussed them separately, the aesthetic and rhetorical responses are not distinct processes that occur apart from each other. An aesthetic response generally becomes a rhetorical one. Rarely do we have an experience that is purely sensory and in which we do not interpret in some

way the sense data we perceive so that they become meaningful or rhetorical. We see more than a patch of color, for example; we see a stop sign or a flag.

Some responses may appear to be predominantly rhetorical and to occur without a concomitant aesthetic experience. The work of art itself may appear to be simply a vehicle for the communication of ideas or emotions, and because our focus is on the effect of the object, we do not apprehend it for its own sake. For example, the hearing of a song ("They're playing our song") may call up memories so that the listener responds minimally to the actual music, which becomes simply a backdrop for the memories. But even in such a case, the aesthetic response still cannot be separated from the rhetorical experience since the aesthetic/physical qualities provide a foundation and a starting point for the rhetorical experience.

The analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that follows relies on the assumptions I have just described about the relationship between the visual image and rhetoric. While I recognize that viewers may have both aesthetic and rhetorical responses to the memorial, my focus in this essay is on the rhetorical responses generated to it. If a viewer responds primarily to the regularity and pattern of the names on the memorial, for example, the response is predominantly aesthetic and beyond the scope of my analysis. But if that viewer attributes meaning to the names and they are used to consider the tragedy of war, the response has become a rhetorical one of the type in which I am interested.

My method of analysis will be to identify the physical or material properties of the memorial that a viewer is likely to use as the basis for attribution of meanings to the memorial. While my description of these may be seen as anthropomorphic in that I will use phrases such as "the memorial provides" or "the memorial generates," this style was selected simply as a matter of convenience. I do not intend to suggest that the meaning of the memorial lies in these physical attributes or that the memorial is itself a rhetor capable of producing purposive communication. Rather, I am suggesting that as the physical embodiment of its creator's intention, the memorial can be examined as containing particular characteristics that are likely to guide the viewer's interpretation in particular directions. The viewer is free to interpret the memorial or create meaning for it according to his or her own experiences, as long as the meaning attributed is grounded somehow in the material form of the memorial. This material form provides the starting point as well for my analysis of how the memorial generates meaning to viewers.

Visual Appeal of the Memorial

I have asserted that a predominant feature of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is its apparent capacity to appeal to diverse viewers who assume very different stances toward the Vietnam War. I will argue that this appeal stems from five major visual features of the memorial: (a) It violates the conventional form of war memorials; (b) It assumes a welcoming stance; (c) It provides little information to the visitor; (d) It focuses attention on those who did not survive the war; and (e) It generates multiple referents for its visual

components. My discussion will apply only to Lin's design; Hart's statue will not be considered in my analysis.

Violation of Conventional Memorial Form

Most visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial approach it with some knowledge of the form of conventional war memorials and expect to see yet another such memorial. Burke discusses the operation of this kind of conventional form as "the appeal of form as *form*" (Burke, 1968, pp. 126–127), and it is characterized by built-in expectations of a particular form that the audience brings to a work. That this memorial is a far cry from the customary warriors' monument is immediately evident. We do not see soldiers erecting a flag, a general on a horse, white marble bearing inscriptions of quotations by the famous about the war and those who served in it, or flags waving. We have, then, in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, ~~violation~~ of the conventional form of war memorials.

Conventional form is violated here primarily in that the memorial lacks any ~~realistic depiction of~~ those who fought in the war, a feature generally included in war memorials. There is no statue reminiscent of John Wayne, with the hero engaged in a task representative of the fighting done in the war. Missing also are the realistic details of his uniform and a stoic, brave facial expression. These traditional kinds of realistic depictions of a person, action, clothing, and facial expression suggest that these conventional statues are to be viewed as representative of a universal type. The soldier depicted is to be seen as wearing the uniform all soldiers wore, wearing the facial expression common to soldiers, and performing actions they all performed or were capable of performing. We are asked, at such memorials, to focus on a representative of a class and thus to see the war in abstract terms.

In contrast, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, we are given no encouragement to see classes of people and an ~~abstract, ideal, remote~~ war. The listing of each name and the fact that each can be touched by the visitor demands that we see the Vietnam War in concrete, personal terms as the killer of each person whose name appears. Each name suggests individual features, actions, personalities, families, and friends that defy their placement in a general, ideal class. Thus, our conventional expectations of a war memorial as abstract and general and thus lacking in capacity to involve its visitors personally in the war are violated.

The memorial breaks conventional form as well in that it does not provide, as described by the Congressional representatives who protested the design, the ~~patriotic uplift~~ expected in a war memorial (McCarthy, 1982). Viewers tend not to leave the memorial with a positive feeling about the role and actions of the United States in the war. This unconventional response can be attributed to the absence of the American flag from the design of the memorial itself—the traditional symbol for eliciting American pride in values such as freedom and liberty. Similarly, no heroic action is depicted to suggest bravery and nobility and to generate a spirit of patriotism, and no inscription quotes a general or a President on the goals or benefits of the war to remind us of American values. Consequently, also missing are the implications, suggested

by many war memorials, that America was right (and always is right) in fighting the war being depicted, that all Americans' actions in that war were noble ones, and that the war resulted in the protection of the American way of life. In this break with the conventional form of war memorials in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, we are apt to think about how the Vietnam War changed our perceptions of our country and of war itself. We are likely to experience some confusion simply because what we are expected to think about America and the war is not made clear in this memorial.

Lacking the clear, patriotic sense that emerges from most war memorials, visitors to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are able to bring new kinds of expectations to the work. Because the form we expected is not there, we are encouraged to replace it with expectations for new forms that may be more personal and individual. This is an important first step in the memorial's process of appeal to divergent individuals—conventional expectations for the work are destroyed, requiring us to bring to it something out of our individual experiences that does not necessarily conform to conventional expectations.

Welcoming Stance

Despite the violation of conventional form and expectations about war memorials, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial does not distance or threaten the visitor. Instead, it invites, draws us in, and almost seems to embrace us. Lin herself described the memorial as conveying a non-threatening welcome to viewers: "It's like opening up your hands. It's not so threatening. You're using the earth, asking people to come in, protecting people from the sounds [of the city] and in a way that's no more threatening than two open hands" (McCombs, January 1982, p. 12).

The invitation to enter what the viewer perceives will be a safe, non-threatening place is achieved largely through the ~~V shape of the~~ memorial. That it appears to be sinking into the ground also adds force to the image of engulfing, nurturing, and enfolding, creating a safe and secure place for the viewer. This aspect of the memorial has been described as typifying a "female sensibility," in contrast to "phallic memorials that rise upwards," towering over and threatening other elements in the area. "I didn't set out to conquer the earth, or overpower it, . . ." (Hess, 1983, p. 123), Lin has explained, recognizing the inviting, non-threatening quality of the memorial that is suggested through the embrace of the V shape.

Another explanation for why the memorial appears more secure and less threatening is because it suggests respect for ~~the elements that surround it~~. It does not appear to struggle against them, nor does it convey that it dictates to them. The memorial is integrated into and interdependent with the earth as it is engulfed by and conforms to the earth's contours. It is attuned and sensitive to the landscape around the memorial. Each arm of the memorial points to the northeast corners of the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, suggesting as well a connection between the memorial and America's earlier history.

We feel no threat as we begin the walk down into the memorial because we already know it will not dictate to us what we must think, overpower us

with one perspective, or attempt to alter whatever relationship we have with the Vietnam War. The safe, engulfing embrace of the arms of the memorial suggests simply that our own personal expectations are legitimate.

The lack of information provided by the memorial reinforces this expectation. I will discuss this lack of information in more detail later, but the fact that the memorial does not, through its physical form, shout one message or seek to control what we should think also contributes to the ease with which the viewer accepts the invitation to enter the work. It confirms, supports, and reinforces whatever individual expectations and perspectives visitors wish to bring to the memorial so that we are able to maintain them without fear of challenge or rejection.

Lack of Information

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial's lack of information does not function only to enable us to feel that our own views and perspectives are legitimate and will not be challenged. It also places the emphasis of the memorial on form. An obvious omission from the memorial is any story or plot line of the Vietnam War—information such as why Americans fought in Vietnam, who sent them there, and how long they fought. Not only are there no words to provide such information, but it is not supplied in the visual elements of the work, either. The visitor is given no clue—through facial expression or heroic deed depicted realistically—of how to answer questions about Vietnam. The message the viewer receives about Vietnam, as a result, is a diluted, ambiguous one. In the words of one respondent, "Lin's memorial is intentionally not meaningful" (Hess, 1983, p. 124). No one meaning emerges from the memorial.

The lack of information allows supporter and protester of the war alike to see the memorial as eloquent. "It says everything it needs to say," explained one veteran. "~~It's eloquent~~" (Vietnam vets, 1982, p. 3). This term, "eloquence," is one Burke uses to describe a reliance on ~~form rather~~ than ~~information in a rhetorical~~ work for appeal (1968, pp. 29-44). A reliance on information has the plot and subject matter as intrinsically interesting, and the techniques used to create and sustain interest are surprise and suspense. Once we know the information—how the story ends—we are less ready to repeat the experience of the work; we are less ready to read the book again or, in this case, visit the monument again.

In contrast, eloquence is the minimizing of an interest in fact and a reliance instead on the psychology of form, where the presence of one quality calls forth the demand for another and certain expectations generated in a work are fulfilled. Reliance on the formal arrangements within the work to create its appeal allows for a great deal of repetition in exposure to a work because a viewer, listener, or reader may bring to and see developed a wide variety of expectations that then are fulfilled. Lin asserts that she designed the memorial with this kind of freedom in mind: "What people see, or don't see is their own projection" (Hess, 1983, p. 123). Frederick Hart, artist for the additional sculpture placed at the memorial's site, also described this capacity of the

memorial, although he viewed it as a negative, rather than a positive, quality: "People say you can bring what you want to Lin's memorial. But I call that brown bag esthetics. I mean you better bring something, because there ain't nothing being served" (Hess, 1983, p. 124).

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, then, relies for its effect on formal aspects that enable various expectations to be created for the viewer and then fulfilled because of the limited information it supplies. The diverse kinds of perspectives that can achieve fulfillment and find reinforcement in the memorial will be discussed later, but an enormous range of different expectations may be brought to the work because information suggesting the proper or appropriate one is missing.

Focus on Those Who Did not Survive the War

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial also is able to appeal to many different individuals because it does not focus on the Vietnam War itself. The war was divisive, frustrating, and confusing for the country; a focus on it would have served as a reminder of old divisions, antagonisms, and ambiguities. But the memorial says nothing about the war and does not honor or glorify it. Instead, because of the listing of the names, the emphasis in the memorial is placed on the individuals who died as a result of the war. As one viewer explained, "It's not a glorification of war and those who fought in them, but a memorial to the dead who don't survive them" (Schmidt, 1982). The names represent what once were living human beings, and they remind visitors that these people are no more. The memorial simply suggests the message: "In war, young men die; here are their names" (McGrory, 1982). Lin has explained that this was, in part, her intent in the memorial: "These [American troops in Vietnam] died. You have to accept that fact before you can really truly recognize them and remember them. . . . I wanted something that would just simply say: 'They can never come back. They should be remembered" (McCombs, January 1982, p. 9).

The memorial's focus on those who did not survive the Vietnam War also is apparent in the objects deposited at the memorial by visitors—objects such as flowers, candles, incense, medals, parts of uniforms, personal treasures, and photographs of the dead. These make the individuals and the relationships they once had with families and friends particularly vivid for visitors. But we also are asked to examine ourselves at the memorial and to focus on our own relationships and our own views of death. As we read the names inscribed in the granite, we can see ourselves reflected in it. "You are looking at yourself through the names of the dead," explained a volunteer for the National Park Service at the site (Clarke, 1983).

The memorial's focus on those who died, rather than on the war, suggests a means by which all visitors potentially can become united. Whatever one's perspective on Vietnam, that so many died in the war is seen as tragic and terrible. "All those names," was one visitor's response. "It simply washed over—the utter futility, the incomprehensible waste, . . ." (Schmidt, 1982). A Green Beret's reaction was similar: "What a horrendous waste it all was. So

many names . . ." (Vietnam vets, 1982, p. 1). The message presented is "that it should never happen again, that the loss of all those young lives was too great a price to pay, . . ." (Schmidt, 1982).

This focus asks us not to bring to the work our views of the war itself but rather anger at the waste, sorrow at the loss, and empathy for those who grieve. The repetitive form of name after name continually restates the message of waste and provides a common feeling and experience of sorrow in which all visitors share. This response of grief seems to be the unifying, universal experience that draws all visitors together at the memorial, enabling our differences to be transcended. As one visitor succinctly explained this response, "The names. The names. They make a man cry" (Vietnam vets, 1982, p. 3).

Generation of Multiple Referents

One major difference between discursive and non-discursive rhetoric is the greater variety of referents and thus meanings available to an audience of non-discursive rhetoric. Certainly, numerous referents and meanings are likely in the decoding of discourse, but written and spoken language have greater constraints such as grammar and denotative meanings that limit, to some degree, the referent and meaning options available to the audience. Because of its abstract form, lack of realistic visual depiction, and lack of explanatory discourse, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial allows a wide variety of referents to be attributed to its various visual elements. The referents accorded to the work's visual characteristics often are very different among viewers, but the result is broad appeal of the memorial as all are able to see it as conforming to their perspectives on the war simply by the referents selected.

The V shape of the memorial serves as one example of the capacity of the memorial to elicit a variety of referents. The V can be seen as standing for the peace sign that was used by anti-war protesters; this referent led some critics of the memorial's design, such as the Marine Corps League and Tom Wolfe, to call the memorial a tribute to Jane Fonda (Wolfe, 1982, p. 13). The V shape also has been seen as "a great privy, an outside urinal of German beer garden design . . ." (DeVaull, 1982), suggesting a negative interpretation of the memorial's meaning—lack of respect for the veterans and the war. The V shape suggests as well an index finger pointing. Some have suggested that it asks those who served in the war why they did so; others might interpret it as pointing a finger of blame at those responsible for Vietnam (Wolfe, 1982, pp. 11, 13).

The black color of the memorial also can be interpreted in various ways. Because ~~black is~~ a color associated with shame, the memorial can be seen as representing America's shame at participation in the war. For others, black is a color of sorrow and mourning, suggesting that mourning at the memorial is proper. The walls themselves can be seen both as a "wailing wall" for such mourning and as a "wailing wall" for the vociferous protests of the anti-war and anti-draft demonstrators (McCombs, March 1982, p. 14).

The submersion of the memorial in the earth elicits equally contradictory referents or meanings. It can be seen as a trench, a pit, or a ditch, suggesting a desire to bury the dead of and thus our experience in Vietnam. Such referents also might suggest that Vietnam was something too horrible and shameful to be out in the open and exposed above ground. The submerged monument also can be interpreted as an admission of guilt by the United States—an acknowledgment of the crimes committed by the United States in Vietnam. It can indicate as well a descent into hell—perhaps the hell of the United States' presence in Vietnam or the hell experienced by those who fought in Vietnam. Still others might see the submersion as representing the healing power of time in the experience of grief, an interpretation made by Lin: "You never get over it when someone close to you dies, but as time goes by, you heal over. And when the memorial went into the earth, the grass healed over the cut, . . ." (Ditmer, 1983).

While all rhetoric is ambiguous and open to interpretation because of the various meanings symbols elicit in individuals, abstract, non-discursive rhetoric is particularly subject to diverse interpretations and the assignment of a wide variety of referents to the aspects of the design. The capacity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to allow opposing referents and divergent meanings to emerge from the same elements is yet another feature of the memorial that enables it to appeal to individuals who approach it from very different perspectives.

Conclusions

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is not likely to change anyone's views on the Vietnam War. Quite likely, however, is that it prompts reflection for many of its visitors about war itself and the waste and loss that war generates. In this sense, the memorial functions as an effective anti-war symbol, as "a nearly perfect statement against the lunacy of war." It guides the viewer to acceptance of the message that "it should never happen again, . . . that there must be a better way to resolve quarrels between nations" (Schmidt, 1982). Whether visitors are veterans of the war, relatives of those who died in it, supporters of it, or former protesters against it, we are encouraged, at the memorial, to put aside political, ideological, and nationalistic perspectives. Our commitment to positions or issues surrounding the Vietnam War—that America must engage in such conflicts to stop Communism, to defend the American way of life, or to maintain an image of strength for America, for example, is irrelevant. The memorial encourages us to look at the personal consequences of war—death of individuals—and to oppose such a method of the destruction of life.

The memorial's presentation of an anti-war message suggests that it can be used as a model of effective anti-war rhetoric by those currently involved in anti-war efforts such as protesting the United States' activities in Lebanon and Granada, protesting American involvement in Central America, counseling young men not to register for the draft, or seeking to stop the proliferation of nuclear arms. The characteristics of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that

enable it to serve an anti-war function suggest strategies that might be used effectively by those involved in such anti-war efforts—strategies not derived from the confrontational era of the late sixties but ones more suited to the particularities of the times in which we now live.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial suggests that contemporary anti-war rhetoric would do well to avoid confrontative strategies that polarize thinking into "us versus them" and that indicate that those who are not with you are against you. The divisions of the late sixties that clearly delineated the establishment from the anti-war protesters are gone, and ideological and life-style differences among Americans are less clear cut. As the memorial is able to communicate acceptance of numerous perspectives leading to similar conclusions, anti-war rhetoric must allow for diversity and recognize as legitimate multiple perspectives. It must provide freedom for people with different motives for opposing war and different perspectives on war to be welcomed and incorporated into the movement. The anti-war rhetoric of today must communicate not that one group's view is right and that another is wrong but that everyone is right to some degree and that all kinds of "rightness" can be accorded room and value in the movement.

The effectiveness of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial indicates, as well, that contemporary anti-war rhetoric must generate and utilize new images. In a society that has been overexposed to images of war through television news reports, news magazines, films, and television programs (some of which even glorify war), a depiction of the conditions of war is not likely to be sufficient to move an unconverted audience to adopt an anti-war stance. What are needed instead are unconventional, unusual images or symbols that attract attention because of their freshness and unpredictability. These images thus will stand out from those to which we are exposed daily and cause us to stop, inquire into, and examine the issue of war.

Finally, the memorial suggests that, at this particular time, the substance of anti-war rhetoric perhaps should be focused less on ideological and ethical arguments against war and more on what war is in its essence—death. Much anti-war rhetoric of the past relied on the arguments that a country has the right to choose its form of government without interference from others, or that to kill other human beings is immoral. In our current society, seemingly characterized by a desire for financial success at the expense of ethical considerations, such rhetoric lacks broad appeal. Ultimately, however, death is a personal matter that affects everyone, and rhetoric that forces a personal reflection on death as the basic fact of war, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial suggests, is able to elicit anti-war responses.

In an essay written in the late sixties, Nat Hentoff discusses the types of symbols and strategies used by anti-war demonstrators then: "Dead rats were thrown in front of city halls. Rush hour traffic was stalled. Young people chained themselves to pillars in front of court buildings" (1969, p. 255). While such acts undoubtedly made the demonstrators feel relevant and that some of their own guilt had been purged, he argues, little happened as a result; " 'the doctrine of the announced idea' " (p. 261) ultimately did not succeed as a

strategy. The reason, he hypothesizes, is that

> those demonstrations made it easier for the bystander—the *moyen* citizen—to separate himself from the activists and their concerns. . . . [T]he *moyen* citizen . . . regarded the activists as so different in kind from him that the thought of ever possibly allying himself with them was inconceivable. (p. 266)

There must be some way to bridge this division, Hentoff asserts, and he asks for suggestions for strategies and symbols that close the gap between the converted and the unconverted. Particularly in these times, when former anti-war symbols and strategies have even less appeal than they did in the late sixties, Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial well may provide an excellent model for anti-war rhetoric that offers one answer to Hentoff's request. For as one visitor to the memorial explained, its effectiveness is beyond question:

> Is there anyone who has ever visited this memorial without being deeply moved? I sincerely doubt it, just as I doubt that 100 years from now, when the conflicting passions of this war have faded almost beyond recall, visitors to the memorial will not be profoundly affected by the experience. (Forgey, 1984, p. 8)

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Dan Gross

THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL: AN INVITATION TO ARGUMENT

Peter Ehrenhaus

This essay develops a perspective of argument as hermeneutic, and explicates its principles through an analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In opting for a view of argument as interpretive, rather than as a material condition of the social world, we are led to examine the resources through which individuals shape understanding. Narrative theory offers valuable assistance in such inquiry precisely because of its concern with how systems of symbolization authorize understanding, and how shared understanding structures human relationships and human action. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is widely known as a place of great power. This analysis suggests that the Memorial's power arises from the limitations of our social resources for understanding; in the absence of constraints imposed by these resources, we are free to engage in authentic commemoration—to discover what is true for each of us as we shape our own arguments about the meaning of Vietnam and its attendant concerns.

Even before its dedication on November 11, 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial had the capacity to arouse intensely passionate and diverse reactions. Initial efforts to raise funds to build a memorial to commemorate those who died and to honor those who fought in Vietnam were met with ridicule and opposition, even from Vietnam veterans (Scruggs & Swerdlow, 1985). When the concept of a memorial eventually won unanimous endorsement by the U.S. Senate, controversy erupted over the winning design, selected in a nationwide competition. The architecture was criticized by some as neither heroic nor patriotic; others objected to designer Maya Lin's gender and Asian heritage as just another "slap in the face" to America's Vietnam veterans. Only a compromise plan which added a traditional piece of statuary and a flagpole to the Memorial grounds saved the Memorial and permitted its construction.

Since its dedication, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., has been widely hailed as a "fitting tribute" of "overpowering emotion," a "national symbol of reconciliation." Yet it has also been reviled by a few as "an open urinal," a "black gash of shame," which is "the universal color of dishonor." Despite these widely differing assessments, however, the Memorial has had remarkable public appeal, and has surpassed all other memorials to become the most visited site in the Capital. Reports of its power—its "inherent" capacity to evoke intense emotional responses—are widespread, and perhaps most intriguing, they come from an American public that had for so long turned away from remembrance of Vietnam (see Egendorf, 1985; Ehrenhaus, in press).

My purpose in this essay is to examine the symbolic power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and to explain why it arouses such intense public reactions. I will argue that the Memorial's symbolic power derives from its distinctive and unconventional design, that denies visitors interpretation of its meaning through the social resources upon which they customarily rely. The explanation that I develop is grounded in Zarefsky's view of argument, which holds that "Our object of study would not be some *part* of the natural world but all communicative behavior. The concept of argument would be hermeneutic; that is, it would be a way to interpret communication" (Zarefsky, 1980, p. 234). Argument thus becomes a way to interpret memorials, or more precisely, a way to interpret symbolic encounters with memorials. And the powerful appeal of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the invitation to argument which it extends.

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As a mode of interpretation, argument is created by each individual as "reader" in the dialectic of subject and object, in the encounter of "knower" and "known." A hermeneutic approach to argument emphasizes the resources of and constraints upon each reader-as-author to interpret those communicative phenomena organized *as* texts. Certainly, memorials, speeches, and the like, are created for consumption by others, and in their creators' concern for accessibity to audiences, those symbolic expressions adhere in varying degree to cultural standards and public expectations. (This is the key premise upon which genre criticism rests, whether genre is defined inductively or deductively.) Consequently, in our encounters with these various communicative phenomena, we often reach similar judgments about the boundaries of a text and the appropriate criteria for its understanding. Having circumscribed "the text" similarly and relying upon similar standards to interpret "the text," we reach similar conclusions about its meaning. From here we move easily to assume that texts, authorship, and meaning stand independent of our experience of them—that is, as material conditions of the social world. Yet at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the very diversity of meanings that emerge calls into question this assumption (see Ehrenhaus, 1988).

To explain the power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, our task becomes bringing to light the factors which conventionally guide encounters with memorials and to explore how those factors give rise to readings at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that are coherent, compelling, and which are genuine for the reader—encounters that are powerful. Here, narrative theory provides valuable concepts for locating those factors. As Hayden White (1980) observes, narrative theory concerns how culturally-based systems of symbolization authorize certain kinds of understanding, and certain ways and standards for understanding. Narration also concerns the implications of such shared understandings for structuring relationships between individuals and their socio-political institutions. In other words, theories of narration seek to explain the logics by which communities structure symbolic experience meaningfully and endorse certain kinds of interpretations and actions (see Fisher, 1987; Jameson, 1981).

Giddens (1979) argues that any community's system of resources for interpretation not only express a point of view about how the world can be seen or known, but more importantly, restricts and naturalizes ways of knowing. In one sense, we may simply characterize these restrictions as a matter of cultural convention. In another sense, restriction is fundamentally political, for it speaks to the relationship between individuals and their institutions. It concerns the question of whether institutions can or should dictate the ways in which each individual may legitimately experience and understand the world, and what obligations the individual has to others by accepting those dictates. Perhaps nowhere are these ques-

tions, and the tensions of this argument, more apparent than in the overtly political use of architecture to commemorate war.

Memorializing as Encounter

Memorials do not simply assert, "We remember." They assert, "This is worth remembering," and argue "This is how war should be remembered, this is what it means." In other words, memorials in the wake of war conventionally tell stories that advance moral argument; the events or persons memorialized are ascribed their significance by their presentation as elements within an historical, moral drama. Members of a community encounter and interpret the meaning of memorials through their social resources for understanding, expecting, and generally finding, a familiar voice. As a form of cultural ritual that involves us "symbolically in a common enterprise," reminding us of our "relatedness and joint interests in a compelling way," (Edelman, 1964, p. 16), memorializing sanctions only a limited range of interpretation. It requires little in the way of personal investment to make the encounter meaningful and affords little latitide to interpretation.

I refer to a community's social resources for understanding because understanding is social. Drawing upon Gadamer (1975), Deetz and Kersten (1983) discuss understanding as arising from the interplay of three properties: linguistic, historical, and dialectic. Linguistic (i.e., symbolic) properties shape understanding beause of the human capacity for symbol use through organized systems of symbolization. These systems allow us to take human action and artifacts *as* something; by implication, we are prevented from taking those actions and artifacts as something else. Historical forces contribute to understanding because encounters cannot be understood except within a context for their meaningful interpretation; a community's socio-cultural practices, traditions, and institutions shape and focus what we conceive of as historical ground, thus providing a context within which encounters become meaningful. Finally, dialectic shapes understanding because meaning arises through interaction—the interaction of differences between people or, more generally, the interaction of subject with object. Consequently, understanding is not reproduced; new understanding is born of interaction and is "positional," never neutral and therefore always having a moral dimension. A hermeneutic approach to memorializing thus requires that we confront the moral implications of the arguments we encounter and shape.

I have asserted that theories of narration offer useful tools for the study of memorializing as encounter. Hayden White (1980), for example, observes that the reality of the events being memorialized does not stem from the fact that they happened, but that they were remembered and given significance within a sequence of events. Every narrative, no matter how complete it seems, is founded upon the omission of a set of events which might have been included, but were not. Its "text," whether discursive or architectural, is selective and provides focus to its encounter. White suggests that by considering what the narrative both withholds and presents, we can begin to understand the view of the world that authorizes such a story. "Once we note the presence of the theme of *authority* in this text, we also perceive the extent to which the truth claims of the narrative and indeed the very *right* to narrate hinges upon a certain relationship to authority per se" (p. 18).

With memorializing, we conventionally find a community advancing an argument to itself. Since memorializing is reflexive, the obligations to advance moral argument are generally undertaken by the community collectively, through its institutions. In bestowing upon our institutions the moral authority to explain the significance of the past, we encounter a view of the world that is institutional—neither genuinely our own, nor necessarily in our best interests.

Through its institutional voice, a community proclaims the need to remember particular events, actions, and sacrifices. Memorializing war, however, involves more than simply remembering particulars. Those particulars are the basis for celebrating universals, the values through which those specific events and sacrifices are given social and historical significance. Hubbard (1984) notes that memorializing is constituted by presenting text in a manner that makes tangible a shared interpretation about those events, actions, or individuals; however, the construction of a "shared" interpretation by community members means "one" interpretation, and it is one that serves the interests of those empowered to commemorate.

In one sense, institutional commemoration pays homage to those who fought and sacrificed. More subtlely, it celebrates the most fundamental value of the community—survival (or, more precisely, the survival of the community's institutional relationships). The institutions which comprise a community (and those who benefit from that structuring) can only survive by reasserting their right to survival through the sacrifices of those who constitute the community. By commemorating the sacrifices of a community's warriors, a memorial reaffirms the legitimacy of purpose for which those warriors sacrificed. But more than just casting *these* sacrifices as meaningful, memorializing celebrates and sanctifies the virtues of accepting as legitimate future calls for sacrifice, and the obligation entailed to heed those calls when issued. The voice of institutional commemoration is politically legitimating; it reasserts the right of those in power to issue calls for sacrifice, and it reconfirms the hierarchical relationships—obligations and responsibilities—binding individuals and their political institutions.

In view of these obligations of a community's institutions to commemorate war, the tone and form of that commemoration is integral to its meaningful interpretation by community members. The traditional, institutional voice that commemorates warriors is heroic, representational architecture, often adorned with inspirational inscription. Consider an encounter with the memorial of the "Flag Raising on Iwo Jima," and the limited interpretations it permits. Also consider how minimal the investment of effort in creating a context for its meaningful interpretation. The memorial is elevated, and we look upward to representational statuary of larger-than-life Marines struggling heroically to raise the community's standard under the most adverse circumstances. The battle for Iwo Jima was among the most hellish and horrific of that world war. But commemorating that battle serves to focus us on a broader concern, celebrating the foundational American virtues of sacrifice and determination through which the grueling war in the Pacific was won.

Institutional commemoration reflects in architecture and discourse what Edwin Black (1978) characterizes as "sentimental style," the function of which "is didactic . . . to instruct the auditor in how he is to respond . . . ." The sentimental style "not only elicits affective experiences, but also defines and delimits them. It enables the emotions to be given *a recreation under sanctioned auspices*" (p. 78, emphasis added). By limiting flexibility of interpretation, the Iwo Jima Memorial and the profusion of now-cliche "soldier on horseback" memorials that populate town squares and parks attest to a readily accessible style of commemoration in which community members can participate.

In all cases, institutional commemoration privileges a few to shape the understanding of many regarding the past and its significance for us in the present. And, it does so only through our knowing participation with that symbolic form. Institutional commemoration tells us why war was pursued, affirms that the cause was just, reassures us that meaning is to be found in the deaths of our warriors, and hints, ever so softly, at the need for future sacrifices and the inevitability of other just causes. It reflects upon the significance of a past, defined and circumscribed by those empowered to commemorate, and represses "the unthinkable which lies beyond its boundaries" (Jameson, 1981, p. 53).

In American society, the principles upon which institutional commemoration rests are clarity of purpose, nobility of cause, strength of will, and the certain victory of good over evil (see Banta, 1978). Through these fundamental convictions, tradition—in the form of institutional commemoration—imposes closure upon the story of war and ends the need for moral debate. We encounter in familiar and compelling form a satisfying version of the past, and a reaffirmation of our obligations to the community. As I stated earlier, encounter is dialectic, and through dialectic encounter with institutional commemoration new understanding does arise, but it is understanding that accepts and operates within a world view authorized by institutional voices. Encountering institutional commemoration does not engender change, but only the refinement of established lines of argument. Institutional commemoration seeks to reinforce the continuity of socio-political relationships.

In sum, institutional voices present to us through conventional, ritualized means a view of the world created by others as self-evident, and in its self-evidence that view stands fundamentally unquestioned and unchallenged. In our encounters with memorials, we expect to be able to locate a context within which we can create a meaningful interpretation of the memorial as text. Through our social resources for understanding and commemorating war, we are joined to our institutions. The arguments we find are accessible, readily predictable, and clear for all.

Johnstone's observation about verbal argument is germane to this analysis: to argue is inherently to risk failure of not securing adherence to one's claim (see Cox & Willard, 1982). As I have attempted to show, that risk is slight for institutional commemoration because of the limitations it places upon interpretation. But unlike a traditional view of argument which assumes that "to argue with another is to regard that person as beyond our control" (p. xxx), the opposite holds for institutional commemoration. Its ritual enactment requires the cooperative efforts of all involved; it operates because we participate in our own effective control. In encountering institutional voices, we find the interests of authority presented as the interests of all, and we identify with that voice we find. Institutional commemoration in the wake of war exerts its control "through active consent rather than through passive acceptance of pre-given social formations" (Mumby, 1987, p. 119; also see Giddens).

Memorializing Vietnam: A Challenge to Institutional Voices

In the case of Vietnam we find the limits of institutional commemoration. The quandry of Vietnam—moral, political, and military—simply did not provide those empowered to commemorate with the "raw materials" for morally acceptable argument. "Narrative becomes a *problem* . . . because real events do not offer themselves as stories" (White, 1980, p. 8). Moreover, while any number of events, actions, or values associated with Vietnam could serve as the raw material for commemoration, the types of stories we could construct of them are limited "to the number of modes of emplotment which [American] myths . . . sanction as appropriate ways of endowing human processes with meanings" (White, 1978, pp. 60-61). Nothing in the American mythic heritage could account for the political lies and cowardice, social fragmentation, and human waste of America's Vietnam experience.

Although this analysis emphasizes memorializing as encounter and the role of reader-as-author, the interests of American political leadership and those of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund are revealing. In the case of Vietnam, the institutional voices of memorializing were faced with a double bind. At once empowered, obligated, and expected to commemorate, but unable to do so without calling into question their own political legitimacy, those endowed with the moral authority to commemorate a war and its warriors relinquished their responsibility. In declining to argue, they averted the risk of further failure.

But the need for a community to bring war to closure through commemoration is a strong impulse. Closure is not merely desirable, it is essential that the past be imbued with meaning. "The demand for closure is a demand . . . for moral meaning, a demand that a sequence of real events be assessed their significance as elements in a moral drama" (White, 1980, p. 24). If those empowered to memorialize relinquish their responsibility, then fulfilling that demand for moral meaning may be attempted by others. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is such an attempt, and its "power," the sense of being overwhelmed which people report at the Memorial, derives at least in part from encountering a moral authority which is not institutional and which refuses to structure the moral meaning of the past.

At the Memorial we do not encounter political leadership either speaking to us or on our behalf. As Umberto Eco (1980) observes, interpretations of design are grounded in habit and expectation, despite any architectural intent. In this case, the design intentionally deviates from those expectations. The design selection committee of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund sought to distance themselves from institutional voices by *not* relying upon the "sentimental style" of heroic, representational architecture. The Memorial does "not seek to make any statement about the correctness of the war" (Weinraub, 1980, p. A14). Rather than white, the Memorial is black, built of highly polished black granite. Rather than elevated, it nestles into a gentle slope. Rather than representational, it is chevron-shaped; its form is spare and indexical, simply announcing its presence (see Jencks, 1972). And rather than bearing inspirational inscription to focus interpretation, it lists chronologically the names of 58,156 men and women who were killed or remain missing. The list is inscribed along two walls that rise at their vertex to ten feet, and that extend for nearly five hundred feet.

Among the raw materials that the Memorial offers each reader is evidence that this memorial refuses to do what we have come to expect of others—to commemorate institutionally, to endorse an established, institutional view of the world which gives "a recreation" to our social resources for understanding. The descriptive and understated tone of the Memorial's two inscriptions reflect its non-institutional voice:

> 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.
>
> Our nation honors the courage, sacrifice and devotion to duty and country of its Vietnam veterans. This memorial was built with private contributions from the American people. November 11, 1982

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial does give boundaries to each reader's encounter, but it leaves the reader's experience unstructured (see Black, 1978, p. 79), requiring each to organize the raw materials of the encounter *as* text. It invites us to participate in argument. In this sense, the Memorial requires of us a much more extensive investment of energies than does conventional, institutional commemoration. Memorializing ceases to be "a recreation" and transforms into a labor-intensive activity. Encounter becomes authentic and fully participative, a genuine dialectic of subject and object. This is the Memorial's power.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is an instantiation of authentic commemoration. Through its declarative inscription, its list of names, and its design, it does not argue an interpretation of the past. It does not tell us what the war meant or what its lessons are for us now. It does not assert why the war was pursued, or that the cause was just. Nor does it assure us that these deaths were meaningful. Rather than asserting how we should feel about the war, it only requests that we remember its warriors. Rather than sanctifying the principle of sacrifice, it asks only that we cherish these particular sacrifices. Regarding the relationship of individual to institution and the obligations that bind one to the other, it is mute. Beyond this, the Memorial offers us the opportunity to participate in authentic encounter: that is, to discover our own answers to these questions—what is true for each of us—unfettered by social convention and institutional voices.

In authentic commemoration we do not encounter "ready made" truths, either through discursive or architectural convention. We are confronted with the challenge and the opportunity to seek out those familiar things among the landscape which might help us to shape morally acceptable argument. But here, our social resources for understanding falter. Conventional logics for interpretation are consensual, relatively stable, and rule-governed; they operate deductively, enabling us to interpret effortlessly each newly encountered instatiation of institutional commemoration. Knowing the rules for understanding, we easily locate a context for meaningfully interpreting each new case that we encounter.

At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, interpretation is inductive, an ad hoc accomplishment of the moment of encounter. True, our understanding is still shaped by history, but it is history which we personally reconstruct while in encounter with the Memorial. Hubbard (1984) comments: "Walking the length of the wall carried us through months and years . . . we remembered the feeling of the war at home . . ." (p. 20). Our understanding is equally shaped in dialectic, but in the absence of institutional constraints, new understanding is genuine. This is not the mere refinement of established lines of argument that support an institutional world view and that perpetuate established relationships between individuals and their socio-political institutions. Rather, authentic understanding gives readers insight into argument that is true for each of them at that moment, as they ponder the lives and deaths of others, their own lives lived in a community shared with others, and the obligations and responsibilities joining all to their institutions (see Ehrenhaus, 1988).

Precisely because each individual is empowered to read the Memorial and create a personal interpretation, we cannot speak of *the* argument(s) that the Memorial advances as fixed or immutable. We can, however, seek to understand ways in which individuals organize the elements of encounter into coherent, compelling, and personally meaningful stories—stories that are powerful. In authentic commemoration, each individual has the opportunity to shape argument using those elements available at the moment of encounter. At the Memorial, the coherent organization of those elements derive from dialectic encounter, from the human acts and artifacts of commemoration we happen upon.

Walter Fisher (1987) suggests two tools that may help us explain how readers authorize their own stories in encounter with the Memorial: fidelity and probability. The inductive nature of interpretation at the Memorial raises questions of narrative fidelity, "the individuated components of stories—whether they represent accurate assertions about social reality and thereby constitute good reasons for belief . . ." (p. 105). The fidelity of each potential element of a storyline is determined through a "logic of good reasons," a value-based informal system of assessment by which one judges whether each element warrants inclusion. The fidelity of elements encountered and incorporated into an interpretation of the Memorial is particularly salient in view of White's (1980) observation: that by considering what a story both includes and omits, we can begin to understand the view of the world that authorizes such a story. When the meaning of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is constructed by reader-as-author, the world view glimpsed in that story is authentic, an insight into the genuine nature of that reader's values and beliefs about war, sacrifice, and the obligations and responsibilities that link individual and institutions.

Probability, whether the various elements of a story "hang together" (p. 47), entails three facets of coherence: structural, material, and character. Structural coherence concerns the internal consistency of a story's elements; material coherence, consistency with other stories; and character, the reliability of actors and their tendencies. In interpreting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as argument, structural coherence is of paramount concern: how do the elements of encounter—artifacts, tales told, and human actions—cohere to enable each reader to shape a consistent understanding of the Memorial's meanings? What inconsistencies or anomalies disrupt coherent readings? Material coherence is less an issue in view of the Memorial's uniqueness and the infrequency of authentic commemoration.

But questions of character pervade in encounter with the Memorial, both in its litany of names and in those who speak for those names. The dead are largely unknown to most who visit the Memorial: Who were they? Why did they serve? How did they die? Why did they die?—these questions drive the search for understanding of the Memorial. Those living, whose disjointed utterances we may overhear, whose tales about the dead and about the war provide focus for our encounters, and whose personal truths we may consider, offer all who encounter them powerful inducements to shaping consciousness and belief. Questions of motive are germane here, not in stories of remembrance, but in political pronouncements made about *the* meaning of the war and its lessons (e.g., that Jane Fonda is a traitor, that the press lost the war, that if they had only let us fight we could have won, that we should never get into another war unless the country is behind it). How cautiously should we take the assertions of those who speak *for* the names? This question is crucial, for in accepting what is true for others, we deny ourselves what may be genuine for each of us. As Fisher (1987) cautions: "Determining a character's motives is prerequisite to trust, and trust is the foundation of belief" (p. 47).

As I mentioned at the outset of this essay, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was conceived in controversy, and the political concession exacted by Secretary of the Interior James Watt in granting the permit for the Memorial's construction required the addition of a traditional statue and an American flag as adjuncts to the Memorial (see Scruggs & Swerdlow,

1985). These are among the materials which readers may rely upon to understand the Memorial. The statue of three soldiers is representational, but hardly heroic by conventional standards. The three faces bear the vacant look of the "thousand yard stare" as they gaze out upon the Memorial from the edge of a grove of trees. Readers find little guidance to interpretation in the emptiness of these three faces. Moreover, since the statue and flagpole are physically removed from the Memorial, visitors may miss them entirely, thus foregoing their use in constructing a personally meaningful interpretation of the Memorial.

"The Wall" is the locus of power, and most accessible are the names, the artifacts—letters, poems, and photographs—that mourners leave there, and the storytelling and scenes of grieving. These elements act as focusing lenses through which we actively shape the Memorial's meaning.

The names are used in a variety of ways, depending upon each reader's relationship to them. For some, individual names become the focal point of interpretation; for others, the names stand silently as a barrier to understanding (see Ehrenhaus, 1988, pp. 51-55). More accessibly, in letters, poems, and photographs, people share the intimacy of doubt and grief in a public place. Through the juxtaposition of these elements in encounter with the Memorial, each reader may give shape to its arguments. A series of photographs of boyish faces and khaki garb, photocopies of obituaries, headlines announcing the need for additional manpower—through these we may come to wonder, and to conclude, how older men may reasonably require such things of younger men. By reading a mother's lament for her dead son, or a note scribbled by a now-grown child asking, "If you knew my father, please contact . . . ," some may ponder, and understand, how one life is interwoven with others, no small task in a place where a single name is lost amid the sheer number of names chiseled in granite.

Poetry is particularly valuable in the personal creation of meaning. More than stories told in prose, poetry is a vehicle of authenticity which allows its author "to describe something about the world that has yet to be uncovered in the vernacular of a community or an audience that one chooses to address" (Hyde, 1984, p. 316). "Poetry . . . is nothing but the elementary emergence into words . . . of existence as being-in-the-world. For the others who before it were blind, the world first becomes visible by what is thus spoken" (Heidegger, 1982, pp. 171-2). This poem was left at the Wall on Memorial Day, 1984:

WE ARE SORRY,
BUT WHO COULD TELL
THAT SUCH AWFUL PRIDE
WOULD GIVE US THOSE WHO DIED
AND THOSE WHO CRIED
AND GOT ALL RIPPED UP INSIDE
FOR SUCH AN IGNOBLE VENTURE,
NOBLY DONE.

WE MISS YOU NOW
AND YOUR CARELESS GRACE
AND WISH YOU HOME
FROM YOUR RESTING PLACE
"THE BOY IS DEAD."
"YOUR DADDY IS GONE, DEAR."
"MY HUSBAND, MY LOVE."
HOW WE MISS YOU SO.

WE WILL LIKELY FIGHT AGAIN, YOU KNOW.
IT JUST SEEMS TO BE THE WAY THINGS GO.
ABLY, AND NOBLY AND ALL THE REST.
AND LIKE YOU, WE WILL DO OUR BEST.
BUT LET IT BE WHEN NEEDED.
WHEN BLOOD-EARNED WISDOM CALLS US RIDE
AND NOT FOR VAIN AND CRIPPLING PRIDE.
PUT THE FOOLISH THINGS ASIDE.

CELEBRATE THE PEACE.
CONSECRATE THIS PLACE.
SOFTLY CALL THE NAMES OF THOSE WE LOVED
THOSE WE SADLY, FIERCELY MISS
THOSE WHO DIED.
MEN OF PEACE AND HONOR
KILLED IN THE LONGEST WAR
A WAR WHERE AT THE TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN
WE ALL KNOW THE NAMES OF THE DEAD.
THE NEXT WAR
THERE MAY BE NO NAMES.

ANONYMOUS

Through poetic form, the sentiments expressed take on the power of truths. Loss, the waste of human life, resignation to future loss, renewal of commitment, forewarning—this is a part of what the names tell us, of what the Memorial means, but *only* through the incorporation of this poem as an element of our encounter. The poem ends with quotations from Herman Wouk and Winston Churchill, respectively: "The beginning of the end of war lies in remembrance." "Never give up. Never never give up."

Conclusion

Through its names, the Memorial focuses us upon the most tangible fact of war: the destruction of human beings. The fundamental question it poses to each who encounters the names concerns the relationship between that brute fact and an ordered system of social relationships that give rise to it. The sheer weight of the names of these dead and missing induces "an awareness that their present condition was always in part a product of specifically human choices" (White, 1978, p. 49).

Institutional commemoration sanctifies those choices and the relationship between individual and institution. It links warrior to war in order to delimit the context within which particular sacrifices are to be construed as meaningful; it does so by celebrating principles—sacrifice, honor, and obligation to an institutionalized system of ordered relationships—over people, the reified over the corporeal. By this move, institutional commemoration lays the groundwork for future calls for sacrifice; it legitimates the domain of political decision- making in which those calls are feasible options (see Wander, 1984).

By contrast, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial allows us to question that relationship between individual and institution, and to determine for ourselves how it might otherwise be defined. In inviting us to argument by requiring us to shape our own answers, the Memorial reveals its power. The Memorial separates remembrance of the warrior from the war by simply listing in chronological order the names of those who sacrificed. And by severing the link between the two, it frees us to remember both as we choose, and not as dictated by the interests of those conventionally empowered to shape remembrance on our behalf.

The Memorial's emphasis upon the sacrifices of individuals, rather than upon the principle of sacrifice, encourages those who knew these people to offer fragments and stories of remembrance. And in these remembrances we glimpse the myriad of contexts within which their lives, more than their deaths, were meaningful. Whatever materials we draw upon to shape our own interpretation of the Memorial, to organize our own text, we must remember that its truth for us is personal and bound to *that* moment of encounter in *that* place. At other times, the "individuated components of stories" which we encounter will differ, and so may the truths of *those* encounters. And for others, the Memorial's truths will differ as do the histories they bring to bear in their dialectic with the Wall. The Memorial endorses remembrance, in the offerings which mourners bring there and in the effort required of all to create a context for the meaningful interpretation of what they encounter. As long as there are those who can speak to the dead and for them, the

"story" of Vietnam remains open. The Memorial prevents us from bringing Vietnam to closure, putting it conveniently in the past. This, too, is its power.

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NARRATIVE *MONTAGE*: PRESS COVERAGE OF THE JEAN HARRIS TRIAL

Janice Schuetz

This essay (1) contrasts the content of media narratives with the stories presented in actual trials, (2) describes media narrative as a type of *montage,* (3) illustrates the *Washington Post's* stories about the Jean Harris case as *montage,* and (4) suggests ways that "narrative about narrative" can present stronger arguments that increase audiences' understanding about public events.

The public has an insatiable appetite for stories about crime. When given a list of 40 types of stories, readers of ten large circulation newspapers ranked crime as one of their top preferences. The press responds to this interest with some newspapers giving nearly 30 percent of their total space to stories about crime. Additionally, local television news gives about 20 percent of its evening newscasts to crime and legal processes (Lofton, 1966; Friendly & Goldfarb, 1967; Gans, 1979).

Despite the fact that the mass media present a great deal of information and are the primary source for public information about the law, the public seems to have little knowledge about the legal system (Monroe, 1973; Denniston, 1980; Drechsel, Netteburg, & Aborisade, 1980). The primary criticism levelled against the media is that they provide incomplete and misleading information about the law, which contributes to the public's low level of knowledge about legal processes (Grey, 1972; Shaw, 1981; Drechsel, 1983). Moreover, the public's lack of knowledge is a direct result of the focus of the media upon nonlegal issues and personalities (Friendly & Goldfarb, 1967; Grey, 1972; Shaw, 1981). Denniston (1980) and Drechsel (1978) raise questions about why media coverage of trials fails to improve the public's knowledge about legal processes.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate the complex informational and dramatic form of news media narratives and the impact these narratives have on public audiences. The essay (1) contrasts the content of media narratives with the stories presented in actual trials, (2) describes media narratives as a type of *montage*, (3) illustrates the *Washington Post's* stories about the Jean Harris case as *montage*, and (4) suggests ways that "narrative about narrative" can present stronger arguments that increase audiences' understanding about public events.

MEDIA AND TRIAL NARRATIVES

Both the discourse within the trial and media accounts about the trial are types of narrative arguments. Media stories contrast with in-trial narratives, however, because of the different requirements of the two contexts and because storytellers use different methods for reconstructing their stories.

Requirements

Like other types of argumentative discourse, narrative messages are directed to the expectations of the audiences they address and restricted by the norms of the

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