

THE AIDS MEMORIAL QUILT AND THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURE OF PUBLIC COMMEMORATION

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This essay situates the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt within the vigorous culture of national commemorative building in the late twentieth-century United States, a culture that found its first articulation in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We begin with an assessment of ways in which the AIDS Memorial Quilt appropriated and extended the rhetoric of the VVM in terms of the two memorials' modes of democratic representation, their troubling of the boundaries between contexts of invention and reception, and their differential coding of the public and private. We take up later memorial projects, specifically the Oklahoma City National Memorial and the September 11, 2001, commemorative projects, to suggest how the rhetoric of the AIDS Quilt can be marked as a harbinger of practices to come and how its progressive rhetoric has been turned in some later commemorative works to very different ends.

The AIDS Memorial Quilt marks the lives and deaths of tens of thousands of individuals. It represents the deaths of hundreds of thousands of others it does not name explicitly. It creates spaces for moving rituals to remember the dead. AIDS Quilt displays often have been attended by events and demonstrations that advocate for those who continue to live with HIV-AIDS. It sometimes moves the otherwise uninvolved visitor to tears.¹ The AIDS Quilt executes, in other words, multiple rhetorical feats and gives rise to a great many

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others. All of those are important in evaluating the legacy of this unusual commemorative monument. But so too is the place of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in the history of U.S. public commemoration.

In this essay, we situate the Quilt in the cultural milieu of late twentieth-century public commemorative building practices. It is our position that the AIDS Memorial Quilt marks an important, tense moment in that milieu, a conjuncture of a sort,² in which public commemoration harbored both the potential for a progressive political practice and the conditions for subversion of that practice. The Quilt neither created nor resolved the conjuncture, but the particularities of its rhetoric display a range of anxieties and tensions that continue both to enable and disable contemporary public commemoration.

Thus we attempt here to understand the AIDS Memorial Quilt within an emerging, late twentieth-century culture of public commemoration that began with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM). We note how the AIDS Quilt appropriated and radicalized the VVM's potent rhetorical patois. We suggest further how a number of later commemorative sites took up an apparently similar set of issues and rhetorical features but depoliticized them, or perhaps more accurately, repoliticized them, to serve more conservative interests.

The situation of public memory practices is no small matter for politics, for culture, or for rhetoric. The importance of public memory has been recognized by scholars in multiple disciplines, as well as by many in the popular press. Although memory's significance is manifold, most commentators agree about its gravity for the present moment. Public memory is often the very battleground upon which are fought issues of contemporary concern. Because of the pronounced tendency of contemporary public commemoration to take up subject matter that yields to ongoing fractiousness or at least to cultural anxiety, it is more likely that issues of the present will be deliberated by debating memory.³

Moreover, with the ever-decreasing interval between event and public commemoration, it becomes increasingly difficult to perceive a distance between past and present; if we attend to how rapidly, for example, moves have been made to commemorate the Oklahoma City bombing or the attacks of September 11, 2001, the past seems hardly "the foreign country" David Lowenthal has called it.⁴ The formal—and at the time highly unusual—features of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the AIDS Memorial Quilt as well as the reception of both memorials prefigure the issues and divides that characterize more recent attempts to commemorate significant events. The Quilt has been many things, but it certainly may be seen as a barometer of contemporary commemorative culture.

THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL AND THE AIDS MEMORIAL QUILT

The AIDS Quilt has been linked to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial by others, most notably by Marita Sturken and by Peter S. Hawkins,⁵ and we rely to varying degrees on their observations as well as our own. We are less concerned here with the influence of the VVM than with how the AIDS Quilt appropriated *and* changed its rhetoric. The AIDS Memorial Quilt was an early participant in a groundswell, called by some a “mania,” of public memorializing, rivaled in the United States perhaps only by the aftermath of the Civil War.⁶ It is arguable that most, if not all, of the public memorial projects undertaken since the VVM have been enabled by it. Certainly the large number of local and state Vietnam veterans memorials were. And there is little question that the VVM provoked the Korean War Veterans Memorial project, which in turn gave rise to the more recent World War II Memorial. But commemorative building projects completely unrelated in substance also were given impetus by the publicity and success that the VVM generated.⁷

Equally important, though, was that many of the memorials following in the wake of the VVM during the final two decades of the twentieth century and extending into the first decade of the twenty-first took up elements of its rhetoric, appropriating and adapting it to their own ends. For example, its signature black granite became for the first time a popular primary material for memorial designers. Naming the dead in the 1980s and 1990s also was *au courant*, to such a degree that Daniel Abramson labels that practice as well as the use of black granite as “clichés.”⁸ The naming gesture, of course, did not originate with the VVM, nor is it obvious that the VVM supplied the inspiration for the names on the AIDS Quilt. Indeed, Cleve Jones has identified his principal source as a family quilt.⁹ Whatever its source, though, the naming feature of the two memorials—and the ways that it works rhetorically with each—sparks the reading together of the two artworks. There are, however, multiple continuities besides that admittedly important one.

The VVM design probably does not seem very radical to most Americans now, but in the early 1980s it generated a bitter conflict, resolved only by the addition of Frederick Hart’s synecdochic, “realistic” sculpture and a flagpole on the site. That controversy was precisely about its genre-busting character; the objections raised at the time were all about the expectations of scale, color, and representational realism that were produced by experience with other major U.S. memorials. One need only think of some memorials within the VVM’s proximity, such as the Lincoln, Grant, Jefferson, or U.S. Marine Corps Memorials, to understand why it was seen as a departure from the norm. The

VVM did not render the beaux arts-inspired or representational monument irrelevant, but it did declare both inadequate to the representation of the Vietnam conflict.

The AIDS Quilt extended that challenge to genre even further, in a number of its **semiotic** features. If the VVM seemed horizontal beside its earlier predecessors, the Quilt intensified the horizontality, at least in its full displays in Washington, D.C., where it was laid out on the ground of the Mall or the Ellipse. If the VVM had darkened the color palette of memorials in Washington, the AIDS Quilt carnivalized it, with its individual panels screaming out every shade and hue one could imagine and in combinations perhaps *never* imagined. The VVM's narrative certainly was fragmented; its chronology of death begins at the apex, breaks at the end of the east wall, begins again on the west wall, and ends at the apex. The panels of the AIDS Quilt are linked together in different combinations for different displays, so if it can claim a narrative at all, it is a protean one. All of these features essentially changed the subject of classic commemorative form,¹⁰ rendering a **major departure from genre** and opening them to charges of inappropriateness or worse.

Although all of these gestures are important to the rhetorics of the two memorials, we focus our attention principally upon three other issues: **the two memorials' modes of democratic representation, their blurring of the contexts of invention and reception, and their coding of the balance between public and private spheres.** Those are central to how the two memorials "work" rhetorically, but they also shed light on some troubling issues that have arisen with commemorative sites that have followed them or that are currently under development.

Democratic Representation

U.S. memory studies have been fairly consistent in the claim that memory practices and representations in this country have become increasingly democratized over time. Michael Kammen is as explicit as anyone in claiming that, at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been a rather steady move toward democratization. He concludes that "successful monuments, historic places, and museums increasingly had to be compatible with democratic values and assumptions."¹¹ John R. Gillis appears to take the trend toward democratization of memory as a given.¹² And while John Bodnar does not accept the assumption so readily, his conclusions about the successes of vernacular resistance to official cultural memory make his conclusions at least consistent with those of Kammen and Gillis.¹³ That memory practices, and in particular commemorative art practices in the United States, became more democratic over the course of the twentieth century is difficult to contest.

There can be little question that the VVM was a major contributor to the democratization of national public commemoration. The most prominent memorials within its immediate orbit represented singular governmental and military figures—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant.¹⁴ Even national memorials that honored groups, especially soldiers from various U.S. military conflicts, had settled on the synecdoche or the abstract representation, with a sculptural figure or group standing in for the larger group or an allegorical figure marking the group's ethos. The U.S. Marine Corps Memorial was an example of the former, with the soldiers raising the flag over Mt. Suribachi standing in for the Marine Corps at large. The Second Division Memorial, a few blocks east of the VVM on Constitution Avenue, rendered tribute to the soldiers of that unit with a sculptural flaming sword.

The VVM names the name of every U.S. soldier killed or missing in action from the Vietnam conflict. The names are recorded in absolutely uniform fashion; the only differences among them are the markers for KIA or MIA. There are no military ranks or units listed, not even military branches. This represents a **departure** from the representations of the dead in U.S. military cemeteries and on most of the walls of the missing from the two world wars. Military gravestones almost always mark rank, unit, and branch of the service, as well as major commendations. Most walls of the missing do the same. At the VVM, though, every individual is represented, and each is marked as absolutely equal in death.¹⁵

The AIDS Quilt arguably democratizes its representation even further, but its mode of democratization is very different. There is no attempt to name everyone who has died of AIDS. Indeed, the NAMES Project is careful to note in its materials the relatively small percentage of AIDS deaths it marks. For example, the approximately 83,900 names on the Quilt, in June 2006, “represent approximately 17.5% of all U.S. AIDS deaths,”¹⁶ and of course, a minute percentage of worldwide AIDS-related deaths. Nor is there any uniformity of representation in the Quilt. The democratic trope of the AIDS Quilt is not personal equality but individual difference. Granted, most of the individual Quilt panels name one individual, as well as his/her birth and death dates. And almost all measure three feet by six feet, essentially the size of a coffin. But even those features vary. For example, a number of the earliest panels carry only a first name, protecting the individual's legacy or his surviving partner or family from the stigma of the disease or from being outed (Figure 1). That sentiment is made even more explicit in a panel that says, “I have decorated this banner to honor my brother. Our parents did not want his name used publicly. The omission of his name represents the fear of oppression that AIDS victims and their families feel.”



Figure 1. AIDS Quilt, Washington, D.C., by Neil Michel/AxiomPhoto.com

Others name someone in terms of relationship, for example, Daddy or My Brother. In addition, a number of panels name more than one individual. One is dedicated to the San Francisco Gay Men's Choir, another to Federal Express employees who died AIDS-related deaths, and another to members of the wonderfully outrageous Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.¹⁷ Apparently due to a misunderstanding, a few quilt panels were submitted that measured three by six inches rather than feet; these were attached to a standard-sized panel so that they could be displayed.¹⁸ Some panels are double size or even larger, usually those that represent more than one death.

The individual quilts are made of very different materials, from simple cotton sheeting to leather. Some panels are relatively unadorned, spray painted with a name, for example, while others are carefully sewn or decorated with symbols or significant objects from a person's life. The NAMES Project lists some of the materials used in the Quilt:

100-year-old quilt, afghans, Barbie dolls, bubble-wrap, burlap, buttons, car keys, carpet, champagne glasses, condoms, cookies, corduroy, corsets, cowboy boots, cremation ashes, credit cards, curtains, dresses, feather boas, first-place ribbons, fishnet hose, flags, flip-flops, fur, gloves, hats, human hair, jeans, jewelry, jockstraps, lace, lame, leather, Legos, love letters, Mardi Gras masks, merit badges,

mink, motorcycle jackets, needlepoint, paintings, pearls, photographs, pins, plastic, police uniforms, quartz crystals, racing silks, records, rhinestones, sequins, shirts, silk flowers, studs, stuffed animals, suede, t-shirts, taffeta, tennis shoes, vinyl, wedding rings.¹⁹

Objects from the individual's life adorn each quilt—a professional uniform, a favorite photograph, a beloved stuffed animal, old blue jeans, even a bowling ball. Many tell stories about the individual's professional, social, or home life.

Some individuals are remembered by multiple quilt panels. At last count, Ryan White had nine panels.²⁰ Michel Foucault is named on at least three. Many are marked as “Anonymous,” while others name very famous names, such as Rock Hudson, Liberace, Robert Mapplethorpe, or Arthur Ashe. Some are poignant, others tacky, some funny, and still others caustic.²¹ The crucial point is that the many and tremendous differences of representation serve a democratizing function, as does the tight focus on the individual as an individual. As Richard D. Mohr suggests, “The moral point of the NAMES Project is the valorizing of the autobiographical life, not necessarily because such a life issues in the honorable, but just because it is unique—the working out, even if stumblingly, of a self-conceived plan of life.”²²

It was not just these memorials' formal features, of course, that democratized. Their subject matter played perhaps an even more important role in the commemorative explosion that would follow. Certainly no one could have predicted that there would be a memorial on the National Mall to the veterans of the most unpopular military conflict in which the United States had ever engaged, much less one that the nation lost. **The organizers of the effort to build the VVM were careful to designate it as a *veterans* memorial, decidedly not a *war* memorial, to distinguish the warrior from the conflict.** Although that distinction has been lost on numerous commentators and even on some scholars,²³ it was a significant one.

Even more improbable was a giant memorial to those stricken down by an epidemic, especially one that manifested first in the gay male community. Neither Vietnam veterans nor gay men, especially gay men with a communicable disease that kills, were the most likely subjects for commemoration in the 1980s. And yet, perhaps because of the ingenious formal characteristics of the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt, these two memorials enjoyed nearly unprecedented cultural success. The positive reception of the VVM has been well documented. But the AIDS Quilt's popular success has been less discussed, perhaps because fewer people have made a deliberate commemorative pilgrimage to a Quilt display than to the VVM. However, it seems quite remarkable that an estimated 15 million people have seen the AIDS Quilt in

its 20 years, especially given (1) that most of its displays are small and fragmentary, and (2) that all of its displays are temporary and brief. It has also been a great fundraising success, generating millions of dollars not only to continue its display journey, but also for direct services to people living with AIDS.²⁴

Contexts of Invention and Reception

The standard, if not always accurate, view of public memorials and monuments tends to be about state power, about “official” renditions of the past, about the imposed authorization of heroes who become models for the everyday life of a polity.²⁵ But that view is not always or even frequently accurate, because many of the most prominent memory sites in the United States were the result of citizen efforts, often even funded by popular subscription. Still, as attested by both Mike Wallace’s and John Bodnar’s very different histories of memory practices in the United States, there have been moments of imposition, of officially sanctioned attempts to “educate” the masses in their patriotic, occupational, and cultural “responsibilities.”²⁶

As a generalization, it is fair to suggest that most U.S. national memorials, even those projects that have arisen as a result of grassroots efforts, have had the benefit of founding support from a group with considerable cultural capital. That is true in the cases of the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt as well. Both projects were initiated by individuals—Jan Scruggs and Cleve Jones respectively—who hardly were shrinking violets. Scruggs was a well-educated and articulate spokesperson, who proved quite capable of shaming Americans to open their wallets to contribute to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF), to muster the support for a major design competition, and to successfully lobby Congress to supply the prime real estate for the VVM. Jones, who had been a visible gay rights advocate in San Francisco, had the recognition and networks to turn his vision of the Quilt into a reality, by soliciting not only donations of money, but more importantly, of Quilt panels. By the time of its first Washington, D.C., display in the fall of 1987, the AIDS Memorial Quilt had grown from a single panel made by Jones for his friend Marvin Feldman (Figure 2) to 1,920 separate panels, a number that would quadruple in just one year.

These “origin stories” offer only the most narrow understanding of the contexts of invention of these two contemporary memorials, however.²⁷ Both of the memorials are cases of the social character of invention, in the most literal of terms.²⁸ The rhetorical invention of the VVM extended well beyond Jan Scruggs, the VVMF, and VVM designer Maya Lin, in at least two senses. First, the VVM was allowed to be constructed on public land only after a fractious

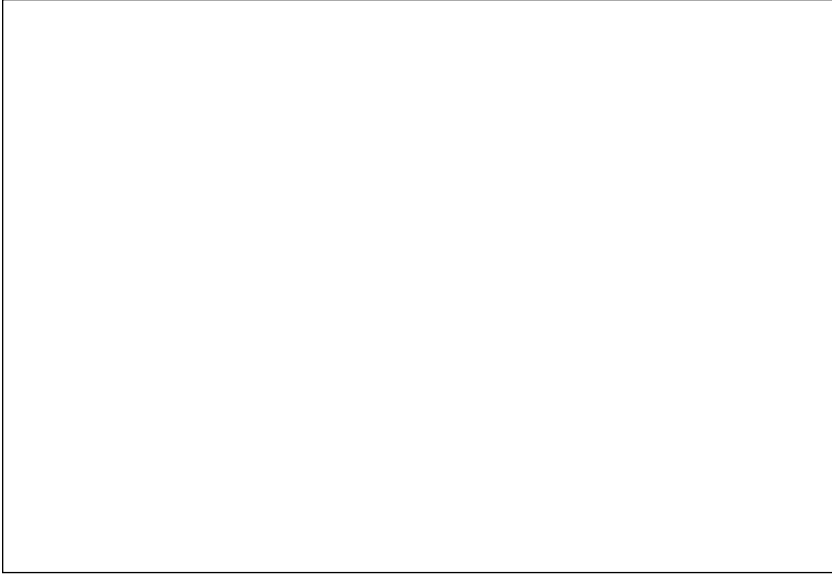


Figure 2. AIDS Quilt, Washington, D.C., by Neil Michel/AxiomPhoto.com

conflict over its design, a conflict played out in public as a result of objections lodged against Lin's design by a handful of Vietnam veterans. Although the conflicts did not result in the sought rejection or alteration of the Lin design, the opponents were successful in forcing a compromise that added Frederick Hart's *Three Fightingmen* sculpture and a flagpole to the site. In turn, that augmentation raised objections that women who had served in Vietnam were not represented adequately by the Memorial. The Vietnam Women's Memorial sculpture was added as a further augmentation to the site in 1993. That these sculptural additions have altered the site's rhetoric is virtually undisputed.²⁹ The ultimate success, if we wish to call it that, of these two attempts to augment the VVM suggests that the U.S. public is not just an audience, but also has been a collective participant in the invention of the site.

In addition to the sculptural amendments to the VVM, visitors to the Memorial reinvent its rhetoric daily, in the common practice of leaving "offerings" at the wall—everything from combat boots to poems.³⁰ Each day those artifacts modify the rhetoric of the VVM, leading visitors to focus on the relationship of artifact to architecture, on the character of a particular person listed on the wall, on a particular event in Vietnam, and so forth. In these senses, the VVM may be declared complete (as it has been by the National Park Service), but its rhetoric is never "complete," as long as it remains open to such inventive augmentation on the part of its visitors.

Still, the VVM—apart from the offerings that adorn it—has an official status, governmental sanction and maintenance, and a fixed location, attributes that distinguish it, as Hawkins points out, from the AIDS Memorial Quilt.³¹ Although we may understand—and many people have treated—the VVM as a context for rhetoric more than as a rhetorical text in its own right, it retains in its design a relatively stable rhetorical imprint, especially in comparison to the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Hawkins calls the Quilt “authorless,” elaborating this way:

It is true that Jones “invented” the initial three-by-six-foot panel, which he then imagined as one patch taking its place in a larger patchwork. Since then, however, he has had no control over how the Quilt would look, either in its parts or in its larger configurations, nor has the NAMES Project, beyond requiring specific dimensions for each panel and the name of the person to be remembered. Otherwise, design depends entirely on the quilters.³²

Of course, the Quilt is not really “authorless,” but instead has literally tens of thousands of “authors.” Still, **Hawkins is correct in observing that there is no author in the classic sense that offers unified interpretive authority.** Now, at more than 46,000 panels, the AIDS Quilt has been invented by a massive collection of individuals, most of them strangers to one another. They have each designed a small part of this giant memorial and have done so with very different aesthetics, tastes, and goals. As we have already noted, even those strictures of naming and size that Hawkins mentions have not been adhered to by all of the individual panel “authors.”

If the invention and reception contexts of the VVM are complex, with visitors and public advocates reinventing the site, those contexts become even more complicated with the AIDS Memorial Quilt, again in at least three important senses. First, any individual or small group that makes a Quilt panel is already engaged, during that process, in a private mourning activity, one that bears a strong similarity to the memory quilt tradition.³³ Unlike in that tradition, however, the AIDS Quilt panel is not retained by the individual or intimate group, but is relinquished to the NAMES Project for inclusion in the larger, collectivized, public memorial. The intimates of the dead, those who have designed individual Quilt panels, are almost certain to become audience members too, after the fact of relinquishment.³⁴ Many of them attend AIDS Quilt displays. But they are audience members among a great many others, some Quilt panel makers, some not. So the relatively private inventional creation of mourning becomes a part of a larger, more public performance, over which the individual panel designer wields no control.

Second, the AIDS Quilt is *literally* not finished. Although no one legitimately expects that all AIDS-related deaths will be acknowledged by the Quilt,

the invitation to submit panels remains perpetually open. One of the most disturbing features about the AIDS Quilt's rhetoric always has been its massive growth, an urgent reminder that AIDS continued to claim more lives, despite medical breakthroughs with drug therapy. In the most recent full display of the AIDS Quilt, in Washington, D.C., in 1996, its roughly 40,000 panels covered the National Mall, twice as many panels as in the full display in Washington just four years earlier.³⁵ Even the photos from atop the Washington Monument cannot capture its scale, for trees block the view of about one-third of the Quilt panels (Figure 3). **Each Quilt display becomes the impetus for new additions to it, again transforming audience members into rhetors.** And so, it continues to grow larger, its message elaborated by each addition.

Third, the NAMES Project has actively cultivated visitors' contributions of supplemental discourse to the Quilt at its displays. While no one perhaps anticipated the desire to leave "offerings" in the form of artifacts or messages at the VVM, it was an early expectation at sites of Quilt exhibitions. Signature blocks are set aside for people to write their reactions, and these blocks become part of the Quilt's rhetoric of display.³⁶ Here, an invited mode of reception becomes an inventional process, with visitors becoming rhetors. In our experience, these blocks, in turn, receive a significant amount of attention; visitors eagerly read the recorded reactions and messages of other visitors.

Public and Private Spheres

Almost no matter where one begins in the massive, interdisciplinary literature about "the public," the distinctions and relationships between public and private emerge as crucial issues.³⁷ We often refer unreflectively to collective memory sites as "public" memorials, when, indeed, they represent differential relationships of publicity and privacy, just as certainly as they occupy public space.³⁸ But some of these public memorials code those relationships much more explicitly than others. In recent times, the naming memorials have done so most prominently. No matter how much these commemorative works may differ from one another, naming multiple individuals in public space not only nominates those individuals as particularly significant members of the collective, but that gesture also marks a general relationship between individual and collective.

The VVM strikes a relatively precise equilibrium between private and public concerns. Close views reveal the inscription of individual names that, of course, imply much more than the identity "Vietnam veteran." From that close perspective, one must focus on individuals, for the larger view of the wall disappears from view. Still, the names reveal only limited information. They announce that this individual lived, was a U.S. soldier, and died in (or on the

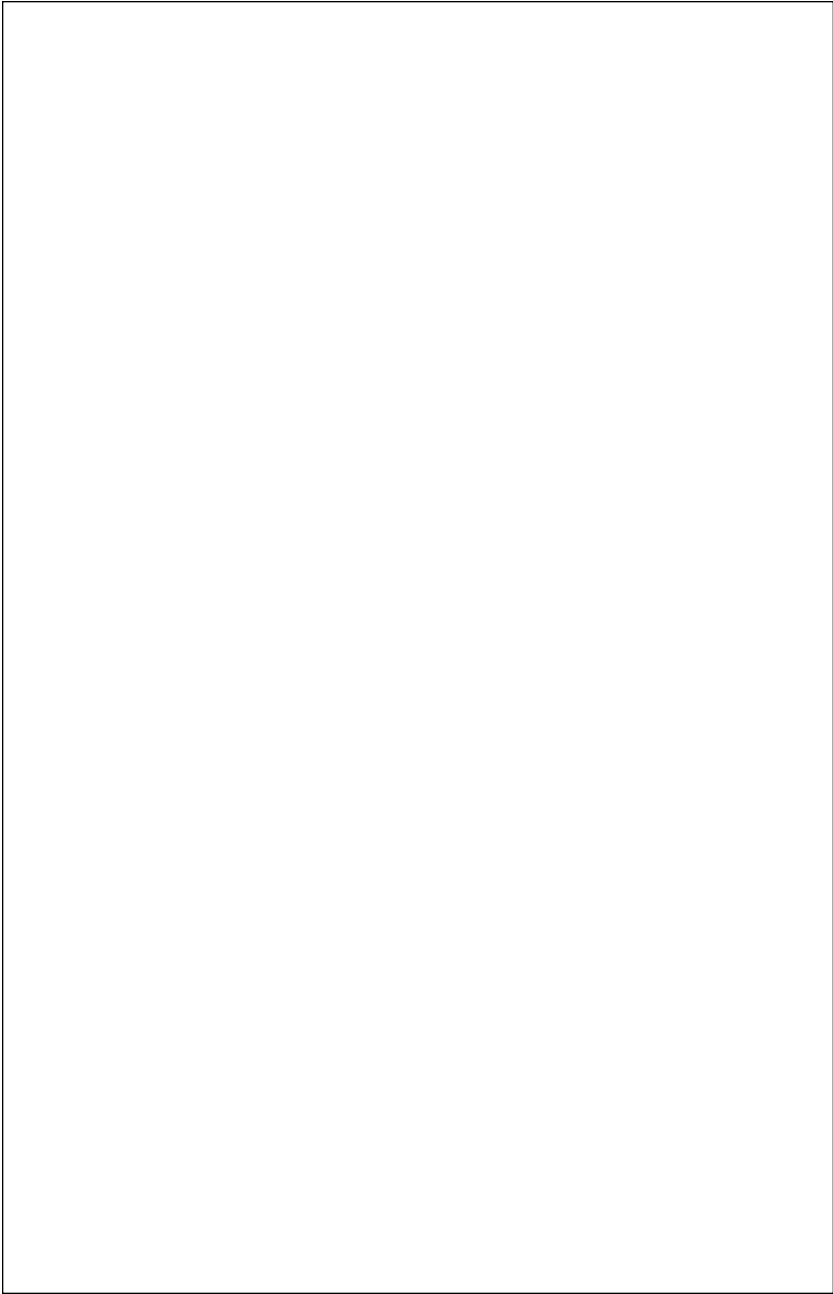


Figure 3. AIDS Quilt, Washington, D.C., 1994 by Neil Michel/AxiomPhoto.com

way to/from, or as a direct result of) the Vietnam conflict; visitors are offered little information beyond that, unless through the supplement of an “offering” left at the wall. Of course, names are symbolic harbingers of individual lives, but this is a rhetoric of implicature. The large majority of the names belong to people who are strangers to any one visitor, and thus visitors cannot know much about them as individuals.

From a more distant vantage point, the individual names disappear, and the massive cost of war comes into view. The visual character of the wall is such that the names of individuals are legible in tight focus, but even in a close-up view, the name of one individual cannot be seen in the absence of others’ names. Moreover, the names share space with the mirror images of visitors; the interpellation is inevitable. Whether or not the visitor has a private relationship with anyone whose name appears on the wall, and whatever the visitor might think about the advisability of the U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, a public relationship is forged indelibly by reflection. The names of the dead are “our” representatives, those sent to their deaths under the sign of a national public good.

The relationship of private individual to the public collective shows up very differently in the AIDS Memorial Quilt. There are similarities to the VVM, to be sure. Visitors to an individual Quilt panel see the quilts of other individuals that are grommeted to it, at least in a block of eight, the usual manner of displaying the Quilt groupings. At a larger distance, one sees the massive loss, one giant memorial rather than the thousands of smaller ones. A visitor may focus on the loss of one, but not in the absence of others. Visitors may also attend to the collective loss, but not without consideration of the individuals composing that collective.

But there are also significant differences in the ways in which the two memorials cast the specific lives and their relationships to a larger, public realm. Private lives are rendered visible in the AIDS Quilt much more than in the VVM. Granted, some of the Quilt panels bear only a name, offering little information about the individual. And of course, those panels honoring “Anonymous” seem to offer even less information than an inscription on the VVM wall. Nonetheless, most of the Quilt panels tell rather than imply stories. Visitors learn about the hobbies, political leanings, cultural status, age, work lives, favorite vacation spots, intimate relationships, personal accomplishments, and aspirations of the individuals represented by the AIDS Quilt. Some individual panels are performances of coming out. Visitors often see photographic representations of the individuals commemorated. In the large majority of the panels, names are named, but the names take on faces, personalities, and personal histories. In sum, private lives are displayed publicly, not by means of commemorative supplement, but by design of the memorial itself.

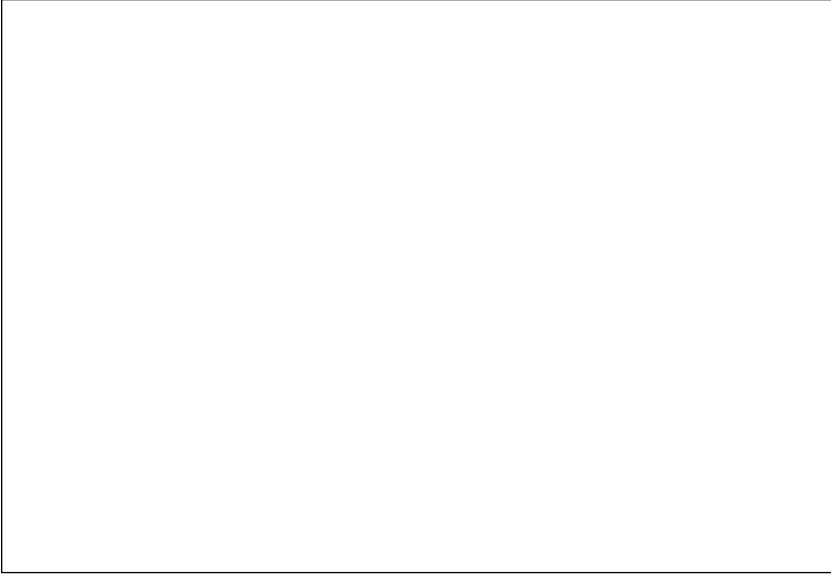


Figure 4. AIDS Quilt, Washington, D.C., by Neil Michel/AxiomPhoto.com

Some of the panels composing the AIDS Quilt portray the commemorated individuals' public identities. Individuals of high profile often have quilt panels that link their lives to the source of their fame. For example, Liberace's panel incorporates as its principal visual element a grand piano. Rock Hudson's panel (Figure 4) is covered with stars along with a rainbow that says "Hollywood."

Other Quilt panels, bearing names not so well known, link the individual to public causes. Many of the 46,000 panels incorporate a rainbow flag or a smaller representation of one. Some identify their subjects as members of the military. Some use national or state flags or parts of patriotic symbols as background. Others make claims on public issues verbally. For example, the Quilt panel for Paul Burdett says, "The San Diego 50 Hour Prayer Vigil was his creation. Please—More Prayers. More Funding." A panel in honor of Roger Lyons reads, "I CAME HERE TODAY TO ASK THAT THIS NATION WITH ALL ITS RESOURCES AND COMPASSION NOT LET MY EPITAPH READ HE DIED OF RED TAPE." Another Quilt panel, identified as honoring a military officer, says, "They gave me a medal for killing two men, and a discharge for loving one." In various ways, then, many of the Quilt panels, however straightforward or sardonic they may be, render the relationship of the deceased to a larger, political collective by means of effigy or elegy.

A remarkably high percentage of the AIDS Quilt panels, though, assert the identity of their subjects in terms of personal, rather than public, relationships.

Quilt panel makers often sign the panels. Many mark the individual by familial or social role—lover, father, son, brother, child, friend, husband, wife, sister. Some bear messages to the deceased, such as “I didn’t get a chance to say good-bye.” The much-reproduced panel in honor of Jac Wall surrounds a silhouette of the deceased man with these words:

Jac Wall is my lover. Jac Wall had AIDS. Jac Wall died. I love Jac Wall. Jac Wall is a good guy. Jac Wall made me a better person. Jac Wall could beat me in wrestling. Jac Wall loves me. Jac Wall is thoughtful. Jac Wall is great in bed. Jac Wall is intelligent. I love Jac Wall. Jac Wall is with me. Jac Wall turns me on. I miss Jac Wall. Jac Wall is faithful. Jac Wall is a natural Indian. Jac Wall is young at heart. Jac Wall looks good naked. I love Jac Wall. Jac Wall improved my life. Jac Wall is my lover. Jac Wall loves me. I miss Jac Wall. I will be with you soon.³⁹

The marking of identity by interaction and by relationship is such a pervasive feature that it simply cannot be ignored. It is remarkable not only because of the frequency with which it appears in the AIDS Quilt, but also because it so exceeds the norms of public memorial.

Public memorials clearly are always about relationships. In the absence of survivor memories, there would be no public memorials. Their inventional contexts may even be, in some respects, about personal relationships. For example, veterans groups often are sufficiently motivated by the closeness of their relationships with their GI “buddies” to commemorate them, sometimes even by taking on the wearisome work of advocating for a public memorial to be constructed. But it is not at all within the boundaries of the typical for a public memorial to code the specifics of personal relationships. More than any public memorial before, the AIDS Quilt seems to be as much about the survivors as about the deceased. That is not to say simply (and obviously) that it is *for* the survivors; its rhetoric is very much *about* them. Quilt panels often tell visitors the nature of the panel maker’s relationship to the deceased, how s/he felt about the deceased, and what he/she feels about the loss, as in Jac Wall’s case. If public memory has always been about the present, and thus more about survivors than the dead, this memorial is more explicit about that than any predecessors we have observed. With the AIDS Memorial Quilt, then, the private-public representation is weighted toward the private.⁴⁰

That weighting toward the private is reinforced in an odd way by the fact that these memorials have been characterized in popular interpretation, academic writing, and cultural practice as “therapeutic.” For example, Charles L. Griswold asserts, without apparent hesitation or evidence, that “a main purpose of the Memorial is therapeutic, a point absolutely essential for an adequate understanding of the VVM. . . . It was generally understood that what

the nation needed was a monument that would heal the veterans as well as the rest of us, rather than exacerbate old wounds and reignite old passions.”⁴¹ The AIDS Memorial Quilt is, if anything, referenced in the terms of psychoanalytic metaphors more explicitly, assertively, and frequently than even the VVM. These typical newspaper headlines demonstrate just how pervasive this terminology became: “AIDS Quilt Comforting U.S. Grief,” “The NAMES Project: A Catharsis of Grief,” “A Healing of Hearts.”⁴²

Terms like “therapy,” “therapeutic,” “rehabilitation,” and “healing” are ubiquitous, not appearing very often in the discourse of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund or the NAMES Project, but instead in the popular and academic interpretive milieux. That these memorials should be understood as offering therapy for trauma can be accounted for in any number of ways.⁴³ The terminology may reach back to the realm of physicality, wherein the figures of both the Vietnam veteran and the person with AIDS represent abject bodies, the wounded soldier and the terminally ill patient, in need of therapy and healing. But it more frequently seems to reference psychoanalytic forms of treatment, either literally or metaphorically. Literally, of course, the reference makes sense. Many returning Vietnam veterans were treated for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). With AIDS, especially in urban gay communities, people often have sought out grief therapy to cope with the loss not just of a loved one, but sometimes of whole friendship networks—often within a very short time period.⁴⁴

But there is also a metaphoric use of this terminology, which assigns ill health to the public realm and suggests that the memorials work their therapeutic processes on the diseased polity. At the very least, most commentators that use the terminology tend to tack back and forth between the literal sense of individuals seeking therapy and figurative “therapy” being worked on a larger, political collective. This usage, of course, not only shifts issues of privacy into the public, but it also reinforces the blurring of the contexts of invention and reception discussed earlier, and in ways that seem to us to be problematic. This unfortunate headline suggests part of the problem: “Powerful Images: Quilt Softens Pain of AIDS Deaths.”⁴⁵ The article that follows is about panel makers working on a Quilt panel for their loved one, not about an AIDS Quilt display. The AIDS Quilt, of course, was intended to do precisely the opposite of the headline; its distinctly political mission was to confront people with the enormity of loss, to intensify, not “soften,” the pain. As Christopher Capozzola argues, the AIDS Quilt was “intended as a tool of political mobilization and as a weapon in the battle for access to economic resources that could be used in the fight against AIDS.”⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the language of therapy, when the metaphor reaches too far, depoliticizes the AIDS Memorial Quilt, rendering it as comforting and curative

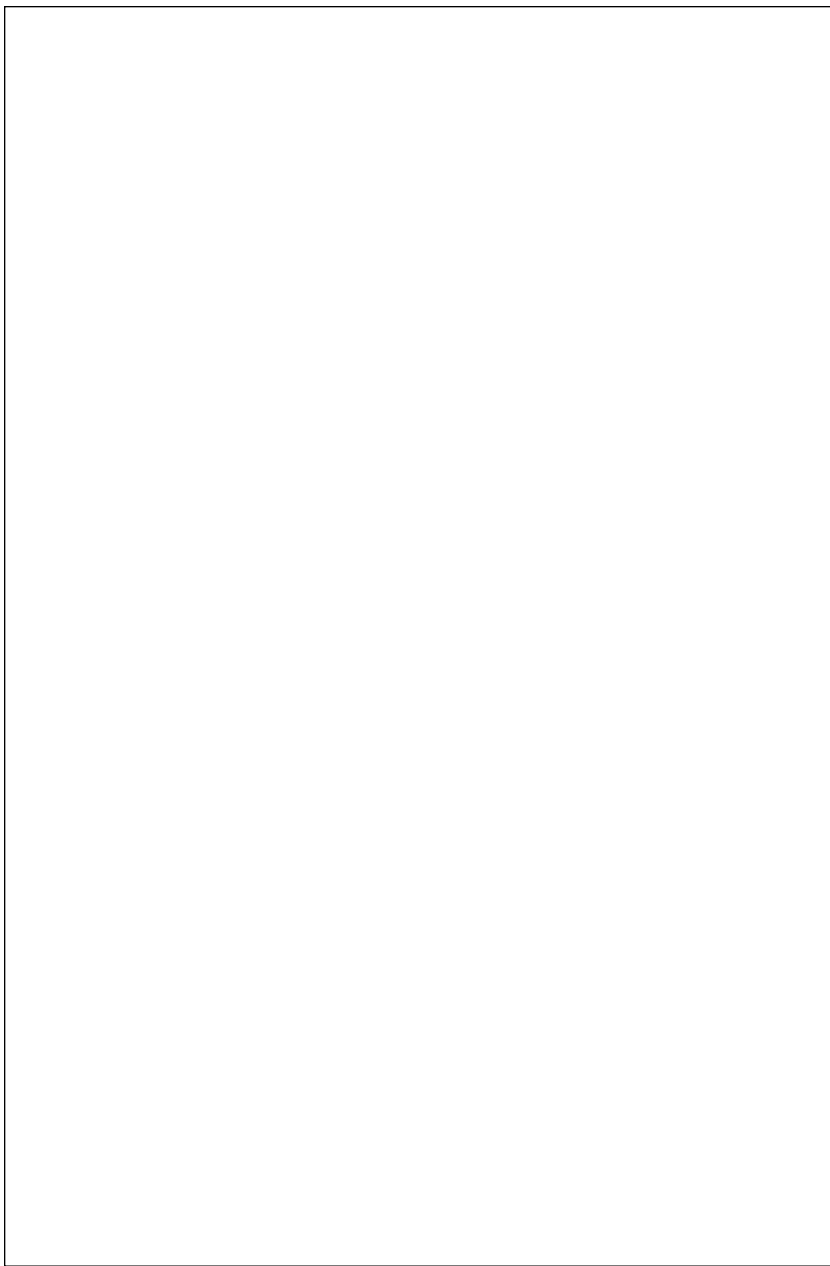


Figure 5. President Bill and Hillary Clinton at AIDS Quilt, Washington, D.C., by Neil Michel/AxiomPhoto.com

rather than as angry and confrontational. The political climate that inspired the NAMES Project should not be discounted here. As Capozzola points out, “During the 1980s, many AIDS activists condemned the Reagan administration for its silence on the issue of AIDS; the President did not even mention the word *AIDS* publicly until over 21,000 Americans had already died of the disease.”⁴⁷ It was not until 1996, in fact, that a U.S. president attended a Quilt display, in spite of the proximity to the White House of the four prior full displays of the AIDS Quilt (Figure 5), an absence that was much remarked in the 1980s and early 1990s.

As Alan Zarembo concludes, “In the 25 years of the epidemic, no symbol has managed to capture the sense of rage and loss like the quilt.”⁴⁸ Mourning and activism, as Douglas Crimp has pointed out, do not have to be mutually exclusive.⁴⁹ When the language of therapy overwhelms the political, however, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is diminished. It unbalances understandings of the Quilt as a vehicle of both productive mourning (especially, but not exclusively in its inventional contexts) and political activism.

That is also the conclusion Zarembo implies, bemoaning what he sees as the Quilt’s recent devolution to “a museum piece.”⁵⁰ He attributes the Quilt’s much slower growth, its nearly moribund fundraising capacity, and its relative lack of attention to a number of conditions, especially the exportation of concern that has occurred “as new drugs have driven down the death rate here and shifted the epicenter of anguish abroad, where the disease kills 2.8 million people a year.”⁵¹ He also notes as a factor the shifting demographics of the disease in the United States. But the subtext of the article gets at an important, final issue having to do with the shifting ground of public and private concern: the ownership of the AIDS Quilt.

Since nearly the beginning of the NAMES Project, “ownership” issues have been in play, particularly with respect to questions of the Quilt as a “gay memorial.” As AIDS demographics shifted from the “risk groups” of gay men, hemophiliacs, and intravenous drug users to a larger population, there were debates about “de-gayng” the AIDS Quilt. There were conflicts too, from time to time, between the national NAMES Project headquarters and local chapters. But “ownership” is now literally ownership, and the NAMES Project is at odds with Cleve Jones (who was fired from the project in 2003), as well as with many of the local chapters, the ones that are still in existence. This is, in part, a conflict of purpose, with Jones insisting that “Everything about AIDS is political,” and that “[t]he people with the quilt have a weapon that they have decommissioned.”⁵² Meanwhile, according to Zarembo, “The [NAMES Project] foundation recently completed writing a two-page strategic plan, saying that the quilt has outgrown its activist roots and should now serve as an inspiration to those living with AIDS.”⁵³ The ownership disputes seem now to

have been almost inevitable, given the democratic character of the inventional process and the frequent linkages of AIDS activism and gay identity issues. But they have had the unfortunate result of relegating the Quilt to near repose in its warehouse in Atlanta.⁵⁴

A NEW POLITICS OF COMMEMORATION?

The VVM is typically credited with, or blamed for, initiating the contemporary culture of commemoration, one in which the issues we have raised here continue to be addressed with a variety of results. Although some claims may be made to the progressive character of this new culture, there are reasons to approach it with a certain degree of skepticism. The VVM is a touchstone; new commemorative works are inevitably compared to it. But we believe that this contemporary commemorative culture may be more understandable if we consider it against the backdrop of a conversation between the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt—their agreements and disagreements, continuities and discontinuities—about how to commemorate in the contemporary United States. Like many others, we have placed these two important memorials in conversation with one another, not because they always “agree,” but precisely because they often do not. Their most important shared attribute, in our view, is an attitude toward public commemoration that is straightforwardly rhetorical, rhetorical in the sense of being accountable to its subject matter, if not always to generic expectation.

Their differential departures from the norms of traditional, Western commemoration were an important source of their success. It is not just formal differences—height, color, and so forth—that distinguish the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt from that tradition. The works display an attitude of sincerity, an attempt at honesty about the difficulties of commemoration, particularly about public commemoration in a sometimes troubled republic. These two memorials focus in different ways on the individual, but they also dignify a spirit of collectivity marked by mutual obligation. The rhetoric of both subverts the (sometimes perhaps disingenuous) claims of their spokespersons that they are “apolitical.” Both make the claim that the political collective does not always do right by its citizens, but they insist that it should.

The number of new, public commemorative sites of both national and local interest in the United States since 1982 is staggering; indeed, we have no way of enumerating them, because there are so many, and because they continue to spring up. Even the number of national projects is difficult to track, for similar reasons. It is no small matter to plan, design, and build a national memorial, but literally hundreds of groups have made the attempt in recent years, and many of them have succeeded. In addition to the VVM, its sculptural supplements, and

the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the following is a sample of those projects that have been completed:

- African American Civil War Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
- Astronauts Memorial (Cape Canaveral, FL)
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
- George Mason Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
- Indian Memorial (Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, MT)
- Korean War Veterans Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
- National D-Day Memorial (Bedford, VA)
- National Japanese American Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
- Oklahoma City National Memorial (Oklahoma City, OK)
- U.S. Air Force Memorial (Arlington, VA)
- U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, D.C.—both a dedicated memorial and a museum)
- U.S. Law Enforcement Officers Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
- U.S. Navy Memorial (Washington, D.C.)
- Women in the Military Services for America Memorial (Arlington, VA)
- World War II Memorial (Washington, D.C.)

In various stages of planning, but not yet completed, are national memorials honoring American Veterans Disabled for Life, Dwight David Eisenhower, John Adams (and family), Martin Luther King Jr., and Victims of Communism. Also in process are memorials at each of the three death sites from September 11, 2001. The rash of new projects has led to a number of attempts to limit additional commemorative building, particularly in the monumental core of Washington, D.C. The restrictions so far have been undermined, frequently by the same decision makers who put them in place; congresspersons, presidents, and agency heads have found that the politics of memory is realpolitik.⁵⁵

Not included in these already lengthy lists are memorials that have generated broad national interest but that are not, technically speaking, national memorials, like the Civil Rights Memorial (Montgomery, AL), the Witch Trials Tercentenary Memorial (Salem, MA), the Freedom Forum Journalists

Memorial (Arlington, VA), and the Kent State May 4 Memorial (Kent, OH).⁵⁶ In any case, the issue is not just how many, but how rapidly these have appeared. In the United States, it clearly was the VVM that set in motion the rush to commemorate, but Holocaust memory work, especially in the 1990s, fueled the drive further.

It is well beyond the scope of this essay to outline in any exhaustive way the culture of commemoration these new memorial projects represent. But we take up some fragmentary features of the culture in order to reach back to the conjuncture marked by the AIDS Quilt. Even a cursory glance at the list of new commemorative works must suggest at least the amazing diversity of projects, from those undertaken to honor the “dispossessed” (Japanese American internees during World War II, African American soldiers in the Civil War, women in the military, Native Americans killed at the Little Bighorn, civil rights workers, those accused of witchcraft in seventeenth-century New England, students killed by the Ohio National Guard in May 1970) to those that acknowledge groups already possessing some cultural capital, like U.S. presidents and statesmen, astronauts, police officers, journalists, and U.S. soldiers from various periods. It is a dizzying array that defies easy explanation.

In a sense, though, an explanation—however incomplete—begins to arise from our examination of the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt. These 1980s memorials reeducated the U.S. political culture about the importance of affect in public life and about the significance of the past to the formation and maintenance of political identities, even when the past sometimes is not what we wish it had been. Following a period of almost 40 years in which commemoration was coupled to an affectless public works project mentality (taking the form of “functional” or “recreational” memorials), the 1980s memorials rearticulated commemoration and public art.⁵⁷ The popular success of that rebuilt relationship was profound, and it points back to the democratization of public commemoration, discussed by memory scholars and enacted by the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

Almost all of these many new additions to the political geography were undertaken by grassroots groups and became national-scope efforts. Some, like the U.S. Navy Memorial and the FDR Memorial, had been proposed years before but gained new impetus in the late 1980s. Others took shape only in the wake of the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Still others reflect the increasingly rapid move to commemorate an event. The Oklahoma City Memorial was dedicated just five years after the 1995 Murrah Building bombing. Editorials urging public commemoration of September 11, 2001, began to appear in major newspapers just days after the attacks, sometimes with quite specific suggestions of what the memorials should look like.⁵⁸ Initial plans for the Pentagon memorial projected its dedication for the first anniversary of the

attacks, but apparently clearer heads prevailed, at least on the issue of how long the project might require.⁵⁹

The establishment of new public commemorative sites in recent years seems to us, on balance, to be a positive contribution to U.S. public memory. Not only has it “recovered” some events from the past that clearly were worthy of commemoration, but it also has begun to further democratize the memory landscape, with heretofore under- or unrepresented groups being recognized. Some of the new memorials, such as the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt, raise serious questions about the U.S. political imaginary, about its inclusiveness, its adherence to principle, or the soundness of its policy. The juxtaposed representations in the National Japanese American Memorial of Japanese Americans marching off to military duty in World War II while members of their families were stripped of their possessions and marched off to internment camps is but one example. Others of the new memorials, especially the World War II Memorial, are overtly and unquestioningly nationalistic, offering a counter of sorts to the attitude of commemoration forwarded by the VVM and extended by the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Some new memorials follow slavishly the VVM’s stylistic features, but do not seem able to capture its capacity to move. Some of the new memorials are exceptional artworks, though, offering not only acknowledgment, but also eloquent enhancements to the aesthetic of their settings.

On one hand, then, much of the new culture of commemoration seems to reflect, even advance, the progressive attitude of its progenitors. But there is also another hand, and its character emerged perhaps most obviously with the Oklahoma City National Memorial, and later in the planning and debates about September 11, 2001, commemoration. The issues we have taken up here to characterize the VVM and the AIDS Memorial Quilt, those related to democratization, context of invention and reception, and publicity and privacy, are all in play with these projects, but they emerge in very different, recombinant, forms.

Most obvious is a clear rush to commemorate. Placed in historical context, the rapidity of commemorative responses to the terrorist attacks of 1995 and 2001 is breathtaking. Consider, for example, that the *U.S.S. Arizona* Memorial was not dedicated until more than 20 years after the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was relatively speedy by contrast to the major presidential memorials on the Mall. The VVM was dedicated in 1982, about seven years after the U.S. withdrawal. The AIDS Memorial Quilt is exceptional, of course, because the NAMES Project was founded not to mark the end of the pandemic but to contribute to the effort to end it.

The Oklahoma City National Memorial was dedicated just five years after Timothy McVeigh’s bomb exploded. Planning to “officially” commemorate September 11 was in process within less than a year after the attacks on the

World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Although the three projects in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia remain incomplete, they all were initiated very quickly. But these projects lacked the overtly urgent demands that brought the NAMES Project into existence; there certainly was no shortage of sympathy or support on the part of the U.S. public and the U.S. government in the immediate aftermath of the 1995 and 2001 attacks.⁶⁰ The very early planning to commemorate, regardless of whether there was really such urgency, almost certainly accounts for some of the features of the planning as well as for some of the decisions made in those processes.

The planning processes for the memorials in Oklahoma City, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, of course, have differed markedly from one another.⁶¹ Nonetheless, reports such as Edward T. Linenthal's careful documentation of the process in Oklahoma City, the thorough press coverage of September 11 commemoration, and the well-maintained websites from each of the memorial projects point us toward several notable features.⁶² Among them are the related figure of "the survivor" and the "therapy" motive. Linenthal's account of Oklahoma City, of course, is the most complete, because that memorial is finished. It is also—so far—the most chilling, especially if we heed Sturken's admonition about U.S. culture's "tendency to romanticize trauma."⁶³ Linenthal discusses the difficulty, for example, of defining "survivor," a task made necessary because the mission statement for the Oklahoma City Memorial had specified that names of survivors appear on the memorial site. As he suggests, "Given the *cultural prestige* of the category of 'survivor,' there was a clear danger that the *allure of being so anointed* could tempt some to claim such *status* inappropriately, thereby trivializing the wrenching experiences of others."⁶⁴

Some of the more compelling images from Linenthal's account are about the conflicts and competitions among family members of the deceased and survivors, many of whom were participating in the Oklahoma City planning process as a mode of therapy.⁶⁵ Before the project was off the ground, survivors were engaging in recrimination, fighting with one another about who was more injured than whom, and in a (probably grief-induced) loss of perspective, insisting that the memorial to the 168 people who died there should be of the same scale as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum—a museum that commemorates the deaths of six million people.⁶⁶ One cannot help but wonder, in reading Linenthal's account, if the process helped to resolve pain or simply inflicted more for those most directly affected. We will leave the question of the quality of the "healing" process here to social workers and psychologists, but its effectiveness seems to be an open question.

Paul Goldberger's general observation, in his assessment of the World Trade Center site, raises additional, related questions: "The monument issue is

complicated by a tendency in the last few years to think of public memorials as 'healing' places for families. But great memorials also inspire awe, and make it possible to transcend the simply personal meaning of an event."⁶⁷ Whether he is correct in implying that awe is what great memorials always inspire, he does at least help us raise the question of whether the participation in the inventional process of those closest to the tragedy is likely to produce the conditions for great public art. With due respect to the bereaved, it is a question worth posing, for memorials often play a major role in an ongoing public process of negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of an event for generations to come. Nikki Stern, whose husband was killed on September 11, makes the case starkly: "Does losing someone in a terrorist attack make one an expert on terrorism or memorial design? Obviously not."⁶⁸

The second issue raised by Goldberger's statement, however inadvertently, is especially ironic, given our understanding here of the AIDS Memorial Quilt as a harbinger of some of these issues. That is the issue of "family" as the preferred way of referencing survivors. As tempting as it might be, we do not point to that terminology to scold Oklahoma City or New York for not being more like the Castro in San Francisco, where the NAMES Project was initiated. The point is how the boundary between invention and reception has been further breached, with family/survivors fully engaged in the planning and decision-making processes.

The family/survivor also reconfigures the relationship of public and private as they are marked in the memorials' designs. "Special" areas will be restricted to family members of the deceased in the September 11 memorials, a feature that is shared by the Oklahoma City National Memorial. There, only family members are allowed access to the area called the "field of chairs," where each of the 168 stone and glass chairs names one of the individuals killed in the bomb blast (Figure 6).

This area of the Memorial, probably the most recognizable from press accounts, clearly was intended as the centerpiece of the site. But the family-only interdiction is enforced by a chain enclosure and by security guards. If a family/survivor is present, s/he is incorporated by visibility as part of the commemorative site, to be gazed upon as another accoutrement of the Memorial. Other visitors, members of the public, are denied contact with the Memorial's representation of the individual victims, in other words, to the most significant symbol of the site. There are several effects of this decision, not the least of which is to render "family/survivor" as spectacle, but another is a literal dislocation of the public at allegedly public memorial sites. This is a very serious "ownership" issue, of more consequence than various groups' attempts to control a commemorative artwork. Oklahoma City's restrictions, as well as the planned "private" areas at the September 11 memorials, raise the question of

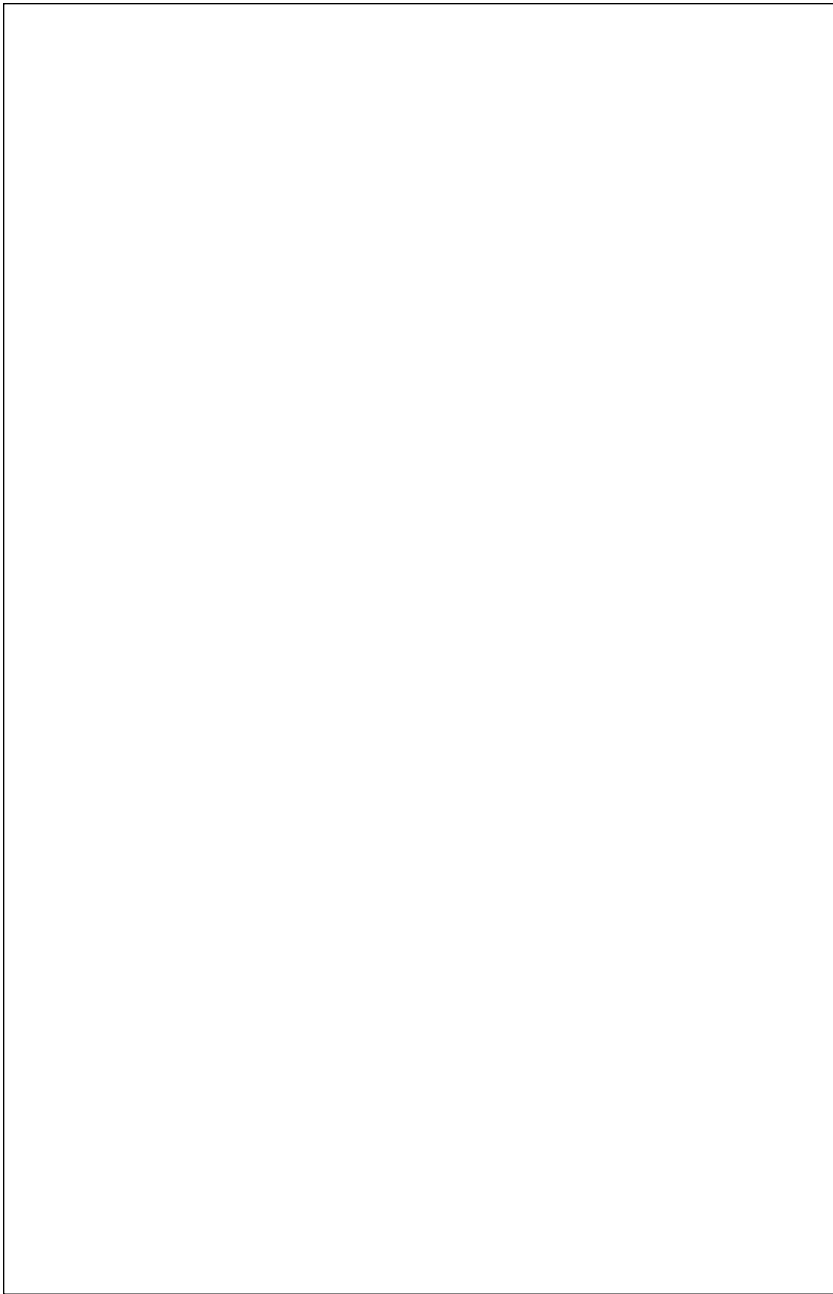


Figure 6. Oklahoma City Memorial by Neil Michel/AxiomPhoto.com

whether these really are public memorials at all, or whether they are private memorials that merely tolerate public spectators. It is a new development in commemorative design, and it is a rather troubling one.

CONCLUSION

The VVM may have been the model, the prototype, or the enabler for these new memorial projects. But we believe it is the AIDS Memorial Quilt that most clearly signaled some of the developments in new commemorative works. Of course, the NAMES Project, Cleve Jones, and the panel makers are not responsible for the developments. Nonetheless, we might understand the Quilt's rhetoric as having been an early sign of things to come. It did its rhetorical work, first, with its bold and fractious departures from traditional generic expectations. It pushed the boundaries further even than the VVM had done before it, particularly in its foregrounding of difference as a legitimate marker of democracy and in its particular mode of blurring reception and invention contexts without completely erasing the line between them. Important and unprecedented too was its weighting of the public-private dialectic toward privacy, but without defacing the public. It initiated the inscription of the survivor as an explicit figure of commemorative work. Along with the VVM, it prefigured the motifs of therapy and healing that have become so pronounced in more recent years, for good or ill.

We believe the AIDS Memorial Quilt still has the potential to be more than "a museum piece." Whatever its fate in the years to come, though, we believe a part of its legacy will (and should) be as an important commemorative artwork in its own right. Another will be its capacity, particularly in its initial decade, to move visitors to tears and to open their wallets for medical research and for support of people living with HIV-AIDS. A sincere and stirring tribute to the dead, it was also a provocative political instrument. We hope that another part of the legacy of the AIDS Memorial Quilt will be to caution those who plan and design public commemorative artworks, in two senses. The first warning is, in Marita Sturken's words, that "[c]ultural memory is not in and of itself a healing process."⁶⁹ And second, public commemoration is unlikely to survive the displacement of the public.

NOTES

1. E. G. Crichton put the case well: "The NAMES Project Quilt has an unusually large [audience]: hundreds of thousands of us across the nation who have walked amidst the panels, stood in the sea of colorful memories, cried, found panels of people we've known, hugged strangers—in general been awed, moved, and inspired by the power of the total vision. . . . The NAMES Quilt bridges the gap between art and social consciousness. Art is too often

peripheral to our society, seen as superfluous fluff. Political activism, on the other hand, is often perceived as uncreative and separate from culture. The Quilt is a rare successful integration of these two worlds . . .” E. G. Crichton, “Is The NAMES Quilt Art?” *OUT/LOOK* 1, no. 2 (1988): 7–8. That is not to suggest that everyone agrees with her assessment. The project has been tarred with labels like “kitsch” and snubbed for promoting exploitative commodification. See Daniel Harris, “Making Kitsch from AIDS,” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 1994, 35. Regardless of whether one thinks of the AIDS Memorial Quilt as art or as kitsch, it has enjoyed remarkable public success, in terms of popularity (as measured by the number of exhibits and attendees) and press coverage.

2. See Lawrence W. Grossberg, “Does Cultural Studies Have Futures? Should It? (Or What’s the Matter with New York?): Cultural Studies, Contexts, and Conjunctions,” *Cultural Studies* 20 (2006): 1–32. We are not certain that our understanding of a “conjunction” matches Grossberg’s. The commemorative “conjunction” is not of the same scale as in his use of the term to describe macrocultural phenomena. Although what we describe here as a conjunction is “small” by contrast, it is culturally significant in its impact on collective memory practices.
3. For example, Brown et al. argue that the national debate over issues of race in the contemporary United States turns on the “profound disagreement over the legacy of the civil rights movement.” Michael K. Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of the Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1.
4. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
5. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Peter S. Hawkins, “Naming Names: The Art of Memory and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 752–79. The original inspiration for this paper, however, comes from Enrico Pucci Jr. and Marsha S. Jeppeson. Their insights about the relationships between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt have been instrumental in shaping our views of the continuities between the two memorials. Also see Timothy P. Brown, “Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy,” *Third Text* 18 (2004): 247–59; and Christopher Capozzola, “A Very American Epidemic: Memory Politics and Identity Politics in the AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1985–1993,” *Radical History Review* 82 (2002): 91–109. These and many other sources take the VVM as a touchstone for the AIDS Quilt and/or place them in critical conversation with one another.
6. See, for example, “Washington’s Memorial Mania,” *Newsweek*, May 27, 1991, 25; and George F. Will, “The Statue Sweepstakes,” *Newsweek*, August 26, 1991, 64.
7. These have enabled, in turn, still others. See Carole Blair, “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” in *Rhetorical Bodies*, ed. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 16–57.
8. Daniel Abramson, “Maya Lin and the 1960s: Monuments, Time Lines, and Minimalism,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): 679.
9. Hawkins, “Naming Names,” 756–57.
10. Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci Jr., “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 279.
11. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 702.

12. John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identification*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), especially 14, 17.
13. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
14. Both the Roosevelt Memorial and the George Mason Memorial, also nearby, were constructed after the VVM.
15. See Carole Blair, "Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places," *Western Journal of Communication* 65 (2001): especially 278–83.
16. NAMES Project Foundation, <http://www.aidsquilt.org/quiltfacts.htm>, updated June 15, 2006 (accessed January 7, 2007).
17. Anyone not familiar with the Sisters might wish to access: The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, Inc., <http://www.thesisters.org/>. Its mission statement reads as follows: "The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, Inc. is a leading-edge Order of queer nuns. Since their first appearance in San Francisco on Easter Sunday 1979, the Sisters have devoted themselves to community service, ministry and outreach to those on the edges, and to promoting human rights, respect for diversity and spiritual enlightenment. The Sisters believe all people have a right to express their unique joy and beauty and use humor and irreverent wit to expose the forces of bigotry, complacency and guilt that chain the human spirit."
18. Cindy Ruskin, *The Quilt: Stories from the NAMES Project* (New York: Pocket Books, 1988), 126.
19. NAMES Project Foundation.
20. Ryan White was an Indiana boy, diagnosed with AIDS in 1984 at age 13. His fight to continue to attend a public school brought international attention to him and his cause. He died in the spring of 1990.
21. For example, a Quilt panel for Roy Cohn, infamous for his role in the Ethel and Julius Rosenberg trial and for his public homophobia (although he was homosexual), bears simply his name and the words "Bully," "Coward," "Victim." Another for Cohn inscribes his name on a flag of the Soviet Union. See The AIDS Memorial Quilt Archive, <http://www.archive.aidsquilt.org> (accessed January 8, 2007).
22. Richard D. Mohr, *Gay Ideas: Outing and Other Controversies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 110–11. Although we are uncomfortable with Mohr's diremption of the moral and the political, his reading of the Quilt is an important one, and on the issues he raises on mourning and the moral we are indebted to his work.
23. See, for example, Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: Dreams, Visions, and Commercial Spaces* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 122–23. Gottdiener recognizes the distinction at first, in his description of the effort to build "a memorial to the veterans of the Vietnam War" (122), but then, without comment, abandons it; in further discussion it becomes the "Vietnam War Memorial" (123, 170).
24. NAMES Project Foundation.
25. See, for example, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 220–28. Also see Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures* (London: Routledge, 1997), 58–83.
26. See Bodnar, especially his chapter "The National Park Service and History." Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 169–205. See also Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996). Especially pertinent on

- this point is his essay "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States." Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, 3–32.
27. See Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 71, 185–86.
 28. Karen Burke LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987).
 29. See, for example, Christopher Knight's astute assessment of the impact of the Vietnam Women's Memorial. Knight, "Politics Mars Remembrance," *Sacramento Bee*, November 7, 1993, Forum 1. For the origins of the second sculpture augmentation, see Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall, "The Sexual Politics of Memory: The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project and 'The Wall,'" *Prospects* 14 (1989): 341–72.
 30. See Thomas B. Allen, *Offerings at the Wall: Artifacts from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1995); Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and A. Cheree Carlson and John E. Hocking, "Strategies of Remembrance at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 52 (1988): 203–15.
 31. Hawkins, "Naming Names," 762.
 32. Hawkins, "Naming Names," 763–64.
 33. Hawkins, "Naming Names," 766–67; Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 191–94.
 34. This "relinquishment" may be the most difficult part of the process. Both Kerewsky and Krouse address the fact that panel makers often have a hard time letting go of their contributions. Shoshana D. Kerewsky, "The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Personal and Therapeutic Uses," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 24 (1997): 431–38; and Mary Beth Krouse, "Gift Giving, Identity, and Transformation: The AIDS Memorial Quilt," *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity* 4 (1999): 241–56.
 35. Allegedly because of the major expense and massive organizing effort required and the difficulty of finding a location large enough to display the full Quilt, the last full display was in 1996. To our knowledge, there have been no plans on the part of the NAMES Project to attempt it again. The AIDS Quilt weighs more than 54 tons, and spread out horizontally with walkway fabric, it would cover 1,293,300 square feet. According to the NAMES Project, with the walkway, that is the approximate equivalent of 275 NCAA basketball courts. See NAMES Project Foundation, <http://www.archive.aidsquilt.org/quiltfacts.htm> (accessed January 3, 2007).
 36. The important nuances of the idea of a "rhetoric of display" are elaborated effectively by Lawrence J. Prelli, "Rhetorics of Display: An Introduction," in *Rhetorics of Display*, ed. Lawrence J. Prelli (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 1–38.
 37. See, for example, Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, eds. *Counterpublics and the State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A Speculative Inquiry into the Art of Public Deliberation," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 18 (1982): 214–27; Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, reprint ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New

- York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); and Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).
38. We take seriously efforts to rethink the public sphere as a spatialized notion, but such spatialization calls even more attention to the relationship of public and private. See Setha Low and Neil Smith, eds., *The Politics of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
 39. Hawkins, "Naming Names," 774.
 40. Also bearing this out is the practice of submitting a letter along with a Quilt panel to the NAMES Project. See Joe Brown, *A Promise to Remember: The NAMES Project Book of Letters* (New York: Avon, 1992).
 41. Charles L. Griswold, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall: Philosophical Thoughts on Political Iconography," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 712. Also see Kim Servart Theriault, "Re-membering Vietnam: War, Trauma, and 'Scarring Over' After 'The Wall,'" *Journal of American Culture* 26 (2003): 421–31.
 42. Gary Abrams, "AIDS Quilt Comforting U.S. Grief," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1988; Gerry Gentry, "The NAMES Project: A Catharsis of Grief," *Christian Century*, May 24–31, 1989, 550; and Tom Dixon, "A Healing of Hearts," *Frontiers*, April 6–20, 1988, 60. Such usage has been just as pervasive in academic discourse. See, for example, Timothy P. Brown, "Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy"; Hawkins, "Naming Names"; Kerewsky, "The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Personal and Therapeutic Uses"; Krosue, "Gift Giving, Identity, and Transformation"; and Sturken, "Tangled Threads." See also Jacqueline Lewis and Michael R. Fraser, "Patches of Grief and Rage: Visitor Responses to the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt," *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (1996): 433–51; Gregg Stull, "The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Performing Memory, Piecing Action," *American Art* 15 (2001): 84–89.
 43. See Timothy P. Brown, "Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy."
 44. One often reads accounts of gay male urban dwellers attending a funeral every month or even more frequently. Cleve Jones's report of his experience is hardly atypical: "I wasn't just losing friends, but also losing all the familiar faces of the neighborhood—the bus drivers, clerks and mailmen. . . . When I walk up 18th Street from Church Street to Eureka Street, a distance of eight blocks, just looking at all these houses and knowing the stories behind so many of the windows, makes me feel so old. To know that's where Shane died, that's where Alan died, that was Bobby's last house, that's where Gregory died, that's where Jimmy was diagnosed, that's the house Alex got kicked out of." Quoted in Ruskin, *The Quilt*, 18.
 45. Rochelle D. Lewis, "Powerful Images: Quilt Softens Pain of AIDS Deaths," *St. Petersburg Times*, March 31, 1989, 1D.
 46. Capozzola, "A Very American Epidemic," 93.
 47. Capozzola, "A Very American Epidemic," 98.
 48. Alan Zarembo, "Once a Mighty Symbol of Love and Loss: The Tribute to Victims of AIDS Has Gone from Large to Largely Forgotten," *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 2006, A1.
 49. Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October* 51 (1989): 3–18.
 50. Zarembo, "Once a Mighty Symbol of Love and Loss," A1. If his position seems rather unfair, it is worthwhile to contemplate the NAMES Project's own account of itself. On the back of the 2007 NAMES Project Foundation's calendar, sent out each year to donors, is this self-representation: "The NAMES Project Foundation, Inc.—the international, non-governmental organization that is the custodian of The AIDS Memorial Quilt—was established in 1987. The mission of the NAMES Project Foundation is to foster healing, heighten awareness and inspire action in the age of AIDS. At the close of 2005, The NAMES Project

Foundation/AIDS Memorial Quilt was awarded a prestigious Save America's Treasures Federal Grant. The Quilt is now recognized as part of America's priceless historic legacy, an enduring symbol that helps define us as a nation."

51. Zaremba, "Once a Mighty Symbol of Love and Loss," A1.
52. Quoted in Zaremba, "Once a Mighty Symbol of Love and Loss," A1.
53. Zaremba, "Once a Mighty Symbol of Love and Loss," A1.
54. The NAMES Project moved from San Francisco to Atlanta in 2001. Cleve Jones was fired by the Foundation in 2003.
55. To resist, for example, the pressure to build the World War II Memorial, even in the face of bitter reaction against its location and design, would have been a major political risk. And indeed, Congress and the president finally just ordered it built, bypassing any further hearings or reviews.
56. It also does not include the establishment of "virtual memorials," like the one announced on January 18, 2007, in Robert Greenwald's blog and Brave New Films's website: "In thinking of how we at Brave New Films can contribute, and inspired by the AIDS Quilt, the Vietnam memorial, and the New York Times biographies of the 9/11 victims, we decided to create a living online memorial to U.S. soldiers killed during the Iraq War." http://www.robertgreenwald.org/2007/01/announcing_the_iraq_veterans_memorial.php (accessed January 19, 2007).
57. Andrew M. Shanken, "Planning Memory: Living Memorials in the United States during World War II," *Art Bulletin* 84 (March 2002): 130–47. Also see Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "The Rushmore Effect: *Ethos* and National Collective Identity," in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), especially 172–75.
58. See, for example, Judy Mann, "Peace on Earth Would Be the Best Memorial," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2001, C11.
59. The dedication of the Pentagon Memorial is now planned for the fall of 2008. See Pentagon Memorial Project Schedule, <http://memorial.pentagon.mil/schedule.htm> (accessed January 12, 2007).
60. We are aware, of course, that some saw an urgency in the fact that the September 11 sites were functionally "gravesites." However, this fact cannot account for the Oklahoma City site, where the physical remains of all the dead were recovered. Moreover, even in the case of the World Trade Center site, where physical remains often were not recovered, the desire to commemorate quickly was pragmatically futile, given the massive cleanup efforts and the large number of "stakeholders" in the battle over the site.
61. To keep this discussion reasonably manageable, we discuss here principally the Oklahoma City project and the planning and projections for the memorial at the World Trade Center in New York City. Some of the characterizations here would be parallel, others not as much, if we discussed in more detail the Flight 93 Memorial, planned for Somerset, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon Memorial, planned for Arlington, Virginia.
62. See Edward T. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Also see, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition, <http://www.wtcsitememorial.org>; Flight 93 National Memorial, <http://www.flight93memorialproject.org>; and Pentagon Memorial Fund, <http://www.pentagonmemorial.net>.
63. Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 257.
64. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing*, 190 (emphasis added).

65. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing*, 4. "In Oklahoma City," he says, "the memorial process involved hundreds of people, and it was consciously designed to be therapeutic."
66. Jesse Katz, "Driving Need for Catharsis," *Los Angeles Times*, Orange County Ed., April 19, 1997, A1+.
67. Paul Goldberger, "Groundwork: How the Future of Ground Zero Is Being Resolved," *New Yorker*, May 20, 2002, 95.
68. Nikki Stern, "Our Grief Doesn't Make Us Experts," *Newsweek*, March 13, 2006, 20.
69. Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 259.

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