Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität München
Department für Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Intensive Program:
Coming Together or Coming Apart? Europe And The United States In The Sixties
Sommersemester 2011
Dozent: Prof. Mark Meigs

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial And Its Impact On US Memorial Culture

By Eva Schmeidl

Von Plagiat spricht man, wenn Ideen und Worte anderer als eigene ausgegeben werden.

Dabei spielt es keine Rolle, aus welcher Quelle (Buch, Zeitschrift, Zeitung, Internet usw.) die fremden Ideen und Worte stammen, ebenso wenig ob es sich um größere oder kleinere Übernahmen handelt oder ob die Entlehnungen wörtlich oder übersetzt oder sinngemäß sind. Entscheidend ist allein, ob die Quelle angegeben ist oder nicht. Wird sie verschwiegen, liegt ein Plagiat, eine Täuschung vor.

In solchen Fällen kann keine Leistung des Studierenden anerkannt werden: Es wird kein Leistungsnachweis (auch kein Teilnahmeschein) ausgestellt, eine Wiederholung der Arbeit ist nicht möglich und die Lehrveranstaltung wird in der Institutskartei als „nicht bestanden (P)“ registriert.

Ich erkläre hiermit, diesen Text zur Kenntnis genommen und in dieser Arbeit kein Plagiat im o.g. Sinne begangen zu haben.

Datum, Unterschrift

Table of Contents

I.	**Introduction**	**p.4**
II.	**Main Part**	**p. 5**
	1. From Iconoclasm to "Statue Mania"	p.5
	2. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial	p.6
	2.1 The Veterans' Fight For Respect And Recognition	p.6
	2.2 The Difficult Quest Of Finding The "Right" Memorial	p.8
	2.3 Maya Lin's Design	p.9
	2.4 The Power Of The Names	p.10
	2.5 Criticism, Controversy And Consequence	p.11
	3. The Influence Of The Vietnam Veterans Memorial On American Memorial Culture	p.13
III.	**Conclusion**	**p.15**
IV.	**Bibliography**	**p.16**

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial And Its Impact On US Memorial Culture

I. Introduction

When one hears the word "memorial" everybody has a slightly different idea about what exactly a memorial is, how it looks like and what it represents. And absolutely nothing is wrong with that since there are thousands of ways to remember therefore memorials can expected to be diverse, too. They are modes of expression that reflect the very uniqueness of remembering and therefore come in many different manifestations like statues, commemorative plaques, fountains, even parks or mountains. But while some imagine well-known memorials like the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument or Mount Rushmore others will think about more temporary ones that come into being at sights of tragic events where people bring flowers, light candles and lay down letters, toys or other things that remind them of somebody or something. But no matter how divergent the ideas of memorials are, they commonly share the same basic meaning.

"At the most basic level, memorials are designed to recognize and preserve memories. They are typically understood as acts and gifts that honor particular people and historical events."[1]

Memorials can be found all over the world, but especially in the US, memorials seem to play an essential role. What is the significance of memorials in the US? In recent years hundreds of memorials have been built leading to the following question:

"Why do we make memorials in America today-and why do we make so many of them? Just in the past few decades, thousands of new memorials to executed witches, enslaved Africans, victims of terrorism, victims of lynching, dead astronauts, aborted fetuses, and murdered teenagers have materialized in the American landscape, along with those that pay tribute to civil rights activists, cancer survivors, organ donors, Rosie the Riveter, U.S. soldiers in any number of wars, U.S. presidents, the end of Communism, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Indian victors of the Battle of Little Bighorn. (…) Memorials of all kinds-including memorials to memorials (…)-are flourishing in America today."[2]

There even is a special national holiday set aside called "Memorial Day". One of the most visited and most talked about memorials in the US is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.. What is it about that particular memorial that draws people to it in shoals? The conception and design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial stirred up a lot of controversies even before it was build. Nevertheless it seems to have had a big impact on how future memorials were defined and understood in the US. To figure out in what way the Vietnam Veterans Memorial influenced the American memorial landscape it is important to first look at the American memorial culture.

[1] Erica Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 7.
[2] Erica Doss, Ibid. 1f.

II. Main Part

1. From Iconoclasm To "Statue Mania"

To be able to understand US Memorial Culture and to see how it has changed since the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was unveiled in Washington, D.C. in 1982, it is crucial to take a look at the history of memorials in the US.

Nowadays memorials spring up like mushrooms all over the country, therefore it is hard to believe that Americans for a long time resented the idea of building memorials altogether. This skepticism towards paying tribute to outstanding men and women as well as to historic events can be traced back to several ideas that were popular in the USA well into the 19th century.[3] On the one hand the apparent iconoclasm was rooted in a deep distrust in monarchy. The fact that in many European nations statues and memorials were erected to honor and glorify their monarchs like e.g. the famous statue of King Charles I. in London, was something with which people, who fought hard for their independence to pursue their dream of a country ruled by democratic principles, simply could not approve. For them it often appeared to be some sort of propaganda.[4] On the other hand opponents refer to America's puritan roots due to which they refuse all graven images entirely since for many Americans the idea of honoring certain people with a memorial or statue was considered idolatry.[5] Furthermore the resistance is motivated by the Renaissance belief that words last much longer than any kind of memorial.[6]

Although this iconoclastic sentiment remained an essential part of public thought for a long time, by the late 19th and early 20th century, the categorical rejection slowly began to give way to a cautious interest in memorials, resulting in a "statue mania" (ca. 1870-1920) as Erica Doss calls it.[7] What had happened? The US nation had been torn apart by the American Civil War and transformations brought about by modernism like industrialization and urbanization as well as the continuing immigration called for measures to make the divided American society a people again.[8] To achieve that goal, statues of the "great men", historical important figures in US history like explorer Christopher Columbus or prominent statesmen like Abraham Lincoln were put up, together with numerous war memorials to function as new national symbols.

[3] Cf. Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1.
[4] Cf. Kirk Savage, Ibid. 196.
[5] Cf. Kirk Savage, Ibid. 1f.
[6] Cf. Kirk Savage, Ibid .1f.
[7] Cf. Erica Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 20.
[8] Cf. Erica Doss, Ibid. 20f.

"Statues played a vital role in championing collective national ideals, as did a widespread public culture of national anthems, holidays, festivals, and fairs."[9]

Examples of that "statue mania" are e.g. the *Columbus Memorial Fountain* in Washington, D.C. (dedicated in 1912) that features Christopher Columbus standing on an implied ship prow symbolizing the discovery of the American Continent or the so-called *Concord Minuteman of 1775* in Concord, MA (dedicated in 1875).[10] The life-size bronze sculpture of the Concord Minuteman depicts a strong young Yankee farmer ready to fight against the British to secure American Independence and represents a great example of a typical US war memorial. Built during this "statue mania" those memorials were a means to promote a common national history and intended to foster patriotism and strengthen American identity formation.[11]

The problem with this "statue mania" turned out to be that too many statues were built during a very short time period so that more and more people started to overlook the statues altogether or considered them to be "kitsch" and old-fashioned which led to the decline of "statue mania".[12]

Nonetheless *"Washington, D.C., took the lead among American cities, and in the sheer number of its monuments the nation's capital rivaled the major cities of Europe by the end of the 19th century."*[13]

The US capital represents the monumental heart of the nation. Washington, D.C. and especially the area of and around the National Mall is glutted with memorials.[14] People interested in the American memorial culture will find hundreds of memorials, among them the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

2. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

2.1 The Veterans' Fight For Respect And Recognition

"The National Vietnam Veterans Memorial may well have generated more controversy than any work of architecture in recent history."[15]

What is the significance of this quote by Nicholas Capasso, the curator at the deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Boston? He states that somehow the Vietnam Veterans Memorial stands out namely in as much as it came to attention though heated debates about it.

---

[9] Erica Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 25.
[10] Cf. Erica Doss, Ibid. 23ff.
[11] Cf. Erica Doss, Ibid. 24.
[12] Cf. Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 195.
[13] Cf. Kirk Savage, Ibid. 2.
[14] Cf. Kirk Savage, Ibid. 13ff.
[15] Nicholas J. Capasso, "Vietnam Veterans Memorial." In *The Critical Edge: Controversy In Recent American Architecture* edited by Tod Marder (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 188.

To understand why the Vietnam Veterans Memorial caused those debates all over the USA it is important to take a closer look at the specific time period of its initiation and realization. By doing so it will become clear why the VVM not only raised discussions, but moreover can be considered to be a turning point in memorial culture.

Arguments about a possible Vietnam Memorial in the late 1970s and early 1980s revealed serious social, political and cultural problems. [16]

The Vietnam War had divided the American nation. The images of the horrors and brutality of war had been brought into the living rooms live and in color by news television, deeply shocking the US public.[17] While Vietnam supporters caught up in Cold War fears about the probable fall of Vietnam to Communism (domino theory), a huge anti-Vietnam War movement had evolved, symbolic for the rift of US society. The fact that it turned out to be a bitter military defeat traumatized the entire US nation. A majority of the American people did not want to be reminded of the war at all, therefore Vietnam Veterans-living symbols of this trauma often were either completely ignored or met with hostility and rejection. They did not return as triumphant heroes as veterans of previous wars had done. They did not get publicly celebrated and even greeted with parades. Instead they were treated with disrespect.

"The Vietnam War did not end the day America began withdrawing from Vietnam. The violence persisted on the home front as veterans were either demonized or simply rendered invisible."[18]

But it was not the war alone that changed the atmosphere in US society dramatically.

"Veterans came home to changing ideas about patriotism and heroism; they returned to a society riven by the civil rights movement, Watergate, and the assassinations of the men who had inspired many of them to fight. There was no clear ideology around which a community of grief could have formed. It was a muddled, lost war waiting to be forgotten even before it was over."[19]

The soldiers mostly were left alone with their traumas and grief, treated as social outcasts making it hard for them to find their place in US society again.

For that reason, Jan Scruggs, one of the Vietnam Veterans, decided in 1979 *"(...) that it was time for the nation to publicly remember the war. (...) the possibility of a community healing itself inspired him to the idea of building a memorial."*[20]

A national memorial would honor the Vietnam Veterans' service and sacrifice to the USA, supporting the healing of the nation torn apart through the war.[21]

---

[16] Cf. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 377f.

[17] Cf. Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 49ff.

[18] Adrian Parr, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 55.

[19] Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 9.

[20] Kristin Ann Hass, Ibid. 10.

2.2 The Difficult Quest Of Finding The "Right" Memorial

The difficulty proved to be the question of how to commemorate a war that had deeply divided the minds of the American people.

"In this regard, the first and most fundamental point to emphasize is the nation's failure to reach an agreement on the Vietnam War's purposes and consequences. Hence there is a "genre problem": how to create a memorial that celebrates the virtues of the individual veteran without reference to his cause."[22]

Was it right to pay tribute to a lost war? If so, how should a memorial to a disastrous military defeat look like? The American nation had no experiences at all with memorials to lost wars. As a consequence there were contradictory expectations about what kind of memorial should come about.[23]

The more conservative, traditionalist faction demanded an exemplary US war memorial that stood for national honor and glory, whereas the initiators of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial explicitly envisioned a veterans memorial not a war memorial.[24] Questions about the memorial genre emerged as a matter of dispute that would unleash most of the controversies associated with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. How was a veterans memorial supposed to look like? And where is difference between a veterans memorial and a traditional war memorial?

To figure out those differences, at first one has to clarify how a typical American war memorial is designed. US war memorials per se neither were very abstract nor minimalistic. They usually included a figurative statue of one or more heroic, masculine soldiers as well as a huge flagpole with the hoisted up Star Spangled Banner.[25] One example is the War Memorials at Omaha Beach, located it the Normandy in France. It includes a huge cemetery, a chapel, several flagpoles, a stone memorial, a statue and the garden of the missing.[26]

Secondly, it is important to have a closer look at Scruggs vision of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. He and the other members of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), which had been founded by Scruggs in 1979, suggested a memorial for all Vietnam Veterans, both living and dead, and they wanted it to be build on the Mall in Washington, D.C..[27] Mr.

---

[21] Cf. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 391.
[22] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, Ibid. 392.
[23] Cf. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, Ibid. 377f.
[24] Cf. Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 11.
[25] Cf. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 395ff.
[26] Cf. American Battle Monuments Commission, "Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial," American Battle Monuments Commission, http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/no.php.
[27] Cf. Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 11.

Scruggs and the other organizers of the Vietnam Memorial viewed their project as a symbol of reconciliation which was meant to help the veterans gain back some acknowledgement; therefore the eminent location was chosen to reinforce the significance of the memorial for the nation's history. They hoped to create a memorial that would bring closure to the conflict around Vietnam and begin a healing process for the scar that the Vietnam War had left behind on the national psyche.[28] To be able to turn the memorial into this healing device, the veterans memorial had to be a nonpolitical one that wouldn`t comment on the rightness or wrongness of the Vietnam War at all. It should simply focus on those who served, died, or went missing in Vietnam.[29]

"It was different in that it combined the traditional idea of a stone monument to the war dead with the radical idea of excluding from it any prominent symbol of national honor and glory."[30]

2.3 Maya Lin's Design

In October 1980 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund announced an open national and anonymous competition to find a design that would fit their expectations. The jury decided to give only few simple, but fundamental guidelines:

"the design should (1) Be reflective and contemplative in character (2) Harmonize with its surroundings (3) Contain the names of those who had died in the conflict or who were still missing (MIA, POW) (4) Make no political statement about the war."[31]

By May 1st 1981, the jury already had picked their winner and it turned out to be a design called "the Wall" by a 21 year-old Chinese-American architecture student named Maya Lin.[32]

"(...) the jurors, after remarkably little deliberation, unanimously selected a simple black granite V, set into a small hill in the Constitution Gardens, carved with the name of every man and woman who never came back from Vietnam. They were impressed with the eloquence and the simplicity of the design."[33]

Like the jury description says, Lin's design consists of panels of black, highly reflective granite that shape a large "V". The walls seem to get slowly swallowed by the ground making it invisible from most locations on the National Mall. One side is oriented towards the Washington Monument, in the east, and the other side towards the Lincoln Memorial to the west.[34]

---

[28] Cf. Ibid. 9f.
[29] Cf. Ibid. 20f.
[30] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 388.
[31] Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 13.
[32] Cf. Kristin Ann Hass, Ibid. 14f.
[33] Kristin Ann Hass, Ibid. 14.
[34] Cf. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 393.

Maya Lin said about her design:

"I wanted to work with the land and not dominate it. I had an impulse to cut open the earth (...) an initial violence that in time would heal. The grass would grow back, but the cut would remain, a pure, flat surface, like a geode when you cut into it and polish the edge."[35]

2.4 The Power Of The Names

"The power of the design lies in the overwhelming presence of individual names, which represent complicated human lives cut short."[36]

These words express the central role, the names and their arrangement on "the Wall" and Maya Lin herself emphasized the importance of the names for the memorial:

"This memorial acknowledged those lives without focusing on the war or on creating a political statement of victory or loss. This apolitical approach became the essential aim of my design; I did not want to civilize war by glorifying it or by forgetting the sacrifices involved. The price of human life in war should always be clearly remembered."[37]

Thus Maya Lin mastered the task of designing a veterans memorial. To emphasize this, Maya Lin chose to arrange the names in chronological, not in alphabetical order, thereby individualizing the names even more.

Thus *"Lin diffused the dominant representation of the Vietnam veteran (a brutal, contemptible, and unwanted figure in national consciousness) while producing a new politically charged representation – a platform from which the veterans and their families could resituate themselves within American society on their own terms."*[38]

Besides creating a memorial for the Vietnam dead, Lin simultaneously created a place for the returning veteran and their families as well to gather in commemoration. "The Wall" in a way symbolizes a psychological coming back to their fallen comrades, relatives and friends, giving them a chance to face them again and in doing so they possibly are able to come to terms with their past.[39]

"Lin wanted visitors to be able to feel the names in many different ways, and she wanted people to be able to take something of the Wall away with them – a rubbing of a name. The Wall tries to make a somehow individuated memory of the war. The events in Vietnam are remembered through the names of the dead (...)."[40]

---

[35] Maya Lin, quoted in "America Remembers: Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *National Geographic* 167, No. 5 (1985): 557.
[36] Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 15.
[37] Maya Lin, quoted in Adrian Parr, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 67.
[38] Adrian Parr, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 70.
[39] Cf. On Point Radio, "Maya Lin's "What is missing?"", On Point Radio, http://onpoint.wbur.org/2009/11/02/maya-lins-last-memorial.
[40] Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 14.

2.5 Criticism, Controversy And Consequence

As noted before, the genre question stirred up a controversy before the design was even introduced to the public. Now as the selection of "the Wall" was a done deal, it was attacked left, right and center.

"Opposition to the memorial wall was expressed by attacks on details like color, shape, and location, but underlying all specific objections was a disdain for the style itself."[41]

Besides from Lin's ethnicity, critics of her design especially targeted features that distinguished the design from more traditional memorials. They criticized that Lin chose black granite instead of the white marble that was used in most other memorials on the National Mall. They carped at the fact that it was not vertical and at the way Lin had decided to arrange the names.

"Our objection…is based upon the clear political message of this design. The design says that the Vietnam War should be memorialized in black, not ehite marble of Washington. The mode of listing the names makes them individual deaths, not death in a cause: they might as well have been traffic accidents. The invisibility of the monument at ground level symbolizes the "unmentionability" of the war. ...Finally, the V-shaped plan of the black retaining wall immortalizes the antiwar signal, the V-protest made with the fingers."[42]

Vietnam Veteran Tom Carhart portrays his reaction to the design as follows:

"When I saw the winning design I was truly stunned, I thought that the most insulting and demeaning memorial to our Vietnam experience that was possible. I don't care about artistic perceptions. I don't care about the rationalizations that abound. One needs no artistic education to see this memorial design for what it is: A BLACK SCAR! Black: the universal color of sorrow and shame and degradation in all races and societies worldwide. In a hole, hidden as if out of shame."[43]

Indeed, Maya Lin's design was clearly different compared with more traditional memorials with flags; statues of brave, heroic soldiers which proudly celebrate the American triumph thereby representing the *"(...) heroic style traditionally associated with noble causes fought for and won (...)."*[44] highlighting the clash between those different styles of memorialization.

"(...) the Wall was too abstract, too intellectual, too reflective. (...) It was not celebratory, heroic, or manly."[45]

Lin's design however relies on this abstractness and minimalism as well as Lin's deliberate exclusion of any patriotic symbols.

Maya Lin understood *"(...) that memorializing the war necessarily meant undoing the traditional idea of patriotic nationalism in the shape of a singular, heroic memorial."*[46]

---

[41] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 395.
[42] "Stop that Monument," *National Review*, (1981): 1064.
[43] Tom Carhart, In Mock, Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision (documentary, 1995).
[44] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 394.
[45] Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 15.
[46] Kristin Ann Hass, Ibid. 20.

This was something many critics did not understand and therefore scolded "the Wall" as absolutely nonheroic and nonpatriotic.[47] Jan Scruggs replied to these accusations:

"These Americans wanted the Memorial to make Vietnam what it had never been in reality: a good, clean, glorious war seen as necessary and supported by the united country."[48]

One of "these Americans" mentioned by Scruggs was a man called James Watt, Secretary of the Interior and one of the most influential critics. He even pushed through a construction freeze until the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund agreed to supplement "the Wall" with a more figurative statue and a flagpole - additions that should make "the Wall" look more like a traditional war memorial.[49]

The result of all this was a compromise. Before "the Wall" was even unveiled the two additions (statue, flagpole) had been officially decided, altering the original concept of Maya Lin.

"The wall was believed to elevate the participant and ignore the cause; the flag and statue were believed to elevate the nation and its causes above the participant."[50]

As a result, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial no longer was a single memorial, but rather a memorial cluster composed of "the Wall" by Maya Lin (dedicated 1982), a flagpole (dedicated 1983) and the *Three Servicemen* statue by sculptor Frederick Hart (dedicated 1984).[51]

"Ultimately, this compromise reflects the impossibility of finding a single design that could represent the Vietnam War for all Americans. Hart's figural sculpture satisfied powerful voices that required concrete representation, but did not solve the problem of representation presented by the war. His figures, a white man flanked by an African American man and a third man whose race is unclear, stand a hundred feet away facing the Wall, apparently transfixed by its power. They are strong, highly masculinized, and heroic."[52]

But even with the addition of the flag and the *Three Servicemen*, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was not completed yet. In 1993 *The Vietnam Women's Memorial* by Glenna Goodacre was dedicated to honor the thousands of female Vietnam Veterans who served in Vietnam and who had not felt duly represented by "the Wall" and the *Tree Servicemen*.[53] This additional sculpture shows four figures: an injured male soldier in the arms of a white nurse, an African American women looking to the sky as if waiting for help and a third woman

[47] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 395.
[48] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, Ibid. 395.
[49] Cf. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, Ibid. 396.
[50] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 396f.
[51] Cf. Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 18ff.
[52] Kristin Ann Hass, Ibid. 18.
[53] Cf. Kristin Ann Hass, Ibid. 18ff.

kneeling, holding an empty helmet.[54] The visitor to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial today furthermore will stumble upon another addition: the "In Memory Plaque" to remember those veterans who died after their return, but due to their service in Vietnam like suffering from Agent Orange induced illnesses, post- traumatic stress disorders and the like which was dedicated in 2004.[55]

3. The Influence Of The Vietnam Veterans Memorial On American Memorial Culture

"The meaning of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is defined by the way people behave in reference to it. (...) Between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and its visitors, a very different relationship obtains. Not only is the Memorial an object of frequent ceremony and frequent visitation (...), it is also an object with which visitors enter into active and affective relationships. (...) the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has become an object of emotion. (...)"[56]

Despite all or perhaps not least because of those controversies, the Vietnam Veteran Memorial became one of the most talked-about memorials in US history. Furthermore it seems to appeal to many people, seems to move many people in a very unique way. Especially the reactions to Maya Lin's "Wall" and its names are extraordinary and very powerful. But what is it that makes the encounter with "the Wall" so exceptional?

First of all, Maya Lin used a very expressive, metaphor to commemorate a controversial war thus creating a very comprehensive memorial.

"The metaphor of the healing wound. (...) It evokes many different bodies - the bodies of the Vietnam War dead, the bodies of the veterans, and the body of the American public. The memorial is seen as representing a wound in the process of healing, one that will leave a smooth scar in the earth. This wound in turn represents the process of memory; its healing is the process of remembering and commemorating the war."[57]

This metaphor and Lin's concept moreover build the basis of her vision of a participatory memorial where the visitors actually are part of the memorial themselves which Lin tried to symbolize with reflections. Furthermore she wanted the people to be able to touch the names or taking rubbings from them.[58] This interactivity made people respond very emotionally, making the Memorial to a kind of catalyst for their pain. By giving the visitors the opportunity to figure out their very personal meaning of the memorial, Lin achieved the

[54] Cf. Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 18ff.
[55] Cf. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, "In Memory Plaque," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, http://www.vvmf.org/InMemoryPlaque.
[56] Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 402ff.
[57] Marita Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Representations*, No. 35, Special Issue: Monumental Histories (1991):132.
[58] Cf. Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 402f.

healing process she had striven for. Therefore some say that Maya Lin created the first "therapeutic memorial" in America.[59]

Maya Lin revolutionized the US memorial landscape. With her design and concept she changed the way how memorials are defined and understood. Many of the more recent memorials do not celebrate the nation, but focus on the essentialls - the names and the memory of the dead.

To only give one example of how the Vietnam Veterans Memorial influenced other memorials in the US, one can take a closer look at a rather recent memorial: the National September 11 Memorial in New York City, dedicated on September 11, 2011, the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks. It is designed to commemorate the almost 3000 people killed in the attacks of 9/11, 2001, in New York City, near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and at the Pentagon. Furthermore it pays tribute to the six people killed in the World Trade Center by a bomb explosion in February 1993.[60] The design by Michael Arad, chosen by the jury which Maya Lin was a member, too, is called "Reflective Absence".[61] It is located at "Ground Zero" and consists of two waterfalls and reflecting pools that are placed exactly where the original twin towers where to be found – illustrating the emptiness of the missing twin towers.[62] The impact of Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial is noticeable especially in the way Arad chose to arrange and record the victims' names. Interestingly here too, the designer decided to list the names of every person who died in the 2001 and 1993 attacks. Just as in the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the names constitute the heart of the memorial. They are inscribed into bronze panels edging the Memorial pools and the display of these names is considered the very heart of the Memorial.

"Names are stencil-cut into the parapets, allowing visitors to look through the names at the water, and to create paper impressions or rubbings of individual names. At night, light shines up through the voids created by each letter of a name."[63]

This enables a similar interaction with the names as at Maya Lin's "Wall". Arad took up her idea of a participatory memorial. Additionally Lin's idea of individualizing the victims inspired Arad so that he chose to not arrange the names alphabetically either, but by affiliation instead. In an interview with the New York Times Michael Arad explained that *"the "river"*

[59] Cf. Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 267.
[60] Cf. National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "About the Memorial," National September 11 Memorial & Museum, http://www.911memorial.org/about-memorial.
[61] Cf. National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "Design Competition," National September 11 Memorial & Museum, http://www.911memorial.org/design-competition.
[62] Cf. National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "Design Overview," National September 11 Memorial & Museum, http://www.911memorial.org/design-overview.
[63] National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "Names on the Memorial," National September 11 Memorial & Museum, http://www.911memorial.org/names-memorial.

of names, without other identification (like age or title or company affiliation), was meant to convey simultaneously a sense of individual and collective loss."[64] Just as Maya Lin intended it to be at the VVM.

III. Conclusion

Coming back to the initial question, what is it about that particular memorial that draws people to it in shoals, one can say that Maya Lin succeeded in creating an extraordinary memorial that became a highly emotional place for a lot of people. She had to overcome a lot of controversies even before her Memorial was built. Nevertheless "the Wall" had and still has a big impact on how memorials are defined and understood in the US. The influence is noticeable in many different ways. First of all, Maya Lin introduced with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial the first therapeutic and interactive memorial to the US. Still today many veterans visit the memorial and get the chance to make up with their past. But "the Wall" not only is healing for veterans, but also for their relatives and family members. Lin provided them with a relatively private place in the middle of public space – a place to remember. Furthermore Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial can be considered a turning point in American memorial design because her tribute to the men and women who served in a highly controversial war focused the individual body more than the American nation. Through her design, the dead bodies themselves gain greater significance, deliberately breaking with the traditional war memorial genre. Central in Lin's memorial was *commemoration*, not celebration. This simple, but revolutionary notion plus her idea to work with the metaphor of the wound in the earth, had a lasting impact on the American memorial landscape as demonstrated with the National September 11 Memorial. With her Vietnam Veterans Memorial Maya Lin transformed the entire American memorial culture.

"No single work since the Washington Monument has done more to change the direction of the memorial landscape."[65]

[64] David D. Dunlap, "Constructing A Story With 2982 Names," *New York Times*, May 4, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/nyregion/on-911-memorial-constructing-a-story-name-by-name.html.
[65] Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 261.

IV. Bibliography

American Battle Monuments Commission. "Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial." American Battle Monuments Commission. http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/no.php (accessed October 10, 2011).

Capasso, Nicholas J.. "Vietnam Veterans Memorial." In *The Critical Edge: Controversy In Recent American Architecture,* edited by Tod Marder, 188. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985.

Doss, Erica. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Dunlap, David D.. "Constructing A Story With 2982 Names." *New York Times,* May 4, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/nyregion/on-911-memorial-constructing-a-story-name-by-name.html (accessed October 5, 2011).

Hagopian, Patrick. *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009.

National Geographic, "America Remembers: Vietnam Veterans Memorial." *National Geographic* 167, No. 5, (1985).

Mock, Freida Lee. "Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision" (documentary, 1995).

National Review, "Stop that Monument." *National Review,* September 9, 1981.

On Point Radio, "Maya Lin's "What is missing?"", On Point Radio, http://onpoint.wbur.org/2009/11/02/maya-lins-last-memorial. (podcast)

National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "About the Memorial," National September 11 Memorial & Museum. http://www.911memorial.org/about-memorial (accessed October 8, 2011).

National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "Design Competition," National September 11 Memorial & Museum.

http://www.911memorial.org/design-competition (accessed October 8, 2011).

National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "Design Overview," National September 11 Memorial & Museum.
http://www.911memorial.org/design-overview (accessed October 8, 2011).

National September 11 Memorial & Museum, "Names on the Memorial," National September 11 Memorial & Museum.
http://www.911memorial.org/names-memorial (accessed October 8, 2011).

Parr, Adrian. *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

Savage, Kirk. *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Sturken, Marita. "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial." *Representations*, No. 35, Special Issue: Monumental Histories (1991):118-142.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, "In Memory Plaque," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. http://www.vvmf.org/InMemoryPlaque (accessed September 9, 2011).

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin and Barry **Schwartz**, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (1991): 376-420.