But Becker seems to miss another part of Benjamin's critique: mechanical reproduction, he suggests, does not undermine an artwork's aura but "emancipates the work . . . from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (224). But replicas of the National Wall, as I have argued, may undermine its auratic status by reinforcing the routinization of rituals first enacted at the Wall. While the displacement of memory from location, enabled through traveling and virtual walls, creates memorializing practices that are increasingly democratic, decentralized, and decontextualized (or put differently, while citizens throughout the country have more access to the Wall through replicas), in the end the experience citizens have at the replicas is prescriptive. Because the tactile and physical experiences at the National Wall are missing, the copies cannot replicate the truly visceral and effective experiences at the Wall.

In the next chapter, I continue my analysis of the routinization of memorializing at the Wall by examining how the practice of leaving objects is presented in a now-closed Smithsonian Institute's exhibition, "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation." In this display, the practice becomes somewhat sterilized as the Wall's viscerality is translated into a visual and contemplative experience at the museum. The chapter offers another model for how memorializing moves away from the Mall as it compares the Smithsonian's exhibit with the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago. One official, the other veteran led, both museums illustrate the materiality and individualization of memorializing in their displays of objects—items left at the Wall, veterans' art, guns taken from the dead, dog tags, and so on. The items signify a multiplicity of attitudes toward and political perspectives on the war, which the museums organize into fixed narratives of it.

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Chapter Four

Objects of War and Remembrance

> They carried all they could bear, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried.
>
> —Tim O'Brien

O'Brien's story "The Things They Carried" highlights the physical and psychological weight of the war and its memory. The story emphasizes the relationships between the physical objects the grunts carried as they were "humping the boonies" and the psychological, emotional, and visceral import of those objects, both during the war and after. The powerful, awe-inspiring things they carry are both objects of war and destruction and objects of memory, containing the ghostly residues of various events or experiences occurring in the past. It is this relationship between object and memory—the materiality of memory—that I seek to explore here, by focusing on two museum exhibits that construct narratives of the Vietnam War using artifacts of war and memory: "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation" at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History and the exhibits at the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago. "Personal Legacy" (now closed to make way for an ambitious new military history exhibit, "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War," discussed in the endnotes section to this chapter) displayed a selection of objects left at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the Veterans Art Museum in Chicago continues to show art beside weaponry and other war relics. Wishing to describe visitors' experiences at these museums, I will speak of both exhibits in the present tense. The display of these objects of war and remembrance illustrates their significance to the process of memorializing the war: at the Smithsonian, the exhibit stages the practice of leaving objects at the Wall, while the veteran-led Veterans Art Museum is both a site of memory and itself a memorial practice. I argue that through their displays, the museums

construct new meanings of the objects by neglecting historical details of the war and the era, foregrounding a dichotomy between history and aesthetics and reinforcing the significance of memory in contemporary understandings of the Vietnam War.

I focus on Vietnam War-themed exhibits within museums that have broader purposes, the Smithsonian and the Veterans Art Museum, because the United States has no national history museum devoted to the war in Vietnam, with one exception. National in name only, the National Vietnam War Museum in Orlando, FL, has a limited focus and appeal: it works to educate high school students about the war through its display of war relics, a mock Vietnamese village, and an online discussion board, which currently has just twenty nine members.[1] The United States lacks one cohesive national museum that narrates the history of America's participation in war at home and abroad, akin to Britain's Imperial War Museum. National museums to specific wars exist, such as the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, PA, which portrays the entire story of the American Civil War "without either union or confederate bias."[2] In addition, some regional museums claim to cover all wars, such as the Virginia War Museum, which offers an "interpret[ation of] American military history from 1775 to the present."[3] With the exception of the Pearl Harbor museum-ship, USS Battleship Missouri, no national museums in the U.S. record the histories of American involvement in the two world wars.

That no national war museum exists illustrates, in part, an ambivalent American identity. The "imperial" in Britain's Imperial War Museum speaks of that country's at times self-identification as a colonial power whose strength was formed through conquest and resistance. In contrast, the United States historically has vacillated between shying away from interventionism and proclaiming itself to be an international superpower. The U.S. has always justified its participation in foreign wars as a defensive response to threats from other countries. Britain celebrates its military history in the Imperial War Museum, but if a national museum to war existed in the United States, it may have to acknowledge its uneasiness with that part of its history. Thus, the United States has preferred to build monuments to war, at which the construction of a coherent narrative of the history of the war is not required. On the National Mall, the war monuments are isolated from the Smithsonian Institute, which allows the museums to both present and shape a more comprehensive narrative of the nation and the role of war but without the need to directly engage with the monuments.

Because, literally and symbolically, the National Mall is at the center of U.S. war memorializing, visitors can piece together a chronology of the

United States at war through a carefully choreographed tour of the monuments outside; that tour would include the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, The Hiker (commemorating the Spanish-American War), the Seabees and Marine Corps (Iwo Jima) Memorials, the World War II Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Charles Griswold argues that these structures are a particular kind of "recollective architecture, a species whose symbolic and normative content is prominent." Because no one died on or is buried under the Mall, the "Mall's memorials connect . . . war and politics on a purely symbolic level" (Griswold 690). Thus while the chronology of war is available to those who participate in guided tours or who come to the Mall having first researched their route, without that preparation the historical context is missing.

But, of course, visitors to the Mall can learn more about the role of war in America's history at some of the Smithsonian museums. For example, the National Air and Space Museum includes "WWI: The Great War in the Air" and "WWII Aviation," and the National Museum of American History formerly presented the "Hall of Armed Forces History" and now exhibits "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War." At both museums, war histories are constructed through a combination of artifact display and written explanation. At the World Wars aviation exhibits, visitors gaze on a sampling of war-era planes; in the Armed Forces hall, before it was removed, visitors could read brief histories of the roles of soldiers in war from George Washington to the G.I. during World War II, illustrated with various artifacts that symbolize the era and animate the written narrative. The new exhibit, "The Price of Freedom," strives to present a comprehensive chronological history of wars that has hitherto been lacking in the museums, starting with the Wars of Independence and concluding, at least for the time being, with the current War in Iraq.

The Smithsonian "collects artifacts of all kinds—from gowns to locomotives—to preserve for the American people an enduring record of their past" through which it hopes to "inspire a broader understanding of our nation and its many peoples."[4] By telling American history through the display of objects, the museum suggests that history is made from the ground up, although, of course, as a national government-funded institution, the museum constructs and depicts history in the opposite direction, from the top down. In comparison with this institutional history, the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, located in Chicago, was founded and is run by veterans; in its purpose as well as its methods, it attempts to produce grassroots knowledge about the war. Despite its regional location, its unique scope, broad-based appeal, and substantial collection of veteran artwork make it nationally significant.

Unlike the majority of regional war museums that do the important work collecting war items from local veterans but display them in rather unimaginative ways, the Veterans Art Museum utilizes innovative display techniques in order to present the war in Vietnam experientially.

Veteran-led sites of memory that are informed by veterans' support for a conservative political ideology construct patriotic narratives of the war that tend to ignore the Vietnamese, the antiwar movement, and the political and social divisiveness the war produced. However, the Veterans Art Museum is an important veteran-led site of memory that constructs narratives of the war in a different way: while various art pieces on display represent the heterogeneity and divisiveness of the war and its memory, its construction of what I call a quagmire aesthetic creates an alternative to the history of the war. Simply put, rather than narrate the war's history, the museum evokes its experience. Similarly, "Personal Legacy" presents not the history of the war but rather the public's response to it in the resonant practice of leaving objects at the Wall. While the absence of historical context can be somewhat problematic for a museum, of course, the focus on experience and memory over history reinforces a mistrust of the official history of the war, mistrust that was paradigmatic of the war era. As many Vietnam veteran writers argue, memory's disjointed, messy, repetitive, and heterogeneous aspects more accurately represent the war than formal history. While continuing to focus on the ways the war is rewritten at veterans' sites of memory, this chapter also highlights the marked differences between official and veteran-led sites of memory and examines the Wall's significance in continuing to shape memorial practices, exploring how veterans construct memorials that simultaneously confirm and challenge that significance.

The particular features that make the two museums so disparate are, in part, what make a comparison of them so compelling. While the Smithsonian is in many ways the quintessential modern museum (or disciplinary museum, in Foucault's terms), the Veterans Art Museum exists on the margins of this disciplinary framework. In different ways, both places combine techniques of museum display with memorializing: at the Smithsonian, this merging happens through its display of the evolution of memorializing at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which the museum demonstrates by presenting developments in the practice of leaving objects there. At the Chicago space, museum and memorial practices merge in its "Above and Beyond" memorial made of dog tags and in its display of the individual memorializing of hundreds of veterans who create art about or through their war experiences. By using objects to construct narratives of the war and the nation, the museums face questions of responsibility: if the Smithsonian as a national museum has the purpose to reflect American identity, what are the consequences of omitting the history of the war from that identity? Does it have an obligation to portray the war accurately and completely? And as a veteran-led, grassroots institution, does the Veterans Art Museum have the same obligation?

At these museums and, in fact, at any museum that displays artifacts, the meanings and evidentiary potential of objects are constructed in particular ways.[5] The scholarship on this practice spans several fields and disciplines, including material culture, art history, and ethnography. Kristin Hass suggests that scholarly work in material culture, which has influenced the fields of American studies and art history, falls into two distinct camps: "one is interested primarily in theories of interpretation as they might apply to things, and the other is interested in details of the things themselves" (30). In the first approach, exemplified in Christopher Tilley's anthology *Reading Material Culture*, attention is given "to ideas of signs and systems of signs, but it is almost completely without mention of particular things" (Hass 31). In contrast, the second approach, in work such as Thomas Schlereth's *Material Culture Studies on America*, examines "details about the origins, production, and histories of things" but does not "explore the symbolic work of material things." Hass suggests that because "a tension [exists] between the context from which they come and the communicative work they do," both approaches together are needed to understand the practice of leaving objects at the Wall (32).

Art historians focus specifically on how museums construct and construe the meanings of objects through selection and arrangement. For example, in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill charts the "taxonomies used to explain the interrelationships of objects and species" in the disciplinary museum during three epistemes—Renaissance, classical, and modern.[6] Hooper-Greenhill suggests that in the classical episteme, objects were arranged in the museum according to "theme, material, or size," whereas in the modern museum they are organized by, for example, school or nation. In these new arrangements, "successive identities and differences began to replace the visual identities and differences of the classical age" (188). Attending to the display of art in the museum and developments in art history, Donald Preziosi examines the hybridity of the art object. He suggests the discipline of art history positions the object within an historical teleology, such as an art movement or school, but also reads it as a unique piece of art (1992, 1993, 1996). In the museum, art is most commonly arranged spatially, such as the period room, or temporally, according to school, style, or artist (1993: 226). The period room presents the objects within "a complex function of multiple relationships within its contextual

milieu," while temporal arrangements "foreground the work's significance as an integral part of an aesthetic or historical development over time" (226).

Focusing on ethnographic displays in museums, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examines what she terms the "the agency of display" in museums (as well as in folkloric performances and festivals), the idea that display "not only shows and speaks, it also *does*" (6). As she argues in *Destination Culture*, items become ethnographic objects not because of what they are intrinsically or where they are found but by their "detach[ment] from their original culture or environment" (18). Any object has a use value for an individual or a community, but this value does not make it ethnographic; only when it is "defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers" (18) does it become so. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett highlights a paradox in ethnography when items with little visual interest that "were never meant to be displayed" are exhibited (2). This lack of visual appeal highlights how interest must be manufactured (2), and it also suggests that the meaning of the object is generated not at its point of origin but at its destination or place of display (12).

Shared across material culture, art history, and ethnography scholarship is the idea that an object's evidentiary potential is constructed rather than is intrinsic to it. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argue the object's meaning is shaped within a system of socially constructed rules they call discourse. To explain the concept, they offer a useful illustration:

> If I kick a spherical object in the street or if I kick a ball in a football match, the *physical* fact is the same, but its *meaning* is different. The object is a football only to the extent that it establishes a system of relations with other objects, and these relations are not given by the mere referential materiality of the objects but are, rather, socially constructed. . . . the discursive character of an object does not, by any means, imply putting its existence into question. The fact that a football is only a football as long as it is integrated within a system of socially constructed rules does not mean that it thereby ceases to be a physical object. (82)

In discussing the difference between a spherical object and a football, Laclau and Mouffe call attention to how the meaning of an object depends on its particular use within social or historical contexts (consider how a football is only a spherical object in certain contexts: in the United States, a football is oval, whereas in Europe or Mexico, for example, a football [soccer ball] is spherical). But they stress that just because meanings are always constructed within certain contexts this does not imply that objects cease to exist outside

that context. The illustration shows the difference between the "being" or meaning of an object, which changes according to the discourse in which it is located, and the object's "entity" or materiality, which doesn't (85).

If objects with no aesthetic visual interest are on display, museums must have another reason for showing them: to this end, Hooper-Greenhill and Tony Bennett examine the educational purposes that inform the display of objects in the modern museum. In *The Birth of the Museum,* Bennett posits that toward the end of the nineteenth century the modern museum "allowed cultural artefacts to be refashioned in ways that would facilitate their deployment for new purposes as parts of governmental programmes aimed at reshaping general norms for social behaviour" (6). Hooper-Greenhill examines how museums became part of the state education system and "new practices emerged as the 'museum' attempted to fulfill its function of transforming the population into a useful resource for the state" (182).

In these readings, museums put objects on display in order to facilitate the construction of narratives of the nation, which in turn instruct and shape visitors' perceptions of and dedication to it. As the United States' official historical and educational institution, the Smithsonian is an exemplary modern museum. The Museum of American History, in which "Personal Legacy" is housed, continually reconceives displays by bringing together the objects in its existing collection in new ways. For example, in April 2004, the museum opened "Taking America to Lunch," which displays seventy-five lunch boxes from its collection. These boxes could easily be used in period exhibits such as "Within These Walls," the story of five families who lived in the same house over a period of two hundred years, or "More Work for Mother" in "Hands on History," one of the museum's interactive rooms. In addition, the museum's floor plan organizes objects thematically such as "the history of science and technology" and "technological and social issues." The architectural design (doorways, walls, and stairs directing the flow of human traffic) forces visitors to proceed through the museum in a particular direction and, at the same time, teaches them conventional behavior in the museum (even if they choose to ignore it, which many do). Through these apparatuses and techniques, the museum shapes as much as it displays American identity. In contrast, while the Veterans Art Museum also educates visitors about the experience of war, it does so without government funding and its concomitant constraints. Like the "Personal Legacy" exhibit, the art museum's displays and floor plans are used to stage narratives about the war. However, the building itself is a converted warehouse not specifically designed for display or visitors and has not been significantly altered to shepherd visitors along certain paths. If the Smithsonian constructs and represents American identity generally, the

Veterans Art Museum does the same with veteran identity more specifically. But their differences—in the display choices and the narratives of the war produced through these decisions—matter, as I show.

PERSONAL LEGACY: HEALING THE NATION BY OMITTING THE WAR

"Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation" was on display in the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of American History from 1991 until its permanent closure in September 2003. The exhibit consists of two elements: a selection of objects that were left at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial, displayed in a large glass display case along the full length of one wall, and a free-standing structure in the center of the room that includes a model of the Memorial on one side and more objects encased in a small vitrine on the other. In both elements of the exhibit, jointly organized by the Smithsonian and the National Parks Service, information labels provide some history of and background to the practice of leaving objects at the Wall and summarize the difficulties faced by veterans on their return to the United States.

Figure 4. "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation" exhibition. Courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

On Veterans Day, 2004, a new military history exhibit replaced "Personal Legacy" and its adjacent "Hall of Armed Forces History;" the new exhibit, "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War," provides a coherent narrative of the history of American involvement in wars, emphasizing the perspective of ordinary Americans who fought in them.

Objects collected from the Wall and displayed in "Personal Legacy" are arranged and juxtaposed to construct a narrative of the war that calls attention to the cultural resonance of the Wall and the preponderance of memory over history. At the same time as the exhibit contextualizes the practice of leaving objects within what it deems a uniquely American cultural and historical milieu, it omits the larger historical background and political circumstances that would explain the existence of the Wall and why people leave objects there. The implications for these erasures are particularly significant for a museum that has as its primary goal the education of the American public.

As visitors make their way through the museum, they will see directions to a third-floor exhibit titled "Vietnam: Personal Legacy." If visitors follow the route suggested, they will walk through the Hall of Armed Forces History and into an area containing "Personal Legacy" along with other exhibits related to military history such as "West Point in The Making of America," "A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution," and "Gunboat Philadelphia." Once past the hall, the exhibit's name changes from "Vietnam: Personal Legacy" to "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation," losing direct reference to Vietnam and offering an interpretation and outcome for the exhibit's focus—the leaving of objects at the Wall.

"Personal Legacy" displays a selection of objects that were left at the Wall between its dedication in 13 November 1982 and the cutoff date for the exhibit, 31 October 1991. Twice a day, the National Parks Service (NPS) collects items that have been left there and transports them to a storage facility in Maryland, where they are catalogued and preserved. Edward Ezell of the Smithsonian and Duery Felton and Pamela Beth West of NPS selected items from storage for display in "Personal Legacy." In the display, the objects are grouped into the following four time periods: 1982–1985, 1986–1987, 1988–1989, and 1990–1991 (see Figure 4). In the narrative accompanying the exhibit, curator Ezell explains that the types of object left at the Wall have changed over time:

> The kinds and the nature of the objects left at the Memorial have evolved over the past decade. In the early years, remembrances generally were smaller, unsigned, spontaneous offerings. Today they tend to be personalized assemblages. Early messages were hastily scribbled and

> left out in the open, but many now are framed, laminated, or covered in protective plastic. Among the first donors were family members, comrades, and loved ones of those who served and died in Southeast Asia. Later offerings reflect all segments of society—young and old, American and foreign. The Wall speaks to more than the Vietnam generation. It reminds all people of the ultimate cost of war. The only consistent data available for objects are the date they were left and the place or panel at which they were placed. Each object's story often remains known only to the donor. These items invite our contemplation, reflection, and our own conclusions.

To depict the evolution Ezell discusses, the exhibit organizes the objects temporally and spatially. The chronological format of the encased objects, most clearly suggested in the four date markers, makes it possible for visitors to perceive both an evolution in the types of objects left at the Wall and a progression from spontaneous offerings to personal assemblages. Paradoxically, the cutoff date, 31 October 1991, mitigates any possibility of further evolution. Perhaps the exhibition would have been updated had Ezell not passed away in 1993, but his death delimits the exhibit with the result that "Personal Legacy" memorializes the curator as much as the objects memorialize the war dead.[7]

Visitors also see in the large display case a spatial arrangement replicating how the Wall might look after many items have been left there. Despite Ezell's assertion that the types of objects left at the Wall have evolved over time, any significant progression is hard to identify in a display that generally appears cluttered with seemingly random items. Commonly left objects such as helmets, teddy bears, buttons, badges, and handwritten or typed notes appear at every stage of the display. Dotted between these common items are larger and more eye catching pieces, such as a nurse's uniform and a mock up of a tiger cage, used by America's south Vietnamese allies to imprison members of the Viet Cong. The exhibit clearly has been arranged for aesthetic appeal as well as to attempt an accurate portrayal of the practice of leaving objects. But this staging, mimicking how the Wall might look, is artificial because while some objects have been chosen for their ordinariness, others are on display for their unusual appeal. As the selection of objects mitigates an accurate re-creation of the Wall, so the number or range of items displayed in the exhibit is far greater and more varied than would be seen on an average day at the Wall.

In contrast to the loosely temporal yet randomly organized display, selected items dividing each of the four time periods are arranged in a highly structured fashion. A display of dog tags is set in between the first two time

periods, 1982–85 and 1986–87, while a collection of military stripes appears between 1986–87 and 1988–89, and rows of Prisoner of War/ Missing in Action (POW/MIA) bracelets are set between the final two time periods, 1988–89 and 1990–91. So far I have suggested the exhibit arranges items in two ways—in a chronological trajectory that narrates the evolution of object leaving and in a spatial staging that simulates the leavings at the Wall. But these in-between sections present the objects in a third type of arrangement: not temporal or spatial but thematic. The dog tags, stripes, and bracelets demarcate each of the temporal periods and create a different kind of aesthetic interest. In the center display, a frame containing approximately one hundred neatly arranged military stripes reaches almost four feet high. Candles are placed beneath the frame with, at each side, desk flags depicting military and state insignia. Matching candle and flag arrangements are positioned beneath similarly organized dog tag and bracelet displays. These arrangements thus have the appearance of shrines, reminding visitors of those who died or are missing and referencing the grief of those who mourn at the Wall. Presented as sites of mourning, these thematic displays speak to the living, helping visitors understand the significance of the other objects on display. Although it is

Figure 5. Display of military stripes in "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation" exhibition. Courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

not clear if the candles and flags were collected from the Wall or provided by the museum, they also narrate the exhibition as a place of memory and ritual, like the Wall itself.

Because the dog tags, stripes, and bracelets are placed between each periodized section, the display implies their leaving occurred in a chronological order also. The arrangement implies that in the early years, visitors to the Wall would leave dog tags and that later military stripes were more common. By the end of the 1980s, according to the chronology, visitors favored leaving POW/ MIA bracelets. The time order produces a specific narrative about visitors' interactions with the Wall. Evolving over the ten-year period covered by the exhibition, changes in the types of objects suggest parallel changes in attitudes among the American public toward the war, veterans, and the role of the Wall in memorializing the war. The progression from dog tags to stripes narrates a shift from soldier to hero (all soldiers had tags, but only those who rose through the ranks of the military had stripes), while the move from stripes to bracelets narrates another shift from the dead to the missing and presumably alive soldiers (recall how the POW/ MIA movement's rationale is based on the firm belief that soldiers are still alive), as well as from the war era to the postwar era (soldiers were decorated during the war, but the POW/ MIA movement continues to the present day). But, like the spatial arrangement that stages the exhibition to look like the Wall, these themed sections also are artificial because the items were left at the Wall during the entire period represented by the museum's collection, not just within the specific time period within which they are displayed. So, the dog tags placed between 1982–1985 and 1986–1987 might have been left at the Wall during any time between 1982 and the exhibit's completion date in 1991; in other words, the narrated evolution in object leaving is as much constructed as it is observed.

In the museum, these offerings are presented as meaningful simply because they were left at the Wall. In *Carried to the Wall,* Kristin Hass argues that each object left at the Wall "is a response to the problem of patriotism in the wake of the war" and that "each object is caught up in the symbolic negotiations of the shape of the nation at the Wall" (89). But when she elaborates on the symbolic meaning of objects to leavers, this argument cannot be sustained because those meanings can never be known by outside observers. Let me use one example from Hass' generally very persuasive work to illustrate how her argument becomes undone at the point when she tries to read symbolic potential into the objects. Hass interprets a Slim Jim, a metal device for unlocking car doors that was left at the Wall in 1990, in several symbolic ways. She starts by suggesting it might symbolize a "memory about

stolen life" or "a metaphor for unlocking the seamless listing of the memorial" and concludes that the Slim Jim "helps the living to unlock, to release, the dead" (100). While Hass acknowledges that the item might have been left at the Wall for a more mundane reason, in "reference to a habit of stealing cars," she does not draw a distinction between the meaning of the objects to its leavers and the meaning to her, the ethnographer at the Wall. But this distinction is a crucial one because the interpretations are Hass' and not the leaver's, and the meanings are only generated at the destination (at the Wall, with Hass observing) not at the source (with the person who left the Slim Jim at the Wall), to put it in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's terms.

As Laclau and Mouffe suggest, the identity and meaning of an object is constituted by the discourse it enters. Thus, the Slim Jim will have significantly different meanings in everyday use, at the Wall, or on display in the Smithsonian. In the discourse of the everyday, a Slim Jim, as Hass correctly suggests, is a device for breaking into locked cars. Although Hass' reading implies its illegal use, Slim Jims are commonly and legally available. Because the Wall is a memorial site, when left there a Slim Jim becomes an offering for the dead, a way to connect the leaver to a name on the Wall. While we cannot know its specific significance, we can know that it has some significance to the person who left it. When the item moves into the museum, it takes on other meanings. If displayed in "Personal Legacy," a Slim Jim's everyday meaning would lessen and the item would convey instead an official recognition of the war, the dead, and the person who left it. The item would become meaningful as an object of memorialization (at the Wall) and of aestheticization (in the museum). Visitors would look at the item and see a Slim Jim, but its display would provoke speculation on its other meanings, as I have suggested above.

Items on display in the museum also become meaningful as ethnographic objects by being removed from the Wall. This removal decontextualizes the items from their relationships with leavers and with names on the Wall and recontextualizes them as cultural and historical artifacts. Culturally, they illustrate the American public's response to the Wall. Historically, they represent contemporary memorializing. In ways similar to the function of objects in the natural history or ethnographic museum, objects plucked from the Wall to be displayed in the museum are at once essentialized (becoming the quintessence of the objects left at the Wall) and totalizing (standing in for all objects left there), to reference Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's argument for a second time (55).

In the "Personal Legacy" exhibit, items are displayed temporally, spatially, and thematically, depicting the evolution in the kinds of items left at

the wall, staging the Wall as it looks when people leave objects at it, and conveying the Wall's spiritual and symbolic resonance. In the spatial organization of the museum itself, "Personal Legacy" is located in a room immediately beyond the Hall of Armed Forces History. Visitors can pass through the hall into a room that contains "Personal Legacy" and several other war-themed exhibits. Because the Hall of Armed Forces History ends with "G.I.: World War II" and this hall leads into "Personal Legacy," visitors might assume that the museum chronologizes war and that "Personal Legacy" addresses the war in Vietnam the way that "G.I.: World War II" presents that war. However, two problems emerge with this chronology: first of all, the sequence only works if visitors ignore (as the museum did before the installation of the new exhibit, "The Price of Freedom") the intervening war in Korea. More importantly, the Armed Forces Hall and "Personal Legacy" are clearly separate exhibitions. Thus, to understand the chronology, visitors must themselves make the connection between the World War II exhibit at the end of the Hall and "Personal Legacy" in the adjacent room. However, visitors might have additional difficulty making this connection because "Personal Legacy," like the Hall of Armed Forces History, does not discuss the history of the war in Vietnam at all.

The war itself is mentioned twice in the exhibit's written explanations, both times in relation to its legacies on the home front. The label explaining the main section of the exhibit, quoted earlier, states: "[a]mong the first donors were family members, comrades, and loved ones of those who served and died in Southeast Asia. Later offerings reflect all segments of society—young and old, American and foreign. The Wall speaks to more than the Vietnam generation. It reminds all people of the ultimate cost of war." The narrative affixed to the model of the Wall declares: "[t]his selection of remembrances provides us an opportunity to ponder the continuing impact of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the generation that lived through that conflict." In both explanations, the focus is on the legacies of the war, not its history. In the first, the text suggests that the objects rather than any direct or specific details of the war remind people of the ultimate cost of war. The second label reinforces the exhibition's proposal that the Wall not the war has a continuing impact on the war-era generation. Because the exhibit's purpose is to display objects left at the Wall, it might not seem fair to criticize its omission of the war's history. However, the exhibition's placement beside the Hall of Armed Forces History implies that a history of the war is being presented, just as a history of World War II is presented through the figure of the G.I. In effect, the museum presents a history of America at war that omits the Vietnam War yet includes American citizens' responses to it.

While the labels fail to historicize the exhibit, other accompanying materials do provide some historical and cultural context to help shape visitors' perceptions about the Wall. In the printed brochure accompanying "Personal Legacy," the objects are described using a variety of carefully chosen expressions like "tokens of remembrance," "mementos," "keepsakes," "collections of messages and gifts from the heart," "outpourings," "gifts," "remembrances," "personalized assemblages," "messages," and "offerings." The museum describes leaving objects as personal and individualized gestures, emphasizing both the emotional reaction of the visitor and the connection between the donor (the person leaving the object) and the dead (the name on the Wall). The brochure tries to personalize the practice (Personal Legacy) as it also nationalizes the experience of recovery (The Healing of a Nation). Further serving to limit the meaning of national healing to personal grief, the cover of the brochure features a man wearing what looks like a military shirt with his arms dramatically outstretched above his head, his palms flat against the Wall touching several names, and his forehead resting on the granite. The fact that he touches several names at once suggests that he feels grief not just for one person but for several soldiers who died at the same time. Because the man's face cannot be seen, he functions as a symbolic griever at the Wall, and his anonymity allows both veterans and nonveterans to connect with his grief. The image does nothing to illustrate directly the practice of leaving objects, which is the exhibit's focus after all, but the portrait of an anonymous griever helps to connect the exhibit with the emotions evoked at the Wall.

This emotive image is one way the Smithsonian counteracts the potential sterilizing of the objects' meanings when it displays them behind glass in the museum. The photograph, like the text in the pamphlet and the labels in the exhibit, guides visitors to understand the significance of the exhibit. But unlike the exhibit, which lacks reference to the history of the war, the brochure includes a historical overview of the war in three short paragraphs. The first starts with one word—"Vietnam"—and provides some basic statistics about the war, including its duration; figures for the amount of Americans dead, wounded, and disabled; and number of those still missing. The second paragraph discusses the difficulties veterans faced trying to explain their war experiences to those at home, especially before the Wall was built. In the final paragraph, the brochure presents the America to which veterans returned, divided as it was by opinions about the war. According to the pamphlet and aligned with the narrative at The Wall That Heals, few veterans received a thank you, and few who died were publicly mourned—until the Wall was built.

In order to provide visitors with the context in which to understand the Wall, these materials need to be available at the exhibition. Yet while exhibition

Figure 6. Cover, "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation" pamphlet.

pamphlets usually are available in abundance at the museum, in the spring of 1999, the museum had to photocopy one of the few remaining pamphlets for me. When I visited "Personal Legacy" in 2002, no printed literature was available. The absence of supplementary materials suggests that the exhibit had become neglected but also perhaps that the museum wished to separate the objects and the Wall's history it displays from the history of the war. Indeed, the lack of war history produces a specific narrative of memorializing in the postwar era. The museum's basic mission is "to inspire a broader understanding of our nation and its many peoples;" and Brent Glass, the museum's director, writes that "the Museum takes care of more than three million objects that preserve the memories and experiences of the American people.[8] The museum's large collection of objects and its interpretive activities make this "the place where history comes alive." But the history presented in "Personal Legacy" is partial and incomplete. It is a history not of the war but of the response of the American public to the war. Within that history, only one response is presented—grieving—and only one form of grieving is presented—leaving objects at the Wall. Even the pamphlet, which does address the war, provides barely enough information for the visitor/ reader to appreciate how personal grieving for the dead is aligned with healing the nation. In addition, the Wall's facilitation of national healing is presented as a given and no discussion occurs on whether or not the nation really has been healed after the war or even what exactly healing constitutes.

In the museum, objects become meaningful through their role in the construction of an official history of the nation's healing process after the war in Vietnam. The context in which visitors contemplate objects is carefully scripted by the museum, but the particular meaning of any object to its leaver can never be known by others. An object's significance will thus always be shaped through the context of its position on the Mall, either at the Wall or in the museum. And because observers can endlessly contemplate the meaning of an object and its significance to the person who left it, its source meaning remains elusive to them. The objects themselves not only resist the knowledge produced about them in the museum space; they also reinforce memory's dominance over history in the exhibit and in cultural discourse. The museum does not use the objects to narrate history, but they can be used to demonstrate memory.

In comparison with "Personal Legacy," objects displayed in the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum omit history as much to foreground the viscerality of war as its memory. The exhibits produce knowledge about the war that is immediate and experiential—visitors are shocked or moved by the art works and memorial of dog tags, and veterans are reminded of

their own experiences in combat. Through its chaotic and overwhelming displays and exhibits, the museum creates a sensory overload that I call aesthetics of the quagmire, an exhibitionary technique that serves to recreate the grunts' experiences of war.

THE NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS ART MUSEUM: AESTHETICS OF THE QUAGMIRE

The National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago presents the brutal and confusing experience of war through its displays of objects of war and remembrance. In the museum, artworks produced by veterans are displayed alongside captured weapons. At the entrance to the museum, a memorial made of over 58,000 dog tags brings together art and military relics. If the Smithsonian's "Personal Legacy" exhibit puts citizens' memorializing practices on display, the Veterans Art Museum shows how visiting the museum and creating art for display are themselves memorializing acts. At every level of the museum's display, from individual artworks to the arrangement of items on the floor or wall, to the juxtaposition of artworks with war relics, a narrative of the war as quagmire is presented. This aesthetic attempts to simulate a visceral experience for the viewer, comparable to Michael Herr's simulation of the viscerality of war in *Dispatches*. In addition, this narrative, like in "Personal Legacy," erases important aspects of the war but at the same time allows visitors to experience some of what veterans experienced in Vietnam.

The seed was sown for the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in the late 1970s when a group of three veterans put together a show of veterans' artwork at N.A.M.E. gallery in Chicago. Calling themselves the Vietnam Veterans Art Group, the three soon joined with Vietnam veteran artist Joseph Clarence Fornelli and Sondra Varco, who would later become the museum's Executive Director, to open an exhibit titled "Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections" in October 1981 (Varco 9–13), a title that foregrounds the museum's choice to focus on experience and memory over history. By the end of the 1980s, the art group had grown from its original five members to over one hundred. Between 1983 and 1992, the group brought its exhibition to over thirty galleries and display sites across the U.S. and attracted new members at each place. After being housed free of charge for two years in a temporary gallery space, it purchased a warehouse from the City of Chicago on the corner of 18th Street and Indiana Avenue South in the Grant Park neighborhood for a token payment of $1; the City also donated over $1,000,000 to renovate the premises. In August 1996, the National Vietnam

Veterans Art Museum opened to the public. On its opening, the museum owned over 500 works of art and accepted everything donated by veterans; now it must jury the acquisition of new pieces. Today the museum owns over 1,000 pieces of art by over 130 artists, the overwhelming majority of whom are American, though some are Australian, Cambodian, Thai, and Vietnamese, including former members of the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese Army.

The museum's history and mission statement focus proudly on its refusal to offer political commentary on the war or to modify the collection in any way. On its website, the museum asserts that it is "adamantly apolitical and without bias," a claim that, however admirable, seems somewhat implausible for a museum based on war. In the museum's only full length publication named for its first exhibition, "Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections," Vietnam veteran and art historian Anthony Janson explains the museum's apolitical claim, noting that in its collection "[t]here is remarkably little direct commentary for or against the war in the art of Vietnam veterans" (202) and that most veterans are "deeply offended by the use of their art as a vehicle for someone else's political opinions." Yet he concludes that to treat this art neutrally is "hardly possible" (199). In her brief history of the Vietnam Veteran Art Group, Varco points out the group's refusal to censor or edit works that may be offensive to individual viewers or corporate sponsors because of their graphic nature, for example. Her assertion that in the early days veterans brought their wives and children to see the exhibit in order to "show them what Vietnam was really like" (11) indicates how the museum's emphasis on the perceived truth of the war and on artistic authenticity were and continue to be a significant lens through which visitors appreciate its art and understand its general mission. Put differently, the museum puts the representation of the war in the control of those who experienced it first hand—the veterans—refusing to discriminate among the artworks and at the same time privileging their perspectives.[9]

The museum's commitment to apoliticism and veteran authenticity translates into a general lack of curatorial practice as it is usually conducted at a traditional museum. In many places, paintings and photographs are displayed salon style, covering some walls almost to capacity, while sculptures are spread all over the floor space. Praising the lack of spatial organization at the museum in her article, "The Blank Space on the Gallery Wall: The Art of Vietnam Veterans in Context," Eve Sinaiko argues that the museum "has always resisted the rhetoric of pristine museum walls and sought to undermine the aesthetic hierarchies of gallery practice" (230). Her comment implies that the museum deliberately challenges the conventions of display

in the traditional museum as described by Hooper-Greenhill, Preziosi, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Bennett, among others.

The organization of space and objects at the Veterans Art Museum, or more appropriately the lack of organization, is as much a challenge to the prevailing conventions of display as it is the creation of an aesthetic of the quagmire in representing the war. This aesthetic enables the construction of a specific experience for its visitors and also produces a particular meaning of the war. For veterans, the word "quagmire" reminds them of immediate, confusing, and overwhelming experiences during their time in Vietnam. The museum tries to teach visitors what Vietnam "was really like," which for many veterans was a combination of physical and mental exhaustion, sensory overload, increasing frustration, and hopelessness. The term also functions as a political metaphor, which, along with "imperialist" and "noble cause," constitutes three competing descriptions of the war that continue to circulate, as Bruce Franklin argues in *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies.*[10] Franklin suggests that while the noble cause theory depicts the U.S. government during the war era as "a coward and a weakling," and the imperialism critique reads the government as "a ruthless agent of power and domination," the quagmire paradigm positions it as "a well-intentioned but self-deceived incompetent" (43). The idea that the war was a quagmire, proposed originally by David Halberstam in his 1965 work *The Making of a Quagmire,* provides an account of war that was appealing to many soldiers and veterans who came to question or oppose the conflict but still desired to have their role in it honored. Halberstam describes how the U.S. government found itself "caught in a limited, ineffective[,] and almost certainly doomed holding action" (38, 322) that was followed, according to Franklin, by "years of errors, misunderstandings, and confusion as America lurche[d] and wallow[ed] deeper and deeper into the mire of Vietnam" (42). The quagmire theory highlights the confusion and frustration felt by those stationed in Vietnam and primarily evokes the first-hand experience of veterans without addressing the larger political agenda. The theory is political but focuses on government incompetence rather than deliberate imperialism and affirms the individual nobility of soldiers without claiming the war was a noble cause. As a metaphor, "quagmire" refers to not only the confusion of battle but also the idea that Vietnam's landscape contributed to that confusion, thus emphasizing an experience only the grunts—on the ground, in the jungle, in the quagmire—could have knowledge of. While the imperialism theory implies forward planning and the future conquest of nations, and the noble cause theory retrospectively rewrites the war as a history of American military success, the quagmire theory captures the immediacy of the war experience in Vietnam. By representing the war as

quagmire, the museum suggests the war can be understood as aesthetic experience rather than historical event. It also suggests that the veterans' experiences can be accepted as a type of authentic history without discussions of the political aspects of the war (the causes, purposes, and outcomes other than those directly affecting veterans).

At the Veterans Art Museum, the lack of attention to the larger political agenda that precipitated and prolonged U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the foregrounding of experience over history, and the privileging of veterans' perspectives on the war all contribute to the construction of a quagmire aesthetic. These elements appear in individual works of art, in the juxtapositions of items, and in the display of art with war relics. The quagmire aesthetic, however, should not be considered the result of carefully constructed curatorial practice. Curation, in the form of the systematic ordering of relations between objects, appears lacking at this museum for the most part, but individual works of art function as they do at the modern museum: each piece has its place in the taxonomy of Vietnam veterans art and, at the same time, represents an element of what can be termed, albeit somewhat problematically, the Vietnam experience. The artwork on display also functions ethnographically: whether purposely or not, many of the works do not meet standards that have developed through traditional forms of art connoisseurship or observe the styles of particular art schools. Thus, the artworks are more likely to be contemplated for what they convey about the veteran artists' war or postwar experiences. But the absence of modern curatorial practice becomes its own form of curatorial practice; the absence of the history of the war in the museum's aesthetics of the quagmire produces another way of knowing and understanding the war; and the museum's professed apoliticism becomes itself a political stance.

The authenticity of the veteran-artist is central to the quagmire aesthetic and to the museum's ideology as a whole, but this authenticity is particularly important for photographs, the only medium on display created during the war and in the battlefields (with the exception of Joe Fornelli's works: watercolors constructed using C-ration coffee and river water and sculptures like "Dressed to Kill," made in the field and shipped back to the U.S.)[11] Photographs confirm the quagmire aesthetic in more immediate ways than other artistic media. Despite the artistic subjectivity in their composition, developing, printing, selection, and framing, photographs represent the experience of war as it was happening, not afterwards when the veteran returned to the U.S. John Tagg argues that institutions give photography "its status as a unified something," which conveys the belief that "photographs picture the real" (63). While Tagg is writing of disciplinary institutions, such as the

police force, the prison, the asylum, and the like, I would argue photographs function in a similar way at the Veterans Art Museum: they authenticate the other art on display, provide the context through which to understand some of the most abstract pieces and, as a result, are used to constitute a particular truth about the war. Because the quagmire functions on at least three levels in the museum—in the content of individual art, the arrangement of items, and the display of art with war relics—my analysis also proceeds through each of these layers. The museum's visceral effect works on all levels, from the overwhelming power of a single image to the questions and confusions provoked by the layout of the museum as a whole.

Art Dockter's photograph, "Real Dead Dead," depicts a hideously mutilated body lying in an unidentified field in Vietnam. The body is so deformed it is difficult to tell immediately whether it is American or Vietnamese, although the uniform rags around the body's ankles and upper thighs tell us this was a soldier not a civilian; the size and shape of thighs indicate, additionally, the body was male. (On closer inspection, it is possible to determine he was Vietnamese.) The legs and torso are cut in sections, the left knee is severed, the head is completely detached, and the face appears to have been ripped off, turned inside out, and flung away from the rest of the body. Despite its destruction, the body lies in an odd, silent state of repose—the

Figure 7. Art Dockter, "Real Dead Dead" (1970). Courtesy of artist.

left arm, severed at the elbow, gestures upwards, the feet point towards each other, and the body lies slightly to one side as if in a sleeping position. And yet, it has been violently torn apart; muscles and tissue are exposed and the upper part of the torso is charred black. The absence of blood suggests, mercifully, that this young soldier was killed on impact.

In many ways, the graphic photograph is the most recognizable and influential documentary medium of war. (Graphic depictions such as "Real Dead Dead" recall the long history of photographing the war dead beginning with Timothy Sullivan's shocking Civil War photograph, "A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg," which by depicting dead bodies strewn all over the battlefield illustrates how dying in war lacked gallantry.[12]) Photographic and televisual images of Vietnam—including firefights, the wounded, Vietnamese landscapes, and GIs arriving, leaving, and sitting around—saturated televisions, newspapers, and magazines across the U.S. from the mid 1960s on. Iconic images from the era, like Eddie Adams' 1968 portrait of General Loan shooting a Viet Cong prisoner in the head and Nick Ut's 1972 image of nine years old Kim Phuc and other children fleeing a napalm attack, are frequently accorded the distinction of shifting public opinion in the U.S. against the war.[13] This kind of photography shaped public perceptions of the Vietnam War to a greater extent than photography has done in any war before or since. While Joe Rosenthal's photograph of soldiers raising the flag atop Mount Suribachi in Iwo Jima has become the single most widely known photograph of war, photographic images captured during the Vietnam War do more than signify patriotism and victory, like Rosenthal's does, but have the power to effect change. By strongly influencing public opinion about U.S. involvement in Vietnam at the time they were released by Associated Press and distributed across the world, Adams' and Ut's images seem to challenge Roland Barthes' and Susan Sontag's arguments that photographs only confirm political or moral positions but do not change them (Barthes 1978; Sontag 1973). Today, the war continues to be defined and remembered by a handful of still images taken in Vietnam, from General Loan pulling the trigger at the height of the war to Huey helicopters lifting the last evacuees from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon on 29 April 1975.

In this context, Dockter's photographs are understandable as part of the history of Vietnam War photography. Photographs taken in Vietnam and displayed in the art museum function both as documentary, reproducing a moment of the war, and as artwork, creative renderings of that moment. Their display in the art museum affirms this duality, which promotes the photograph as both a part of history and a piece of art. In turn, the duality confirms the museum's belief in the veteran-artist's bona fide experience in

Vietnam, permitting the photograph to convey both the immediacy of the war and the authentic role of the veteran in it.

In "Real Dead Dead," the mutilated body fills the whole frame except for the hint of another dead body in the top left hand corner. The image's gruesome content surely evokes an immediate visceral response of horror, revulsion, or disgust from all but the most hardened viewer. But the viewer's visceral response may be tempered by the sterilizing aspects of the photograph—the distinct lack of blood as well as the lack of context, such as might be provided by the depiction of other soldiers, weaponry, or scenery. The fact that the soldier's face has been torn off and thrown away from the body adds to this tempering, complicating what Susan Sontag calls the "powerful interdiction against showing the naked face" in war photography (2003: 70). "The more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying," Sontag suggests (70). Images of starving or mutilated children in, for example, Biafra or Rwanda, "show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired. They confirm that this is the sort of thing which happens in that place" (71). In contrast, by World War II, American casualties were always photographed "prone or shrouded or with their face turned away[,] . . ."a dignity not thought necessary to accord to others" (70). Because the Vietnamese soldier's face is missing, viewers should not assume the photograph necessarily affirms American opposition to the display of full frontal suffering, or that this image challenges the war photograph's willingness to portray the suffering of the "Other." Rather, the image is doubly confrontational, showing a view of suffering (the torn apart body) that is full frontal (the camera looks directly at the dead) and is even more "Othered" by the face being absent from the body yet still visible in the image.

The first time I came across this photograph, in December 1999, it was on display in a special area of the exhibition space labeled with a warning about its "potentially disturbing" content. The image was displayed beside other gruesome photos by Dockter in a multi-artist collection of particularly graphic works depicting violent deaths. By August 2002, the photograph had been moved into the first floor gallery and set below another of Dockter's images titled "Living Dead Contemplating the Dead Dead," a photo depicting several GIs looking at the bodies of dead Vietnamese. (By June 2004, my most recent visit to the museum, both images had been removed by Dockter. See endnotes to this chapter for a discussion on other changes to the museum.) This image shows the full figures of five soldiers standing with their backs to the camera and gazing down on several mutilated bodies (the exact number is unclear). As we look closely, we see that

Figure 8. Art Dockter, "Living Dead Contemplating the Dead Dead" (1970). Courtesy of artist.

one of the dead bodies to the right of the soldiers is the same one that fills the frame in "Real Dead Dead."

The placement of "Living Dead" above "Real Dead Dead" invites us to view the image of the mutilated body in the same way that the group of five soldiers is depicted as viewing it in "Living Dead." Because "Real Dead Dead" is a close up of the most mutilated of the bodies in the wider shot of "Living Dead," its arrangement on the wall suggests Dockter has moved forward to gaze on the dead body in the same way the soldiers did, gathering closer to get a better look. And as visitors to the museum, we voyeuristically gaze over the shoulders of the GIs to see what they see.

If immediate shock at "Real Dead Dead" is somehow tempered by the photograph's unemotional representation of the dead body, the display of the photographs together is likely to provoke a new visceral response to the images. Displayed on its own, "Read Dead Dead" coolly documents the human cost of technological warfare in Vietnam. But when "Real Dead Dead" is placed beside "Living Dead," the photographic arrangement shifts the viewers' focus to the American soldiers' perspective and constructs an American narrative of Vietnamese death. Looking at these images, viewers will consider what it means for this kind of gruesome death to become

Figure 9. Art Dockter, "Living Dead Contemplating the Dead Dead" and "Real Dead Dead," on display at the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum. Photograph by author.

commonplace, and what it means for the photograph to represent only the grunts' response to the dead body and not, for example, the response of local Vietnamese observers.

These images, individually and in juxtaposition, depict the war as quagmire: no one knows exactly who killed these Vietnamese soldiers, and the GIs' casual stance appears to suggest that coming across these bodies is unremarkable. Whether or not they were horrified when they first came across these bodies, in Dockter's photograph, the GIs' body language—their legs apart, one of them lighting a cigarette, all of them standing rather than

kneeling—speaks of resignation not shock. In *Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections*, Dockter explains that the GIs were not nonchalant, as the photograph might suggest, but "seemed exhausted and dazed" (54). Ultimately, the GIs' stance tells us that this scene, while gruesome in its extremity, is not at all unusual in its occurrence. When the museum rejects overt political commentary and yet depicts gruesome violence as common practice, how can visitors read the aesthetics of the quagmire but as primarily experiential? In this way, the museum displays graphic photographs, such as Dockter's, to narrate the war experientially rather than historically.

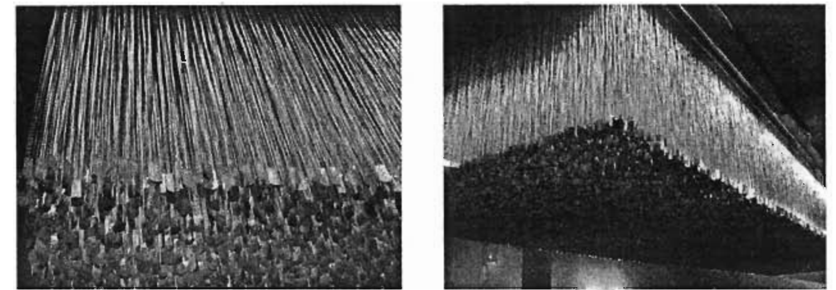
And yet the juxtaposition of military relics beside artwork helps put the quagmire aesthetic in historical context. The collection includes small and medium sized arms brought back from Vietnam—mostly Russian, Chinese, and Czech weaponry used by the National Liberation Front or North Vietnamese Army. These relics provide the material, or more precisely the military matériel, to convey the technological details of the U.S.'s foray into Southeast Asia. Placed beside artistic renderings of veterans' war experiences, the military relics add empirical knowledge of the war to the meanings conveyed by the artwork, and they complicate visitors' understandings of this place as an art museum. These war relics are randomly scattered around the gallery space. Their apparent lack of organization, like the art displays, stages the museum as representative of the quagmire of the war, coded as confusing, lacking in planning, and ultimately without clear meaning or order. No obvious attempts to juxtapose a particular relic with a specific art piece are apparent, but the very presence of the war relics contextualizes the art: if the lack of curatorial practice with regard to the artwork does not make painfully clear to visitors the milieu in which these artworks were created, the war relics remove any uncertainty.

Because the weapons were found or captured by U.S. soldiers, they both illustrate the soldiers' experiences in Vietnam and confirm the museum's self-presentation as an authentic site of veterans' memory. Some items are common: both the U.S. military's standard issue M-16 rifle and the Russian-made RPG-2 and RPG-7 rocket launchers used by the North Vietnamese Army would be instantly recognizable to anyone who was stationed in Vietnam, is interested in military history, or has watched at least a couple of Vietnam War movies. Other weapons are more obscure: for example, a Pattern 1912 Maxim machine gun, not widely used by Vietnamese, and a Czech VK light machine gun to which someone has attached a Japanese magazine are likely to be rare curiosities for even the Vietnam War veteran. Each weapon could suggest two narratives: one of the U.S. veteran who donated it to the museum and another of the Vietnamese soldier to whom it initially belonged.

But the museum is not interested in telling the story of Vietnamese soldiers; rather, it situates the weapons among the artwork of U.S. veterans in order to narrate their versions of the Vietnam War experience only.

By creating a techno-military context by which to view the art, artistic critique becomes more difficult. Thus, the art juxtaposed with war relics collected from Vietnamese can be read more as ethnographic objects, giving visitors insight into guerrilla warfare but again always from an American perspective. Because these guns and rocket launchers could only be brought back to the U.S. discreetly and illegally, in pieces, and hidden in a soldier's luggage, their display in the museum space feels like a private collection on show. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the museum has not edited the collection for display or arranged the weapons in any particular order. The displays of weapons donated to the museum and their function as ethnographic objects produce two specific narratives: that the war can be known through the individual experiences of veterans and that it was an American experience. In addition, because the weapons contextualize the artwork yet make critique of it difficult, veterans' artistic representations are allowed to stand without scrutiny or analysis, and the absence of labels directing visitors to read the artwork in particular ways compounds this lack of critique. Ultimately, then, the juxtaposition of war relics with art reinforces the quagmire aesthetic, providing a visceral encounter with the American veterans' war experience that avoids addressing the historical and political social causes and consequences of the war.

In fact, weapons authenticate the veterans' artwork through not only their placement beside art but also their incorporation within it, making a clear distinction between art and war relic sometimes impossible. For example, Ned Broderick's sculpture, "Le Duc Tho Goes to Paris to Discuss the Shape of a Table," includes a submachine gun barrel protruding from a face constructed of polyurethane resin embedded in a suitcase. Joe Fornelli's "Dressed to Kill" comprises a teak head with spiked hair made from brass 50-caliber shell casings. Several sculptures include helmets and combat boots while other works are constructed from pieces of metal, prosthetics, and other material residues of war and injury. But the most impressive piece that brings art and war relics together is "Above and Beyond," a memorial made of 58,226 dog tags, each imprinted with the name of someone who died in Vietnam. The dog tags of "Above and Beyond" hang from the ceiling twenty-four feet above the atrium entrance to the museum and are arranged in chronological order according to the date of death, just as they are on the Wall. The large mobile, if you will, is ten by forty feet, each tag spaced exactly one inch apart, with the whole structure perpetually in motion. When the



Figures 10 & 11. "Above and Beyond" dog tag memorial, National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, Chicago. Photographs by author.

door opens into the museum or when a breeze blows through the atrium, the dog tags knock against each other, ringing gently like a massive wind chime and constantly reminding visitors and staff of their presence. A staff member told me she did not imagine the memorial would shiver and chime in this way, but stressed all staff members feel this unexpected consequence of its position above the atrium is one of its most moving features.[14]

The efficacy of "Above and Beyond" memorial as art emerges from its composition, its location in the museum, and its symbolic potential. The overall design, a basic rectangle, is so simple that the shape does not detract from the tags themselves; in fact, it is the tags that shape the memorial (perhaps, as a large rectangle, the shape mirrors that of a tag itself). All tags hang on wires of exactly the same length and are made of the same thin and shiny silver metal, with one exception—at one corner, a plain black tag hangs to represent those still missing in action. The overall result is uniformity and simplicity. The memorial hangs from the atrium ceiling and is surrounded by a pre-existing narrow mezzanine walkway. Visitors can walk along the mezzanine floor, getting closer to the tags and even reading some of the information stamped on the closest ones. Because the tags appear to be uniform from a distance and yet on closer inspection are unique, the memorial has the capacity to invite interpretive and affective responses.

The memorial's power emerges also from its ability to incorporate elements of ethnography and history. As ethnographic objects, the dog tags offer basic information about the lives of soldiers—their name, service number and branch of service, blood type, and religion if the soldier wished it. As documents, they provide some historical information about the military—the number who died and the technology of soldier identification. As a memorial, "Above and Beyond" is the only material structure in addition to

the Wall to include the names of the more than 58,000 soldiers and nurses who died in Vietnam. The dog tag is an ingenious choice for a memorial because it is perhaps the most personal and democratic icon of war. Every soldier and nurse stationed in Vietnam was issued two dog tags in order to identify his or her body in the event of death. And the sight of all these tags gathered together is overwhelming both in its entirety and in the uniqueness of each tag. Dog tags serve as authentic artifacts from the war: the living bring them back from Vietnam as souvenirs, or the military gives them to parents as part proof of their child's death. In the museum space, the artwork and war relics donated by living veterans narrate the stories of their lives after the war, while the dog tags narrate the stories of deaths during it.

Because "Above and Beyond" is both ethnographic object and historical document, it differs from the Wall in one important aspect: it addresses head-on the connection between the names of the dead and the fact that they died in war. While no one denies the power of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, its efficacy depends upon the viewer's willingness to imagine the individual lives behind the names. But with "Above and Beyond," each name is inscribed on a dog tag that is unavoidably recognized as an accessory of war. The irony of the memorial is that to preserve and memorialize the identities of these soldiers, it uses dog tags, the military symbol for uniformity and anonymity, which suggests that the only time the soldier actually needs an identity is when he dies.

Of course, the other important way "Above and Beyond" differs from the Wall is the fact that it makes noise. As wind catches the thin metal tags, they knock against each other and chime gently. The sound serves as background noise for visitors as they peruse the artwork and for staff as they go about their work days. In the quiet museum, which often has only a couple of visitors at a time, the sound of the dog tags can have a powerful effect. The chiming does not evoke or create the sounds of war; rather, referencing a wind chime, the sculpture is more likely to evoke a western domestic space—the familiar comfort of a suburban front porch, for instance. Yet this gentle sound, peeling for those who died, contrasts starkly with the graphic images of war in the exhibits. Like other memorial spaces of contemplation, for example the Hall of Remembrance at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., the sound of "Above and Beyond" offers an opportunity for visitors to reflect and gain composure. The memorial, it seems, evokes not the viscerality of war but the viscerality of mourning.

Richard Steibock, the museum's volunteer director of travel and relations and the main architect of the memorial, offers a way to understand

its music. One day, as he says, "I bumped into a model we were making of the sculpture, and all of a sudden I heard music. It started to come alive. It had a spirit." Steibock continues, "I believe that, with this memorial, we are going to bring together all the spirits of those who fought and died."[15] He and others read this sculpture built of military accessories as a site that collects the spirits of dead soldiers. Indeed, one visitor to the memorial observed that it "sounds like angels,"[16] and the museum's website talks of the memorial moving "like a living thing."[17] As the name of the memorial implies, the tags naming the dead are located above the heads of visitors, while the dead, who gave their lives "above and beyond the call of duty," are placed symbolically and literally beyond visitors, beyond the museum, and beyond life itself.

The fact that the dog tags were made for the memorial rather than obtained from the families or estates of the dead could potentially undermine the authenticity the museum strives so hard to achieve. However, I believe their lack of originality does not diminish the memorial's efficacy. The act of making each tag, repeated more than 58,000 times—a process that took Steibock and others months to complete—becomes powerful in its own way. During the construction of the memorial, visitors could watch volunteers making the tags on a Vietnam-era embossing machine that is now exhibited to remind them of the labor of the volunteers and the accurate reconstruction of the dog tags. Even though the tags are not original to the war, as volunteers spent months imprinting each individual tag with the name of someone who died, the construction process became a form of memorializing for those volunteers.

The artwork, weapons, and dog tag memorial make a visit to the Vietnam Veterans Art Museum a multi-sensory experience. No single element within the space has this impact; rather, the visceral experience at the museum is created through the ways that all elements work together. The aesthetics of the quagmire in place at the museum is a political paradigm even though it attempts to explain the war by shifting the focus from the war's history to the veterans' experiences. By describing the war as quagmire, the museum may ignore competing histories of the war, but its art pieces, collection of war relics, and dog tag memorial are material reminders of combat. In this way, the museum, on the margins of the discourse of the traditional museum, resists the forgetting of the war. Thus, the museum's lack of political commentary, rather than contributing to the erasure of national memory about the war, forces visitors to recognize that erasure. The visceral experience helps visitors to memorialize the war in their own ways while they are there and after they leave.

VISITING OBJECTS, ACTING SUBJECTS

This discussion has so far focused primarily on how the meanings of objects are constructed and construed through curatorial practices, or lack thereof, and other forms of museum display. As Art Dockter's provocative images demonstrate, the meanings and evidentiary potential of objects cannot be divorced from visitor responses to them. It is clear, however, that meanings and significances can alter visitor interaction. When the visitor moves around the space according to or in spite of direct or implicit instructions in the layout, narrative, chronology, or other prompts, she makes connections between objects and interprets them based on the information given. Focusing on how both museums shape visitors' perceptions of the war, I argue that while the primarily visual experience at "Personal Legacy" might prevent visitors from understanding the war emotionally, the visceral experience at the Veterans Art Museum has the potential to teach visitors about combat.

The "Personal Legacy" exhibit is certainly not the biggest attraction at the American History Museum and, housed in a room that dead-ends on the third floor, it may be missed by many. If visitors walk through the Hall of Armed Forces History toward the room that houses "Personal Legacy," they will first confront the model of the Wall, positioned in the center of the room. A large display case containing objects left at the Wall is located to the right (the west), and the museum's Archives Center is housed on the left (east) side of the room (see Figure 4). Continuing from the Hall of Armed Forces History into "Personal Legacy," visitors will view the exhibit in chronological order, from 1985 to 1991, but will move from right to left, a nonconventional way to view an exhibit. The large display cases filled with objects may attempt to recreate the experience of being at the Wall through the practice of object leaving, but the visitor's own sense of the appropriate way to view an exhibit, cued through curatorial practices in the rest of the museum, may prompt them to move to the other side of the room in order to start their examination of the exhibit from the left. When chronology and perceived appropriate behavior conflict, visitors ultimately can make up their own minds about how to view the displays.

With the objects enclosed behind glass and physically out of reach and with no interactive features, visitors' experiences are visual. Because the display is small and contained mostly along one wall, visitors' movement through the exhibit is minimal, although they might turn around to examine the model of the Wall in the center of the room. While the experience of the exhibit is visual and stationary, the contents of the exhibit—the

objects left at the Wall by the bereaved—demand contemplation that works on two levels. Because the majority of objects on display are recognizable as quotidian items—such as cigarette packets, shoes, and buttons—visitors' contemplation of them is based on existing popular knowledge or their own personal experiences of these items. Visitors recognize these objects and make whatever meaning they want to about why they were left at the Wall. In addition, even if they have not been to the Wall, visitors know of it and of the practice of leaving objects there. They know, to a greater or lesser extent, how to contemplate these objects not only because of the written directions at the exhibit itself but also because of the popular discourse that circulates about the Wall. This contemplation is not based on their experiences but on their prior knowledge of the significance of the Wall in memorializing the war. These two forms of contemplation make the visitors' experiences at "Personal Legacy" visual and interpretive, experiences undeniably shaped by the curatorial practices in the museum as well as by popular discourse on the war.

At the Veterans Art Museum visitors are bombarded with a cacophony of colors and shapes seemingly displayed in no particular order but with the power to create an overwhelming effect. Trying to make sense of the museum, visitors move through the entire space, upstairs and down, looking at artwork and war relics, maybe doubling back to find a piece that was of interest to them the first time around and making their own connections among the artists, the genres, or the artworks and relics. In other words, because the museum does not direct them to follow any particular path, visitors may cover more ground than in a traditional museum space. Added to this experience is the "Above and Beyond" sculpture, gently chiming in the background, announcing the entrance or exit of a visitor. The experience at this museum, then, is multi-sensory: it is kinesthetic, visual, and auditory.

The museum's quagmire aesthetic helps visitors know the war experientially. The lack of curatorial techniques replicates the experience of war, particularly its lack of order and coherence. Visitors to the museum may feel a sense of discomfort at not knowing where to begin, which items are especially significant, or how to understand or respond to specific images. This sense replicates, to a certain extent, the experience of soldiers arriving in Vietnam. In addition, the aesthetic promises a kind of immediate experience, a rush of senses without time for contemplation. As one visitor wrote in the guest book: "The museum is moving, shocking, enlightening, and confounding all at once. In short, it has shown the immediacy of war and its many horrors better than I ever imagined could be done."[18] I

understand the visitor's idea of the war as immediate as a sort of "allatonceness," to use Marshall McLuhan's expression, both in terms of the soldier's experience in Vietnam and of the visitor's experience in the museum; this "allatonceness" is conveyed by the simultaneity of artworks that depict moments of combat in all their detailed vividness, the juxtaposition of artworks and weaponry in the museum, and the sound of the dog tags jingling overhead.

Both museums display objects with no aesthetic interest of a formal artistic nature: the items—quotidian objects, artwork powerful though sometimes lacking formal skill, weaponry, etc.—become particularly meaningful at their destination. These items are displayed for their ethnographic significance in order to educate their audience: again, the American History Museum, as noted in the director's welcoming comments on its website, attempts to bring history alive and is committed to "inspiring a broader understanding of our nation and its many peoples." The Veterans Art Museum's educational purpose is "to show [visitors] what Vietnam was really like." In the mission statement of both museums, education is experiential—to bring the past into the present in order to show visitors the real Vietnam. But, I suggest, while both museums educate about the dominance of memory and experience over history in recording and representing the war, only the veterans museum successfully educates about the war experientially. The difference in success between the two museums relates to their focus: the Veterans Art Museum recreates the experience and memory of war, while "Personal Legacy" represents the experience at the memory of the Wall. To present these aspects, both museums use objects (artwork, weapons, dog tags at the Veterans Museum; items left at the Wall in the traditional museum). So while the Veterans Museum asks visitors to imagine what Vietnam was really like, the Smithsonian asks visitors to imagine what the Wall is like. However, because visitors can easily travel from the museum down the Mall to see the Wall for themselves, this exhibit can never as effectively evoke the multi-sensory experience that visitors can have there.

Together, the museums attempt to educate about the experiences of war and about how the war and the dead are remembered and memorialized, but they do not educate about the war itself—its causes or its larger political and social legacies beyond the personal consequences of war for American veterans and their families. But, perhaps these limitations are acceptable. At the veterans museum and "Personal Legacy" exhibit, visitors gaze on the memorializing practices of veterans and their loved ones. These personal renderings of the war are honest even if the knowledge of the war produced is partial, skewed, or incomplete. We cannot expect these museums to do

more than what they already do, nor can we ask them to speak for those whom they do not represent such as politicians, military leaders, academic historians, and antiwar protestors. The limitations of memory must be considered as an important feature of these places; in the words of James Young: "I would rather preserve the complex texture of memory—its many inconsistencies, faces, and shapes—that sustains the difficulty of our memory work, not its easy resolution" (1993: xi). If we were to demand a fuller history of the war from these museums, we might undermine the accurate presentation of memory's inconsistencies and might also seek totality where none exists.

Thus, if education about the war does not include its history, what do visitors really learn? By looking at artwork aside weaponry at the Veterans Art Museum, visitors learn about the experience of combat not the history of the war. Its presentation of the quagmire personalizes the war and shifts the focus from the politicians and military decision makers to the veterans themselves. But the museum's lack of political commentary, I would argue, forces visitors to recognize how a similar erasure has occurred in dominant cultural discourses of the war. By shifting the focus away from the history of the war at "Personal Legacy," the Smithsonian calls attention to how memory practices have supplanted the war's history. The exhibit offers visitors the opportunity to consider that the most important or lasting aspect of the war has been how Americans at home choose to memorialize it.

ENDNOTES: CHANGES AT THE MUSEUMS

While meanings constructed within exhibits may be static or fixed, the exhibits themselves are not. The Veterans Art Museum has edited the collection on display that I discuss here and added new exhibits to its space. "Personal Legacy" and the Hall of Armed Forces History at the Museum of American History have been replaced with a new exhibit, "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War." Initially I considered that the changes may render this chapter obsolete, but ultimately I decided on the value of presenting this discussion and on updating it; in doing so, the chapter shows how curatorial practice both reflects and shapes contemporary discourse: in the case of the Veterans Museum, this means reflecting the evolving memories and experiences of veterans; in the case of the Smithsonian, it means meeting visitor expectations and both reflecting and shaping cultural understandings of war and the military.

I returned to the Veterans Art Museum in June 2004 and found changes to the displays that in many exciting ways challenge the line of argument I make here. In addition to the removal both of Dockter's photographs and

weaponry from the display areas, the permanent collection on the second floor has been replaced with a temporary exhibit titled "Trauma and Metamorphosis." This exhibit presents a new, updated authenticity, not of war experience but of post-traumatic stress disorder. Ron Mann's work dominates the floor; his black and white paintings detail his complex and extended struggle with PTSD. As I stood examining these paintings, my immediate response was embarrassment—I felt that I was looking at the excruciatingly private products of the tortured mind of a trauma survivor. I felt at first that these paintings did not need to be on display because they held value only for the artist, who used the painting process to work through his private struggles with the illness. Mann's images are not deliberately contrived representations of trauma, as are Tim O'Brien's trauma writings; rather, the images *are* Mann's trauma, rendered in black and white paint. But, on further consideration, I realized that because Mann's paintings are so personal, their efficacy lies in their ability to evoke strong visceral responses in other survivors of post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as provoke similarly strong feelings of empathy among visitors.

The exhibit is just one example of how the museum is evolving to address and reflect the contemporary experiences of veterans. While graphic images of war continue to have the power to narrate veterans' visceral experiences and to provoke comparable experiences in viewers, the museum also recognizes that for many, veterans and nonveterans alike, the war is over—it is in the past. Thus, more important than representing the events of the war is recognizing the memory of it that continues to exist in the present. If the museum's permanent collection tries to construct the experience of war, "Trauma and Metamorphosis" narrates the structure of veterans' war memory, which is both intensely personal and socially constructed. By constructing the viscerality of trauma as well as the visceral experience of war, the museum's visual and kinesthetic appeal reaches beyond Vietnam veterans to the postmemory, using Marianne Hirsch's term, of the postwar generation.

In September 2005, I visited the new military history exhibit at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History, "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War." The new exhibit replaces the somewhat stale and disjointed Hall of Armed Forces History, which contained "Personal Legacy: The Healing of a Nation," with a highly interactive and visually and aurally stimulating exhibit that narrates the history of America at war, beginning with the Wars of Independence and ending with "New Roles," a room that includes the Persian-Gulf War, the World Trade Center attacks on 11 September 2001, the War in Afghanistan, and the current War in Iraq. The Vietnam War section has been greatly expanded, while only a small section of the "Personal

Legacy" display has been preserved. After reading about the Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis, visitors' first introduction to the Vietnam War is a mock-up of an early 1960s American home, complete with patterned wallpaper and comfortable chair and couch. "A Television War" emblazoned on the wall explains the reason for the display of televisions in the replica home. Playing repeatedly on the televisions is a five-minute narrative of carefully edited newsreels covering American involvement in Vietnam from 1954, when the United States agreed to support the French, to the withdrawal of the last troops and American citizens in 1975. The next room in the exhibit contains a Prisoners of War display as well as glass cases showing grunts' and enemy soldiers' clothing and various accoutrements of war. A Huey helicopter dominates this room, the largest artifact in the exhibit; from its open side door, a flat screen monitor projects short videos of veterans describing their specific experiences during the war.

"Remembering the Lost" preserves just a small section of the now gone "Personal Legacy" exhibit. One small display case holds a selection of objects also seen in "Personal Legacy," such as a teddy bear, a cross handmade with wood and barbed wire, and a six pack of Budweiser. The framed dog tags, military insignia, and POW/ MIA bracelets are now gone, as are the chronological markers, and the accompanying text also has changed. While "remembering" remains part of the new display's title and theme, the rhetoric of "healing" has been replaced with one that "honors" the dead. The narrative informs visitors that "many who visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial make a rubbing of the name of a cherished family member or friend who died in the war," then asks: "What do these impromptu mementoes recognize?" This question promotes visitor contemplation, but it is not purely rhetorical as the exhibit provides its own answer: beneath the question is a replica of a section of the Wall's surface. Instead of the names of the dead are the words "sacrifice," "memory," "service," and "honor." "Regardless of the differences over how the war should be understood" claims more text nearby, at the Wall Americans "could join in honoring those who served." In this updated rhetoric is the presumption that the healing process has ended and the divisiveness of the war's memory has been overcome by the need to remember honorably the war and its lost. The exhibit not only presents its perception of contemporary culture's evolving attitudes toward the war, but it also frames the war in terms of current, that is to say post-9/11, discourse on the military and war more generally, drawing on the contemporary popular vernacular of honor, sacrifice, and heroism. This framing, of course, is not limited to the Vietnam War section: the name change to "The Price of Freedom" draws on the

rhetoric used by the current presidential administration to contextualize and justify current foreign and military policies.

If the Hall of Armed Forces History can be described, as I do earlier, as somewhat lacking in coherence—with, for example, the omission of the Korean War—"The Price of Freedom" swings in the opposite direction, providing a somewhat overly coherent narrative of America's history of war. Every war in the exhibit has a linear progression—a clear beginning, middle, and end—and one war progresses rather neatly into another, as the exhibition space presents it. The representation of coherence is somewhat problematic, particularly in the case of the Vietnam War, which dragged on for many years without seeming purpose and which many commentators describe as singularly lacking coherence both during the war and after as veterans sought to memorialize it. To construct the consistent narrative, "The Price of Freedom" ignores debates over whether the war's purpose was indeed to defend freedom when the United States was under no threat from Vietnam and when the Domino Theory, the concern that communism would spread throughout Southeast Asia and beyond, was found later to be misguided. And by shifting the rhetoric in the Vietnam War section from healing to honoring, the exhibit suggests this event no longer needs to be debated, that it has been resolved in America's memory and history. The shift functions the same way as does the location of the National World War II Memorial between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, asserting the prominence of that "honorable" war as central to the shaping of twentieth-century America and relegating the "Asian wars" (Korean and Vietnam) to the margins of history.

The update and removal of exhibits reflect internal changes in the museums (new leadership in the case of the Veterans Museum; new curators and curatorial practices in the case of the Smithsonian), and these changes attempt to mirror contemporary discourse on the Vietnam War and on war more generally. The Veterans Art Museum has incorporated more of the postwar experience in its exhibitions (in particular, veterans' experience of trauma and recovery), whereas the Smithsonian's changes reflect current social and official discourses on war. In both cases, updated narratives do more that present changing perspectives—they have the ability to shape them. As visitors seek understanding and knowledge of the Vietnam War at these museums in a cultural context that lacks an ongoing dialogue on it, they are presented—particularly so in the case of "The Price of Freedom"—with a narrative that minimizes the history of dissent and foregrounds the idea that those who died in Vietnam made an honorable sacrifice, even though many veterans during the war and after it rejected that rhetoric. While most representations

of history and memory mirror not the historical moment being represented but the contemporary period in which the remembering occurs, one responsibility museums must accept, I suggest, is to acknowledge and foreground the complicated practices of remembering and representing that are at work in curatorial practice. Without that acknowledgement, societal and official understandings of the war are presented within exhibits as ahistorical, without influence or change across space and time.

Museums in the United States influence visitors' perceptions on the history of and attitudes toward the war, and the same occurs for visitors to museums in Vietnam, including the many American veterans who go there. As veterans move through various sites of memory in Vietnam, including museums and memorials, their own memory becomes increasingly affected by how Vietnam remembers the war. At the same time, veterans will note that signs of their war experience have been replaced by exaggerated narratives of American involvement. Veterans' return journeys are a continuation of the memorializing practices they started in the United States, for some the last stage in their healing and recovery process, but in seeking the place where the war happened to and for them, they find instead that the "Nam" has been erased in Vietnam.

19. The Virtual Wall Vietnam Veterans Memorial, "About the Virtual Wall," 21 April 2005, http://www.virtualwall.org/about.htm.
20. Carol Becker, talk at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, 15 April 2003.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. National Vietnam War Museum, 6 June 2003, http://www.nvwm.org.
2. National Civil War Museum, 2002, http://www.nationalcivilwarmuseum.org.
3. Virginia War Museum, 2000, http://www.warmuseum.org.
4. Smithsonian's Museum of American History, "Collections," undated, http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/index.cfm, and "Mission and History," undated, http://americanhistory.si.edu/about/mission.cfm.
5. For a discussion of the fetishization of the object, see Susan Stewart's "Objects of Desire" in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1993: 132–169).
6. Hooper-Greenhill follows Foucault in defining discipline "as a power/ technique [that] operates through hierarchical observation, normalising judgment, and examination" (169). She defines Foucault's use of episteme as "the unconscious, but positive and productive set of relations within which knowledge is produced and rationality defined" (12).
7. Smithsonian Institution Photographic Services, "Edward C. Ezell," undated, http://photo2.si.edu/vvm/ezell.html.
8. Smithsonian's Museum of American History, "Mission and History," undated, http://americanhistory.si.edu/about/mission.cfm, and "Director's Welcome," undated, http://americanhistory.si.edu/about/message.cfm.
9. The museum's vehement refusal to modify its collection to appease sponsors may be in jeopardy, however. The museum has undergone changes to its management structure, which now comprises curatorial committees, a professional gallery owner, Vietnam veteran board members, an organizer, and local business men—all designed to secure the museum's future, in part, by developing corporate sponsorship and promotional tie-ins with special exhibits. Staff member, on-site interview, August 2002.
10. Franklin argues that the "imperialism story" begins in 1945 "when America's economic and political leaders committed the nation to buttressing, maintaining, and becoming the dominant power within the 'Free World,' that is, a global Anglo-European-American imperial system that had controlled the planet's economy for about a century" (2000: 42). The "noble cause" story is attributed to Ronald Reagan, who referenced it repeatedly in speeches from 1980 on, including at a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Day celebration in 1984 (see introduction for excerpt from transcript).
11. Joe Fornelli, telephone conversation with author, 7 September 2005.

12. The Civil War was the first American war to be photographed, but photographic documentation of the Crimean War (1854–1856) occurred earlier. The British government's official Crimean War photographer Roger Fenton has become known as the first war photographer. However, Fenton's images avoid the horror of war itself: as Susan Sontag describes it in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, precluded from recording the dead or the maimed, "Fenton went about rendering the war as a dignified all-male group outing" (50).
13. See also Franklin's "Burning Illusions: The Napalm Campaign" (2000: 71–88) for a case study of how gratuitous images of napalm-burned Vietnamese were used to turn around attitudes towards the war in Redwood City, CA.
14. Staff member, conversation with author, August 2002.
15. C.E. Hanifan, "Etched in Memory," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 29 May 2000, Section E.
16. Lola Smallwood, "'It Sounds like Angels,'" *Chicago Tribune*, 31 May 2001, 5.
17. National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, "Above and Beyond Memorial," undated, http://www.nvvam.org/aboveandbeyond/index.htm.
18. Visitor's book, noted by author, August 2002.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Earlier versions of sections of this chapter have been presented at three conferences: Space-Place-Memory at the University of Minnesota, April 2001; American Geographers Association convention in Los Angeles, March 2002; and the Modern Language Association convention in New York, December 2004.
2. Tourism was identified as an "important branch of the strategy of economic development in the country" in "Government Resolution 45/CP, 22 June 1993," cited in "Master Plan of Vietnam Tourism Development period 1995–2010," *Vietnam National Administration of Tourism*, 24 April 1995, http://www.batin.vn/dbotweb/tourinfo/phan4b.htm (accessed 13 March 2001). Site no longer active; Vietnam National Administration of Tourism available at, http://www.vietnamtourism.com.
3. The White House, "Remarks by the President in Announcement of Lifting Trade Embargo on Vietnam," 3 February 1994, http://clinton6.nara.gov/1994/02/1994-02-03-presidents-remarks-on-lifting-vietnam-trade-embargo.html, and "U.S., Vietnam Sign Open Trade Agreement," *CNN.com*, 14 July 2000, http://archives.cnn.com/2000/ASIANOW/southeast/07/13/us.vietnam.03/.
4. Nine Dragons Travel and Tours, undated, http://www.nine-dragons.com/vietnam.htm, and MilSpec Tours, undated, http://www.gomilspec.com/asiantours.html.