

The Moving Wall:  
Commemorative Healing and Spatiality in the Commemoration of the Vietnam War

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## **Abstract**

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Abstract: In 1984, Vietnam War veteran John Devitt and volunteers from the Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. of San Jose, California, debuted a half-size traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Named “the Moving Wall,” the replica was conceived as an attempt to bring the experience of the memorial wall to those in the United States who could not make the trip to Washington. Offering a temporary simulation of the VVM experience in communities throughout the country, the Moving Wall raises a number of questions regarding issues of authenticity, simulation, and the relationship between commemoration and space. The spatiality of the Moving Wall facilitated transcendence beyond simple replication, creating something unique through socially granted authenticity, the organic evolution of commemorative rituals, and vernacular negotiations and expressions of memory.

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## Introduction

Historians, scholars of art and architecture, museum curators, and the designers of memorials have identified and grappled with the important and inseparable relationship between memory and space. This relationship is especially significant in the case of commemorating wars and other instances of violence that have had a profound impact on a given society. Commemoration acts as a complex series of spaces and rituals for the purpose of healing, the construction of narratives, and the construction or reconstruction of individual and collective identities. As David Blight suggests, “Memory can control us, overwhelm us, even poison us. Or it can save us from confusion and despair. As individuals we cannot live effectively without it; but it is also part of the agony of the human condition to live with it as well.”<sup>1</sup> The confusion, despair, and agony that is often harboured within individual and collective memories of war become the primary inspiration for and target of commemorative installations and rituals, situated within interpretive space. For Edward Linenthal, writing about the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the organization and rhetoric of interpretive space in the presentation of memorials plays an extremely important role in the effectiveness of the commemorative experience.<sup>2</sup> The spatial contexts where commemorative forms and rituals are held play a crucial part as interpretive landscapes for observers to navigate as individuals and groups. These contexts can profoundly affect the textuality of a commemorative form as it is situated within the narratives of its surrounding space,

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<sup>1</sup> David Blight, “The Memory Boom: Why and Why Now?” in Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch, eds., *Memory in Mind and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 239.

<sup>2</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, “The Boundaries of Memory: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *American Quarterly* 46:3 (September 1994), 406-433.

therefore contributing to the interpretations of meaning assigned to the commemorative experience.

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) on the Washington Mall has proven to be one of the most powerful and controversial war memorials in the United States. Some scholars have approached the memorial with a sensitivity to the myriad meanings contained within the space and have explored interpretations relating to grief, healing, honour, shame, and finality.<sup>3</sup> Others have highlighted the profound importance of the VVM's spatial context on the Mall grounds, the power of its physical aesthetics, and its interactive and ever-changing textuality.<sup>4</sup> For these scholars, the physical space and material nature of the memorial are central to the engagement and interpretations of visitors as they seek to relieve their confusion, despair, agony, and other emotions tied to their memory of the Vietnam War and its victims. The VVM facilitates a number of important commemorative rituals for veterans and those who lost family and friends, while immersing visitors in an interpretive space tied to the national narratives of the Washington Mall.

To engage in the scholarly discussions surrounding the relationship between memory and space, as well as to contribute to the ongoing work related to American commemoration and memory of the Vietnam War, this study will focus on the Moving

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<sup>3</sup> John Bodner, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Patrick Hapogian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Scott Laderman and Edwin A. Martini, eds., *Four Decades On: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Charles L. Griswold, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall: Philosophical Thoughts on Political Iconography," *Critical Inquiry* 12:4 (1986), 688-719; Anne Hilker, "The Comfort of Melancholy: Understanding the Experience of Absence in American Memorials," *Journal of American Culture* 37:1 (March 2014), 29-36.

Wall, a travelling replica of the VVM that has toured the United States since 1984. Conceived and constructed by Vietnam veteran John Devitt of the San Jose Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. (VCVL), the Moving Wall has become a popular commemorative structure, having visited every state in U.S. and having made a few trips across the border to Canada. Relatively absent from the bodies of literature related to the VVM and America memory of the Vietnam War, the Moving Wall offers a number of important insights into the relationships between memory and space, as well as commemorative healing and dissonance. It also raises questions about issues of authenticity in replication, as it became embraced by supporters who spoke highly of its simulation of the VVM experience despite the glaring differences in the interpretive landscapes in which this simulation was occurring. These themes form the basis of this study, which will use the history of the Moving Wall as a lens through which to view issues of space and authenticity in commemoration.

Academic interest in the legacy of the Vietnam War in the United States swiftly followed the war's ultimate conclusion in 1975. The initial wave of scholarship occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s as literary and cultural studies scholars along with political scientists and commentators considered what the impact of the Vietnam War might be. It was within this initial wave that the dominant theme of introspection in American memory of the Vietnam War was first formulated. In 1977, literary scholar and cultural historian Morris Dickstein suggested that the Vietnam War and its conclusion, along with the fall of the New Left, the rise of New Right, and the 1970s economic crisis, were not the products of a new decade, but the fallout of the politics and culture of the 1960s. On Vietnam, Dickstein states that what was lost in that war was not just the war

itself, but also the “pervasive confidence that American arms and American aims were linked somehow to justice and morality, not merely to the quest for power. America was defeated militarily, but the ‘idea’ of America, the cherished myth of America, received an even more shattering blow.”<sup>5</sup> Within two years of the war’s conclusion, Dickstein identified the cultural impact of defeat in Vietnam: the American identity that had solidified in the post-Second World War era was shaken in the 1960s, had been completely disrupted with the fall of Saigon. Though more focused on 1960s art culture and its social and political contexts, Dickstein nonetheless provides a foundational insight into the legacy of the Vietnam War as an introspective tension over the “idea” of a post-Vietnam America.

Religious studies scholar Walter Capps reinforced Dickstein’s formulation of the introspective turn in his study which argues that the rise of an intensified Christian neo-conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s was in part a cultural and psychological reaction to the Vietnam War’s conclusion and the radical anti-war politics of the 1960s. He suggests that “[the Vietnam War] was a national trauma, a rupture in the nation’s collective consciousness, and a serious and somber challenge to the ways we wish to think about ourselves, our role in the world, and our place in human history.”<sup>6</sup> Like Dickstein, Capps identifies the impact of the Vietnam War as an unsettling of the American identity that had developed since the Second World War, and a fundamental challenge to notions of American exceptionalism and military superiority. A reaction to this challenge came in the form of an intensified New Right that clashed with the pacifist legacy of the radical

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<sup>5</sup> Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties*, Harvard University paperback edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 271.

<sup>6</sup> Walter H. Capps, *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 2.



1960s. Suggesting the idea of the Vietnam War and its legacy on the home front as a psychological and cultural civil war, Capps asserts that on a fundamental level, “[the war] was a contest between two views of human priorities. Because those [views] became so sharply divided, the question became whether the American story could ever again be told as a single narrative account or whether the nation’s involvement in the war in Vietnam made such cohesiveness impossible.”<sup>7</sup> The trauma of the Vietnam War was a national identity crisis that starkly divided Americans over what exactly it meant to be American.

Capps’ work can be situated in a larger debate over the morality of the war and the justifications given to support it. Capps argues that had the United States not situated involvement in Vietnam in the larger Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, the consistent escalation of the conflict and its tragic end may have been avoided.<sup>8</sup> Others contested this view, and argued that the lack of domestic support for the war and the unwillingness to escalate further cost the United States victory. Norman Podhoretz and Robert Tucker are the two most significant proponents of this argument. Both Podhoretz and Tucker attacked those who saw the war as morally questionable, and saw domestic pacifism as a weakness. Tucker railed against the “Vietnam Syndrome” as the cause of weak foreign policy during the Carter years, while Podhoretz argued that contemporary developments in Angola and other Cold War stages were a direct result of America’s defeat in Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Capps, Tucker and

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<sup>7</sup> Capps, *The Unfinished War*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> Robert W. Tucker, “Spoils of Defeat,” *Harpers* 263 (November 1981), 85-8 as cited in Stephen Vlastos, “America’s ‘Enemy’: The Absent Presence in Revisionist Vietnam War History,” in John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg eds., *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 53; Norman Podhoretz, *Why We were in Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 176-7.

Podhoretz argue that more should have been done to secure military victory in Vietnam, and suggest that the war's legacy was a sickness of domestic pacifism and weakness that fettered American military and political power. While politically opposed, Capps, Podhoretz, and Tucker all focus their arguments on the cultural and political home front, where the legacy of the Vietnam War is an ongoing conflict over the "idea" of America, waged between two contrary ideals of what the Vietnam War meant and what lessons were to be learned.

The major boom of scholarly writing on American memory of the Vietnam War occurred in the 1990s. Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe introduced their edited collection by arguing that America's memory of the Vietnam War had indeed excluded the nation where the war had actually taken place by introspectively focusing on its own scars.<sup>10</sup> In effect, "Vietnam" was reduced to an American cultural phenomenon that shook American identity to its core, while the fighting and dying on foreign soil became an afterthought. Berg and Rowe articulate what the scholars of the early 1980s had taken for granted – that the introspective focus had left the real Vietnam behind. They also identify the linguistic turn that accompanied this introspection. Berg and Rowe highlight the emphasis placed on "healing," "scars," "syndromes," and "trauma" as a quasi-psychological framework that dominated the language of Vietnam War remembrance. They assert that "American idealism didn't die; we are simply in the course of 'healing' the wounds those ideals suffered in *our* war.... We are obsessed with the trauma and injury we have suffered, as if the United States, not Vietnam," was the battleground, the

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<sup>10</sup> Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe, "The Vietnam War and American Memory," in John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg eds., *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 3.

target of bombings and napalm strikes.<sup>11</sup> Their cultural studies approach, focusing primarily on film and literature, and the argument of introspection marginalizing the nation and people of Vietnam, is consistent throughout the collection as literature and cultural studies scholars explore various aspects of the introspective turn.

The essays by Rick Berg and Michael Clark in this collection tackle the role of mass media in the shaping of American memory of the Vietnam War in the late 1970s and through the 1980s. Berg's study, which analyzes films, television programs, and popular music, argues that mass media in the 1980s had resurrected the Vietnam War as a commodity to be consumed.<sup>12</sup> Film and television constantly reproduced the scars of Vietnam through images of the conflict and stereotypical depictions of veterans struggling psychologically and socially. Intense media obsession in the 1980s became a new cultural mediator between the actual events and a new generation of citizens attempting to understand what "Vietnam" as a cultural phenomenon was. Connecting popular media obsession in the 1980s with the obsessive news coverage of the war as it was happening, Clark argues that this obsession reflected the ongoing struggle of the United States to come to terms with the war, and the attempts to create social coherence in the historical memory of the war.<sup>13</sup> Analyzing film, television, literature, and various monuments to the Vietnam War throughout the United States, Clark identifies a socio-cultural demand in the Reagan years for the Vietnam War to be framed in easily digestible pedagogy in order for the moral, cultural, and political conflicts of the war's legacy to be healed.

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<sup>11</sup>Berg and Rowe, "The Vietnam War and American Memory," 2.

<sup>12</sup>Rick Berg, "Losing Vietnam: Covering the War in an Age of Technology," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, 115-6.

<sup>13</sup>Michael Clark, "Remembering Vietnam," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, 180.

Other major studies in the 1990s consider the memory of the Vietnam War in the larger context of American public memory, and the ongoing struggle with the legacy of Vietnam during the Gulf War. Examining American public memory from the nineteenth century to the debates over the VVM's design, historian John Bodnar argues that public memory in the United States has been "a product of elite manipulation, symbolic interaction, and contested discourse," facilitating a tension between official and vernacular narratives and forms of commemoration.<sup>14</sup> For Bodnar, vernacular narratives, like those of Vietnam veterans of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) – the non-profit organization founded in 1979 that spearheaded the creation of a national Vietnam War memorial – and other veteran support organizations, clashed with or operated within official narratives and discourse that promoted notions of patriotism, honour, and duty. After the Vietnam War, this tension was especially prevalent as Americans were so starkly divided along ideological lines of what Vietnam meant and how it was to be remembered.

Marilyn Young carries the idea of the introspective civil war into the 1990s as she explores the impact the legacy of the Vietnam War had on the Gulf War. She argues that "the enemy in the Gulf War was only in part Iraq. Equally, the Bush administration sought to defeat an older enemy, the memory of defeat in Indochina twenty years [before]."<sup>15</sup> Using press coverage around the Gulf War, Young shows how the rhetoric and the execution of the war in the early 1990s took on the guise of the "anti-Vietnam," a swift, technically proficient conflict with government filters on media coverage. Because

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<sup>14</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Marilyn B. Young, "The Vietnam War in American Memory," in Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Hyunh eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 249.

of the lingering need to come to terms with the memory of the Vietnam War in the 1990s, the Bush administration felt the need to “defeat” that memory through a swift and unquestionable military victory that would show that the scars of Vietnam could be left behind.

Two studies in the latter half of the decade focus on the impact the introspective turn had on veterans. Fred Turner and Keith Beattie explore representations of veterans in popular media and oral histories from actual veterans to explore the role of the image of the Vietnam veteran in American culture. While covering much of the same ground, Turner and Beattie diverge on what exactly the implication of the relationship between veterans and the introspective is. For Turner, the veteran brings the realities and the scars of the war home, becoming a symbol of the trauma suffered by the nation.<sup>16</sup> As the psychological framework was established as the dominant way of thinking about the memory of the Vietnam War as a wound, scar, or syndrome, veterans became the personification of that national trauma after the initial marginalization of veterans immediately after the war. Beattie is more critical of this cultural and political use of veterans as the actors in this framework. Beattie argues that the psychological framework of traumas and scars, and its pragmatic use of veterans, was an effort to marginalize political and cultural debates for the sake of national unity and “healing.”<sup>17</sup> The need to “heal” the nation, to repair its battered ego and reaffirm its identity while attempting to minimize the cultural civil war, appropriated the image of the veteran as representative of the nation, while the social marginalization of veterans in society and media continued.

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<sup>16</sup> Fred Turner, *Echoes of Combat: The Vietnam War and American Memory* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Keith Beattie, *The Scar that Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 26.

After the turn of the century, a few studies continued the work of placing the Vietnam War and the introspective turn into larger contexts. Brian Balogh argues that the domestic impact of the war and the domestically focused memory of the war became scapegoats for many of the nation's problems. Considering film, literature, and press articles, Balogh states that "because Vietnam was such a wrenching emotional experience... because it affected the lives of so many Americans... there has been a tendency to blame much that has gone wrong in America on the Vietnam War."<sup>18</sup> A cultural civil war, a national identity crisis, and intense foreign policy debates were all considered to be rooted in the American experience of the Vietnam War. Echoing Dickstein's assertion that fallout from the 1960s can better explain the post-Vietnam American experience, Balogh reduces the war's political and cultural impact. Even if national ills often attributed to Vietnam can be identified prior to the American defeat, Balogh ignores the ways that the war and subsequent defeat exacerbated or otherwise affected such issues.

Historian Robert McMahon also placed the introspective memory of the Vietnam War into a larger historical context by connecting it to the discursive strategies used to reunite the United States after the Civil War. As official narratives of the war shifted toward the quasi-psychological framework and focused on those who fought and died rather than what exactly they had fought and died for, a particular memory of the war was promoted that better supported the official commemorative narratives identified by Bodnar and Beattie. McMahon asserts that the "rhetorical *volte face*, reminiscent of a similar turn that occurred following the Civil War... paved the way for a direct and

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<sup>18</sup> Brian Balogh, "From Metaphor to Quagmire: The Domestic Legacy of the Vietnam War," in Charles E. Neu ed., *After Vietnam: Legacies of a Lost War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 26.

simple discourse of memorialization: a discourse wholly consistent with the language of patriotism, sacrifice, and nobility traditionally employed by American leaders in remembering the veterans of previous conflicts.”<sup>19</sup> The parallels drawn between the Civil War and Vietnam War highlight a trend of pragmatic official commemoration steeped in nationalist ideology that, while not overly surprising, helps to explain the psychological and veteran-focused framework used to view the domestic ills that needed “healing.”

Patrick Hagopian provides the most comprehensive historical study of American memory and commemoration of the Vietnam War. He argues that while veterans acted as the focal point of discourses of personal and national healing, they also played a crucial role in the history of the memory of the Vietnam War as instigators of memorials and other commemorative projects.<sup>20</sup> Using a wide range of sources, including newspaper articles, documents from veterans’ organizations, memorials and monuments, and oral histories of veterans, Hagopian explores topics such as the Vietnam Syndrome, PTSD, and the discourses and politics of commemorative healing, but focuses primarily on the creation, evolution, and debates over the VVM. His specific arguments about the VVM will be considered in detail below, but his general contribution of resituating veterans as crucial political and cultural actors within the contexts of the introspective turn is significant to the literature of the memory of the Vietnam War in general. Like Beattie, Hagopian is critical of how the image of the veteran was used within commemorative narratives to depoliticize veterans and push their very real psychological and practical needs aside. He states that “[o]nce veterans were wrapped in society’s healing embrace as objects of public sympathy and acceptance, their roles as bearers of political critique

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<sup>19</sup> Robert J. McMahon, “Contested Memory: The Vietnam War and American Society, 1975-2001,” *Diplomatic History* 26:2 (Spring 2002), 166.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 21.

quietly fell away. When the Vietnam veterans ‘problem’ was redefined in psycho-sociological terms, an ameliorative vocabulary replaced the language of political critique.”<sup>21</sup> In tune with or in spite of this redefinition, many veterans struggled to break the stereotypes constantly projected by popular media while attempting to offer their voices to the contested memories of the Vietnam War.

The introspective turn is central to the historiography of American memory of the Vietnam War. If anything, its occurrence is the one true consensus in the literature. While there is some debate over what led to the introspective turn, what lessons could or should be learned, and what the politics are at the foundation of that memory and its commemorative forms, the view of the Vietnam War as America’s war against itself has been a dominant theme. In 2013, historian Walter Hixson argued that it was because of the United States’ self-centred focus and its ambivalence to the history, culture, and people of Vietnam that it failed militarily and experienced such profound psychological, political, and cultural upheaval in the decades after the war’s conclusion.<sup>22</sup> For many Americans, the idea that “Vietnam,” a cultural phenomenon rather than a nation and a people, had traumatized and scarred the United States had been an easier conclusion to accept than the reality of military defeat from a Communist force in the global South – that defeat could only be self-inflicted, by weak pacifists, arrogant imperialist policy makers, or psychologically disturbed veterans. The resulting commemorative ideal was to “heal” the nation, to address its wounds, scars, and syndromes while the political and moral debates surrounding the Vietnam War, future conflicts in the global south, the

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<sup>21</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 18-9.

<sup>22</sup> Walter L. Hixson, “Viet Nam and ‘Vietnam’ in American History and Memory,” in Scott Laderman and Edwin A. Martini eds., *Four Decades On: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013), 44.



socio-cultural marginalization of Vietnam veterans upon their return, and what exactly the post-Vietnam United States was to become, both domestically and on the world stage, were left to incubate.

My study of the Moving Wall replica of the VVM is situated directly in this discourse and politics of commemorative healing. The literature on the introspective turn places a psychological framework over the social, cultural, and political contexts of the Moving Wall, and those who built it, displayed it, and went to see it. The quasi-therapeutic nature of commemorative forms and rituals related to the Vietnam War spring directly from this introspective focus on the psychological wounds sustained by the nation and the desire for official commemorative narratives to separate the memory of the war from the radical political and moral critique directed at the war effort. The works of Keith Beattie and Patrick Hagopian are especially important because of their focus on the role of veterans. While official commemorative narratives pragmatically used the image of veterans as the personification of the nation's scar tissue, veterans as individuals and in organizations played active roles in the contested memories of the war. The creation and touring of the Moving Wall provides an excellent example of such action as the veterans of the Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. engaged in an act of collective healing through the building of their replica of the VVM and sharing *their* experience of the VVM with communities across the country. My contribution to the literature on the introspective memory of the Vietnam War in the United States will be to show through the example of the Moving Wall the power of the discourse of commemorative healing to organize veterans, sponsor organizations, and communities to create and support the replica. However, it will also show how the process of commemorative healing can be disrupted

through the spatial dimensions of the touring memorial and the inescapable tangle of politics bound to the politics of commemorative healing and the politics of the memorial's display. These issues can be more clearly defined through an examination of the academic literature which focuses specifically on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, its impact, its controversies, and its place on the Washington Mall.

Since the construction and dedication of the VVM wall in 1982, it has become an incredibly popular subject of academic study. Its design, popularity, infamy, and evolution over the last three decades has drawn the attention of philosophers, historians, and art scholars, each bringing new insights to the complex and controversial memorial. In 1986, philosopher Charles Griswold argued that the spatial context of the VVM on the Washington Mall relative to the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial is profoundly informative to a visitor's interpretation of the memorial wall.<sup>23</sup> As part of the wall's design and its positioning on the Mall, visitors are drawn to see the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial as they read the names of those killed or missing in action from 1959 to 1975, suggesting that they situate the Vietnam War and the memorial in the larger narrative of American history. Likewise, as visitors see their reflections in the black granite of the wall, they also see the reflection of the surrounding Mall grounds, its many monuments, and its historical and cultural meta-narratives. Griswold also notes how the focus on individuals and the human cost of the conflict on the American side invites or even demands that visitors leave their politics at home.<sup>24</sup> Griswold's observation situates the VVM in the "political depoliticization" of the politics and discourse of commemorative healing. What is left for visitors is the psychological

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<sup>23</sup> Griswold, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall," 690.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 709.

framework of commemorative healing placed within the contextual meta-narratives of the Mall, where visitors can then negotiate or ignore the greater moral and political questions raised by the war while they interpret its meaning and from its place in American history and post-Vietnam War America from the site of the wall and the Mall.

Sociologists Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz analyze the VVM, its origins, and its popularity as they question Emile Durkheim's theories of social and moral unity through commemorative forms. By analyzing written materials and objects left at the wall and by observing visitors at the memorial, they argue that "[t]he [VVM] and devices like it come into view not as symbols of solidarity but as structures that render more explicit, and more comprehensible, a nation's conflicting conceptions of itself and its past."<sup>25</sup> As visitors participate in commemorative rituals with the memorial wall, such as the leaving of objects or written materials, they are articulating the disparity in the ways people think and feel about the Vietnam War and its legacy. While the rituals act as part of the healing process for individuals, they express the broader divisions in American society as one's public display of mourning may implicitly articulate a conflicting political, social, or cultural foundation from that of another. For Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, "[r]ituals... do not solve historical controversies; they only articulate them, making their memory public and dramatic. Unable to convince one another about what went wrong in Vietnam, therefore, the men and women who assemble at the [VVM] do so with more gravity than is displayed at shrines commemorating any other war."<sup>26</sup>

Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz also provide the first consideration of the Moving Wall as they consider other memorials to the Vietnam War. They offer little analysis of

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<sup>25</sup> Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology* 97:2 (September 1991), 376.

<sup>26</sup> Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," 417.

the Moving Wall itself or the nature of a travelling structure as a commemorative form, as they are concerned more with the social reproduction of the VVM image as a cultural object. However, they do point out that the motives of the Moving Wall's creator, veteran John Devitt, coincide with the aims of the VVMF to "elevate the participant but ignore his cause."<sup>27</sup> In tune with the introspective turn, the VVM, and thus the Moving Wall, focuses specifically on the loss of American lives during the war, marginalizing radical political critique. The honour and sacrifice of traditional nationalistic commemorative narratives finds its foothold as the honour and sacrifice of military service itself outweighs the moral and political dimensions of what exactly the men and women in Vietnam were fighting for.

Marita Sturken relates the aesthetic form of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to a screen, a surface which projects and is projected upon, stressing the interactive nature of the VVM and its role in the construction of the various historical narratives of the Vietnam War. She argues that as the VVM became the central icon in the discourse of healing it also became central in historicizing the war in a negotiation of remembering and forgetting, projecting official commemorative narratives while concealing the rupture the Vietnam War caused in how Americans perceive war and themselves.<sup>28</sup> Drawing from a large body of secondary literature and press sources, Sturken considers the spatial context of the VVM and its aesthetics, the racial and gendered othering of Maya Lin by critics of the VVM's design, interactive rituals with the memorial, and veterans' reception of the memorial to show how the memorial contributed to historical narratives of the Vietnam War while playing a crucial role in the centring of American memory of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 413.

<sup>28</sup> Marita Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Representations* 35 (1991), 119, 137-8.

the Vietnam War in the introspective discourse of healing. Unlike Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, for Sturken the experience of the memorial mollified the political and cultural tensions of the war years through its ability to subsume the rupture of history that was the Vietnam War into a digestible nationalist discourse.<sup>29</sup>

John Bodnar offers another interpretation in his study of the tension between official and vernacular narratives of public memory. Bodnar emphasizes the critiques of the memorial wall's design as the "black gash of shame" to suggest that the VVM wall cannot be so easily positioned as a tool of nationalist discourse. He argues that "[it] could be viewed by people as an embodiment of the ideals of patriotism and nationalism and as an expression of comradeship with and sorrow for the dead. But unmistakably the latter theme predominated over the former, a point which troubled opponents of the original design."<sup>30</sup> The eventual additions of an American flag and a GI statue addressed the concerns from some critics that the memorial wall was unpatriotic and shameful, but for Bodnar the vehement concerns over the perceived lack of nationalist symbolism in the VVM was a reaction to the fear that vernacular commemorative narratives would dominate official narratives of the Vietnam War and future conflicts.

Architectural scholar Jeffrey Ochsner advances Bodnar's tension between official and vernacular commemoration by attempting to explain the ways in which the memorial architecture of the VVM wall and the GI statue communicate with visitors. He primarily argues that the VVM wall is incomplete without the interaction of visitors and that it acts as "a void in which we have the simultaneous experience of both the absence and the

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<sup>29</sup> Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, the Image," 137-8.

<sup>30</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 9.

presence of the dead.”<sup>31</sup> While critics had feared that the wall was far too abstract and unpatriotic to effectively facilitate the commemorative healing deemed necessary for the nation, Ochsner suggests that in fact the wall was a far more effective at evoking emotion and psychological investment, while the realism of the GI statue was ironically more impenetrable.<sup>32</sup> The design of the VVM wall created links with those visitors that interacted with it, drawing veterans and others into its embrace to deeply reflect on their personal experience with the Vietnam War abroad or at home, while the GI statue, a concession to the critics of the wall’s abstractness and lack of patriotism, failed to draw the same profound attention.

Historian Kristin Hass takes a detailed look at one particular form of visitor interaction with the VVM in her study of the ritual of leaving behind material objects at the wall as one would leave something at a grave. Situating this ritual in a larger context of American funerary tradition but pointing out the singularity of its occurrence at a national war memorial, Hass argues that the leaving of writing and material objects at the wall was an attempt by American citizens to come to terms with the human cost of the war and to engage in the debate of how the Vietnam War should be remembered.<sup>33</sup> Similar to Wagner-Pacifci and Schwartz, but from a more optimistic perspective, Hass uses press coverage and materials left by visitors to the VVM to suggest that visitor engagement with the wall is an expression of individual memories and commemorative narratives that clash with others in a public memory negotiation of how exactly Vietnam should be remembered. For Hass, this public negotiation of the war’s meaning and

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<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, “A Space of Loss: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 50:3 (February 1997), 156.

<sup>32</sup> Ochsner, “A Space of Loss,” 166.

<sup>33</sup> Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, 1-3.

American memory of it through the ritual of leaving objects resembles Bodnar's vernacular commemorative narratives that may blend with or contest official narratives. She describes how the VVM is alive through human engagement, or as she puts it, "the work of ordinary citizens getting their hands dirty in the forging of public memory."<sup>34</sup>

Contributing to the work that stresses visitor interaction, art historian Kim Theriault argues that the psychological framework of American memory of the Vietnam War had a constructive effect through the VVM and its aesthetics by bringing people together to contribute myriad vernacular commemorative narratives in a profound negotiation of the meaning of that memory. She states that the VVM "has helped to re-member, put back together, or re-engage individuals, families, and much of the government and society through a process of remembering that has addressed physical, psychological, and intellectual trauma," but concedes that this was made possible "by a memorial that refuses to treat war as anything other than the accumulation of loss and reflection of individual and collective trauma."<sup>35</sup> The minimalism of the memorial's design and its abstract interactive nature allows a wide variety of interpretations as visitors have the relative interpretive freedom to make the wall whatever they need it to be. These many interpretations are unified by the discourse of commemorative healing while they may clash over aspects of how the war should be remembered. Theriault's conclusion is that like any wound, the pain may lessen with time but the scar will remain – as Americans remember and re-member the Vietnam War, its meaning will remain dynamic.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Kim S. Theriault, "Re-membering Vietnam: War, Trauma, and 'Scarring Over' at 'the Wall,'" *Journal of American Culture* 26:4 (December 2003), 421, 429.

<sup>36</sup> Theriault, "Re-membering Vietnam," 430.

Patrick Hagopian's comprehensive survey of American memory and commemoration of the Vietnam War prominently features the VVM as part of its argument for the crucial role of veterans in shaping commemorative narratives. Hagopian focuses his attention on the VVMF, its veteran members, and their motives. He suggests that VVMF members adopted what they believed to be an "apolitical" stance of commemorative healing, disavowing any political or ideological statements in memorial designs, both pro-war and anti-war, but also rejected any representation of the Vietnamese.<sup>37</sup> Fearing that the memorial would become an arena for ideological and political conflict (which, of course, it did), the veterans of the VVMF wanted the memorial to focus on the sacrifice of those who fought and died. Hagopian also stresses the fact that veterans generally, and especially those within the VVMF, were far from a homogenous group, and after Maya Lin's design for the memorial wall was chosen ideological divisions within the organization intensified. Supporters of the design, like founder and president of the VVMF Jan Scruggs, clashed with veterans Tom Carhart and James Webb who vehemently opposed it. Webb, for example, had been a vocal opponent of the lack of apparent patriotism in the memorial and its inclusion of those veterans who had critically opposed the war, such as members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War organization.<sup>38</sup>

While highlighting the role of veterans in initiatives like the VVM, Hagopian is also intensely critical of the VVM as a complicit commemorative form tangled in the discourse of healing that stripped many veterans of their critical political voices. The focus on the sacrifice without any real addressing of the moral and political quandaries of

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<sup>37</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 89.



the war and American conduct in Vietnam left many wounds harboured by some veterans open to fester while the nation sought to heal its identity crisis.<sup>39</sup> Hagopian raises the important question of who is being left behind in the formulation of American memory of the Vietnam War so focused on abstract national and cultural wounds and the sacrifice of the dead. For him, the answer is sadly those veterans whose pain lies in the ethical issues that the rest of the country is too reluctant to address.

Hagopian also provides the only other consideration of the Moving Wall replica other than Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz. In his chapter on patterns of public reception to the VVM, he briefly notes the existence of the Moving Wall and other touring and static replicas of the memorial wall throughout the United States. After a brief description of the Moving Wall's origins, Hagopian demonstrates how journalists often describe the replica with the same quasi-therapeutic language used with the original and its aesthetic differences from the original that make it appear less impressive, but emphasizes how visitors to the Moving Wall often treat it with the same reverence and engage it with comparably intense emotions as those who visit the original.<sup>40</sup> The maintenance of commemorative rituals at the replica suggests that visitors to the Moving Wall bestow upon it their approval and recognition of its authenticity. Hagopian also notes the transformative effect the Moving Wall has on some of the spaces it occupies. Without offering any deep analysis of this spatial transformation, he notes some of the commemorative structures or markers placed in the same space as the Moving Wall and states that such "material afterimages of the memorial's presence evoke the resonance of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 430.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 387-9.

acts of remembering, echoing through the years.”<sup>41</sup> By discussing the Moving Wall and other replicas, Hagopian focuses on the popularity and power of the VVM and highlights the acts of veterans in the creation and reception of VVM replicas. He does not address the spatial complexities of the travelling replica as a commemorative form or the detachment of the replica walls from the spatial and interpretive context of the Washington Mall and the potential for new interpretive landscapes to influence the replica’s visitors.

Art and theatre scholar Michael Balfour offers a final spatial interpretation of the VVM in his 2012 study. Balfour compares the VVM to the Camp X-Ray replica of Guantanamo Bay in the UK, arguing that both sites act simultaneously as place and non-place that demand engagement in the dynamic creation of meaning. He asserts that both sites “are imbued with aesthetic qualities that assist in re-framing or re-calibrating perspectives, creating displaced palimpsests between place and non-place.”<sup>42</sup> In the case of the VVM, the reflective surface of the embracing wall and its situation within the physical earth draws visitors into a contemplative state of non-place while the surrounding context of the Washington Mall and the VVM’s situation within it works as part of an interpretive landscape as place. Meanwhile, commemorative rituals and the engagement of visitors with the memorial constantly change the nature of the memorial text, playing their own role in the interpretive landscape in dynamic place-making and construction of meaning.<sup>43</sup> Echoing Griswold’s emphasis on the interpretive landscape of the Mall and the interactive nature of the memorial wall emphasized by Wagner-Pacifici

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 392.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Balfour, “Mapping Realities: Representing War through Affective Place Making,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 28:1 (February 2012), 31.

<sup>43</sup> Balfour, “Mapping Realities,” 36.

and Schwartz, Hass, and others, Balfour suggests the complex interplay between the place of the memorial and the non-place of a visitor's contemplative state as they are pulled into the wall's reflective surface.

Two primary themes are present throughout this literature on the VVM that will inform my study of the Moving Wall. Most importantly for the issue of the travelling replica's spatial complexities is the profound importance of the VVM's spatial context on the Washington Mall. The situating of the wall relative to the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial were deliberate design choices made to set the memorial in a larger meta-narrative of American history. Detached from this spatial context, the Moving Wall is placed within, while also creating, new interpretive landscapes in which visitors construct and assign meaning to the memorial and the Vietnam War. The other theme is the interactions of visitors, both as profound acts of commemorative healing and the expression of vernacular commemorative narratives in a larger negotiation of meaning. The interactive textuality of the VVM allows visitors to become part of the interpretive landscape through their expressions of grief, mourning, and reflection, engaged in the discourse of commemorative healing promoted by the ideally "apolitical" design desired by VVMF.

The sparse writing on the Moving Wall itself does situate it within the discourse of healing of the original and the memory of the Vietnam War generally, while also demonstrating its authenticity to some visitors who maintained the rituals and intense emotions experienced at the original. However, the questions raised by its detachment from the spatial context of the original and the effects of its placement in new interpretive landscapes have not been addressed. All of this is situated within the context of the

introspective nature of commemoration of the Vietnam War in the United States and the politics of healing the nation. The ideal was to bring the healing experience of the VVM to communities across the country, but to do so meant the creation of something separate and detached.

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A number of terms that will appear throughout this thesis deserve clarification and definition, especially those related to the discourse of healing and the motives of Maya Lin and the VVMF in the creation of the VVM. The works of Keith Beattie and Patrick Hagopian inform this study's definition of "healing" and its associated discourse that focused the political and cultural quandaries of the war years in therapeutic terms. Beattie suggests that the media's role in bringing the violence of the war home and the widely propagated image of the wounded veteran created the impression of physical and psychological wounds to the nation.<sup>44</sup> The result was a language of scars and syndromes that needed to be cathartically healed, while cultural and political discussions and critiques were meant to be set aside. "Healing" then is the process of psychologically overcoming – or perhaps simply ignoring – the quandaries faced by the United States and its citizens while trying to minimize the divisions of the 1960s and early-1970s. Hagopian describes it as the "triumph of the therapeutic," in which a quasi-medical language redefined political and social problems as emotional pathologies curable by the ministrations of experts and the adjustments of hearts and minds."<sup>45</sup> Culpability for the

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<sup>44</sup> Beattie, *The Scar that Binds*, 12-3.

<sup>45</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 19.

war is disregarded as the introspective conflict, the symptom of a “Vietnam Syndrome,” became the defining focus of the memory of the Vietnam War years.

The discourse of healing also brought a language of “depoliticization,” especially regarding the VVM and the idea of engaging the monument while leaving your politics at home. When discussing ideas around engagement with the VVM and the Moving Wall, and using terms such as “depoliticization” and “apolitical,” the intent is to avoid igniting political debate in spaces of commemorative healing. For example, VVMF president Jan Scruggs used such language to promote Maya Lin’s design for the VVM, suggesting that Americans could feel however they wanted about the war, as long as they could honour those who fought it.<sup>46</sup> While obviously this is a political suggestion, just as Lin’s design and her idea of its meaning were inherently political, they framed such expression as apolitical relative to the more intense debates that stemmed from domestic conflicts between the anti-war movement and its opponents. Therefore, when terms such as “apolitical” and “depoliticization” are used, they come with the understanding of an inherent politics, but also reflect the ideas and intent of individuals and groups involved in the memory-making process.

Another set of terms used that deserve some clarification are taken from John Bodnar’s dichotomy of cultural expression used in his book, *Remaking America*. Bodnar describes the tiers of cultural and commemorative expressions as being “inevitably multivocal. They contain powerful symbolic expressions – metaphors, signs, and rituals – that give meaning to competing interpretations of past and present reality.... Citizens view the larger entity of the nation through the lens of smaller units and places that they know firsthand,” at times competing with interpretive lenses promoted by political and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 82.

cultural elites.<sup>47</sup> These interpretive lenses and cultural/commemorative expressions form a contrast between what Bodnar calls the “official” and the “vernacular.” In some ways this dichotomy is problematic because of the simple fact that something as complex as cultural expressions cannot be reduced to a binary structure, where a broader and more fluid spectrum would be more appropriate. However, and even where overlap exists, more grassroots expressions and actions can be viewed in a context separate from grander ideologies promoted by powerful social, political, and cultural institutions in a relative sense. In the context of this study, the discourse of healing and the VVM as the official national Vietnam War monument act as Bodnar’s official culture and commemorative expression, while the half-scale replica and the community-based displays of it represent vernacular culture and commemorative expressions.<sup>48</sup> This is ironic considering Bodnar’s suggestion that the VVM is itself vernacular in contrast to right-wing official declarations that the VVM’s design did not do enough to promote pride and patriotism in the righteous fight against communism.<sup>49</sup> While on one hand this difference in the model’s use returns us to the problem proposed above, it also highlights its malleability as a lens through which to view the nuances of multivocal expressions, rituals, and spaces.

With some of the significant terminology clarified, some of the theoretical foundations for various aspects of this study will be discussed here. The Moving Wall as a replica, and its display in temporary spaces, invite a number of questions regarding authenticity, simulation, the phenomenology of memory, and the role of space and place

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<sup>47</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> Examples of this dichotomy: Conflicts involving the VCVL and veteran support of the Moving Wall during such conflicts will be discussed in Chapter 1; the contrast between continuity of commemorative rituals and the creation of new rituals is explored in Chapter 2; and spatial differences between the Washington Mall and community-based displays will be considered in Chapter 3

<sup>49</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 7-9.

in commemoration. In the case of the VVM and a representation of its image as projected by the Moving Wall, authenticity was largely contextually dependent. Interpretations of authentic engagement and the authority given to one replica over another was a complicated negotiation. Differences in spatial context, size, and materials were often noticed in comments regarding the Moving Wall, but rarely said to have ruined the commemorative experience as a whole. Interestingly, debates over authenticity were more likely to arise over the authority of the replica's creator, where John Devitt and the VCVL were held in higher regard than more corporately driven replicas.<sup>50</sup> The work of Walter Benjamin provides the fundamental theoretical basis for the question of authenticity at the Moving Wall, especially considering the replica's transformation into its own commemorative experience.

Benjamin highlights the inherent authenticity of a thing through the axiom of its "aura." The VVM, inspires a profound reverence that the Moving Wall was undoubtedly unable to accurately replicate. In "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," Benjamin states that "[i]n even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence at the place at which it is to be found. The history to which the work of art has been subjected as it persists over time occurs in regard to this unique existence – and to nothing else."<sup>51</sup> For the VVM, the profound "here and now" cannot be understated, as the debates over its design, the changing cultural climate during the Reagan years, and its deliberate positioning on the Mall all played roles in its creation and the myriad interpretations that celebrated and

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<sup>50</sup> These debates, specifically the conflicts between veterans and two corporate sponsored walls from Adolph Coors Company and Service Corporation International, are explored in Chapter 1

<sup>51</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," First Edition translated by Michael W. Jennings, *Grey Room* No. 39 (Spring 2010), 13.

opposed it at its inception. Directly inspired by the original, and his experience of its aura, Devitt dedicated himself to extending its reach. As Benjamin suggests, “technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations to which the original itself cannot attain. Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway,” exactly as Devitt had intended for his mobile replica.<sup>52</sup> Recognizing the general inaccessibility of the VVM for those who did not have the time, finances, or inclination to travel to Washington, Devitt attempted to package its commemorative power, bringing a travelling exhibition from town to town. Hardly alone, Devitt’s Moving Wall was part of a larger commemorative project that rallied around the image of the VVM walls, and in true Benjaminian fashion, replicated itself *ad nauseam*.<sup>53</sup> Benjamin describes this phenomenon, explaining “the desire of the... masses to ‘bring things closer’ and their equally passionate concern, the tendency to overcome the uniqueness of every reality through its reproducibility. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image... or, better, in a facsimile....”<sup>54</sup> For many across the United States, the Moving Wall acted as such a facsimile, even if only for short bursts of time. As later chapters will show, despite differences in size, shape, and place, the commemorative experience at the Moving Wall was deemed by many to be an authentic and fitting substitute for the original. However, other commentary and the evolution of new commemorative rituals discussed in chapter 2, also hint at interpretations of the Moving Wall as a simulacrum, less a replication of the VVM than something new, despite its familiar form.

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<sup>52</sup> Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” 14.

<sup>53</sup> Other replica walls examined in Chapters 1 and 3.

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” 15-6.



Differing interpretations of the Moving Wall found in newspaper articles and the visitor commentary therein, fit well with Jean Baudrillard's phases of the image as proposed in *Simulacra and Simulation*. He identifies these four phases as: an image or sign that "is a reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum."<sup>55</sup> In the case of the Moving Wall, all of Baudrillard's four phases come into play. For its creators, their motive and intention was to create a replica resembling the first phase. It was meant to package and share a facsimile of the powerful commemorative experience of the VVM (that John Devitt had experienced at the 1982 National Salute to Vietnam Veterans) beyond the limited reach of the Washington Mall. However, inherent in this effort was the packaging of a specific individual's experience. Though likely an unintended side-effect of replication, it was Devitt's own experience, interpretation, and emotions that formed the aura, the "here and now" of the Moving Wall in its inception, alongside the emotional input of other VCVL volunteers that helped him. The result is Baudrillard's second phase, denaturing the "profound reality" through a new Benjaminian aura. Phase three is reached by nature of the Moving Wall's function as a place-holder for an absent form during its tours, making obvious the spatial displacement of the physical form from intended place, and attempting to deliver a commemorative experience absent for so many. A void is meant to be filled – and as chapter 3 will show – all the while a new one is created in its place by nature of its temporariness. Finally, as new commemorative rituals developed around the Moving Wall's intrinsic mobility and need for assembly and disassembly, the structure of its presentation in variable space

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<sup>55</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 356.

developed and influenced cultural place-making processes. The Moving Wall thus approached the guise of Baurillard's simulacrum, becoming something all its own and without the need for a connective tissue between itself and the VVM. Throughout this fluid and overlapping network of interpretation and engagement, the Moving Wall evolved and shifted into whatever a given visitor, community, or volunteer needed it to be, much like the work of its inspiration, but in new vernacular ways that set it apart.

With regard to place-making and vernacular expressions of both collective and "collected" memory, philosopher Dylan Trigg and historian James Young offer complementary ideas. In Trigg's phenomenological study of the relationship between memory, place, and sense of self, he probes our conscious and unconscious perceptions and attachments to places and spaces. He suggests that "the memories we acquire of the places we inhabit assume a value that is both immeasurable and vital. Without the memory of places, memory itself would no longer have a role to play in our conscious lives."<sup>56</sup> These places, as the foundational backdrop for our memory, also become repositories for our memories as we implant pieces of ourselves into the places we connect with. However, place is hardly ever concretely defined, existing within a matrix of interpretations and connections. Trigg states that "Place is all around us and yet not always thematized. Place is at the heart not only of who we are, but also of the culture in which we find ourselves. As invested with cultural, ecological, and political ramifications, place does not simply designate a patch of land without value."<sup>57</sup> Coupling Trigg's phenomenological ideas about memory and place with James Young's concept of collected memory nuances this reciprocal relationship between places and the people that

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<sup>56</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>57</sup> Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 1.

form connections with and in them. For Young, collected memory is “the many discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning. A society’s memory, in this context, might be regarded as an aggregate collection of its members’ many, often competing memories.”<sup>58</sup> Rather than the more traditional concept of collective memory, Young suggests that while socially organized and expressed memory exists, it exists through the contributions of constituents. The memories of people are collected in spaces and through expressions, then organized and expressed in collective terms through social institutions and discourses. While the discourse and language of healing worked to limit and shape national memory and political critique, the on-the-ground processes of memory-making were forged by the rituals, spaces, structures, and vernacular expressions of the public. In social settings, such as displays of the Moving Wall, these aggregates of memories and expressions form the tissue of a network of collected memory. As Young suggests “it may even be the act of remembering together that becomes the shared memory; once ritualized, remembering together becomes an event in itself that is to be shared and remembered.”<sup>59</sup> Within the places that become the foundation for our conscious memory, the social act of remembering together – or perhaps the social contributions to a network of collected memory – in spaces of profound commemorative power – facilitates important connections between those social acts of commemoration, the memories they both reflect and create, and the places we associate with those memories. This matrix of meaning and the value placed on experiences and memories form the foundation for the relationship between commemoration and space.

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<sup>58</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xi.

<sup>59</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 7.

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In order to access commentary from the Moving Wall's creators, sponsors, visitors, and critics, this study will analyze newspaper articles and editorials to identify perceptions of the discourse of healing, authenticity and authority in commemorative display, the maintenance and creation of commemorative rituals, the perception of spatial incongruities in interpretive landscapes, and the evolution of the Moving Wall beyond being simply a replica. The press has the ability to function as both a mouthpiece of ideologies and as an intermediary between official and vernacular expressions of culture, while also acting as a general expression of a given cultural and political climate. However, this approach does come with some limitations. Corporate interests and politics have a great influence over the transference and representation of information. Any analysis of the press, as well as radio or televised news, must be sensitive to this fact and to the power of the press to emphasize or obscure facts for the sake of economic interests or political agendas. Through content analysis, articles from large papers such as the *New York Times*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *LA Times*, and the *Miami Herald*, as well as smaller local papers will be examined for explicit and implicit commentary on the Moving Wall and other travelling replicas, visitor comments and descriptions of interactions, comments from significant figures from the VCVL, VVMF, and various sponsors of the replica, and the significance placed on the replica's visit generally. The above named papers were chosen for the amount of content they produced on the Moving Wall, especially around the replica's creation (*San Jose Mercury News*) and the later creation of the Wall South (*Miami Herald*). These sources are limited to the sparse available writings on the replica

and the people involved in its creation and tours, and the natural curating of commentary done in the construction of the article as text. However, they do provide an insight into the public discourse surrounding the replica, the actions of the VCVL, and the broader influence of the discourse of commemorative healing as it acted on the Moving Wall project. The analysis of newspaper sources for this study will also be sensitive to the analytical tools and theoretical concepts of studying mass media put forth by the works of Ben Bagdikian, Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky, and Stuart Hall, such as Hall's work on content analysis, Herman and Chomsky's "propaganda model," and Bagdikian's work on organizational structure in media.<sup>60</sup>

Following this introductory chapter will be three chapters exploring various aspects of the Moving Wall's history. Chapter I will trace the origins of the Moving Wall and John Devitt's journey from the 1982 National Salute to Vietnam Veterans in Washington to the conflict between the VCVL and other replica makers. It argues that despite a discourse of healing and a popular culture that objectified Vietnam veterans' struggles and marginalized them socially, Devitt, the VCVL, sponsoring veterans organizations, and veteran supporters of the Moving Wall became active participants in the memory-making process. One underlying tension that complicates this argument is the hegemonic relationship between many active veterans and the discourse of healing. Many veterans were immersed in the language and commemorative project of healing, promoting its "apolitical" attempt to honour the warrior while being ashamed of the war. As an overbearing force, the discourse of healing did limit the themes of veteran-led

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<sup>60</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 163-7; Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, "A Propaganda Model," in Durham and Keller, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies*, 257-8; Ben H. Bagdikian, "Shaping Media Content: Professional Personnel and Organizational Structure," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 37:4 (Winter 1973-1974): 574-5.

commemoration, however the popular objectification of veterans' struggles was subverted by the Moving Wall project. On another level, authority in replication became an issue as corporations attempted to profit from replicating the VVM, an effort vehemently opposed by Devitt, the VCVL, and their supporters.

Chapter II shifts gears to look at visitor engagement with the Moving Wall, the maintenance of commemorative rituals from the original, and the creation of new rituals facilitated by the replica's mobile and temporary nature. It argues that reporting on visitor engagement at the Moving Wall situated the commemorative experience within the canon of the VVM and the dominant discourse of healing, but issues of politics and space complicated the commemorative experience and disillusioned some to the dominant discourses of the memory of the Vietnam War. Attempts at "depoliticization" were complicated by vernacular engagement with the themes of the VVM's image. Additionally, the creation of new rituals – such as transport convoys and assembly/disassembly practices – along with visitor recognition of vernacular spaces, contributed to the replica's evolution away from simple replication to something resembling Baudrillard's simulacrum.

Chapter III turns more specifically to the spatial elements of the mobile replica and the effect that mobility and temporariness have on the commemorative experience. It examines differences in the spatial context of the Washington Mall as interpretive landscape against the vernacular community displays of the Moving Wall and its ability to reach beyond the scope of the original. It will also consider the issue of absence via the Moving Wall's departure from a given space and recognitions and reactions to the void it leaves behind. It argues that the Moving Wall offers a new lens through which to view

the relationship between commemoration and space while raising questions about the contrast between authenticity in replication and an unexpected and ironic uniqueness. It is followed by a brief concluding chapter that brings together the previous arguments and brings them into a larger conversation about authenticity, replication, and simulation.

This study will argue that the Moving Wall was an important “therapeutic” tool for both those that built it and those who went to see it, but also that the spatial disconnect from the context of the original memorial, along with its temporary nature, created complications in the commemorative process. It also argues that despite its origins as a replica, the Moving Wall evolved, taking on an identity of its own through its own authenticity and authority, its own commemorative rituals, and the many spatial factors that separated it from the original. Through the story of the replica, the many ways in which it was received by visitors, its perceived authenticity, and the phenomenon of transformative and temporary place, this study will address a relatively ignored aspect of the American memory of the Vietnam War while considering critical questions related to the relationship between commemoration and space, and replication and authenticity. Was this spatial disconnect recognized by visitors? If so, how did it effect interpretations of the replica? If commemorative rituals associated with the original were maintained, were they altered? What new spatial contexts were created on the replica’s tour stops, and how did they inform new interpretations? How were visitors affected by the memorial’s absence after a visit? These and many other questions will guide and shape this study as it seeks to analyze the travelling memorial as a commemorative medium, and how the Moving Wall may enhance our understanding of the relationships between commemoration, space, and individual and collective healing.

This study will draw from multiple historiographies ranging from the plethora of work on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and memory of the Vietnam War in the United States, to histories of monuments and memorials as commemorative forms in North America and Europe, to studies of the relationships between history and memory, and memory and space. The Moving Wall as a travelling memorial, and as a replica of one of the most powerful and divisive memorials in the United States, acts as an anomaly in our established understanding of commemoration, memorials, and the deep connection between memory and space. Having been almost entirely absent from secondary literature, the Moving Wall offers a rich opportunity to bring something new to the ongoing discussion of the legacy and memory of the Vietnam War, analyses of commemorative media generally, and studies of the spatial aspects of memory and commemoration. While the Moving Wall undoubtedly operated within the same discourse of healing and politics of scars and syndromes that dominated the memory of the Vietnam War, it signifies an explicit collective act by a group of veterans inspired by the experience of the VVM, bringing their own memories and politics to a commemorative form that consistently existed in transitional space. Meanwhile, displays of the replica operated on reciprocal transformations of meaning in the interpretative landscapes that acted on, and were acted upon, by the Moving Wall, presented to the public to be engaged and negotiated on individual and collective levels. This study argues that despite existing within the interpretive apparatus of the discourse of commemorative healing and as a replica and simulation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the spatiality of the Moving Wall – its thrust into the vernacular spaces of memory – facilitated a transcendence beyond simple replication, as authenticity and authority was socially



granted to it and its creators, through the organic evolution of commemorative rituals, and through vernacular negotiations and expressions of memory.

## I Veteran Agency and the Birth of Moving Wall

To understand the Moving Wall within the context of the popular discourse surrounding the memory of the Vietnam War in the United States, as a replica of one of the most powerful war memorials of the twentieth century, and yet, also as something almost completely all its own, it is important to first consider those who brought it into being. Veteran John Devitt and fellow volunteers of San Jose's Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. (VCVL) took active roles in the process of remembering the Vietnam War and the American men and women who were killed or missing in action, bringing Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) to communities throughout the United States. Their efforts provide a powerful example of veterans attempting to subvert the popular "discourse of healing" described in the introduction, using their own inspiration and interpretation of the VVM to craft their own memorial, share it beyond the reach of the Washington Mall, and defend it against those who they felt tarnished the reverence and memory it represented. This chapter will first examine the origins of the Moving Wall from John Devitt's encounter with the VVM to the Moving Wall's first decade of touring. It will then turn to a brief consideration of sponsorship of the Moving Wall and lastly, it will examine the controversies between Devitt and Jan Scruggs of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) and the lawsuits between the VCVL and Coors, and later between the VCVL and Service Corporation International. This chapter will argue that through the Moving Wall, Devitt, the VCVL, and their supporters provide important examples of veterans actively engaging in the memory-making process of the post-Vietnam era. Rather than fully subscribing to a prescriptive discourse of psychological,

cultural, and national healing, Devitt and others quite literally took matters into their own hands to support fellow veterans and their families and friends.

First, a brief return to scholarship on the discourse of healing and Vietnam veteran agency will serve to set the stage for a look at the Moving Wall's conception. Historian Keith Beattie provides an important interpretation of the origins of this discourse that directly relates to popular ideas about Vietnam veterans after the war, their needs as defined by official expressions of commemoration, and their supposed social impotence. With the powerful impact of visual media coverage of the war and its aftermath, and the very visible state of veterans in that coverage, Beattie suggests that the damage of physical violence became the defining character of the struggles faced by the nation culturally and politically. He states that "[t]he overwhelming presence of wounding so impressed itself upon the popular imagination that injury and wounding became *the* framework for representing and interpreting the distressing political, economic, social, or psychological consequences of the war in Vietnam for U.S. culture."<sup>61</sup> Best represented by an increasingly popular language of scars and syndromes, the plight of the nation after the war took on a pseudo-psychological guise, requiring healing as opposed to political and cultural critique. For the official narrative, veterans became important figures in this discourse as personifications of the crippled nation. For Beattie, veterans were marginalized even further beyond the initial public backlash they faced after the evacuation of 1973 as they were pragmatically fit into a psychological framework of

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<sup>61</sup> Keith Beattie, *The Scar that Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 12-3

trauma and scars, and an effort to marginalize political and cultural debate for the sake of national unity.<sup>62</sup>

Patrick Hagopian further relates this framework to the objectification of veterans by a civilian public haunted by confusion over what all the killing and dying had been for, and an official narrative determined to minimize national fissures and deflect culpability for what some called an unjust war. The voices of veterans were drowned out by politicians and popular media as they were told what they themselves needed, and that their perspective on what the war was and what it meant was irrelevant.<sup>63</sup> From a position of rejection, veterans were absorbed into the discourse of healing that relegated them to positions of inaction, from a national problem to examples of national rebirth.

Despite this objectification, many Vietnam veterans would quickly come to subvert their imposed sidelining, becoming active forces in the creation of memorials, other commemorative projects, social support networks, and fundraising initiatives. In her comprehensive study of the VVM in the context of American commemorative and funerary tradition, historian Kristin Hass explored the role of veterans in the creation of the VVM amid intense debate over its design. Ultimately, it was veterans organizations that exerted the most power over bringing about a national memorial to the Vietnam War, with many championing Lin's design and its focus on the human cost. While many veterans were opposed to the design, seeing it as a symbol of death, loss, and dishonour, "[t]he VVMF and all leading organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, officially approved the design. The best evidence of the reaction of the larger community of veterans was their continued effort to support the monument

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<sup>62</sup> Beattie, *The Scar that Binds*, 26.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 18-9.

despite the barrage of bitter publicity about the design,” including a number of fundraising initiatives in support of its construction.<sup>64</sup> Funded primarily through public donations, veteran-led fundraising in support of the VVM was a huge contribution to the memorial’s eventual completion, and an early sign of veterans becoming actively engaged in the war’s commemoration. Perhaps in direct reaction to their marginalization, first upon returning home, and then again by the “healing embrace,” veterans across the country worked to be recognized beyond popular culture and officially prescribed representations of their place in post-Vietnam War American society. Hass relates this work to a contrast she suggests Vietnam veterans felt to their Second World War counterparts. She states that “[f]or the Vietnam veterans, in contrast to the World War II veterans, the intensity of the crisis of finding a place in the culture created – and continues to create – an enormous pressure to make a memory of the war that will heal that radical rupture the war created between so many citizens and the nation.”<sup>65</sup> For Hass, veterans felt an intense pressure to do their part in promoting “healing,” of themselves and the nation. This ultimately resulted in a situation in which veterans found themselves entwined in a discourse that worked to limit their role as voices of critique, but at the same time inspired them to become active forces in the creation of memorials and other commemorative projects. Returning to the example of the VVMF, Hagopian explains that “by using an armory of powerful sentiment they garnered honor and recognition for those who fought and thereby furthered the hegemonic project of rehabilitating the Vietnam

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<sup>64</sup> Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 16.

<sup>65</sup> Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, 62.

War itself,” signifying one of the many crucial roles veterans played in post-Vietnam War memory and discourse.<sup>66</sup>

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Vietnam veteran and Moving Wall creator, John Devitt, is a prime example of Hass and Hagopian’s contention that veterans took an active role in the memory-making process of the postwar era. During his service, “[at] 19, Devitt had been a helicopter gunner in Vietnam. He flew relief to the Marines besieged for 77 days at Khe Sahn. He was shot down three times and crashed a fourth time because of engine failure.”<sup>67</sup> He returned to the United States in 1969. From the Moving Wall’s initial construction in 1983 to its present-day tours, Devitt and fellow members of the VCVL, while entwined in the discourse of healing, took it upon themselves to create something to help address untended traumas and emotional needs. Profoundly affected by his engagement with the VVM, and pulling through the emotionally difficult process of constructing the replica, the Moving Wall became Devitt’s life’s work, his life after his service in Vietnam to it and to those he hoped it might help.

The story of the Moving Wall, and John Devitt’s dedication to it, begins with a trip to Washington D.C. in 1982 to attend the National Salute to Vietnam Veterans at the VVM. Prior to seeing the memorial wall, Devitt held what were common criticisms and reservations about the memorial’s design, but his view was altered upon actually experiencing and engaging with it. His early assumptions and subsequent experience fit

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<sup>66</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> “Moving Wall Makes First Mobile Area Visit,” *Cherokee County Herald*, October 11, 1989, 1; Wayne King, “Our Towns: Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall across the Land,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

with historian Kim Theriault's suggestion that many Vietnam veterans struggled to see anything redeemable in the "black gash of shame," especially with its emphasis on the dead and supposed omission of the living. Theriault states that "Many living Vietnam veterans were originally bitter about being left out of the memorial. The simplicity of the memorial, however, includes them.... The Wall becomes a constructive place because it allows the veterans to reconnect with a community of veterans through reckoning with their individual Vietnam experiences."<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the National Salute to Vietnam Veterans brought many veterans together despite widespread reservations about the VVM's design. Devitt had been encouraged to go by friends who had given him some money to make the trip, and he was reunited with members of his old unit for the first time since returning home.<sup>69</sup> He stated that:

I'd read about it.... It's a gravestone. That's the way I felt about it before I walked up to it. It was black, it was in the ground, it wasn't designed by a Vietnam vet. Symbolically, I didn't like it.... But when I walked up to it, all that disappeared; it seemed irrelevant. The impact was incredible. I thought I knew how many 58,000 was, but when I saw how many 58,000 was, 58,000 names, I couldn't believe it. I was shocked.<sup>70</sup>

Like so many other testimonies of the VVM experience, Devitt was fully immersed in the wall's embrace, finding some solace in its message about the human cost of war – a message, and a feeling, that he wished to bring to others that were not fortunate enough to experience it themselves. As one article put it, "[w]hat happened at the Vietnam Veterans

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<sup>68</sup> Kim S. Theriault, "Re-membering Vietnam: War, Trauma, and 'Scarring Over' at 'the Wall,'" *Journal of American Culture* 26:4 (December 2003), 426.

<sup>69</sup> "Vietnam Memorial Takes to the Road," *The New York Times*, December 1, 1985.

<sup>70</sup> Wayne King, "Our Towns: Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall across the Land," *The New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

Memorial in Washington was that Mr. Devitt...felt a feeling of pride for the first time since he came home in 1969. 'It's not a statement about war,' he realized. 'It's a statement about sacrifice and service.'"<sup>71</sup>

Devitt's story about his encounter with the VVM became a popular subject in press reports of Moving Wall tour stops. Articles tended to focus on his own comments, especially referring to the power of the VVM and how it had helped him deal with his own "healing." The trip to Washington was illustrated as a turning point for Devitt, promoting his story as a relatable one for other veterans and offering a satisfying example of the discourse of healing at work, while advertising his replica. One article stated in 1990 that:

Not until then did the recurring problems he'd been dealing with since serving in Vietnam from '67 to '69 cease. For years he had suffered from violent temper flares, the sweats, bad dreams and the boredom of going from an intense, adrenaline-pumping existence to normal workaday life. 'That's why I wanted to do something. People really did care, and I wanted to let other vets know they care,' says the 41-year-old Devitt. 'I wanted to capture that spirit I felt in Washington, D.C., and sort of spread it around and share it with people who couldn't get there.'<sup>72</sup>

That spirit he wished to capture coalesced in the space of commemoration, made physical in the wall. Like many others, Devitt's own interpretation associated the feeling and effect of commemorative healing with the engagement of seeing, feeling, and being in the

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<sup>71</sup> Wayne King, "Our Towns: Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall across the Land," *The New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Oricchio, "Walls & Bridges: The Moving Wall, A Portable Replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, is One Veteran's Tribute to the Sacrifices Made by His Fellow Comrades," *San Jose Mercury News*, July 16, 1990, 9B.



space, in the physical presence of the VVM. He said that “It was the first time since I’d left Vietnam that I’d felt that good.... It was right then that I wanted everybody that I’d ever know, whether it was for two minutes or 10 years, to see that. To be right there with me.”<sup>73</sup> Because of this, it comes as little surprise that he would see the VVM’s static and site-specific nature as problematic. The profound impact he felt, and thought should be shared as widely as possible, was limited in its reach, especially given the language of the National Salute and the suggestions of healing and closure given to veterans in attendance. He told one interviewer, “I had the opportunity to attend the dedication of the memorial in Washington in 1982.... I kept hearing the word finally at the dedication: Finally, the vets can put the war to rest. And I thought, but not all of the vets will be able to come here.”<sup>74</sup> Recognizing that the Washington Mall was beyond the reach of many Vietnam veterans and their families, Devitt was left with a feeling that something should be done for those unable to go.

It did not take long for this feeling to turn to action as Devitt returned to California from Washington. While struggling financially, he became determined to do whatever he could to help his fellow veterans. Referencing a telephone interview with Devitt in 1992, Hagopian explains that:

[a] month after the National Salute, Devitt learned that the organizers of a Vietnam Veterans fair in San Francisco had advertised a scale reproduction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. He became involved in the project...giving up his

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<sup>73</sup> “Moving Wall Makes First Mobile Area Visit,” *Cherokee County Herald*, October 11, 1989, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

apartment and living in his car so that he would not waste money on rent, putting every penny he raised in the memorial.<sup>75</sup>

This first replica, constructed by Devitt and other members of the VCVL, was displayed at the Peace is Alive Vietnam Veterans Fair in San Francisco and became the progenitor of the Moving Wall. Made of plexiglass panels mounted on a wooden frame, Devitt's model could be made mobile, easily assembled and disassembled for transportation. This idea sparked what became the two-year project of creating the first Moving Wall.

A number of articles from the latter half of the 1980s highlighted the initial construction of the travelling replica while chronicling Devitt's story. Reports tended to focus on the great amount of time it took to build, the final cost and how it was financed, and the emotion involved in replicating such a powerful monument. Some emphasized what an unexpectedly arduous task it had become for all involved:

What started as a weekend project took 30 volunteer members of San Jose's Vietnam Combat Veterans, Ltd., two years and \$28,000 to complete. Using original blueprints and negatives borrowed from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund in Washington, the crew assembled the 140 panels in a silk-screening shop. White epoxy paint created the slightly raised letters that loved ones now trace again and again.<sup>76</sup>

Devitt began work on the Moving Wall in early 1983 with fellow VCVL members Gerry Haver and Norris Shears. After pooling their own funds, Devitt, Haver, and Shears requested financial support from the city of San Jose and collected donations from the public to help pay for materials. One article stated, "Mr. Devitt started work on the 253-

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<sup>75</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 386.

<sup>76</sup> "Vietnam Memorial Takes to the Road," *The New York Times*, December 1, 1985.

foot Moving Wall in January 1983 as ‘a weekend project’ with two other Vietnam veterans, with \$2,500 out of their own pockets. They finished it 21 months later after going \$18,000 in debt, bailed out by donations and a \$16,000 contribution from the San Jose City Council.”<sup>77</sup> Despite the initial financial difficulties, public support for the Moving Wall from civilians and the city, like the support shown to the original, ensured that the project would see completion. Further testament to the popularity of the VVM’s design and belief in the Moving Wall project, the \$28,000 cost was covered, ultimately cutting the eventual touring costs for sponsors to just transportation and lodging for Devitt and other VCVL representatives at given tour stops, usually amounting to \$2,500 a week.

The emotional cost, however, was also a significant subject in early coverage of the replica. Articles tended to focus on the application of the names on the Moving Wall’s panels, raised in white epoxy through a silk-screening process. Devitt’s own comments helped to highlight how emotionally difficult this process was, but also their dedication to maintaining relative consistency in the experience of engaging with the replica as one would with the original. One article noted:

Each of the 58,156 names on the wall is raised by a silk-screen process on aluminum panels coated with black enamel to simulate the original. ‘It was important that the letters be raised,’ said Mr. Devitt. ‘It gives people the

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<sup>77</sup> Wayne King, “Our Towns: Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall across the Land,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 1989; Final cost and the amount contributed by the San Jose City Council corroborated by a number of other articles: Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989; Michelle Guido, “The Things They Left Behind With Each Visit: The Vietnam Vet Who Trucks his Memorial Wall Across the Land Collects a Message, and a Memory He Can’t Forget,” *San Jose Mercury News*, December 9, 1990, 1A; Michael Oricchio, “Walls & Bridges: The Moving Wall, A Portable Replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, is One Veteran’s Tribute to the Sacrifices Made by His Fellow Comrades,” *San Jose Mercury News*, July 16, 1990, 9B.

opportunity to touch the names, to feel the names.’ Mr. Devitt and another veteran applied the names one-by-one, at times working upside down or in reverse so as not to read the names, an experience that at times proved too emotionally intense.<sup>78</sup>

Early in the Moving Wall’s creation, Devitt recognized the importance of the memorial wall’s interactivity, especially the physical engagement with names. Raising the names in epoxy was a relatively inexpensive alternative to the carved names of the VVM, and as the next chapter will show, this physical inconsistency rarely limited visitor interaction or the maintenance of commemorative rituals. However, the names on the Moving Wall did present a new commemorative challenge for those involved in their application. For Devitt, the application of names proved to be the most difficult part of the Moving Wall’s creation. He was quoted as saying “It was pretty hard dealing with it on a daily level – just all those names.... It didn't seem like we were ever going to finish. There were times when I wanted to just get into my truck and leave.... I never left. I just said, 'Let's go for it.' And that meant stop when you finish or die trying.”<sup>79</sup> While engagement with the names on the original and replica walls is arguably the most profound part of the VVM experience for visitors, their application became an intermediary step, a unique commemorative activity specifically for those involved in the Moving Wall’s creation. Devitt and fellow veteran volunteers grappled with their own emotional challenges in a process all their own, at times having to pause or develop strategies to hedge the emotional intensity. The one-by-one application of the names amplified the VVM

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<sup>78</sup> Wayne King, “Our Towns: Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall across the Land,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Oricchio, “Walls & Bridges: The Moving Wall, A Portable Replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, is One Veteran’s Tribute to the Sacrifices Made by His Fellow Comrades,” *San Jose Mercury News*, July 16, 1990, 9B.

design's emphasis on the human cost of the Vietnam War and on the significance of the individual along with the many.

Since the Moving Wall's initial tour in late-1984 and early-1985, Devitt hoped that visitors would feel the same intense emotional impact he had, both at the VVM and during the Moving Wall's creation. Early comments to the press emphasized his desire that the Moving Wall would both help those veterans and civilians grappling with their memories of the war and the losses they had endured, but also to help others gain new perspectives on the war and those who fought it. He said in 1985, "I think the size of the replica takes most people by surprise.... People are shocked when they see it and they should be. We came back to a society where the whole attitude was that the war was no big deal. But this shows how big a deal it was."<sup>80</sup> Calling out a perspective of the war that contributed to the marginalization of veterans, Devitt at times championed a call to other veterans to find pride in their service, despite a commemorative discourse that objectified them, and a popular culture that fetishized their struggle.<sup>81</sup> He once said that through the Moving Wall and its tours, "What we're trying to do is let the Vietnam veterans know they are not alone, that they are not the only ones that remember, that now we can all remember with pride instead of being afraid."<sup>82</sup> Within a few years the Moving Wall skyrocketed in popularity, finding temporary homes all across the United States and seeing visitor counts that ranged from tens-of-thousands to hundreds-of-thousands per stop. The *LA Times* reported in 1989 that "By the end of next year, it will have made an

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<sup>80</sup> Tim Waters, "Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

<sup>81</sup> For more on depictions of Vietnam veterans in television and film during the 1980s, see: Michael Clark, "Remembering Vietnam," in John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg eds., *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 177-207; Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 66-9.

<sup>82</sup> Tim Waters, "Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

appearance in every state. A minimum of 17,000 people have seen it at each stop; more than 250,000 viewed it in Chicago. ‘We get requests from military bases, colleges, high schools and civic groups,’ Devitt said.’<sup>83</sup> The staggering attendance numbers and the wide array of sponsors speaks to the Moving Wall’s popularity, and its versatility as a commemorative form and experience, used to satisfy a variety of commemorative and educational needs.

The second chapter will provide a deeper examination of visitor engagement and commemorative rituals at the Moving Wall; however the impact of one of those rituals in particular on John Devitt is important when considering the evolution of the Moving Wall project, as well as his dedication to it. Some articles, during the replica’s early years, referenced the ritual of leaving mementos at the wall, an act carried over from the VVM. The logistical problem of addressing the incredible number of things left at the Moving Wall led to an expansion of Devitt’s project that is still being worked on to this day. Recognizing the immense significance of every item left at the replica, Devitt collected them after every stop, leaving nothing behind. A *New York Times* article in 1985 stated that “Wherever it is set up, it becomes a place where thousands of mourners come to leave their mementos. ‘The things people leave - medals, pictures, letters from kids who never knew their dad - are just as important as the wall,’ Mr. Devitt said. He is collecting the items in hopes of creating a museum someday.”<sup>84</sup> The museum project, intended to see completion when the Moving Wall ceases its touring, has led to processes similar to the efforts of the National Parks Service, which collects and catalogues items left at the VVM. Mementos left at the Moving Wall are gathered up at the end of a stop

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<sup>83</sup> Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

<sup>84</sup> “Vietnam Memorial Takes to the Road,” *The New York Times*, December 1, 1985.

and brought along until Devitt returns to San Jose where they are stored in a warehouse, silently awaiting their reawakening in Devitt's planned museum. As Hagopian describes it, "The boxes stack up ever higher on industrial shelving like so many exotic specimens in Citizen Kane's Xanadu, an uncatalogued and uncounted reminder of the vast reservoir of unstilled emotion left over from the Vietnam War."<sup>85</sup> Identified only by their place of origin, the myriad items in Devitt's collection serve as a mosaic of memory transcending time, small profound statements of love, pain, pride, and loss gathered together in one man's attempt to bring solace to those in need. The *San Jose Mercury News* wrote in 1990:

The very first object left at the wall in Tyler [Texas] on that very first day – Oct. 15, 1984 – was a large red votive candle with a note attached: 'In loving memory of Graham Hickman and all the others – Mother and Daddy.' The woman who left the candle asked Devitt if he would take it with him when he left for the next city. 'I just thought, how could I possibly leave something like that behind? I knew I couldn't,' said Devitt.<sup>86</sup>

An unforeseen result of the Moving Wall's popularity and its simulation of the VVM experience, the San Jose warehouse, filled to the brim with small but powerful tokens of memory hailing from all corners of the country, sits as a profound but hidden space in the commemoration of the Vietnam War. Reaching out in a network of memory, the Moving Wall collection brings together disparate pieces from across space and time, coalesced in a gestalt of vernacular commemorative expressions. Recognizing the importance of each

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<sup>85</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 389.

<sup>86</sup> Michelle Guido, "The Things They Left Behind With Each Visit: The Vietnam Vet Who Trucks his Memorial Wall Across the Land Collects a Message, and a Memory He Can't Forget," *San Jose Mercury News*, December 9, 1990, 1A.

individual item and determined to preserve the memories they hold, Devitt has taken great care to ensure their survival and to one day create a more fitting home in order for them to be viewed and engaged in a new commemorative space.

Despite a discourse that had objectified veterans and their struggle, John Devitt and members of the VCVL became active members in the construction of memory in their own way. From Devitt's trip to Washington in 1982 to the eventual establishment of a Moving Wall museum, his legacy will be one of compassionate action, finding relief in commemorative forms and rituals that he was able to share with those who could not make the same trip. The Moving Wall in its three and a half decade journey across the United States has touched millions of lives thanks to the efforts of the veterans of the VCVL, providing the structure and space for individual and collective commemoration through their attempted simulation of the nation's most powerful war memorial.

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During its early years, the Moving Wall quickly gained in popularity as visitor turnout and demand for booking increased through the late 1980s. With the construction of the second and third walls, the replicas increased their reach and saw annual visitor numbers that would rival the original in Washington. One 1990 article in the *San Jose Mercury News* stated that, "The Moving Walls each visit 22 to 28 cities around the United States annually. Devitt says 75,000 to 100,000 people come out to the memorials during their weeklong appearances at each spot. There's a certain similarity to what happens in each city. 'Basically it's what happens at the wall in Washington, D.C.,' he



says. ‘You just see the whole emotional spectrum played out.’<sup>87</sup> Noting the success of his simulation, the article conflates the replica’s popularity with Devitt’s comments about the similarities between the two experiences. For sponsors, the growing popularity of the replica and the mostly positive commentary about its presentation heavily encouraged demand from 1985 to 1990.<sup>88</sup> While visitor responses to the replica, its spatial settings, and comments on authenticity will be considered in later chapters, available press coverage and comments from sponsoring veterans organizations regarding motives for sponsorship and attempts to accurately simulate the VVM experience will be briefly considered here.

One early example was the Moving Wall’s stop in Hawthorne, California, in August of 1985, sponsored Hawthorne’s Veterans Council. Advertisement for the replica’s visit noted its previous stop and the great distances visitors had travelled to see it in its earliest years: “Devitt...said the replica has been on display in four Western states since it was built. Before the Hawthorne showing, it was set up in the parking lot of a shopping center in Killeen, Tex., where an estimated 25,000 people, some from as far away as Arkansas and Oklahoma, came to view it.”<sup>89</sup> The same article also gave some insight into the Hawthorne Veterans’ Council’s motives for sponsoring the Moving Wall’s visit. While the majority of press coverage analysed for this project rarely made mention of sponsor motives, the Hawthorne Veterans’ Council was refreshingly open about wanting to attract new members. The *LA Times* said, “The showing in Hawthorne

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<sup>87</sup> Michael Oricchio, “Walls & Bridges: The Moving Wall, A Portable Replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, is One Veteran’s Tribute to the Sacrifices Made by His Fellow Comrades,” *San Jose Mercury News*, July 16, 1990, 9B.

<sup>88</sup> Jumping from 18 stops in 1985 to 41 in 1990: “History of Moving Wall Displays,” <http://www.themovingwall.org/docs/history.htm>, December 17, 2013; accessed October 5, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Tim Waters, “Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

is being sponsored by the Hawthorne Veterans' Council, a group representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and World War II veterans. Council members said that in recent months they have attempted to lure more Vietnam veterans into the group and honor them."<sup>90</sup> For the Council, there was the perception that many veterans felt they had no one to turn to, or were apprehensive about joining a large organization. They hoped that the Moving Wall's visit would help to bring veterans together and see the benefits of their group. Council member Ben Ainsworth said, "I think the Vietnam veteran is reluctant to join a veteran's group.... I think a lot of them think they got punched around. They were ridiculed by their own friends and old buddies. We're paying our respects to those veterans."<sup>91</sup> In cases like this, the Moving Wall became part of some veterans organizations' initiatives to bolster membership while also offering commemorative support to their compatriots and communities and attempting to minimize the distinction between veterans of just and unjust wars.

In many other cases this support is reciprocal, as communities and veterans financially contributed to Moving Wall sponsors through donations to ensure its visit, similar to massive public financial support shown the VVMF and VCVL in the respective creations of the VVM and the Moving Wall. This financial support also helped sponsors to ensure the presentation of the replica fit within expectations of authenticity. One *Miami Herald* article, writing about a 1987 Moving Wall visit to Palm Beach County noted that:

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<sup>90</sup> Tim Waters, "Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

<sup>91</sup> Tim Waters, "Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

...the Palm Beach County chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America is stoking the memories of residents with an accessible reminder – a replica of the 5-year-old Vietnam Veterans Memorial.... The chapter is spending \$5,000 for the two-week rental, \$3,000 for Devitt and colleagues' accommodations, and \$3,000 for sod around the wall. The rest of the money is going to pay for a tent, including a Vietnam Memorial exhibit, security and on-the-site counselors. ‘We want the wall to appear as similar and natural here as it does in Washington, D.C.,’ [county chapter president Tom] Mannin said.<sup>92</sup>

As sponsors have been generally expected to take care of the presentation of the Moving Wall to visitors after it is assembled, public donations were often essential for securing spaces, additional equipment such as lighting, tents, and other displays, and any ceremonies held in addition to the replica’s presentation.<sup>93</sup> Moving Wall visits became community projects as interested parties gave what they could to help sponsors secure a booking and help pay other expenses.

A deeper analysis of sponsor motives and the role and impact of public donations is beyond the scope of this project, but the cases of the Hawthorne Veterans’ Council and the available insights into sponsor calls for financial aid supports Hass’ suggestion of a large grassroots network of commemorative action stemming from the initial fund raising projects for the VVMF and the original memorial. This is especially apparent in cases like Hawthorne’s, where a sponsoring veterans group explicitly wished to encourage the participation of reluctant veterans to join the organization, the greater commemorative

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<sup>92</sup> Dan Van Natta Jr., “Memorial Brings War Home to the County,” *The Miami Herald*, October 7, 1987, 1PB.

<sup>93</sup> “The Moving Wall,” *Herald-Journal*, March 30, 1988, C3; Joe Callahan, “Vietnam Veterans Bring the Moving Wall to Lady Lake,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, March 9, 1999, 1B.

project, and to feel confident in seeking aid from their fellow veterans in times of need. As popular films of the late-1970s and 1980s depicted veterans as troubled lone-wolf characters, organizations like the Hawthorne Veterans' Council, the VCVL, and others were trying to break down barriers between apprehensive veterans.<sup>94</sup> Aided by public support, veterans organizations used the Moving Wall as a space for commemoration and healing, but also as a site to foster supportive relationships between veterans within a cultural climate that tended to marginalize more than help.

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While the Moving Wall acts as a lens through which to view a multi-leveled network of veteran action in support of commemoration and healing, it also illuminates more negative relationships between veterans groups, especially when corporate interests emerged. This negativity is exemplified by the rocky relationship between John Devitt and Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund founder Jan Scruggs. Scruggs served for two years in Vietnam, forming the VVMF in 1979. While Scruggs was moderately supportive of Devitt and the Moving Wall at its inception, the two men came into conflict over a series of lawsuits between the VCVL and two corporations who tried to use the Moving Wall for their own ends. This conflict was an unfortunate development between the two groups who, for all intents and purposes, both wanted to do what they could to help veterans through commemorative healing and offer their vision of how the Vietnam War should be remembered in the United States.

Scruggs showed support for Devitt and the Moving Wall, and was open to the press about what he saw to be the benefits of the travelling replica. After facing such

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<sup>94</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 66-9.

intense controversy over the VVM's design, he seemed open to the idea of sharing that design so more people throughout the country had the opportunity to experience it for themselves. The *LA Times* reported, "His idea for a portable wall sounded like it was worth a shot," Scruggs said in a telephone interview from his home in Columbia, [Maryland]. "A lot of folks don't have the mobility or finances to make a trip to Washington."<sup>95</sup> Scruggs also recognized some of the significant differences in the commemorative experience that the mobile replica presented by nature of its impermanence. He suggested that there would be a sense of greater urgency to see the Moving Wall, stating that "[t]he magic of the portable wall is that it is only going to be in that one town for a few days.... So anybody who has any connection to the Vietnam War – whether they lost a buddy or a relative or a neighbor – is drawn to the wall, because they have to see that person's name."<sup>96</sup> However, Scruggs' keenness for the travelling replica created a fissure between himself and Devitt, the VCVL, and Moving Wall supporters with the creation of "The Wall that Heals" in the early-1990s, a VVMF-sponsored travelling replica created by Service Corporation International (SCI), the largest funeral company in the US. A series of disputes and lawsuits resulted over the idea of the Moving Wall and the perception that corporate interest and profits superseded commemoration and healing.

The initial dispute occurred between the VCVL and the Adolph Coors Company from 1986 to 1988. Coors had approached Devitt about sponsoring the Moving Wall or setting up their own. Devitt turned down Coors' offer when they stipulated that

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<sup>95</sup> Susan Christian, "Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

<sup>96</sup> Susan Christian, "Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

sponsorship would involve advertising for Coors at Moving Wall tour stops, which prompted the company to go ahead with creating their own wall using plans they had received from the VCVL.<sup>97</sup> Devitt sued Coors in 1987 claiming that they had used his plans without permission. Coors countersued but backed down the day they were to appear in court, settling and donating their wall to the American GI Forum in Texas.<sup>98</sup> The long and arduous battle with Coors took a toll on Devitt, and his comments to the press against Coors hinted at how intensely he was against a corporation taking advantage of veterans and the memory of those who never returned home. In 1991, the *San Jose Mercury News* reported that in response to a Coors representative's accusations of libel, Devitt had replied:

Every statement I have made or will ever make in regards to the project I undertook and have given my life to will never be anything but the truth – for that is the ONE spoil of war we emerged with, and the one we will never be lost to. To be a Vietnam combat veteran is to be none other than the truth, for when the face of death kisses your lips, truth is all that remains.<sup>99</sup>

By the end of the dispute, Devitt grew cynical of corporate sponsorship, prompting intense resistance when SCI suggested making their own walls in 1989.

What became the “Wall that Heals” created controversy among many Vietnam veterans across the United States and especially between Devitt and Scruggs. For many, there was concern over use of the wall as an advertisement for SCI cemeteries, made worse by Scruggs’ support and VVMF patronage. Devitt was especially critical, calling it

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<sup>97</sup> Michelle Guido, “A Wall Divided by Commercialism: Corporations Trying to Exploit Viet Memorial, S.J. Vet Says,” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 14, 1991, 1A.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Michelle Guido, “A Wall Divided by Commercialism: Corporations Trying to Exploit Viet Memorial, S.J. Vet Says,” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 14, 1991, 1A.

an affront to veterans and the deceased. He stated, “[Scruggs’] work in getting the original memorial built was one of the best things that ever happened to vets. But at the same time, that doesn’t give him license to abuse the names on that wall.”<sup>100</sup> Scruggs was quick to respond, arguing that Devitt had no right to claim any sort of ownership over the idea of a replica and that the SCI wall was a wholly different project to Coors’ more blatant advertising strategy. He said:

John and I shared the same opinion regarding the Coors wall and I never discouraged him from fighting that.... But this is different because of the lack of commercialization in this wall.... What John doesn’t understand is that the memorial doesn’t belong to me, and the replica doesn’t belong to John Devitt because he was the first guy on the block.... No one owns it, he doesn’t own it.<sup>101</sup>

This statement would take on an ironic tone in hindsight following Scruggs’ opposition to the Wall South replica in Florida in the early 1990s, but he stood by SCI and the official Wall that Heals saw completion in 1996 after earlier SCI replicas were discontinued.<sup>102</sup> Some veterans found themselves taking sides as many opposed the Wall that Heals, seeing its placement at SCI cemeteries as an obvious marketing strategy. Hagopian notes one occasion where both the Moving Wall and the Wall that Heals were scheduled to be displayed in Pinellas County, Florida, where “a supporter of Devitt’s moving wall said it was ‘the real travelling wall’ and called the other ‘the money wall.’”<sup>103</sup>

Despite opposition, SCI went ahead with their initial replica, and the now VVMF-controlled Wall that Heals continues to tour to this day. As the SCI began showing its

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Scruggs’ copyright claim against the Wall South Foundation of Pensacola, Florida, explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>103</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 391.

first replica the tour schedule stayed close to SCI cemeteries, but nevertheless drew the ire of Devitt and other veterans. The *San Jose Mercury News* reported in early-1991 that “Service Corporation International... has already built and is showcasing a wall of its own. Devitt and some veterans’ officials have vowed to do everything they can to stop SCI from displaying the wall in more than 100 of its cemeteries nationwide over the next two years.”<sup>104</sup> When representatives of SCI tried to defend their replica they would compare the VVM design and its memorialization of individual deaths to their own business, suggesting an assumed appropriateness. While the interpretation of the VVM as a grave or cemetery was both a popular criticism and commendation, SCI failed to separate their promotion of this interpretation from criticism of their wall as shallow marketing. “SCI officials insist that the company's motives for building the wall are not financial ones. ‘At SCI, our profession is memorialization – that's what we do every day,’ said Jim Proctor, manager of advertising and public relations. ‘And what better place to have a shrine to those who lost their lives in Vietnam than at a cemetery.’”<sup>105</sup> Such comments did little to assuage the concerns of SCI’s opponents, especially veterans and their organizations. Earl Edwards, POW-MIA chairman of the San Jose chapter of Vietnam Veterans of America told the *San Jose Mercury News*, “[o]ur buddies lost their lives over there. They're on the wall... And to have a company like Coors or SCI owning the wall is like saying, ‘Have a beer while you're looking at the wall,’ or ‘Buy a cemetery plot while you're looking at the wall.’ There's a sick, perverted irreverence.”<sup>106</sup> The SCI wall controversy, similar to the controversy over the VVM’s design, was an instance of

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<sup>104</sup> Michelle Guido, “A Wall Divided by Commercialism: Corporations Trying to Exploit Viet Memorial, S.J. Vet Says,” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 14, 1991, 1A.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Michelle Guido, “A Wall Divided by Commercialism: Corporations Trying to Exploit Viet Memorial, S.J. Vet Says,” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 14, 1991, 1A.



intense criticism from some veterans. Concerns about commercialism tainting commemorative healing was a rallying cry for veterans who had become active forces in the creation and expression of memory. Selling out the names on the wall to the highest bidder was an unacceptable notion for many, especially with the revelation that Jan Scruggs had received money from SCI during their initial partnership.<sup>107</sup> While the discourse of commemorative healing remained the dominant lens for viewing and expressing the memory of the Vietnam War in the United States, its objectification of veterans only went so far as their voices rang loud in opposition of commercial agendas. Exhausted by the battle with Coors, Devitt did not contest the VVMF over the Wall that Heals, but through legal action and vocal declaration he did his part to defend the memory and the veterans he had worked so hard to preserve and protect.

Through the creation and display of the Moving Wall, and fights against corporate imitators, Vietnam veterans subverted their objectification, and became active agents in the construction, expression, and critique of commemorative forms. John Devitt and fellow volunteers created a far reaching simulation of the popular and profound VVM to be shared throughout the country, using its physical construction to work through some of their own trauma and intensely emotional memories. Sponsors, especially veterans organizations, used the Moving Wall to bring people together and to forge new relationships between those who shared common pain and loss, to work together towards the goals of commemorative healing. When this healing appeared to be in danger of abuse, Devitt and others rallied together against commercialization in a conflict over the right of replication. For many veterans, companies like Coors and SCI did not have the

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<sup>107</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 391.

same right to the project of memory as the VCVL and VVMF, fearing what they saw as the perverted use of the names on the wall to sell beer and grave plots.

While the sort of deeper public discussions of the war in moral and political terms that the discourse of healing worked to avoid remained elusive, what did occur was a complex network of vernacular expressions and debates over memory, its expression, and its appropriate use. One wonders for how long such discussions will go without proper consideration, especially given the comparisons between the Vietnam War and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and in the twenty-first century.<sup>108</sup> It does seem that the language of healing started to lose its cultural power for some at the turn of the century, twenty-five years after the fall of Saigon and sixteen after the first display of the Moving Wall. The *Eugene Register-Guard* reported in 2001 about a recent Moving Wall visit to Florence, Oregon, which Devitt had to miss due to an invitation to a war memorials convention. The article included prepared remarks by Devitt read at the opening ceremony for the Florence stop:

In Devitt's prepared remarks, read at Tuesday's ceremony, he said that the travelling memorial is sometimes called a 'healing wall,' but that there's no way to heal the loss of a son, daughter, brother or sister. The best that can be hoped for, he said, is to reconcile the feeling of loss. 'We can start living each day of our lives in memory of those we loved, and in that way give their loving memories the life they so richly deserved,' he said.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Marilyn B. Young, "Two, Three, Many Vietnam's," *Cold War History* 6:4 (November 2006): 413-424.

<sup>109</sup> Larry Bacon, "Florence Hosts Poignant Memorial," *Eugene Register-Guard*, September 5, 2001, 1D, 4D.

Perhaps years of touring and seemingly endless talk of healing illuminated the scars that just would not go away, or that the ongoing need for the Moving Wall made clear that the idea of healing did not quite hold the same commemorative power it had in decades past. Regardless, visitors continue to approach the Moving Wall, like the VVM, with the same rituals, heartfelt expressions of grief, and touch the same names they always have. Visitor engagement and the prominence of the discourse and language of healing at the Moving Wall will be the subjects of the next chapter, especially through commemorative rituals and expressions of healing made by Moving Wall visitors to the press.

## II Visitor Engagement and the Discourse of Healing

For John Devitt and the members of Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. (VCVL) the Moving Wall was intended to bring the experience of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) to Americans throughout the country who could not make the pilgrimage to Washington. As discussed in the previous chapter, Devitt's experience of the original memorial, and the experience of the veterans who constructed the replica, aligned the Moving Wall within the discourse of commemorative healing that dominated the memory of the Vietnam War in the last decades of the twentieth century. Ideally, the Moving Wall, like the VVM, acted as a catalyst for veterans and others to confront their grief and mourning, engaging with the memorial to "heal" themselves as individuals, as a group, and as a nation. The need to "heal" the nation, to repair its battered ego and reaffirm its identity, evolved out of political and ideological debates over the morality of American engagement in Vietnam and the precedent it set for future military endeavors. However, as Patrick Hagopian reminds us, despite some veterans' criticism of the war while it was ongoing, Vietnam veterans were projected as the personification of this need to heal after its conclusion.<sup>110</sup> While this language was still bound to the politics of memory, it was reframed as quasi-therapeutic, subsuming the cultural and political dimensions of commemoration into a psychological framework. Sponsors of the replica memorial – veterans' organizations, city councils, college campuses, and others – drew on this discourse, facilitating the desired "depoliticization" of Vietnam War memory in their

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<sup>110</sup> Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 18-9.

respective communities while offering veterans and citizens an opportunity to publically mourn and honour those lost during the war.

How visitors interacted with and related to the Moving Wall as a commemorative form, a therapeutic experience, and a reproduction of the nation's most popular and controversial memorial is the basis of this chapter. In most cases, visitors to the Moving Wall treated it as one would expect a visitor to engage with the VVM. Many commemorative rituals and the language of healing were maintained, even as the replica's spatiality promoted new vernacular practices and interpretations. Considering the desire of the VCVL to take "on the road" the experience of the original memorial and the prevalence of the discourse of healing, this chapter will examine commentary and interviews published in newspapers to illuminate and frame visitor engagement with the Moving Wall. Particular attention will be paid to the continuity of commemorative rituals from the VVM, expressions of "healing" in visitor comments, and criticism directed at the Moving Wall, its authenticity, and its anchor spaces. Visitors to the Moving Wall maintained many of the rituals associated with the VVM, such as leaving objects and interacting with the names on the wall. These rituals acted as the primary forms of interactions between visitors and the memorial and were part of the interpretive landscape of the commemorative experience. Newspaper articles often emphasized these rituals and especially the "healing" potential of visitor interaction with the replica, comparing the intense emotional responses to the Moving Wall with that of the original. However, in some cases commenters criticized aspects of the commemorative experience at the Moving Wall, such as the lack of adequate emotional and psychological resolution, a lack of authenticity, or what they felt was an inappropriate spatial context. Overall, this

chapter argues that reporting on the Moving Wall situated the commemorative experience and visitor engagement within the canon of the VVM and the dominant discourse of “healing,” but issues of politics and space complicated the commemorative experience and disillusioned some to the dominant discourses of the memory of the Vietnam War.

The continuation of commemorative rituals at the Moving Wall speaks to the power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a commemorative form and a cultural product. Americans across the country re-enacted the popular rituals associated with that memorial whenever the replica presented the opportunity to do so. As Hagopian notes, “what is extraordinary is that people touch the replica with the same intense emotion and reverence that attaches to the original.... [it] brings forth the same kind of behaviours.”<sup>111</sup> Two of the most popular rituals, leaving offerings and interacting with names, translated easily to the replica. For Walter Hixson “[t]he genius of Lin’s design... lies in the interactive potential of the Wall, which reflects back on its visitors and invites them down into the sunken memorial to literally touch the names; take imprints; or leave flowers, letters, and ruminations on the Wall, all of which have been done by the millions.”<sup>112</sup> While lacking some of the original’s grandeur in both size and space, the replica was deemed to be authentic enough to inspire such rituals and engagement.

Newspaper articles emphasized this continuity when reporting on the Moving Wall, highlighting its authenticity while providing emotional stories of veterans and civilians interacting with the memorial. Sadness and grief were common themes, but they were often framed within a constructive narrative of solidarity, healing, relief, or closure.

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<sup>111</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 387.

<sup>112</sup> Walter Hixson, “Viet Nam and ‘Vietnam’ in American History and Memory,” in Scott Laderman and Edwin A. Martini, eds., *Four Decades On: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013), 50.

According to one article drawing comparisons to the original, "...like visitors to the wall in Washington, some in Livermore [California] placed hands over names and lingered, heads bowed. Gray-haired women hugged one another and cried. Groups knelt before the wall and prayed. Others strolled, and still others just stared."<sup>113</sup> As visitors engaged the Moving Wall, much like those who engaged the original, they became part of the commemorative landscape, connected in a network of commemorative expression. The range of emotional responses and forms of interaction speaks to what historian Kristin Hass describes as the VVM's dynamic and organic nature, alive through human engagement.<sup>114</sup>

The most prominent form of visitor engagement is interaction with names on the wall. The 58,000 names of the dead and missing from 1959 to 1975, arguably the memorial's most striking feature, humanize the war for many, stripping away some of the moral and political implications of the war in favour of an emphasis on its human cost. Jay Winter notes in his study of First World War memorials, "Touching war memorials, and in particular, touching the names of those who died, is an important part of the rituals of separation which surround them.... whatever the aesthetic and political meanings they may bear, they are also sites of mourning and of gestures which go beyond the limitations of place and time."<sup>115</sup> In the case of the Vietnam War, regardless of political perspectives of the war itself, the loss of life was invariably perceived as avoidable or senseless, but

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<sup>113</sup> Dennis Rockstroh, "Pausing to Remember a Wall that Moves in Many Ways," *San Jose Mercury News*, March 11, 1993, 1B.

<sup>114</sup> Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>115</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113.

especially inadequately addressed. This element crystalizes around names, and the scale of loss.

Newspaper reports on visits to the Moving Wall often included the voices of visitors interacting with the memorial. One 1985 article in the *LA Times* highlighted a number of visitor reactions to the wall, and especially the names. “Sinclair Miles slowly walked along a side of a half-scale model of the Vietnam War Memorial Sunday, quietly searching for the name of a son, Mark, who was killed in the war. ‘I’ve got goose bumps, I’m telling you honestly,’ Miles, a La Mirada resident, said after he had found his son’s name and taken a picture. ‘I’m nearly in tears right now.’”<sup>116</sup> Veterans expressed similar grief when searching for the names of friends and fellow servicemen that never made it home. “‘This morning, the first time I saw it, I got teary eyes,’ said Vietnam veteran Richard Brandl, 40, who came to the park aboard a chartered bus with a group of Santa Barbara and Ojai area veterans. ‘It’s very moving.’ Brandl said that at least a dozen names of his friends are on the monument and replica.”<sup>117</sup> Some veterans managed to find some form of solace or closure from the fact that their fallen brothers were finally being given some recognition. Others, however, expressed guilt. One veteran noted in a 1987 article in the *San Jose Mercury News* his feelings of denial and survivor’s guilt when a name on the replica confirmed the death of his friend: “They told me Joe died. But you know, you sort of deny it. Seeing him here makes it real. He’s the closest person

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<sup>116</sup> Tim Waters, “Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*



who went through this with me. He was there. I was there, and it could have been me on this wall.”<sup>118</sup>

The names on the wall became a powerful conduit connecting the visitor to the dead. Visitors expressed grief and guilt over those who were both there and not. Philosopher Dylan Trigg offers a point of comparison in an analysis of the Chattri monument in Sussex, England. Trigg comments that the “direct exchange between texture and death empowers the monument, generating an intensified ambience, in which durability coincides with the appearance of the transcendental.”<sup>119</sup> In the case of the Moving Wall, the epoxy screened names that jut out from the wall’s surface invite the visitor to approach and engage something tangible left behind by someone they have lost. The name becomes the physical representation of being with which a visitor can communicate and interact, helping to define both latent and overwhelming grief. As one visitor put it during the Moving Wall’s 1994 visit to Bangor, Maine, “I found my buddy.”<sup>120</sup>

Along with simply viewing and touching names, many visitors to the VVM and the Moving Wall will make graphite rubbings of names onto paper to take with them when they leave. This allows visitors to take a piece of the memorial, the commemorative experience thereof, and a piece of the person they have lost, a token of closure, remembrance, or, in some cases, continued grief. “11-year-old Brian Arenella, his lips

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<sup>118</sup> Neil Chethick and Karen Klinger, “Wall of Tears: Veterans get a Special Chance to Say Goodbye,” *San Jose Mercury News*, April 7, 1987, 1B.

<sup>119</sup> The Chattri is a memorial to Sikh and Hindu soldiers who died during the First World War; Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 93.

<sup>120</sup> John Ripley, “Moving Wall a Reminder of Vietnam,” *Bangor Daily News*, August 15, 1994, B5; Other articles show similar cases of names facilitating interaction with the dead as visitors figuratively “catch up” with those they have lost: John M. Willis, “Renewing Old Acquaintance That Should Never Be Forgotten,” *Rome News-Tribune*, July 19, 1998, 7B.

tight in concentration, did a rubbing of the name of John M. Rizzo. ‘I didn't know him,’ said the boy. ‘I wasn't born. My mom knew him, and she asked me to come and make a rubbing of his name.’”<sup>121</sup> Rubbings of names are both a significant commemorative ritual and a commemorative artifact in themselves as small tokens of memory. However, there is some indication that at least for some visitors the raised epoxy names on the replica inspired a different reaction than the engraved names of the original. The engraved names in the VVM create a sense of permanence and finality, literally carved in stone. For some, the printed names on the replica fail to offer that kind of closure. In a 1990 article on John Devitt’s collection of offerings left at the Moving Wall, the *San Jose Mercury News* published excerpts of a letter left at the replica: “‘I kept thinking that if I rubbed hard enough, your name would disappear off of that wall, and that you would come back to me,’ wrote a mother from the Midwest to a son she lost in 1969. ‘Now I’ll just go home, and wait for you to come to me, as you always do . . . in my dreams. I Love You.’”<sup>122</sup> In this case, the visitor found little closure or relief in the memorial, wanting to erase her son’s name from the wall. The name on the wall acted more as a nagging reminder of loss and grief, a barrier between mourning and relief. The aesthetic difference between the engraved and printed names inspired the notion of erasing the written name, as opposed to the notion of “scarring” associated with the engraved names of the original.

While this letter illuminates complications surrounding the names on the Moving Wall, it also exemplifies the maintenance of another of the VVM’s commemorative rituals. Leaving behind offerings at the VVM, and the Moving Wall, is a popular and

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<sup>121</sup> Wayne King, “Our Towns; Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall Across the Land,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

<sup>122</sup> Michelle Guido, “The Things They Left Behind With Each Visit, the Vietnam Vet who Trucks His Memorial Wall across the Land Collects a Message, and a Memory He Can’t Forget,” *San Jose Mercury News*, December 9, 1990, 1A.

powerful commemorative practice, simulating the experience of a grave on a collective scale. Hass asserts that “together [offerings] are a noisy, insistent response to the problem of the memory of all Vietnam veterans. Not only does the presence of one object inspire the leaving of another, but collectively, as a response to this crisis of public memory, they transform the memory of the soldier.”<sup>123</sup> Essentially, the act of leaving items becomes part of the interpretive landscape of the memorial by inspiring reactions, influencing behaviour, and providing supplementary definition to the men and women represented by the names on the wall, further humanizing the experience of the memorial and those it represents. In an essay written after a visit to the Moving Wall in the late-1980s, one woman explicitly highlighted various offerings left at the memorial, taking the time to quote various letters that had been made part of the commemorative landscape. She states “I look down the line and reflect. Strange to think of people littering the ground around a national monument. It’s like an outpouring.... I bend over to see better and I notice the note. Hold back those quick tears.”<sup>124</sup> This visitor became wholly immersed in the commemorative space as it was formed by the offerings left by others. She noted the clear peculiarity of “littering the ground” at the site, but admits to being drawn in by the emotional power that the offerings and letters brought to the space and experience. However, this is one experience, one potential organization of offerings in a truly chaotic process of memory and ritual. David Guynes, curator of the National Parks Services collection of VVM offerings, commented on the influence of offerings on the commemorative experience, nuancing the idea of dynamic alteration of commemorative space through object and ritual in tandem with active attempts to canonize their memory:

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<sup>123</sup> Explored in greater detail in Introduction; Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, 24.

<sup>124</sup> Regina E. Tucker, “Veteran’s Day: A Visit to the Moving Wall,” *The Southeast Missourian*, November 11, 2006, 6A.

“Guynes argues that there are unquestionably two collections: the collection of spontaneous, unmediated offerings and the collection of offerings left to be saved in the warehouse, exhibited at the Smithsonian, or written about in the press.”<sup>125</sup> While some visitors bring offerings in a personal attempt to grapple with their memory of the war and their mourning, others consider the ritual part of the collective experience. Desiring to have their memories canonized in the larger collective national memory of the Vietnam War, some visitors bring what they wish to have catalogued and displayed.

At the Moving Wall, offerings are left in the same fashion as the original; with many offerings consistent with the sort you would see in Washington. One article notes a number of items left at the Moving Wall:

Visitors to the Vietnam Memorial wall – even the half-scale replica in Livermore this week – seem compelled to leave behind more than tears. On Wednesday, there were dozens of flowers, a Purple Heart medal, military patches, poems and letters left at “The Moving Wall.” “Heinz, Every time I hear 'Pretty Woman,' I remember you. Too short a time for us,” wrote Mink. Another was poignant in its simplicity: “I miss you, Don. Love, Sue.”<sup>126</sup>

As described in chapter 1, such items are collected by Devitt and other members of VCVL, and are stored in San Jose with the goal of one day opening a museum, similar to the displays and exhibits created by the National Parks Service.

While the visitors at the Moving Wall continue many of the prominent rituals associated with the original memorial, the replica has developed some rituals of its own. The two primary rituals that grew out of the Moving Wall’s tours are the escort convoys

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 25-6.

<sup>126</sup> Dennis Rockstroh, “Pausing to Remember a Wall that Moves in Many Ways,” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 11, 1993, 1B.

that travel with the replica, and the community volunteers that help assemble and disassemble the replica at the beginning and end of its stay. In July of 1999, a North Carolina chapter of the POW-MIA awareness group “Rolling Thunder” escorted the Moving Wall to Southport via motorcycle convoy, and volunteered to assemble and disassemble the monument.<sup>127</sup> Another example of such a convoy was described in the *Miami Herald* during the Moving Wall’s tour of south Florida in 1999. “The memorial was escorted from Tampa, through a driving thunderstorm, by two groups of the U.S. Military Vets Motorcycle Club. The Tampa chapter escorted the wall to Fort Myers, where the Broward chapter was waiting.”<sup>128</sup> As noted, these convoys are often made up of veterans who either served in or feel some connection to the Vietnam War. Veteran Geno Vassil stated, “I didn’t want our brothers to be alone – I lost a lot of brothers in 2 ½ tours of Vietnam.... The wall is important to anyone who was in Vietnam.”<sup>129</sup> Such escorts are only possible because of the mobile nature of the Moving Wall, and they act as a significant commemorative ritual for the veterans who join the journey, delivering their “lost brothers” safely from one community to the next. When a new community received the memorial, it was common even in the early tours that community members would volunteer to assemble the wall and watch over it day and night during its stay. As the *LA Times* noted, “Devitt, who hauls the replica from town to town in a flatbed truck, said he never has to worry about finding help putting the replica together or taking it apart. ‘There is always a crowd willing to help. There are guys who show up specifically

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<sup>127</sup> Cece von Kolnitz, “Moving Wall Hits Home for Local Vietnam Vet,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, July 8, 1999, 1.

<sup>128</sup> Adam Ramirez, “Veterans Rally Around Replica of Vietnam Wall,” *Miami Herald*, April 29, 1999, 7B; David Green, “A Moving Experience: Vietnam Dead Recalled at Wall,” *Miami Herald*, May 2, 1999, 3BR.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

to take down panels with the names of their partners on it. It's a real family thing.”<sup>130</sup>

Both of these rituals, specific to the replica, speak to its profound effect on the communities it visits. Escorts, even in the transitory non-place of being “on the road,” are given the opportunity to do their part for their “lost brothers” ensuring that they safely make the journey from one community to the next since they could never make it home. For volunteers, there is an active role in bringing the experience of the wall to their communities, doing their part for a loved one on the wall or simply for the collective remembrance of the community. A complex network of groups and individuals from VCVL to the sponsors, escorts, volunteers, and visitors, act together in a process that exists beyond the Moving Wall’s temporary stops, extending into transitory space and beyond the replica’s time as a static form. This product of the replica’s spatiality sets it apart from the original through the organic evolution of commemorative rituals that are impossible to perform at the VVM. In tandem, the replica’s placement in everyday spaces facilitated larger community-based activities to compliment the simulated VVM experience, infusing a new dimension into the commemorative landscape and visitor/volunteer engagement.

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Reports of visitor engagement with the Moving Wall, whether through canonized commemorative rituals or otherwise, often emphasize the idea of “healing.” The dominant discourse of commemorative healing enveloped the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Moving Wall in a separation of the war and its human cost – a separation of politics and trauma, of war and warrior, and of aggressive invasion and

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<sup>130</sup> Tim Waters, “Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

national wounds. It effectively sought to “depoliticize” the memory of the Vietnam War in a political move against critical analysis of the war’s political and moral questionability. Patrick Hagopian tackles the discourse of healing head-on, suggesting that “all the talk of ‘healing’ at the memorial neglected and foreclosed a more morally satisfactory and hence psychologically effective resolution of memories of war. The superficial reconciliation and closure that ‘healing’ promises prevent a serious scrutiny of issues that remain vital, irrespective of their long neglect.”<sup>131</sup> Essentially, the obsessive focus on healing (primarily the “nation”) had an adverse effect on the actual psychological grief of veterans and civilians who suffered trauma, neglect, and/or loss in Vietnam or at home. For Hagopian, the introspective turn in American culture in response to defeat in Vietnam failed to adequately address the psychological needs of veterans and others in its pragmatic attempt to stabilize politics and construct a simple and comfortable narrative of America’s most divisive war since 1865. Considering Hagopian’s critique of the commemorative discourse, this section will explore uses of “healing” rhetoric in newspaper articles related to the Moving Wall to highlight the prevalence of this discourse. This prevalence will then be compared to instances of the discourse’s failure to effectively meet the needs of visitors to the Moving Wall with examples that address political criticism, spatial incongruity, and overwhelming grief like that of the mother wishing to erase her son’s name from the wall, referenced above.

It is not much of a surprise that the majority of articles examined fit within the discourse of healing, emphasizing feel-good stories of recovering veterans and mourning families finding at least some solace in the commemorative experience of the Moving Wall. As Hagopian suggests, it is likely that the comforting nature of the commemorative

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<sup>131</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 404-5.

discourse was its most effective aspect, to the point that visitors and writers alike embraced it openly without considering its political and psychological implications. Hagopian asserts that “the recurrent concepts had become such standard fare that they could be regurgitated in reflex fashion but their unexamined use is also what best demonstrates their importance in shaping commemoration, even if – or perhaps especially if – those who used the terms were heedless to their significance.”<sup>132</sup> “Healing” the nation’s figurative wounds and traumas equated to concealing and forgetting its ethical warts and blemishes, but for the many veterans and civilians suffering from real unresolved traumas, the rhetoric of healing provided the right amount of comfort after decades of vehement political debate that only served to re-open the wounds.

In the most basic cases, the rhetoric used by visitors is used sincerely, but is nevertheless reflective of Hagopian’s concerns. Despite the mask of “depoliticization,” many adherents to the language of healing had their politics, from which specific and constructed remembrance of the war could easily manifest. A 1989 article noted that “[o]ne of the veterans who plans to visit the Moving Wall at Chapman is therapist Kenneth Flint, team leader of the Veteran's Center in Anaheim. ‘A lot of families in Orange County were touched by the Vietnam War,’ he said. ‘Seeing the names of loved ones on the wall is part of the healing process; it allows people to say goodbye.’”<sup>133</sup> The Moving Wall is situated as a therapeutic tool as much as a commemorative form, ideally giving visitors the necessary environment to address their psychological needs. One press release from the Moving Wall’s 1994 stop in Georgia, drawing comparison to the original wall, stated that “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and The Moving Wall have helped to

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>133</sup> Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.



hasten that healing process by neither glorifying nor condemning those who served, [but] by acknowledging their names.”<sup>134</sup> As late as 1999, some veterans continued to echo the discourse of healing: “‘This really is a wall of healing - people will leave a lot of grief and pain behind here,’ [veteran John] Roxey said as rain and wind tossed around the camouflage netting he erected. ‘I want people to come here and see the names of 58,213 brothers and sisters we lost over there.’”<sup>135</sup> Though framed positively, the implication is that after more than a decade, there still was pain and grief to be left behind, and that the focus should remain on those whose names adorn the memorial walls. Vietnam itself and the Vietnamese people remained absent while Americans continued to grapple with ultimately unresolved pain.

In one article documenting the replica’s visit to Navajo land outside Hollister, California, the writer and commenters noted how the Moving Wall served the purpose healing and raising awareness:

[Veteran Richard] Begay, who is a legislative assistant to the speaker of the Navajo National Council, said displaying the wall has two immediate benefits: It gives American Indian war veterans an overdue welcome-home celebration, and it focuses attention on their contribution to the war effort. It also focuses attention on the plight of Indian war veterans and continues the healing process. “It helps a lot,” said Begay. “And not only soldiers, but also Gold Star mothers and the families that are left.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> “Moving Wall Pays Tribute to Soldiers from Vietnam War,” *The Cedartown Standard*, May 3, 1994, 2; “Moving Wall Memorial Coming to Cartersville,” *The Chattooga Press*, May 18 1994, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Adam Ramirez, “Veterans Rally Around Replica of Vietnam Wall,” *Miami Herald*, April 29, 1999, 7B.

<sup>136</sup> Gold Star Mothers would place gold stars next the names of their lost sons and other loved ones; Jack Foley, “In Service to Their Country Moving Wall Memorializes Indians Killed in Vietnam,” *San Jose Mercury News*, May 21, 1992, 1B.

While highlighting such inherently political efforts is a departure from the sort of reporting Hagopian is wary of, the event is still framed within the dominant discourse and expressed with its rhetoric. The “plight” of Native American veterans is not the focus, rather passively mentioned as just another wound to heal or scar over. However, the placing is significant in its power to create an incongruity between official national narratives and discourse, and local political concerns:

Displaying the wall on Indian land is ‘extremely important,’ [Ann-Marie] Sayers said. ‘We have contributed a great deal to this county and we have not been recognized or acknowledged; this is one way of doing that.’ The presence of the wall, she said, also will mark the first step toward creation of a Living Indian Heritage Area on about 240 acres of traditional and spiritual land for Native Americans.<sup>137</sup>

In this sense, the placing becomes integral in reintroducing unwanted politics into the dominant discourse.<sup>138</sup>

The spatial elements of the Moving Wall become significant to the discourse of healing in other ways. In a number of articles, the idea of the travelling replica bringing the experience of the VVM and the healing process “closer to home” separates it from the hallowed ground of the Washington Mall. In 1985, Lorraine Girard visited the Moving Wall in a public park in Altadena, California, after having visited the original in Washington to see the name of her son. “When I was in Washington in 1983 I didn't shed a tear when I saw the monument because I realized these boys were finally getting the

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> The full extent of Native American land as a spatial context for the Moving Wall and as a lens for viewing the memory of the Vietnam War deserves greater attention, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

respect they were due, that people were finally recognizing them.... Today, I'm afraid I'm a little teary-eyed.”<sup>139</sup> This change in emotional reaction hints at two significant distinctions between the static original and the mobile replica. On the Washington Mall all the grandiose cues of nationalism, politics, and history situate the VVM as something wholly “official,” especially when official ceremonies plug notions of honour and pride into a discourse of specifically national healing. Meanwhile, the more casual feel of the replica, placed in the familiar and relaxed space of a public park (for example) has the potential to inspire deeper, more natural expressions of grief, sadness, and mourning. In tandem, at the original, where no specific community is emphasized, acts of visitor engagement are more individual and personal as they simultaneously imprint on the interpretive landscape. With the Moving Wall, where specific communities are emphasized on a given tour stop, commemorative rituals and expressions have the potential to be much more collective in a vernacular sense. One 1989 article in the *LA Times* included comments from Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) founder Jan Scruggs describing this phenomenon. As Scruggs suggests, while the Moving Wall has the practical benefit of bringing the VVM experience to those who cannot travel to Washington, it also possesses the uncanny potential to better address more vernacular needs.<sup>140</sup> Rather than the national stage of the original, the Moving Wall operates on a local, although temporary, level to highlight and focus in on the commemorative needs of a given community and its members.

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<sup>139</sup> Tim Waters, “Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985.

<sup>140</sup> Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

This same article gives insight into the problem of unresolved psychological grief that Hagopian suggests. Many veterans had to face psychological trauma inflicted both in Vietnam and upon their return home as the country turned inward in political and cultural debate. Veterans faced the dual stigma of being combatants in an unpopular war, and the failures of America's proud military heritage. Veteran Bob Kakuk told the *LA Times* that since coming home he felt "incomplete.... It was as if I came home from the war without finishing the job I went to do."<sup>141</sup> When Kakuk could not afford a trip to Washington, he saw the Moving Wall in nearby Riverside, California. He commented that "looking at [the replica] hit me just as hard as when I saw the real thing in Washington a few months later," but that "I thought that seeing the wall would close the book on Vietnam – or, at least, a chapter of the book."<sup>142</sup> For some, neither the Moving Wall nor the original memorial and their overlapping discourse of healing could adequately address their psychological needs. The *New York Times* published comments from veteran Mario Aguilar of Santa Barbara, lamenting the state of some fellow veterans that continued to struggle psychologically. He stated that "[f]or the families of the guys that lived here, their sons have finally come home.... The guys that really hurt come in the wee hours of the morning, when no one's here, but someone needs to be here for them."<sup>143</sup> Aguilar's fears were justified: veteran suicide rates showed no sign of dropping in the 1980s and instances of suicide and attempted suicide at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial were well known.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> "Vietnam Memorial Takes to the Road," *New York Times*, December 1, 1985.

<sup>144</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 365-6.

While the rhetoric of most press articles more often framed the Moving Wall within the discourse of commemorative healing, occasional comments illuminate both latent and explicit criticisms of the politics of healing and the Moving Wall itself. Hagopian asserts: “Separate the warrior from the war; commemorate the war and promote healing without making a political statement: the words spilled freely from almost anyone involved in creating a Vietnam veterans memorial after the one in the nation’s capital.”<sup>145</sup> However, politically, some visitors twisted the ideal of healing the nation toward a critique of the state and American commemorative tradition, while others used the rituals of the walls as critical political expression. One supporter of Maya Lin’s design opposed pro-war critics, arguing that “[t]he lady that designed that had it together.... It's not a bronze figure of a guy on a horse leading his troops up the hill, the cannons, the eagle. It shows you very simply that's what war costs right here. That is the true cost of a little folly called warfare. In Vietnam: 58,175.”<sup>146</sup> While emphasis remains on the human cost of the war, official declarations of memory are criticized. In another case noted by Hass, veterans would leave their medals at the original and the replica in protest. Dissatisfied with the official narratives of memory and the government’s treatment of veterans, “[t]he giving of these gifts is a powerful symbolic response to this betrayal; all the medals and money are fetishized pieces of bodies and political iconography, taken together, are a palimpsestic collective negotiation about the problem of the memory of the deaths and the war.”<sup>147</sup> The latent political negotiations of

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>146</sup> Bill Kaczor, “Veterans Boost Wall South: Vietnam Memorial for Panhandle,” *Miami Herald*, October 21, 1990, 5B.

<sup>147</sup> Hass, *Carried to the Wall*, 92.

collective memory on official and vernacular levels found clear expression in the interpretive landscape of offerings.

More direct criticism aimed at the Moving Wall, including what historian James Young describes as perceived incongruities between monuments and their surrounding spatial contexts, made its way into newspaper articles. The primary concerns coming from visitors were the appropriateness of the replica's space and the issue of absence. Similar to concerns over sponsors and spaces chosen for advertising purposes, inappropriate hosting spaces could draw heavy scrutiny. One example published in an editorial piece in the *Miami Herald* sharply criticized the site of a Moving Wall visit to Fort Lauderdale, and the aesthetic difference between the replica and the original. Here the differences in size, form, and materials were joined by a recognition of the spatial dissonance that can be interpreted in the Moving Wall's placing during any given tour stop.<sup>148</sup> In this case, the "serenity" of the Washington Mall and the "melancholy" of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are lost with the Moving Wall. The free-standing, short, thin painted panels that make up the Moving Wall pale in comparison to the black granite of the original wall as it descends with the visitor into the earth of a cut out hill side. For this critic, the commemorative process is distorted, limited in its ability to convey the power of the original to visitors.

A second criticism of the Moving Wall that visitors expressed was related to its departure and absence. With the replica, its mobile and temporary nature invites a number of tensions and incongruities to surface as it occupies a given space, only to depart and create a void in the space it leaves behind. Upset with the infrequency of the replica's stops in his community, veteran John Roxey advocated regular future bookings.

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<sup>148</sup> Fred Grimm, "Black Wall of Eternity," *Miami Herald*, May 2, 1999, 1BR.

As the *Miami Herald* reported, “[e]ven though many veterans still can't bear to see the thousands of names inscribed on the panels, Roxey and other Broward vets hope the wall will make an annual stop in here. ‘Twelve years is too long for it not to be here - this isn't ancient history,’ Roxey said.”<sup>149</sup> Though the Moving Wall had visited before, its prolonged absence was a cause for concern for Roxey and other local veterans.

A major disruption in the commemorative process, especially for volunteers who helped to assemble and disassemble the replica, was the departure of the Moving Wall at the end of its time in given place. Veteran Mario Aguilar expressed his mixed feelings over the mobile memorial, stating that “[t]his thing does a lot of healing.... But the bad thing about it is when you take it down and watch it go away. It's like putting one of your friends in a body bag, and knowing part of you walked away.”<sup>150</sup> Like the members of the escort convoys, Aguilar anthropomorphized the Moving Wall as the representation of a fallen friend, someone in need of care. Disassembling the panels to be loaded on a truck and sent away is equated to losing the men and women on the wall again and again, creating a profound void in the community.

This void, expressions of its impact, and local attempts to fill it in various communities with new memorials and replicas is the focus of the next chapter. Considering the profound impact the Moving Wall had on the communities it visited, whether through the zealous recreation of rituals, the creation of new rituals, the dominance or superficiality of the discourse of healing, or strong visitor criticism against spatial and political incongruities, how did visitors, veterans, and sponsors deal with the void in transformed space left behind? The commemorative canon of the Vietnam

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<sup>149</sup> Adam Ramirez, “Veterans Rally Around Replica of Vietnam Wall,” *Miami Herald*, April 29, 1999, 7B.

<sup>150</sup> “Vietnam Memorial Takes to the Road,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1985.

Veterans Memorial easily translated to the Moving Wall, bringing with it many of the commemorative rituals practiced by millions of Americans every year. Interacting with names and leaving offerings became staples of the Moving Wall experience, but took on distinctions through aesthetic differences between the two memorials and the travelling replica's uncanny ability to be "closer to home." The discourse of healing dominated the rhetoric of visitors and newspaper reports of the replica's visits, but as Patrick Hagopian feared for the original, the avoidance of deeper political, moral, and psychological attention in favour of simplified and comforting language and narratives led to unresolved grief and the continued neglect of veterans in need. Spatially, controversy could erupt over perceived incongruities between the memorial and its surrounding space, but also over the motives of sponsors and the appropriateness of its presentation. Finally, the departure of the Moving Wall led to a void in the commemorative process and the space left behind, in some cases creating a need for the replica's return or a new installation in its place. The following chapter will focus on the perception of this void and power of the Moving Wall to transform space, create place, and inspire the creation of new memorials.



### **III Spatial Incongruity, Vernacular Commemoration, and the Issue of Absence**

The spatial differences between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) and the Moving Wall present interesting contrasts that set the replica apart from the original. While the previous chapter highlighted continuities in rituals and the overarching discourse of commemorative healing, this chapter will consider spatial elements that make the Moving Wall unique, more than simply a replication of the VVM's design and commemorative experience. Through the separation of the memorial wall from the interpretive landscape of the Washington Mall, its placing within a new local dimension bringing the experience closer to the spaces of everyday life, and issues brought on by its impermanence, the Moving Wall became a powerful commemorative form in itself, bringing the Vietnam War "home" in a way the static monument could not. While envisioned as a replication of the VVM and a simulation of its experience, the Moving Wall was made unique by the spatial elements inherent in its mobility. This chapter will examine differences in the spatial context of the Washington Mall as interpretive landscape in contrast to the community displays of the Moving Wall, the replica's ability to reach beyond the scope of the original, and the issue of absence via the Moving Wall's departure from a given space and recognitions and reactions to the void it leaves behind. It argues that the Moving Wall offers a new lens through which to view the relationship between commemoration and space while raising questions about the contrast between authenticity in replication and unexpected and ironic uniqueness.

Naturally, the placement of the static VVM versus the mobile Moving Wall presents the starkest and most obvious contrast. The grandeur of the Washington Mall and the explicitness of the original monument's placing within it has been a well canonized part of the VVM experience, while the myriad spaces in which the mobile replica has been presented suggests an infinite number of interpretive spatial contexts in which the physical form can be read. It is in these spaces that the rituals and emotions of remembering and commemorating are held and felt. Of course, the experience of the original is hardly static itself, as the coming and going of visitors and the mementos they may leave behind act upon the interpretive landscape of the VVM in their own ways. However, the austerity and formal setting of the Mall and the static permanence of the VVM suggest stability, the concreteness of official narratives of remembrance on a stage of national identity and history. James Young suggests that "a monument necessarily transforms an otherwise benign site into part of its content," creating cohesion or tension depending on the level of perceived incongruity between the monument and the surrounding spatial context.<sup>151</sup> The VVM's placement on the Washington Mall was deliberate, an intended part of its design, its commemorative cohesion created through its spatial context.

The Moving Wall, however, subverts this cohesion by removing the physical form from its intended landscape. The potential for incongruities is amplified as the replica passes through communities, occupying space for a short time before moving on. These variable and temporary spaces each create new interpretive landscapes for the Moving Wall, placing visitors in a wholly different commemorative experience than that

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<sup>151</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 7.

of the original on the Washington Mall. As Young also states, “a monument becomes a point of reference amid other parts of the landscape, one node among others in a topographical matrix that orients the rememberer and creates meaning in both the land and our recollections.”<sup>152</sup> These topographical matrices are fundamental to understanding any commemorative experience within a given space. The “everyday life” settings of the Moving Wall suggest a wholly different orientation than that of the official setting of the VVM on the Mall. While many of the same rituals, emotions, and rhetoric are maintained between the original and replica, they are oriented, expressed, and interpreted within new contexts. To grapple with this, the context of the VVM and the Washington Mall must be considered first, before turning to how the absence of the Mall as context is noticed or ignored by visitors to the Moving Wall.

The Washington Mall acts as the most prominent site of symbolic architecture in the United States, creating a cultural and historical meta-narrative of what is remembered and celebrated, but also what is worth remembering and celebrating. Its many monuments and memorials and its proximity to the seats of federal power orient its space as the prime setting of official expressions of culture and memory. Philosopher Charles Griswold suggested in 1986 that “It is made to educate and edify the citizens of the present as well as form those of the future by persuading them to live out the virtues of the past. It is memory in stone, earth, and water, a patrimony articulated by measured expanses and the interplay of symmetrically arranged symbols.”<sup>153</sup> While the various structures appear to create a mosaic of chaotic temporality, where symbolic representations of history are strewn about without of any semblance of order, the symmetries of space and symbols

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<sup>152</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 7.

<sup>153</sup> Charles L. Griswold, “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall: Philosophical Thoughts on Political Iconography,” *Critical Inquiry* 12:4 (June 1986), 691.

serve to promote a cohesive wholeness, where history becomes an idea (or ideal) in space rather than a series of events in time.

Thinking of the Mall in these terms helps to unveil how disparate points of history are organized within a topographical matrix to create meaning. For Griswold, the spatial context of the VVM on the Washington Mall relative to the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial is profoundly suggestive to a visitor's interpretation of the memorial wall.<sup>154</sup> With the wall's deliberate positioning on the Mall, visitors are drawn to see the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial as they read the names of those killed or missing in action from 1959 to 1975, placing the Vietnam War and the memorial within a wider lens of American history and ideals. Likewise, as visitors see their reflections in the black granite of the wall, they also see the reflection of the surrounding Mall grounds, its many monuments, and its historical and cultural meta-narratives. The war, and the controversies that surround its memory are oriented with the founding of the nation and its fracturing and reconstruction during and after the Civil War. Ideally, a contemplative resolve can be reached as "America's Vietnam" is presented as another challenge for the nation to overcome. Griswold also notes how in itself the wall's intended focus on individuals and the human cost of the conflict on the American side invites or even demands that visitors leave their politics at home, promoting the discourse of healing explored previously.<sup>155</sup> Through the space of the Mall and the supposed apolitical discourse of national healing, the division and internal conflict the country experienced during the Vietnam War era is relegated to an old wound, healing over as the sacrifice of those whose names adorn the VVM is mourned and commemorated while the ethical

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<sup>154</sup> Griswold, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall," 690.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 709; See Chapter 2.

debates of the war's purpose, the immense casualties on the Vietnamese side, and what was to be learned, fell by the wayside.

Architectural historian Jeffrey Karl Ochsner builds on Griswold's work by pointing out another way in which the power of the Mall is arguably absent, or perhaps altered, in the experience of the Moving Wall. Ochsner states that "Because the Washington Mall is the setting for many of the nation's most symbolically significant buildings and monuments, the site of the [VVM] already carried a greater 'charge' than almost any other possible setting.... In turn, this context raises the significance of the record of the names on the memorial."<sup>156</sup> Honouring the dead takes on a profound significance in this setting that Ochsner suggests supersedes any sort of replication. As a site of such immense and intense cultural power, the Mall canonizes the dead of the Vietnam War in a way similar to that of the nearby Arlington National Cemetery. Much like a national cenotaph, the VVM is a marker of the absent dead, and the space of the Mall serves to imprint an even greater significance on those deaths by nature of its austerity. As we will see, the Mall's power over the significance of the dead is an issue for the Moving Wall.

Concerns over spatial incongruity between the original on the Mall and the replica have been noted in press coverage of various Moving Wall tour stops. Commentary ranges from the view that the lack of the Mall as context was inconsequential, to the perception of a sort of cheapness, a lack of the original's ominous nature. A contributor to the *New York Times* stated:

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<sup>156</sup> Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, "A Space of Loss: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Journal of Architectural Education* 50:3 (February 1997), 159. (156-171)

Virtually everyone who has seen the [VVM] testifies that the emotional power of the stark black wall bearing 58,156 names is enormous. That is no less so in a bustling city park within earshot of a spirited soccer match and a home game of the [local] baseball team than in the austere grove on the Mall in the nation's capital under the somber eyes of Abraham Lincoln.<sup>157</sup>

In this case the commemorative form is separated from its designed spatial context, the reproduction of the VVM standing for itself to be interpreted on its own terms. The wall and the names are given precedence over where the replica is placed, and the Mall is not given any particular significance as an interpretive landscape. However, this new interpretive landscape, the “bustling city park,” like any other temporary spatial context for the Moving Wall, is not recognized as itself a force that can profoundly affect the commemorative experience. In contrast, one critic of the Moving Wall mentioned previously articulated this very concern during its stay in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1999:

I know they're here, written on a portable black wall. These are the same names. The same haunting names. Here, of course, the din of traffic is inescapable. Just beyond the wall, cars and a steady flow of big trucks out of Port Everglades corrupt any notion of serenity. Nor can some temporary setting in a semi-industrial section of Fort Lauderdale envelop visitors the way that sloping descent into melancholy does on a grassy reach of the Washington Mall. A jumble of camouflage netting offers a backdrop for the replica of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall that has been erected by VFW Post 1966, amid self-service gas

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<sup>157</sup> Wayne King, “Our Towns: Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall Across the Land,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

stations, warehouses, an all-night diner and other unpretty addresses along State Road 84. And this version, a traveling exhibit called the Vietnam Moving Wall is only a half-scale model of aluminum panels just six feet at the apex, without the overwhelming effect of those daunting slabs of polished black granite. The names are silk-screened, rather than carved. Yet it's the names that lend the traveling memorial emotional power.<sup>158</sup>

While this critic also emphasized the profound importance of the names on the wall for the commemorative experience, he was much less forgiving regarding the issue of space. The “serenity” of the Washington Mall and the “melancholy” of the VVM are lost in the Moving Wall’s reproduction of its image. For this critic, the commemorative process is distorted, limited in its ability to convey the power of the original to visitors. He later stated, “The memorial in Washington draws me back nearly every time I go there. I search out the familiar. Touch the carved indentations. Sense that strange stifled emotion, like distant grief.”<sup>159</sup> For critics, the power of the Mall as setting, along with the physical differences such as the carved names versus their painted counterparts on the Moving Wall, far outweighs the replica’s attempted simulation of the VVM experience.

For both of these commentators, the details of surrounding space and the perception of that space is significant, even if the former suggested otherwise. For one, traffic was noted as a key disruption, as the nearby roads were an audible distraction. The serenity of the ideally hallowed ground of the memorial had been assaulted by the bustling of traffic, the ugly and unpleasant mechanical noise disrupting what were supposed to be moments of quiet reflection and contemplation. Another article echoed

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<sup>158</sup> Fred Grimm, “Black Wall of Eternity,” *The Miami Herald*, May 2, 1999, 1BR.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

this sort of observation, noting the noise of a nearby motorcycle starting, likely a common occurrence given the relationship between the Moving Wall and veterans' motorcycle clubs.<sup>160</sup> However, for the other, the nearby sounds of local sports and the community oriented activity of a local park served as no distraction, merely an addition to a community experience, different from the authentic VVM experience in Washington but no lesser. For this commentator, the emotional power of the names and the form itself are hardly impeded by the lack of the official setting and the cultural power it holds.

This emotional power the Moving Wall has on its own, separate from the interpretive landscape of the original, has been noted by other historians. Patrick Hagopian stated that, "what is extraordinary is that people touch the replica with the same intense emotion and reverence that attaches to the original. This is all the more striking because the moving wall is not as [physically] impressive as the one in the nation's capital."<sup>161</sup> Indeed, while Hagopian raises the critique of the replica's physical stature versus that of the original, he is right in identifying the effect the replica has on its visitors. While this aspect of the replica was covered in more depth in the previous chapter, it is important to stress again the maintenance of old and the creation of new commemorative rituals performed with the Moving Wall during tour stops and while travelling between stops. It speaks to the power of vernacular commemoration outside of the settings of official narratives and forms.<sup>162</sup> The faith in the replica's ability to simulate the VVM's emotional power can be seen even in its earliest years. Robert van

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<sup>160</sup> "The Moving Wall: A Visit," *The Fort Scott Tribune*, July 27, 1992, 4; See Chapter 2.

<sup>161</sup> Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 387.

<sup>162</sup> To use John Bodnar's model of official and vernacular cultural expressions; while Bodnar's model is quite strict and requires further nuance and the consideration of a broader spectrum of cultural expression, it serves to differentiate the national and community levels of engagement with the memorial wall as original and replica: John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-4.



Kueren, president of the group Vietnam Veterans of San Diego in 1985 stated that, “I don’t know if it’s so much the physical size of the wall.... It’s the process... the process of dealing with it and looking at it and coming to terms with what each of our own individual experiences with Vietnam was.”<sup>163</sup> Free from the meta-narratives and the encompassing setting of the Washington Mall, the Moving Wall offered a literally and figuratively scaled-down experience, more explicitly focused on the personal and the process of healing, and so much more accessible.

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Before tackling more of the spatial issues associated with the Moving Wall as a mobile and temporary memorial, it is important to consider the replica in two contexts. One context is a consistent theme from the original that took on new characteristics in localized forms, and the other reaches places that the original arguably failed to penetrate. The first is the interpretation of the Moving Wall as a grave, while the second is the placement of the Moving Wall on university campuses. Both contexts speak to the ways that the Moving Wall was able to extend its commemorative reach deeper into community life than the VVM ever could, signalling that while it was a replica attempting to simulate the experience of the original, it was something all its own.

The interpretation of the Moving Wall as a grave or cemetery carried over from similar interpretations of the original, and war memorials more generally. The “black gash of shame” and gravestone criticisms of the VVM were common, with many veterans

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<sup>163</sup> “Moving Wall Stirs Veteran’s Emotions,” *The Telegraph*, November 6, 1985, 22.

feeling it failed to instill a sense of pride or honour because of its emphasis on death.<sup>164</sup> Academic works on the VVM's design and commemorative experience have also emphasized the grave analogy as a way to understand its emotional power and the commemorative tradition it followed. For historian Jay Winter, comparing the VVM to the common European cenotaph, the wall reaches "beyond the political, and beyond conventional architectural forms, to express existential truths too often obscured in the rhetorical and aesthetic fog of war and its aftermath."<sup>165</sup> As designer Maya Lin intended, the VVM wall emphasizes death, making a statement on the human costs of war, stripping away layers of political, cultural, and ethical debate to humanize the conflict and touch on the most basic emotional needs in the war's precarious aftermath. In its physical simplicity, replicated by the Moving Wall, the names and dates along with the reflective surface of the black granite facilitate an almost funerary experience, a place to speak with those no longer living and contemplate the value of life and meaning of death in the context of war. This is amplified by the context of the Washington Mall, canonizing these deaths as sacrifices for the nation in a lineage of selfless heroism. Many of the rituals closely associated with the VVM, such as graphite rubbings of names and the leaving of mementos, share this funerary tradition. Historian Kristin Hass explores this connection in great detail and states that:

The impulse to use public memorials to privilege the memory of the individual as an emblem for the nation, the impulse to use the dead to assert the past of the community, and the impulse to use things to negotiate the liminal position of the

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<sup>164</sup> John Devitt's own initial reservations followed this discourse: Wayne King, "Our Towns: Vietnam Veteran Moves the Wall Across the Land," *New York Times*, August 22, 1989.

<sup>165</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 104-5.

dead meet at the Vietnam memorial. People have responded to the individual memory that the Wall makes with a new memorial impulse – leaving something at the Wall is an act of negotiating each of these relationships – between the dead and the nation, the dead and the past, and the dead and the living...<sup>166</sup>

While the analogy of the gravestone started as a criticism levied by those opposed to Lin's design, it has since become a powerful way of understanding the VVM's popularity and the profound connections visitors can have with it. Emphasizing the basic emotional needs of those visiting, or perhaps more aptly, using the VVM to reflect, contemplate, or address emotional pain in the same ways that people engage in funerary rituals and sites to mourn the deceased, says a great deal about the resonance of the VVM's design.

Naturally, the Moving Wall became entwined in similar analogies as it toured the United States. The idea of the wall as a grave marker and the rituals associated with it taking on a funerary guise followed the Moving Wall in both positive and negative lights. One article from the *LA Times* published in 1989 noted the commentary of three veterans who described the confusion and chaos of being in Vietnam and how easy it was to lose track of the friends one had made, only finding out someone had died when their name was found on the wall years later. One described it as, "like going to a relative's grave when you had never been able to go to the funeral."<sup>167</sup> Like a grave, a physical marker recognizing the deaths of those individuals, the Moving Wall provided for some a sense of closure, simulating a final resting place for those lost, a place of mourning, dialogue, and remembrance. Others likened the wall and the entire list of names to something more

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<sup>166</sup> Kristin Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 65-6.

<sup>167</sup> Jim Carlton, "Moving Wall Lives Up to Its Name: A Traveling Replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington Arrives in Orange County for the First Time and Revives Memories of Heroism and Horror," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1989.

akin to a cemetery, emphasizing the collective over any one individual, especially for veterans who had known the people behind the names. One veteran stated, “I, along with most other veterans, know people who are on the Wall, and when I see that, it has the same effect of going to a cemetery.... We have a lot of Vietnam veterans who cannot bring themselves to come down to the Wall.... The last time it was here I insisted that one of them come down. He did, and he was thoroughly shelled. He broke down.”<sup>168</sup>

Along with the allusion to the cemetery in a physical sense, the complex and powerful emotional responses described by visitors helps illustrate just how successfully Lin’s design speaks to the relationships Hass described. Death provokes complex human emotions and responses, instigating a need for closure for the living in a social and cultural sense. For some visitors to the Moving Wall and the VVM, informal ceremony meets a dynamic physical form to stand in for funeral, burial, mourning, dialogue, and closure. However, as with any subject that peers into what Winter calls existential truths, there are no easy answers or adequate generalizations. For the veterans who have difficulty confronting and engaging the memorial wall, and those who break down before it, closure is elusive. One article noted a visitor who failed to find satisfaction at the Moving Wall, stating that “He found his father’s name on the wall earlier. What did he feel? ‘Just kind of nothing really,’ he said. ‘It’s not much of an epitaph.’”<sup>169</sup>

While the response and language used at the Moving Wall is similar to the original in terms of the grave analogy, the replica took on a few of its own rituals and nuances. These new characteristics came as part of the replica’s detachment from static space, as visitors and veteran volunteers engaged the replica in new ways. The first was

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<sup>168</sup> Lisa Stevens John, “Travelling Vietnam Wall Opens Tonganoxie Tour,” *Lawrence Journal-World/The Mirror*, September 5, 1999, 1A-2A.

<sup>169</sup> “Moving Wall Stirs Veteran’s Emotions,” *The Telegraph*, November 6, 1985, 22.

the escort convoys highlighted in the previous chapter. Resembling a funeral procession, the replica is transported between communities often accompanied by members of veterans' motorcycle clubs, with many relating it to delivering lost friends and brothers safely home, a place of final rest.<sup>170</sup> A result of the replica's need for transportation, the escorts symbolically became the pallbearers of this transition, carrying the deceased away from the previous ceremony. The procession has yet to end, however, as the three Moving Walls continue to tour, and questions can be raised about whether this new ritual can bring any sort of commemorative closure as an analogue to a funeral, or if instead it withholds a sense of finality until the Moving Wall finds a permanent home. As there has not been any clear indication either way, or commentary on how the ritual affects its practitioners in this sense, that question remains unanswered.

The other ritual performed at the Moving Wall that fits within this analogy is a result of its tour stops, a reduction of its scope from the national to the local, emphasizing the vernacular over the official. This takes the form of emphasizing the names of those on the wall who were from the community the wall is visiting. This is most often done in the form of ceremonies where the names of local deceased are read aloud separate from the rest, emphasizing the sacrifice of the community, town, or county over the sacrifice of the nation as a whole.<sup>171</sup> This emphasis on the local is also seen in some press reports, especially editorial and opinion pieces that advertise the replica's visit.<sup>172</sup> Narrowing the lens of the Moving Wall to the local level begs a consideration of the divide between the

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<sup>170</sup> See Chapter 2; Adam Ramirez, "Veterans Rally Around Replica of Vietnam Wall," *The Miami Herald*, April 29, 1999, 7B; David Green, "A Moving Experience: Vietnam Dead Recalled at Wall," *The Miami Herald*, May 2, 1999, 3BR.

<sup>171</sup> Chip Chase, "Local Moving Wall Event Should Not Be Missed," *The Item*, April 15, 2002, 6A.

<sup>172</sup> John M. Willis, "Renewing Old Acquaintances that Shall Never Be Forgotten," *Rome-News Tribune*, July 19, 1998, 7B.

organized cultural space of the Washington Mall and the more organic local spaces of a given tour stop. Placing the memorial wall within the comfort and familiarity of the local effects the memorial in a way wholly different than the Mall as the new spatial context acts upon the physical form. This “closer to home” concept can be felt in other aspects of the Moving Wall’s presentation and impact.

Before exploring this idea in any more depth, there remains the suggestion that the placing of the Moving Wall in certain contexts penetrates areas the original failed to adequately address. The university campus as a place of radical opposition to the war and the government at the time is a familiar image in memory and popular culture representations of the period. While the VVM worked to “depoliticize” the memory of the Vietnam War era with its emphasis on the human cost of war, the Moving Wall found itself coming much closer to the places of domestic conflict. The generalization of the campus as site of conflict may perhaps have been overstated. Some argue that the antiwar movement found a home at some campuses but hardly all. Sociologist E.M. Schreiber stated in 1973 that “[c]ampus-based anti-war protests in the late 1960s gave a misleading picture of American university students and faculty. At the overwhelming majority of American campuses up through the 1968-9 academic year, no anti-war protests were reported.”<sup>173</sup> While this obviously does not negate the existence of demonstrations at some campuses, it does help to explain how campuses become a welcoming stop for the Moving Wall in the 1980s and 1990s (in addition to general cultural changes on American campuses between the 1960s and 1980s).

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<sup>173</sup> E.M. Schreiber, “Opposition to the Vietnam War among University Students and Faculty,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 24:3 (September 1973): 298. (288-302); Paul Joseph, “Direct and Indirect Effects of the Movement Against the War,” in Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 170.

One factor that was a common element in press coverage of Moving Wall visits to university campuses was the relationship between students and veterans. Again, while the image of the student radical is a familiar one, some have argued it is a misrepresentation of the majority. This is not to downplay the scale, significance, and cost of on-campus action during the war, with massive demonstrations picking up after Operation Rolling Thunder in 1965 and the deaths of students at Kent State and Jackson State Universities after the invasion of Cambodia in 1970 being clear signifiers.<sup>174</sup> However, within the political and ideological contexts surrounding the anti-war movement, students and protestors were commonly propped up by the political elite as “anti-troop” as much as they were anti-war, often juxtaposed as images of embarrassment versus virtue. Richard Nixon, quoted in the *New York Times*, stated that “You see these bums, you know, blowing up college campuses today.... Then out there we have kids who are just doing their duty. They stand tall and they are proud.”<sup>175</sup> Nixon’s sentiment is one commonly associated with students and the anti-war movement of the era, which fell out of view in a commemorative sense through the “apolitical” memory promoted by the VVM and the discourse of national healing, but remained a pop-culture staple of the era. One study notes that:

...in the press accounts of protest between 1965-1971, stories in which the anti-war movement directly or purposefully targeted troops are virtually non-existent. Instead, the movement was rather frequently labeled by members of the national elite, if only indirectly, as ‘anti-troop.’ Such labelling provides one possible

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<sup>174</sup> Michael K. Hall, “The Vietnam War Era Antiwar Movement,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18:5 (October 2004): 15. (13-17)

<sup>175</sup> As quoted in: Thomas D. Beamish, Harvey Molotch, and Richard Flacks, “Who Supports the Troops?: Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the Making of Collective Memory,” *Social Problems* 42:3 (August 1995): 352.

source of popular memory about the intentions and conduct of anti-war protesters, a planting of seeds that sprouted in the post-war period and came to full flower during the Gulf War.<sup>176</sup>

Despite the popular idea of the bond between students and the anti-war movement, the reality for the majority of students was far less radical, and partially speaks to the apparent lack of radical opposition to the Moving Wall.

This is not to say that there were never concerns. In a few cases, articles in campus papers that included quotes from campus administrators indicated maintenance of the view against students and the potential for opposition or demonstrations. One article stated that “Trustees of Santa Rosa Junior College voted unanimously Tuesday night to allow the ‘moving wall’ Vietnam War memorial on the school's front lawn during the 1986 spring break. Roy Mikalson, president of the college... expressed concern about the fragility of the college's lawn and the possibility of demonstrations on the campus.”<sup>177</sup> Another noted comments made by the president of the local veterans organization that was sponsoring the Moving Wall’s visit to Angelo State University in central Texas in 2002. He stated that “They need to be aware of the cost of freedom.... Having the wall at ASU is part of the intent. We view it as a wonderful tool for educating the public.... What’s more important is educating the college students.”<sup>178</sup> In both cases students are looked upon with suspicion and scepticism, an image carried over from the war era. The placing of the Moving Wall on the respective campuses causes both concern and a patronizing attitude regarding students. Of course, time and place matter here. A campus

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<sup>176</sup> Beamish et al, “Who Supports the Troops?,” 354.

<sup>177</sup> “College OKs Display of War Memorial,” *San Jose Mercury News*, November 14, 1985, 9B.

<sup>178</sup> Winston A. Hall, “Memorial Replica to be Displayed on Campus,” *The Ram Page*, October 31, 2002: <http://www.asurampage.com/news/view.php/25699/Memorial-Replica-to-Be-Displayed-on-Camp> accessed October 4, 2016.



in California in 1985 and one in Texas after 9/11 are contexts where this sort of view may not be so surprising.

In other examples, students and the campus as place for the Moving Wall are considered more positively. At Central Washington University in 2001, the visiting Moving Wall was incorporated into a larger event, “...designed to honor CWU students who have served in the military....’ ‘This is a recognition and tribute that is long overdue,’ said Dan Jack, CWU Alumni Association executive director.”<sup>179</sup> There were no apparent signs of concern over opposition or demonstrations, emphasizing the more positive message of tribute and recognition, with students playing a role. In other cases, articles and campus faculty or administration praised the involvement of student volunteers in the presentation of the replica on campus. One article emphasizes the cooperation between veterans and student volunteers at Chapman University in Orange County in 1989: “[v]eterans and student volunteers will keep watch over it and aid visitors in finding specific names. ‘The names are listed by the date of death rather than alphabetically, so we will have cross-reference books available to help the public.... We look forward to the opportunity for interaction between students and veterans.’”<sup>180</sup> Unlike the more negative attitudes toward students, these comments indicate optimism about students and campuses as places of commemoration of the Vietnam War. Students, veterans, and the interaction of the two become an active part in the presentation of the Moving Wall in a supportive and positive sense, defying the popular dichotomy. As before, the context of space and time matter. While these few examples hardly illustrate the entirety of this aspect of the Moving Wall’s role and place on university campuses,

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<sup>179</sup> “Moving Wall to Visit Campus Next Week,” *Ellensburg Daily Record*, October 17, 2001, B2.

<sup>180</sup> Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

the available evidence at least gives a picture that defies simple generalizations of opposition or embrace.<sup>181</sup>

Unlike the VVM, the Moving Wall has a communal element that played out in a way the original never could. The full picture of what this means and what it meant over time requires a deeper inquiry, but without going too far into speculation we can ask how this farther and more localized reach makes the Moving Wall unique. The Moving Wall's presence on campuses, entwined with face to face engagement of students, faculty, and veterans brings a proximity that the original does not. The campus context had the power to ignite old prejudices and concerns over protest, but it also created the space for people to work together in ways that brought them closer in supportive and cooperative roles. The wall as a grave, and the campus as a space for reflection and interaction illuminate how the removal of Lin's design from the static space of the culturally powerful Mall to the vernacular spaces of communities and campuses shaped the Moving Wall into something unique; an attempt to simulate an experience that became something all its own.

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The issue remains of how the temporary nature of the replica and its eventual departure from a given place affects the commemorative experience. Such questions do not plague the VVM, but the Moving Wall's commemorative experience includes an awareness of its short stay, the disassembly of its pieces, and watching it depart.

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<sup>181</sup> A comprehensive treatment of college campuses in the 1980s and 1990s as sites for the Moving Wall is beyond the scope of this study, but the comments that reflect popular images of radicalism indicate a cultural space that the replica was able to penetrate.

Philosopher Dylan Trigg gives a sense of how the replica's impermanence can be thought of in a consideration of commemorative silence:

Just as the practice of collective silence stabilizes the presence of the past in the present... so the durability of the material serves to bind time with place, establishing a reliance on the monument.... As located within a given place, the temporal centrality of commemorative silence is transferred to a fixed location, a practice that would be otherwise undermined were the monument physically dispersed.<sup>182</sup>

The VVM is a clear example of this immutability with its close relationship to the rest of the Washington Mall, ideologically situating the Vietnam War within the Mall's lens of U.S. history – its permanence anchoring its legitimacy in a pantheon of cultural power. The Moving Wall, on the other hand is untethered and dynamic, in a near constant state of movement. As Hagopian notes, this temporariness and subsequent absence is undoubtedly recognized in the communities it leaves behind, transforming them with its passage.<sup>183</sup> The Moving Wall inadvertently incorporates these new dimensions into its simulation of the VVM, and is interpreted in different ways because of it.

Press coverage and visitor commentary never truly shied away from this fact even as they were consumed with the common discourse of commemorative healing. Both the idea of it being temporary and comments on its departure stood out in articles advertising the replica's visit and notices that it would soon be leaving. This was interpreted by some as a positive effect, adding greater significance to a visit because it was only present for a short time. Jan Scruggs of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund was relatively positive

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<sup>182</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 92-3.

<sup>183</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 392.

in this sense, offering his blessing when approached for comment.<sup>184</sup> For Scruggs, the brief opportunity to have the simulated VVM experience at the Moving Wall is an intense motivator to visit the replica during its stay. Other commentators emphasized this even more, suggesting that the Moving Wall experience was even more powerful than the original by nature of the supposed deliberateness of tour stops. One article stated that, “In many cases, the experience is even more intense than that of seeing the wall in Washington. These people have made a special effort to visit the (portable) wall. They're not just tourists happening by the Vietnam War Memorial on their way to the Lincoln Memorial.”<sup>185</sup> Arguably, such comments oversimplify the “happening by” of the VVM and perhaps understate its own popularity and the special effort some visitors take in travelling great distances to see the original on the Mall. However, such an attitude does give a sense of how the perception of the Moving Wall’s temporariness is perceived by some. Its impermanence demands a commitment, to see it and feel it before it is too late.

Its departure also roused emotional commentary, especially from veterans and volunteers. The assembly and disassembly of the replica at the bookends of a visit became a common practice for volunteers throughout the country, with the disassembly being an especially emotional exercise. An article including a few quotes from an interview with Devitt noted the enthusiasm volunteers show while taking part in the assembly and disassembly.<sup>186</sup> The disassembly operates as Trigg’s physical dispersion, where the replica is literally, though reluctantly, torn apart and sent away. It serves as the

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<sup>184</sup> Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

<sup>185</sup> Susan Christian, “Vets Get Chance to Say Goodbye as Moving Wall Heads to Orange,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1989.

<sup>186</sup> Tim Waters, “Vietnam Remembered: Half-Scale Model of Memorial Stirs Full-Size Emotion,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1985; See Chapter 2 for more on disassembly as ritual.

last chance to engage the wall before it is gone, with no clear idea as to when or if it will return. One veteran likened the disassembly to the physical parting of the deceased, echoing the funerary and grave analogy discussed above, but in a much more immediate way.<sup>187</sup> For this veteran, the departure of the Moving Wall, and his part in its disassembly impacted his overall commemorative experience, shaking any sense of finality or closure. Another veteran echoed such sentiment in 1990, stating that “It felt like they took something away when it left. . . . It's the magic in it.”<sup>188</sup> For some, the Moving Wall’s departure creates a void in both space and psyche.

Over time this absence has the power to give way to desire to see the Moving Wall return. This is true even of its place of origin in San Jose. A 1990 article in the *San Jose Mercury News* highlighted how even its home finds relief in its return. The article stated that “Gone for almost a year, the Moving Wall has returned to the city where both creator and creation were born. ‘After having traveled all over the country with it,’ says Devitt, ‘it's good to bring it home and let people know it's still going on.’”<sup>189</sup> This longing for it in its absence was a common sentiment in articles documenting a return visit to a given area. In some cases it was a simple note on the length of the replica’s absence and how it was greeted. One article stated in 1999 that “Wednesday's driving thunderstorm didn't dampen the spirits of the dozen Vietnam vets on hand, as they hugged and celebrated The Wall's arrival. . . . The Moving Wall has not been in South Florida since

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<sup>187</sup> “Vietnam Memorial Takes to the Road,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1985.

<sup>188</sup> Bill Kaczor, “Veterans Boost Wall South: Vietnam Memorial for Panhandle,” *The Miami Herald*, October 21, 1990, 5B.

<sup>189</sup> Michael Oricchio, “Walls and Bridges: The Moving Wall, A Portable Replica of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, is One Veteran’s Tribute to the Sacrifices Made by His Fallen Comrades,” *San Jose Mercury News*, July 6, 1990, 9B.

1987.”<sup>190</sup> The end of a twelve year absence of the Moving Wall from the area is depicted as cause for celebration, the filling of a void felt for more than a decade. When asked for comment, one local veteran articulated his displeasure in such a prolonged absence, advocating for more frequency in future bookings. He stated that “Twelve years is too long for it not to be here - this isn't ancient history... this is hallowed ground like the cemetery across the street. It demands your respect.”<sup>191</sup> Other articles commenting on the Moving Wall's absence show explicit desire for it to return, relief in its return after time away, and note its visit to nearby areas while remaining “out of reach.”<sup>192</sup>

Such longing for the Moving Wall in its absence or before it has ever been to a given community illuminates two profound aspects of the mobile memorial. The first is the “closer to home” concept mentioned above; the ability of the Moving Wall to become a transformative force in the space it occupies, embedding itself in the community transforming its simulation of the VVM experience into a vernacular commemorative experience. The second is the creation of a commemorative void, a product of the residual transformations of space lacking their anchor in its absence. These two ideas together form the primary spatial dissonance of the mobile replica. To return to Jeffrey Ochsner's suggestion that the context of the Mall carries “a greater ‘charge’ than almost any other possible setting,” the Moving Wall defies this notion by placing the form in a vernacular context, producing new interpretive contexts to elicit new emotional

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<sup>190</sup> Adam Ramirez, “Veterans Rally Around Replica of Vietnam Wall,” *The Miami Herald*, April 29, 1999, 7B.

<sup>191</sup> Adam Ramirez, “Veterans Rally Around Replica of Vietnam Wall,” *The Miami Herald*, April 29, 1999, 7B.

<sup>192</sup> Kyle Minshew, “Moving Wall Leaving Rome,” *Rome News-Tribune*, July 15, 1998, 3A; Nancy Welsh, “Moving Wall Finally Comes for Vietnam Vets,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 21, 2000, N13; “Edinboro University to Host Spring Exhibit of ‘The Moving Wall’ Vietnam Memorial,” *Edinboro University News*, November 9, 2007, <http://www.edinboro.edu/news/detail.html?inode=5b6e850a-8906-4be1-9bf-9bf5c124e8b7> accessed on October 4 2016.

responses.<sup>193</sup> While a comprehensive comparison of the experience of the VVM as official and the Moving Wall as “closer to home” vernacular is beyond the scope of this project, a look at how visitors and press reports have identified this distinction can be useful in understanding the uniqueness of the mobile monument.

While the Washington Mall holds a firm grip on national cultural authority, and the VVM has been a key fixture among the many other structures that make up the Mall’s meta-narratives of the nation and citizenship therein, there is perhaps a sort of meta-physical detachment from the everyday life of the more localized communities, both large and small. Where the Mall seeks to promote a sense of cohesion in national identity, the reality of physically being in space is more tightly focused, where the familiarity of the everyday surroundings and the more immediate space of “home” has its own power. Philosopher Edward Casey reminds us that “[memories] seek out particular places as their natural habitats... because places furnish convenient points of attachment for memories; but also because places provide situations in which remembered actions can deploy themselves... places are congealed scenes for remembered contents; and as such they serve to situate what we remember.”<sup>194</sup> There is no more immediate anchor for memory than the spaces in which everyday life is enacted. While the macro-cultural pull of the Mall is undeniable, and serves to situate the VVM, the Vietnam War, and the dead behind the names on a national stage, through the lens of the state, the memories people have of those they have lost are more often placed within the spaces of community and home. Writing about the national cenotaph in France in the twentieth century, Michel Ragon suggested that “The war memorial assumes its full significance only in the

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<sup>193</sup> Ochsner, “A Space of Loss,” 159.

<sup>194</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 189.

villages, townships, and small towns, in places where a community life still survives, where the names on the memorial have faces for those who read them.”<sup>195</sup> Perhaps the VVM can be thought of in this way, and if so, the Moving Wall offered the chance for communities to localize their commemoration in a way that the wall in Washington could not.

Along with the use of funerary motifs that focus on a respective community’s sacrifice through the emphasis on local servicemen and women, newspaper articles and visitor commentary give a small glimpse of this transformative power the local context has over the Moving Wall’s simulation of the VVM experience. One 1987 article put it quite plainly, stating that “For millions of Americans, the Vietnam War and its black marble memorial wall in Washington, D.C., was always ‘over there’ – too inaccessible for the heart or mind. But the Palm Beach County chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America is stoking the memories of residents with an accessible reminder – a replica of the 5-year-old Vietnam Veterans Memorial.”<sup>196</sup> The distance and detachment of the “over there” separates the official narratives of memory from the vernacular needs of the distant community. Many who could not make the pilgrimage to Washington must be content with simply knowing that it is there, what it looks like, and suggestions of what it means and how it feels. Those who do go are oriented in a macro-lens, placed within the interpretive landscape of the Mall to see the VVM in that context. In contrast, the Moving Wall, though only briefly, brings the experience to you, oriented within the relative comfort of the familiar and the memory-scape of home. Outside of the spatial context of

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<sup>195</sup> Michel Ragon, *The Space of Death: A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 108.

<sup>196</sup> Don Van Natta Jr., “Memorial Brings War Home to the County,” *The Miami Herald*, October 7, 1987, 1PB.



official recognition and commemoration from the state, for this visitor the Moving Wall experience elicited a different emotional response. Something about standing in a local park so much closer to home made the wall accessible in new ways. While the original on the Mall had produced a sense of validation, that the men and women on the wall were getting recognition and respect that was long overdue, the replica within this new space allowed for more intimate expressions of personal grief. Of course, this is not to say that the Moving Wall or other such travelling memorials have any sort of monopoly on such responses, or the proposed contrast is universal, but it does indicate how the simulated VVM in a new space is reengaged and reinterpreted, accessible in unique ways not available on the Mall.

This may, in part, help to explain the profound sense of a void within the Moving Wall's absence after its disassembly and departure. As commentary on the replica's departure has suggested, visitors have been conscious of the temporariness of the Moving Wall and the sense of something missing. This distortion in the commemorative experience became a powerful call to action for some. Patrick Hagopian notes a number of efforts by local organizations to fill perceived voids left behind by the Moving Wall. He catalogues some of the commemorative structures and markers placed in the same spaces as the Moving Wall and states that such "material afterimages of the memorial's presence evoke the resonance of acts of remembering, echoing through the years."<sup>197</sup> These material afterimages often take the form of modest markers, such as flowerbeds and concrete chevrons on the replica's former position. The most ambitious of these responses to the void was the Wall South memorial in Pensacola, Florida. After the Moving Wall's 1987 stop in Pensacola, a group of local Vietnam veterans formed the

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<sup>197</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War and American Memory*, 392.

Wall South Foundation and proposed to erect their own half-scale replica of the VVM wall, suggesting that it would be placed in the same spot formerly occupied by the Moving Wall, but more accurate in form to the original.<sup>198</sup> This reproduction inspired by a reproduction speaks to what Hagopian considers the elusive commemorative closure that so many seek in the VVM and its image. Relating the Moving Wall, other travelling replicas, static reproductions, and mail-order cardboard miniatures, he states that:

The reproduction of the objects in different scales also suggests an effort to achieve psychological mastery over historical experience, as if being able to reproduce a memorial... means that one can at will contain or exteriorize the memories it evokes, to possess, not be possessed by them; the apparently endless proliferation of replica memorials, though, suggests that this mastery remains elusive.<sup>199</sup>

What forms is an almost cyclical quest to capture those memories, emotions, and commemorative experiences associated with the war into an exterior physical token. For Hagopian, the fact that this quest arguably remains ongoing speaks to the failure of the discourse of national healing. In the context of the Moving Wall and the Wall South, the void left by the former necessitated the creation of the latter for the members of the Wall South Foundation. Something had been taken away with the Moving Wall, and that had affected their commemorative process, inspiring them to fill that void with their own replica.

Less than a year after the Moving Wall's departure from Pensacola, the Wall South Foundation was already gaining momentum. Set on placing their own replica of the

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<sup>198</sup> "Group Seeks Money to Build Memorial," *The Miami Herald*, January 6, 1990, 2B; "Vets Plan 'Wall South' in Florida: Memorial Would Honor War Dead," *The Miami Herald*, September 16, 1990, 1B.

<sup>199</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War and American Memory*, 394-5.

VVM in the former space of the Moving Wall, the veterans of the Wall South Foundation found ample press coverage in the years leading up to its eventual completion. Veteran Lenny Collins spoke of the Moving Wall and the Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. as inspiration, and the positive involvement of the local community. He told an interviewer that “Vietnam vets are the ones who brought The Moving Wall here in December and after we saw the reactions and the way everybody was moved and everybody pulled together for the vigil... it just mushroomed.”<sup>200</sup> Eventually, the plan for the Wall South grew more and more ambitious as talk of turning the small greenspace into a veterans memorial park entered the conversation.

Although his interest is the memorial for Vietnam vets, [Wall South Foundation president, Nelson] Wellborn said he would like to see the Wall South become the starting point for a veterans park that would commemorate Americans who fought in other conflicts as well. “I can't see a more fitting thing than having a veterans park, period,” said Wellborn. “Those who died in Grenada, Beirut and most recently in Panama need to be remembered and honored. Dead is dead.”<sup>201</sup>

Inspired by the action of their fellow veterans that created and brought the Moving Wall, but also by a need to rectify the temporariness of the travelling replica through their own static version, the Wall South Foundation and their partners engaged in extensive fundraising initiatives to make their vision a reality. One article detailed a number of different events that were held in cooperation with other local veterans groups in Florida:

The veterans have sponsored car washes, a sausage festival, concerts, mud wrestling, auto races, rodeos and raffles. They have sold T-shirts and were given

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<sup>200</sup> “Veterans Seeking to Build Replica of Famed Memorial,” *The Miami Herald*, May 5, 1988, 2D.

<sup>201</sup> “Group Seeks Money to Build Memorial,” *The Miami Herald*, January 6, 1990, 2B

the run for a weekend of Trader Jon's, a memorabilia-filled Pensacola bar that caters to service personnel from the Pensacola Naval Air Station and other bases. The Florida Coalition of Vietnam Veterans is helping, the Allman Brothers band has offered to hold a benefit concert, a Cuban-American club is raising funds in Miami, and the Florida Jaycees plan a "Play Ball for the Wall" softball tournament, said Wellborn and Collins.<sup>202</sup>

The immense efforts of the Wall South Foundation were ultimately rewarded in 1992 with the completion of the Wall South in the Moving Wall's former space, and the surrounding area subsequently became the Pensacola Veterans Memorial Park, now also home to memorials for the two World Wars, the Korean War, and others. Upon recognizing a void in the commemorative experience by nature of the Moving Walls' inherent temporariness, the Wall South Foundation profoundly responded through great time and effort to address this void and restore spatial consistency to their local project of remembrance.

However, along with replicating a replica in physical form, the Wall South was met with similar opposition with regard to authenticity and impact.<sup>203</sup> The local press was quick to point out the existing conflict between the Wall South Foundation and their critics, including Maya Lin herself. Lin echoed the common concern related to any replica of her design, stating issues of size and space. One article chronicling Lin's disapproval stated that:

Lin said the V-shaped wall inscribed with names of Americans who perished in the war was intended to be a one-of-a-kind monument designed specifically for its

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<sup>202</sup> Bill Kaczor, "Veterans Boost Wall South: Vietnam Memorial for Panhandle," *The Miami Herald*, October 21, 1990, 5B.

<sup>203</sup> See Chapter 1.

site in Washington, near other national memorials. “Part of the power of the memorial is its size,” she told the Pensacola News Journal. “It has to be taller than you at the apex of the two walls. I would not like to have people stand next to a miniature wall and say: Oh, it isn't so powerful. And I believe that will be the reaction of people who have never seen the original. They will be disappointed.”<sup>204</sup>

Lin’s concerns for the Wall South replica hint at Hagopian’s later suggestion that the endless proliferation of the VVM signifies an endless search for closure. This becomes especially bleak as each new replication potentially dilutes the original experience. As one writer put it in 1992,

“The irony is that once it's completed, the Wall South will be just as inexplicable as Noguchi's twisted double helix or Treister's huge hand. It will raise the wrong questions – Why is this here? Why is it small? – rather than philosophic questions of life and death that ought to be addressed.”<sup>205</sup> Despite these questions of authenticity in form, experience, and interpretation, the Wall South, the efforts of the Wall South Foundation, and the profound inspiration imparted by the Moving Wall’s absence suggest that for some, authenticity is hardly an issue. Perhaps this is simply indicative of Hagopian’s suggested tokenism, the attempt to encapsulate history and memory in something physically tangible; and what better form than the immensely popular and textually dynamic VVM wall? While this is likely part of a complex network of psychological and emotional needs, in flux over space and time, the spatial distinctions of the Moving Wall perhaps offer another way of thinking. Unique in its spatial impermanence and its offer of

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<sup>204</sup> “Pensacola, Pasco Vie For Vietnam Monument,” *The Miami Herald*, September 15, 1991, 2B.

<sup>205</sup> Beth Dunlop, “Memorials’ Mission: To Foster a Shared Vision,” *The Miami Herald*, May 24, 1992, 1C.

a more vernacular commemorative experience, the Moving Wall brings something altogether new in its attempted simulation of the VVM. Authenticity is compromised, but in a way that offers something new, entwined with its own positive and negative effects.

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Despite, or perhaps because of, the Moving Wall's removal from the original's spatial context on the Washington Mall, it became a powerful commemorative form in itself, bringing the Vietnam War "home" in a way the static monument could not. Separated from the space of state promoted official narratives of commemoration, the Moving Wall helped to inspire new narratives, rituals, and responses to the VVM's design, while operating within a similar discourse of healing and entwined in similar analogies. As a figurative grave and facilitator of funerary practices, it formed new rituals and an emphasis on the local and communal over the national. It illuminated perspectives and attitudes about university campuses and students, and ongoing negotiation of the anti-war legacy in those spaces as promoted by popular cultural, elite condemnations, and on the ground cooperation. Meanwhile, its temporariness, departure, and the void it left behind became integral parts of the Moving Wall experience, distorting the commemorative experience for some while inspiring profound responses from others. The Wall South and its resulting veterans memorial park was the most ambitious of these responses, creating a new commemorative space from the figurative ashes of the old.

Bound in all of this is the ultimate question of authenticity. A common debate in the canon of the Moving Wall that had also leaked into the creation of the Wall South, the issues of authenticity and simulation, will be taken-up in the concluding chapter. The

prime motive of the Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. had been to bring the VVM experience to those who could not make the trip to Washington. Yet, the end result became something profoundly unique in its attempted simulation. Motive, engagement, and spatial elements combined to produce a commemorative experience that can only shallowly be called a replication. The wall is there, the names are there, and the rituals persist, but it is so much more in the same ways that some argued it was so much less. Through a consideration of authenticity, replication, and simulation, the closing chapter will address the clash between authenticity and uniqueness at the Moving Wall.

## Conclusion

After over three decades the Moving Wall continues to tour the United States, but has seen a steady decline in demand since its peak in the late 1990s. During the period between 1995 and 2000, the replica would consistently make over 60 stops annually, reaching its peak in 1999 with 73.<sup>206</sup> Recent years has seen these numbers diminish, reaching a low in 2013 with only 21 stops split between two of the VCVL's three replicas. Devitt's museum project for the collected offerings left at the Moving Wall is still a work in progress, and the replica itself is still taking sponsor bookings into 2019. While it currently shows no sign of stopping, its declining activity speaks to a suggestion Hagopian made in 2009 regarding the longevity of the replicas, and memorials generally: "The moving wall will cease its travels when it no longer attracts sufficient visitors to justify the trouble and expense of maintaining, administering, and moving it. But this will also foreshadow the time when, instead of inspiring imitation after imitation to satisfy a far-flung public, Lin's wall itself becomes the sort of unremarked, unremembered place," left as a mark in the landscape without the level of engagement that makes the monument whole.<sup>207</sup> It begs the question of what will happen to the Moving Wall when it is finally retired, or perhaps how will it be remembered. If the VCVL does choose to render it static near the proposed museum of offerings, what will become of it and the engagement it so desperately invites? Will it lose what made it truly unique?

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<sup>206</sup> "History of Moving Wall Displays," <http://www.themovingwall.org/docs/history.htm>, December 17, 2013; accessed October 5, 2015.

<sup>207</sup> Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 396.



Through the lens of the Moving Wall – the people who created it, the visitors who interacted with it, and the power of its spatiality – the complex relationships between memory and space, and replication and authenticity are seen in a new light. This study has argued that despite existing within the interpretive apparatus of the discourse of commemorative healing and as a replica and simulation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the spatiality of the Moving Wall – its thrust into the vernacular spaces of memory – facilitated a transcendence beyond simple replication, as authenticity and authority was socially granted to it and its creators, through the organic evolution of commemorative rituals, and through vernacular negotiations and expressions of memory. Rather than fully succumb to a prescriptive discourse of psychological, cultural, and national healing, Devitt and others quite literally took matters into their own hands to support fellow veterans and their families and friends. The act of creating the replica and the emotion that was poured into it gave it a new aura, a new profound “here and now” as a social exercise of addressing memory. When this aura was threatened by the perceived perversion from corporate interest, supporters rallied behind what they saw as the genuine and authentic attempt at replication, pure in intent. Visitors interacted with the Moving Wall in ways similar to the VVM, but contributed to the evolution of the commemorative pageantry provoked by the replica’s spatiality. Vernacular community-based rituals and expressions of commemoration became common, spreading throughout the country with the Moving Wall’s popularity. Finally, the extended reach and mobility of the Moving Wall brought it closer to the every-day sites of memory and commemoration that the static original could not reach, using these spaces as new interpretive landscapes to act on and be acted upon. This transformative power was so

strong that in some cases it inspired place-markers in the replica's absence, a commemoration to commemoration itself. These new dimensions and characteristics gave the Moving Wall a profound uniqueness that set it apart from the VVM even as it operated as a simulation of the VVM experience.

Hanging over all of this is the cultural and political force of the discourse of commemorative healing, which deserves one final consideration. "Healing" in itself became a perversion of memory, a superficial form of commemorative closure simulated through language and symbols. As Hagopian reminds us, "all the talk of 'healing' at the memorial neglected and foreclosed a more morally satisfactory and hence psychologically effective resolution of memories of war. The superficial reconciliation and closure the 'healing' promises prevent a serious scrutiny of issues that remain vital irrespective of their long neglect...."<sup>208</sup> By the turn of the century, even Devitt himself began to question this language as the passage of time brought no sign of being "healed." Visitors found the space to question the language of healing at the Moving Wall by way of its placement in vernacular spaces, such as Native American reserves, and as a gravesite, where the scale of loss and a perceived sense of limited recognition and honour left some dissatisfied. While Hagopian also asserts that "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial disavowed politics and avoided judgements of the Vietnam War" and "The suspension of judgement meant that contemplation of the moral significance of the Vietnam War had, by default, to take place elsewhere," the Moving Wall at times became that "elsewhere," breaking down the barriers raised against critique.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory*, 404-5.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 430.

There exists a tension in the relationship between the Moving Wall and the discourse of healing as simulations. Returning to Baudrillard, “healing” itself was a simulacrum, a series of rhetorical suggestions that bore no resemblance to the reality of the memory of the Vietnam War. Pathologizing the political and cultural quandaries left in the Vietnam War’s wake ensured that commemoration would hardly find closure under the “healing” regime. Meanwhile, memories of the conflict in Vietnam, the violence perpetrated against the Vietnamese people, and the domestic fissures of the late-1960s and early-1970s found no adequate consideration or resolution. Baudrillard explains the power of such cultural models in his analysis of the relation between symbols and reality by stating: “It is necessary to see in this impossibility of isolating the process of simulation the weight of an order that cannot see and conceive of anything but the real, because it cannot function anywhere else.”<sup>210</sup> The language of healing was so prevalent and so attractive in its ability to eschew questions of political culpability and cultural fissure that it became the “real” for many. The Moving Wall was naturally immersed in this language, as press reports regarding it, its creators, and its visitors were steeped in this rhetoric. However, as the previous chapters have shown, the Moving Wall subverted this in some ways as it evolved into its own simulacrum. When applied to the Moving Wall as a replica, Baudrillard’s phases of the image provide a framework to view this evolution, as the Moving Wall transitioned from pure replica in the realm of ideas, to a spatially unique physical form that severed some of its connective tissue to the original in many ways. The replica took on its own identity as a vernacular expression of commemoration and through its spatiality. Through a perceived spatial dissonance

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<sup>210</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 466.

between the replica and the VVM on the Washington Mall, visitors found the space to reinterpret and reengage the VVM's design and the ideas of healing. While steeped in its language, the Moving Wall unsettled the discourse of healing for some in ways the VVM could not by simulating its experience in new, vernacular space.

This spatiality, though the fundamental distinction between the Moving Wall and the VVM, is what helped give the replica, and the experience thereof, its authenticity. Visitors were generally satisfied with the simulation of the VVM experience at the Moving Wall, claiming it to be a fitting substitute. Meanwhile, during the legal battles between the VCVL and Coors and Service Corporation International, supporters declared the Moving Wall to be the genuine wall, the true replica and carrier of the VVM's image and experience. The Moving Wall earned this authority through what Benjamin relates to the maintenance of tradition:

The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the history to which it testifies. Since the historical testimony is based on the physical duration, the historical testimony of the thing, too, is jeopardized by reproduction.... yet what is really jeopardized thereby is the authority of the thing, the weight it derives from tradition.<sup>211</sup>

This authority was not lost in the VCVL's translation of the VVM to a mobile form. Its creation as the act of veterans like John Devitt, and the easily maintained rituals associated with the wall contributed to its acceptance, even when spatial incongruities were noticed. The Moving Wall's state as a replica within a lineage of a frequently

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<sup>211</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," First Edition translated by Michael W. Jennings, *Grey Room* No. 39 (Spring 2010), 14.

reproduced form situates it in a cycle of affirmation through the phenomenon described in chapter 3, whereby the memory of the war is tokenized in order to capture and gain mastery over it in a physical form. As Benjamin notes, “By replicating that which has been reproduced many times over, the technology of reproduction substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the viewer in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is being reproduced.”<sup>212</sup> For the majority of visitors to the Moving Wall, the distance of the VVM was temporarily nullified, offering an adequate simulation while also offering something new. Visitors and sponsors adapted to the replica’s spatiality with new rituals and locally-minded ceremonies while also engaging the replica in accordance with the canonized rituals of the original. While there remained critics of Lin’s design, the spatial incongruities of the replica’s placement, and the physical differences in size and materials, the Moving Wall operated on a vernacular level to address commemorative needs for those who gave it such authority.

Bestowed with an aura of authenticity as a simulation of the VVM and as an act by veterans to share the VVM experience, the Moving Wall’s spatiality became the core and foundation of its uniqueness in ways other than the obvious mobility. It highlights important aspects of the relationship between commemoration and space, specifically the introduction of a national monument (via a replica) into the vernacular spaces of smaller communities. The dominant discourse remained, but the new spaces the Moving Wall occupied were transformed, and transformed the commemorative experience. As Dylan Trigg has suggested “[s]ometimes it is the case that a place provides the defining character to a memory, such that the memory becomes inextricably bound with place,

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<sup>212</sup> Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” 14.

thus rendering it an event.”<sup>213</sup> The commemorative events in the vernacular spaces of the Moving Wall associated expressions of commemoration with those spaces, bringing an approximation of the VVM closer to home. Rituals and ceremonies – such as the escort convoys, the assembly and disassembly of the replica, and name reading that focused on locals – organically sprouted from the replica’s mobility as visitors and supporters found new ways to expand commemorative interaction, giving the Moving Wall a unique identity. Simulating the VVM’s image and experience, and immersed in pseudo-psychological language of healing, the Moving Wall was embraced by visitors as its spatiality brought it into the neighbourhoods and communities of everyday life. Its mobility, temporariness, and transformative powers evolved the commemorative experience of Lin’s design beyond what was intended.

The Moving Wall’s eventual retirement will spell the end of what made it truly unique. Even if the three replicas find new homes to be displayed as static memorials, the loss of their dynamic spatiality will return them to a state of simple replication. The half-scale replicas will be given one final chance to transform their anchoring space before their ability to transcend ordinary vernacular spaces into powerful sites of memory and commemoration is lost. While they will still have commemorative power as replicas of Lin’s wall, the spatiality that made them unique will be gone. Nevertheless, the Moving Wall has touched millions of lives since its first display in late-1984, becoming the anchor in thousands of commemorative spaces, an inspiration for expressions and rituals beyond the reach of the original, and a profound artifact in the memory of the Vietnam War in the United States.

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<sup>213</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 53.

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