Still Life: A Dramaturgical Study Of A Vietnam War Play

2008

Lauren Fajerski
University of Central Florida

Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd

University of Central Florida Libraries http://library.ucf.edu

Part of the Theatre and Performance Studies Commons

STARS Citation


This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact lee.dotson@ucf.edu.
STILL LIFE: A DRAMATURGICAL STUDY OF A VIETNAM WAR PLAY

by

LAUREN ELIZABETH FAJERSKI
Bachelor of Arts University of Central Florida, 2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2008
ABSTRACT

Emily Mann’s play *Still Life* is a story of a Vietnam War veteran who returns home to a less than enthusiastic welcome. Like most veterans from this war, he struggles to come to terms with the atrocities he witnessed and even carried out himself. The play consists of three characters: Mark, a Vietnam veteran, Cheryl, his wife, and Nadine, his lover. Both women believe they intrinsically understand Mark, but neither truly can. Mark has returned from the war violent, irrevocably broken, and feeling that he has been abandoned by society. Emily Mann interviewed real people and transcribed their words into theatre of fact to provide a fresh outlook into a tumultuous period of American history.

This thesis will explore the historical and artistic significance of Emily Mann’s *Still Life* and its depiction of the political and cultural atmosphere of post-war America. Specifically, I will discuss the reception of the Vietnam soldiers and how they were affected by the war socially, psychologically and economically. I will explore interviews detailing what these young men experienced while at war, how it affected them then and now, and discuss how these issues are reflected in Emily Mann’s *Still Life*. In addition to interviews, my methodology will consist of scriptural analysis and quantitative research.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................................. ii

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ iv

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 2: TIMELINE OF THE VIETNAM WAR ................................................................. 5

CHAPTER 3: MEDIA INFLUENCE ....................................................................................... 15

CHAPTER 4: LIFE AFTER THE WAR ................................................................................... 26

CHAPTER 5: STILL LIFE: A DOCUDRAMA ........................................................................ 36

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION ................................................................................................. 50

LIST OF REFERENCES ........................................................................................................ 57
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The 1943 Post Cover by Norman Rockwell. Copyright by the Curtis Publishing Company 20

Figure 2: Willis S. Riddick, Jr. Willis S. Riddick, Jr. (Class of 1939) 21

Figure 3: Willis S. Riddick, Jr. Willis S. Riddick, Jr. (Class of 1939) 22

Figure 4: Lance Corporal James C. Farley, crew chief of Yankee Papa 13 23

Figure 5: Powerless to save YP3 (Yankee Papa 3) copilot James Magel, Farley and Hoilien bandage Owens. 24

Figure 6: The mission over, Farley gives way. 24
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam War, also known as the Vietnam Conflict, was the longest conflict in American history. More than 58,000 Americans died and more than 304,000 were wounded. Remains of military personnel killed in action have been found as recently as 2004, when four service members were identified and returned to their families for burial. The war was and continues to be a defining moment in United States history. Rarely before had Americans found such a dividing line. Rarely before had Americans seen such violence and slaughter of young men who looked like their brother, their father, their uncle, their husband, or, their friend. In fact, the Vietnam War also became known as the first “television war”, meaning that it was the first war widely televised. Indeed, the American public could sit in their living room and watch some kind of program about Vietnam nightly, which could include images of our young men in combat and dying. The war began in 1959 and lasted until April 30, 1975, although American occupation did not officially begin until March 1965. While the war raged in Vietnam, the American public was engaged in a kind of civil war at home. As more information became available and the American people were exposed to more of the atrocities involved in war, public dissent became more vocal. Protests on campus universities, in newspapers, and on television all spread the word about people who did not support the war and included people from every walk of life. The country was divided by a line that pushed people to drastic action, in order to voice their opinion. On the nightly news programs, people could witness young looking men as they laughed about bombing a city or smoked a cigarette and cried over friends they had just lost. Regardless of an individual’s opinion, no one was unaffected. Undoubtedly, it would be
impossible to be unaffected, especially with the possibility of viewing a loved one on television whilst he was overseas fighting in the war. The Vietnam War stands out as the war that had the most profound impact upon American history. This is evident in many places such as history classes, bookstores but it is also apparent in our society’s culture, specifically theatre. Theatre has almost always been an avenue to affect social change and this time period was certainly when the masses wanted to affect social change. In fact, the playwrights of the 60’s and the 70’s sought to capture the experiences of the soldiers and the American public before the war even ended.

In this thesis, I will discuss the Vietnam War in detail in an effort to understand one specific play, Emily Mann’s Still Life, a docudrama about a Vietnam veteran. This thesis is a focused dramaturgical study on specific aspects of this particular play. The definition of dramaturgy, quoted from Bert Cardullo’s book What is Dramaturgy?, is, “the multi-faceted study of a given play: its author, content, style, and interpretive possibilities, together with its historical, theatrical, and intellectual background” (3). The second chapter is a brief timeline of the war. During the course of my research, I quickly discovered how inadequate my own knowledge of this war was and how little I had been taught regarding this subject. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., in his book The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, states, “Cafeteria-style education, combined with the unwillingness of our schools to place demands on students, has resulted in a steady diminishment of commonly shared information between generations and between young people themselves” (2). I have personally found this to be true, especially in the case of the Vietnam War. In discussing this topic with peers, many of them had little to no knowledge of the historical events surrounding the war. In my dialogues with older generations regarding this topic, I found how little I understood of what the person was saying because I had no knowledge
of the events. As I grew up and attended school, I remember looking in my history books and discovering that the Vietnam War received one page of information. There were some statistics about how many soldiers had died, some information about the protestations that occurred, and the basic fact that the war had been televised. I was so young that I never realized how incomplete my knowledge was and without this base knowledge, the conversations I attempted to have regarding the war could not continue.

The third chapter begins the body of my analysis and discusses the impact of television on the American public regarding the Vietnam War. Unlike previous wars, the presence of the field reporters and photographers in Vietnam gave the American public a more accurate view of the Vietnam War. The television had become increasingly prevalent in American homes and this form of media was partly responsible for how the public felt about the war. American playwrights were a part of this viewing public and, therefore, must have been influenced by the inundation of wartime images. The effect that the coverage of the war had on the masses includes demonstrations, protests, and even acts of self-immolation. The response was varied but usually dramatic. Prior to this research thesis, I was unaware that the American people were witnessing such horrific images of this war on a nightly basis. In reviewing the effects of media images on the American public, I will illuminate the climate the main character in Still Life must endure upon his return.

The fourth chapter will discuss in detail the return of the Vietnam soldiers and the problems they faced from the American public, as well as the challenges they encountered with their loved ones. In previous wars, soldiers arrived home to ticker-tape parades and were labeled “heroes.” This was not the case in the Vietnam War; instead, soldiers came home to the cries of “baby-killer” and were spat upon. In addition, many had suffered great physical injuries and/or
suffered from severe Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Many plays have dealt with how much these soldiers have had to endure and how difficult the process of returning from war was and continues to be. However, this homecoming also attributed to the volatile climate in America during these years. Many of the people who had demanded the return of the troops found that these men were not the wide-eyed naïve young boys who had left. The soldiers who returned found it difficult to adjust to civilian life. The examination of the challenges each soldier faced upon their return is Mann’s backdrop for the specific play *Still Life*.

The fifth chapter of this thesis will discuss Emily Mann’s play, *Still Life* and how the preceding chapters informed my understanding of the play. This play is a real life account given by a Vietnam soldier, his wife, and his mistress. The play is labeled a docudrama, which can be briefly defined as a play written about a true story in a documentary style. This specific type of theatre will be discussed in this chapter. A basic plot synopsis will be included, followed by script and character analyses.

The final chapter of this thesis will discuss the parallels between Iraq and the current Iraq invasion. This chapter will also briefly discuss what audiences may expect to see from playwrights of today.

My methodology consists of qualitative research and scriptural analysis. My resources include historical timelines, individual accounts, and previous scriptural analyses.
CHAPTER 2: TIMELINE OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnam War is not a war that can be encapsulated in just a few paragraphs or a few words. To truly understand the conflict, one must look at the war with a panoramic scope. For many years, an overall view of the war was almost impossible to find due the inability to access information. However, in the mid 1990’s, the documents and records of military service during the Vietnam War became unclassified. In addition, many of the participants of the war began to open up and provide more information about their personal experiences. American soldiers and Vietnamese people have come forward in an attempt to understand the war and the events that led to it. Since this time, more books and television specials have come out in an effort to provide some type of understanding of the war as a whole. Several factors must be remembered when attempting to write or read a historical account of any war. The first is that it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to accurately discuss every event that transpired. The second issue to remember is that no writer can truly be objective, due to the fact that his/her personal beliefs will color his/her writing. Objectivity is a goal that cannot entirely be reached due to the personal nature of any war. The third point to remember is that an historical account of a war cannot truly describe all the events that an individual experienced. It can only describe a collective whole. My main goal will be to use the “collective whole” to discuss the war in order to provide a cultural context for the play Still Life, in order to understand the climate from which Mark has returned. My main resource will be one of the most prolific texts on the Vietnam war, Stanley Karnow’s Vietnam: A History, for which Karnow won a Pulitzer Prize. The text was also a companion to PBS’s American Experiences series.
History is organic, always changing, always moving forward, yet influenced by the past. To attempt to simplify the Vietnam War is difficult at best and presumptive at worst. There are many factors that led up to the ensuing conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam; however, I will focus on the years of direct U.S. involvement.

In 1945, at the Potsdam Conference, the Allies “devised a scheme to disarm the Japanese in Vietnam – a minor item on their agenda – by dividing the country at the sixteenth parallel” (Karnow 163). The British took the southern part of Vietnam and the Chinese Nationalists took the north. The same year, once the Japanese were defeated, the communist activist Ho Chi Minh declared himself president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which was the northern part of Vietnam. Minh created a new organization, led by communists, called the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (the Vietnam Independence League), which later became shortened to Vietminh. In late 1945, the French sent soldiers into Vietnam in an attempt to restore French rule. This was met with severe resistance but they were able to succeed in expelling the Vietminh from Saigon. The next nine years would produce a series of counter attacks followed by heavy losses on both the French side and Vietnamese side. After almost a decade of fighting, the Vietminh finally overtook the French after weeks of fighting near Dien Bien Phu. On May 7, 1954, “the red Vietminh flag went up over the French command bunker at Dienbienphu [sic]” (Karnow 214). The following morning nine delegations assembled for the Geneva Conventions to discuss how to end the fighting.

During the Geneva Conventions, the dividing line between North and South Vietnam was changed from the sixteenth parallel to the seventeenth parallel. This was done in hopes of unifying the country through elections in two years time. Ho Chi Minh took control over the northern part of Vietnam and Ngo Dinh Diem was placed as the southern portion’s prime
minister. Both the United States and Diem were unhappy with the Geneva accords. Both believed that the concessions made would simply erupt at a later time; in fact, Diem predicted “‘another more deadly war’” (Karnow 221) in Vietnam’s future.

The next four to five years, Diem spent attempting to eradicate the remaining Vietminh from South Vietnam. However, he failed to anticipate the adversary he had in Ho Chi Minh. According to Karnow, “He [Diem] saw their uprising in narrow military terms- a misperception shared by his American patrons” (229). His inability to broaden his view of the Vietminh rendered him unable to see that these forces were anything but military. In fact, Ho Chi Minh campaigned against Diem politically, socially and economically. During this time, many attempts were made to unify the country, divide it forever in two, or to bolster the Southern Vietnam Army. None of these options worked so, when Minh sent guerillas into South Vietnam, bombed South Vietnam, and officially declares armed war in March 1959, Southern Vietnam is ill prepared. The first American deaths during the Vietnam Era were of Major Dale Buis and Master Sergeant Chester M. Ovnand. Having sat down to watch a movie, they were killed during a reel change by guerillas who raked the room with automatic weapons. These were only the first deaths of the 58,000 to come.

John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as America’s 35th President in January of 1961. As Karnow states, “In April 1961, Kennedy created a ‘task force’ to prepare economic, social, political and military programs aimed at preventing communist ‘domination’ of South Vietnam” (267). However, Diem was not a proponent of American troops in his country. He believed it would “compromise his nationalistic pretensions, and it might also give the United States greater leverage over his government” (Karnow 267). Despite these nationalistic sentiments, Diem was not well loved by all of his people. On June 11, 1963, after being denied rights to flying the
Buddhist flag, a Buddhist monk named Quang Duc burned himself to death in an act of protest against Diem. His final words were a plea to Diem to show tolerance to all religions. The photograph of the self-immolation was on the front page of every newspaper the following morning. In response, “…American entreaties failed to shake Diem’s stubbornness…” (Karnow 297). In fact, nothing shook his stubbornness, even as many of the top officials began to resign in their own form of protest. The unrest of his country soon led to a desire to stage a coup in which Diem would be removed from office and subsequently assassinated, along with his brother.

Less than three weeks later, President Kennedy was assassinated and President Johnson became the fourth president to contend with the Vietnam War.

The next two years brought military actions, bombings, attacks on American Naval boats, and several regime changes as the current political leader of Southern Vietnam was overthrown. For the United States, the war officially began on March 8, 1965, when thirty-five hundred marines arrived in Danang. As Karnow states, “…Johnson had skillfully presented it as simply a short-term expedient” (432). Despite this miscalculation, President Johnson kept this action out of the limelight so as not to alarm the public or alert the media on any changes he may have made to policy. The next year would see the approval of the use of napalm, increasing numbers of troops deployed to Vietnam, air strikes and bombings. Karnow notes, “Student opposition to the war was spreading in response to larger draft quotas” (495). In fact, the opposition became so great, two American protestors committed suicide by self-immolation, imitating Vietnamese Buddhists. Johnson was quite aware of the changing moods of the American public and feared their lack of support for the war. Karnow quotes Johnson as saying, “The weakest chink in our armor is American public opinion…Our people won’t stand firm in the face of heavy losses, and
they can bring down the government” (495). Johnson had no idea how predictive this statement would become.

The court of public opinion waxed and waned with the influx of information. However, Johnson was never challenged with more than perfunctory opposition on Capitol Hill. Yet, even his aides’ security and support were fast disappearing and were to be replaced with growing unease on this unending war. Most of his aides attempted to find a peaceful solution which included halting bombing for a short period and allowing the North Vietnamese a chance to consider peace. Most of these attempts were regarded as a trick and dismissed (Karnow 505).

The American opinion of the war began to erode as more and more protestations erupted on college campuses nationwide. As Robert D. Schulzinger notes in his book *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*:

College students eligible for conscription worried about their own participation in the war, but concern over the war extended far beyond anxiety about whether individuals would go to Vietnam. Some college anti-war protesters came to see the war in Vietnam as interfering with efforts to create a fairer society at home.

(227)

Not only did young men and women fear the draft, but they also began to see the correlation between Vietnam and the United States. If the war could escalate so quickly overseas, what could happen here at home? Many young men protested the draft, burned their draft cards or dodged the draft altogether by sneaking into Canada. In 1969, a lottery was installed in which only certain birthdays and years would be called into service. Many young men were relieved that they were not called to participate in a war they had no desire to support. The institution of
this policy did lower the numbers of young men who participated in anti-war rallies but it did not put an end to the protests.

One of the most remarkable events that occurred during the Vietnam War was known as the Tet Offensive. On January 31, 1968, “nearly seventy thousand Communist soldiers had launched a surprise offensive of extraordinary intensity and astonishing scope” (Karnow 536). As Keith William Nolan notes in his book Battle for Huế: Tet, 1968, “It was Tet, the Vietnamese lunar new year — 1968 was the Year of the Monkey …As was the custom throughout the war, Tet cease-fire truces had been declared by both sides” (2). However, this particular Tet would not be peaceful. Communist soldiers flooded into more than a hundred cities and towns, the urban areas of South Vietnam. Prior to this, Americans had witnessed much of the monotony of the life of a soldier but they had never witnessed this level of brutality. Karnow states:

…newspaper accounts paled besides the television coverage, which that evening projected the episode, in all its vivid confusion…There, on color screens, dead bodies lay amid the rubble and rattle of automatic gunfire as dazed American soldiers and civilians ran back and forth trying to flush out the assailants. (539)

The fiercest battle during this offensive occurred at Huế. The majority of the American public missed this particular battle, since so many were focused on the massacre at Mylai, “…in which American soldiers massacred a hundred Vietnamese peasants, women and children among them” (Karnow 543). In Huế, Vietcong teams conducted house-to-house searches and proceeded to kill more than three thousand people who were “exhumed in nearby riverbeds, coastal salt flats and jungle clearings. The victims had been shot or clubbed to death, or buried alive” (Karnow 543). Karnow also notes that the U.S. command reported the deaths of some two thousand American
troops and some four thousand South Vietnamese soldiers during the entirety of the Tet offensive, which was only a month before (547).

Three months after the Tet Offensive, the democratic primary elections took place. President Johnson only received three hundred more votes than his opponent, Senator Eugene McCarthy. The narrow margin illustrated the lack of public support for Johnson’s handling of the war. Robert Kennedy also announced his candidacy for president but would be assassinated in June of 1969.

The majority of Johnson’s advisors could no longer see an end to the Vietnam War. Karnow quotes Walter Cronkite from a report given on February 27, 1968, as expressing long-held public opinions that it seemed “…more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate” (561). Johnson was apparently upset at this broadcast, believing that it would sway public support even farther away from the war. In an address to the nation on March 31, 1968, Johnson shocked the country by announcing his decision not to run for reelection. The ensuing year in office left the President essentially impotent, with most of his advisors making the decisions regarding Vietnam for him. Richard Nixon is elected as the next president to cope with the Vietnam War.

Thirty thousand Americans had been killed in Vietnam before Nixon became president and nearly ten thousand would die in his first year alone. His first few months in office, Nixon was confronted by several Communist attacks and in May, “…American forces fought one of the fiercest battles of the war to capture Apbia mountain…” (Karnow 616). This mountain would become extremely well known as “Hamburger Hill” – a gruesome nickname so chosen as to indicate the number of men who died there. In one week, two hundred and forty-two American
G.I.’s were killed in action and *Life* magazine published the photographs of every man who died there as a reminder that the war was far from over.

In September of 1969, Ho Chi Minh died at 79 of a heart attack. The death of their leader proved insignificant to the North Vietnamese Army, who had been operating with more involved leaders for some time. During this time, official peace talks had begun in Paris but were not closing in on any type of peaceful agreement. Henry Kissinger, appointed by Nixon as national security adviser, began secret talks involving Le Duc Tho, who was responsible for directing the South Vietnam insurgency.

On April 30, 1970, Nixon announced his Cambodian incursion, in which American troops would invade Cambodia in an attempt to crush Communists bases. Many top officials voiced their opposition to this offensive, as well as the important newspapers of the era, such as *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Public unrest was already high; however, at the announcement of the Cambodia incursion, the protestations came to a head. At Kent State University, antiwar students began a protest. Governor James Rhodes ordered national guardsmen onto the campus. Karnow recounts, “On May 4, 1970, nettled by the demonstrators, they [the guardsmen] shot a volley of rifle fire into the crowd, killing four youths” (626). The initial reaction to this event was tremendously insensitive. Karnow quotes Nixon’s press secretary, Ron Ziegler, as stating that the deaths are a reminder that “…when dissent turns to violence, it invites tragedy” (626). The killings at Kent State provoked many more protestations across the country.

In March of 1971, opinion polls indicated that the approval rating for the president had declined to 50 percent and support for his war policy had declined to 34 percent. The ensuing year would bring many troops called out of Vietnam, many more deaths, many more bombings,
and no steps towards a peaceful resolution. The first rumblings of Watergate began, when, on June 17, 1972, five burglars are arrested attempting to place microphones in the Democratic National Committee headquarters. These incidents were the signs that, for Nixon, it was the beginning of the end. The war would come to an official end, but only due to Henry Kissinger, who would not give up on peace talks Le Duc Tho. The peace agreement was formally signed on January 27, 1973 in Paris. Karnow notes, “At that juncture, all the peace settlement accomplished was to stop the conflict pending a political solution, which might never be achieved” (669). The truth of this peace agreement was that it simply delayed another conflict. It offered no lasting solution for peace, despite Nixon’s comments: “We have finally achieved peace with honor” (Karnow 669). The war, however, was not quite over.

Watergate was arriving on Nixon’s heels, which was a train that Nixon could not avoid. On August 9, 1974, Nixon resigned from office in an effort to avoid impeachment for illegal activities. He and his running mate, Spiro Agnew, resigned and Gerald Ford became the last president to deal with Vietnam War.

The war could not be over until all the troops had returned from Vietnam and the prisoners of war held by Northern Vietnam were released, which occurred on April 1, 1973, with the release of Captain Robert White, the last known American POW.

By 1975, the United States had departed from Vietnam, leaving it vulnerable and unprepared for attack. By April, the Communists had already begun their plan to overrun South Vietnam and claim it for their own. Option IV began on April 29, “…the largest helicopter evacuation on record” (Karnow 682). By dawn the next morning, Saigon was deserted and simply awaiting the arrival of the Communists. By the end of the day, General Ming would abdicate his control of Vietnam to Colonel Bui Tin, who Karnow quotes as telling Minh:
There is no question of your transferring power…Your power has crumbled. You
cannot give up what you do not have…Between Vietnamese, there are no victors
and no vanquished. Only the Americans have been beaten. If you are patriots,
consider this a moment of joy. The war for our country is over. (683-684)
CHAPTER 3: MEDIA INFLUENCE

According to James Landers in his book *The Weekly War: Newsmagazines and Vietnam*, the coverage of the Vietnam War consisted of three television networks and three weekly newsmagazines. The majority of the public, approximately fifty-one million, watched at least three programs a week on television and roughly thirty-eight million people read *Newsweek*, *Time*, or *U.S. News & World Report* (2). In America, the perception exists that the “cumulative effect of bad news so dismayed and discouraged Americans that it weakened their resolve to continue, which compelled a military withdrawal without victory” (Landers 1). Many people believe that the public attitude towards the war had a direct effect upon its outcome. The sheer number of publications and programs devoted to the Vietnam War, and the number of people who watched/read them, indicates the magnitude of its impact upon Americans. Not only did this overflow of information affect the public, it also had an effect upon the policy makers. As Elizabeth M. Perse states in her book *Media Effects and Society*, “Between 1966 and 1974 was an era of ‘watchdog’ journalism, marked by intense investigative reporting and scrutiny of the political process” (126). The coverage of the war did not only report on the happenings in Vietnam, it also critically examined the strategy and policies of the time. The prevalence of these intense images was vastly dissimilar from the images that had been seen in previous wars. These two issues combined proved devastating to American morale at home during the Vietnam War.

Michael J. Arlen was the first to classify the war as “the living-room war.” A columnist for the *New Yorker* in 1966, he wrote weekly columns regarding television programs and their
impact on the American public. As Arlen states in the introduction of his book, *The Living-Room War*:

> I call this book *Living-Room War* not because I especially like the piece I first attached the title to (which was the first thing I wrote about Vietnam and television…), but because quite a number of the pieces *are* about the war and television – because during the period I was writing them the war seemed to be the central fact in American life…” (Arlen xi)

In writing these weekly articles, Arlen recognized how important the issue of Vietnam was to the people. In his article, “Living-Room War”, Arlen states, “I read a while back that sixty per cent of the people in this country get most of their news about the Vietnam war [sic] from television…” (7). With such a high percentage of the population learning about the war from television, it is no wonder that most of America was disturbed by the images they were seeing. In the article, Arlen reports about the different kinds of programs that are available during the week from the different news stations, including CBS, ABC, and NBC. However, Arlen’s overall assessment of the news programs was not positive: “I do know, though, that the cumulative effect of all these three-and five-minute clips…is surely wide of the mark, and is bound to provide these millions of people with an excessively simple…view of what is…a might unsimple situation” (7-8). Arlen suggests that the public received its information about the war in almost sound-byte form: short clips with very little information that implied a simpler solution than reality dictated. Arlen wrote many more articles regarding television programming about Vietnam during his tenure as a *New Yorker* reporter. One such article about Morley Safer, titled “Morley Safer Loses His Breath But Finds His Voice: A Moral Tale”, was especially poignant. Morley Safer was a correspondent for CBS that was on assignment in Vietnam in 1967. Susan D.
Moeller quotes Morley Safer in her book *Shooting the War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* during that CBS Special Report: “Something happens to you when you stay in this place long enough. A kind of schizophrenia takes over and you become both a believer and a cynic. You get the Vietnamese disease... Vietnam is like a lunatic asylum” (327). Arlen’s recount of this report is poetic, describing the visual of Morley Safer in Vietnam among the trees, with soldiers around him, looking nervous as opposed to the cool and calm demeanor that his audience knew. The part of the program that affected Arlen the most was the fact that Safer was not professional, as he normally was, but that “*Morley Safer is out of breath*, he is not reading from a little notebook, he has not written anything down...he is rubbing his face and moving his microphone about as if he’d just as soon not have to hold it” (23). Arlen also goes on to state that Safer has succeeded in providing an individual human voice about the atrocities they were all witnessing in Vietnam. In fact, Arlen argued for less objectivity in news programs and encouraged a more decisive standpoint from the news stations. In his article “*The Bombs Below Go Pop-Pop-Pop*”, Arlen states:

> I mean if you are in favor of the air attacks against the North, then come out and say so, and be intelligent about it. Or if you are against the air attacks in the North, then say that, and be intelligent about it. Or if, as a journalist, you want to say something about the whole situation, both sides, then do that… (45)

The policy makers of the time also had to contend with the influence of the media. As Landers states, “…news coverage from Vietnam had a decisive impact on public opinion and national policy” (1). Although, at the start of the war, most of the print regarding national policy was anti-communist and in favor of the current political policies because, “Journalists relied almost exclusively on government sources of information and on scholars or specialists who
agreed with national policy‖ (Landers 20). However, in 1967, public opinion regarding the war and American policy turned and people saw how little effect the war was having on situation in Vietnam. This was partly due to the fact that so many of the news stations and print magazines were relying on combat footage but they also began explaining the dissenting viewpoints. Landers states, “Increasingly costly warfare, which saw the deaths of two hundred to three hundred Americans a week, had produced congressional debate challenging the Johnson administration's policy and had caused some measure of public dissent‖ (100). The people began to see how these policies were affecting the soldiers, how low the soldiers’ morale was, and the conditions that everyone was suffering in Vietnam. Public dissent became more widespread and more mainstream once it was more included in the nightly programming. Many of the protesters were from upper-echelon universities or were the alum of such universities. Despite the fact that this population was well educated and respected in society, they were dubbed either “doves” or “Vietniks”. As Landers states, “Doves and hawks used their position and social status to proselytize peers, policymakers, presidential advisors and assistants, and the public” (205). Soon, the newspapers and other print media began sensing the changing mood towards the war and began printing articles aimed towards them, such as the article in Newsweek titled, “The War No One Wants – Or Can End”, printed in 1965.

President Johnson was well known as being a “news junkie”. According to Melvin Small in his book Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, “…if possible Johnson watched each of the early evening news programs on the three networks and often the 11 P.M. news. When he was not able to watch them, they were frequently recorded” (26). Small also comments on the fact that Johnson was often open to journalistic interviews, even considering some journalists his personal friends. However, Johnson made one crucial mistake.
His focus was mainly on editorials and columns and not on front-page stories. He believed that the masses cared more about publicly expressed opinions. After some time, Johnson began to believe that certain newspaper and news stations were completely against him. According to Small, “He [Johnson] told an audience of broadcasters on April 1, 1968, the day after his speech announcing that he would not seek another term, that television had driven him to take that position” (29). Many historians believed that certain news stations and reporters were “out to get” the President, the most outspoken being Walter Cronkite on CBS. However, despite the possibility that Johnson may have been treated unfairly in the press, the public opinion regarding him and his policies fell into a downward spiral as protests were reported on more.

In my opinion, one of the most important factors that should not be overlooked when considering the media influence during the Vietnam War is the fact that the images people were viewing had never been seen before. In fact, the images of previous wars that had been released to the public were downright tame compared to what people were seeing during Vietnam. During the two World Wars, reports were scant on the individual soldiers. Indeed, many of the images coming out during World War II are now seen as propaganda, including the patriotic films. These films, including “Casablanca”, are perceived as propaganda; however, according to Gerald F. Kreyche in his article “We’ll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema during World War II,” “…Hollywood’s mission to inform the public of what the conflagration was all about and why the U.S. was involved” (79). These images and films were meant to inspire, to explain and to calm the women left behind. In fact, a character was created to inspire these women in their efforts at returning to the work force when a large portion of the male population had been sent overseas. Rosie the Riveter, seen here in Figure 1, also inspired a song of the same name.
Figure 1: The 1943 Post Cover by Norman Rockwell. Copyright by the Curtis Publishing Company

However, as is written by Maureen Honey in her book *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II*:

The predominant media portrayal of women war workers was that they were young, white, and middle-class; furthermore, that they entered the labor force out of patriotic motives and eagerly left to start families and resume full-time homemaking. As historians have studied the war period, it has become clear that this image is almost completely false. (19)

Most of these women were working-class who needed the money to improve their standard of living. Most of them had worked in the labor force prior to World War II but had been forced out due to the economic situation.
Not only were there posters of Rosie the Riveter, there were also images coming back from the war of bright eyed young men, arms around each other, smiling. These images were what people perceived as the war: heroic young men, doing their duty, and happy to be doing so. One such image, shown here, depicts two young men smoking a cigarette, posing for a photograph. One man is smiling, while the other is wearing an oversized jumpsuit. The picture shows the silly side of these young men and not the side that must go into battle and kill.

Figure 2: Willis S. Riddick, Jr. Willis S. Riddick, Jr. (Class of 1939)
World War II Photograph Album Bougainville, 1943. 6th Field Artillery Battalion
Online Exhibit New Hebrides, 1943 Two members of "A" Battery, 6th Field Artillery Battalion
Another photograph in this series depicts five men at work at what the photographer designates as the Fire Direction Center. These young men are at work, but one of them is smiling at the camera, as if to convey that they are busy but not unhappy.

Figure 3: Willis S. Riddick, Jr. Willis S. Riddick, Jr. (Class of 1939)
World War II Photograph Album Bougainville, 1943. 6th Field Artillery Battalion
Online Exhibit Bougainville, Solomon Islands, 1944 "Fire Direction Center."

In contrast, the images from Vietnam were and still are more shocking and more disturbing than the images that came out of World War II. Since there were so many reporters and photographers who were on assignment in Vietnam, more images came back from the front lines. Photographers became popular and well known through their photographs of Vietnam. One such photographer was Larry Burrows, a photojournalist for Life. He first went to Vietnam in 1962, since, according to Life, he was too young to cover the Korean conflict and World War II. According to David Halberstram’s introduction in a book of Larry Burrows Vietnam photographs, “He [Burrows] got there early and staked it out…telling his wife, Vicky, that he
was going to stay to the end and cover it until there was peace” (9). Halberstram also calls Burrows the signature photographer of the Vietnam War. Larry Burrows died in a helicopter crash in Vietnam on February 10, 1971, along with several other photojournalists. Although film fragments, camera parts, and helicopter debris were found, their bodies still have not been recovered (Halberstram 225). Larry Burrows’ most famous story was a series of photographs of one young man: twenty-one year old Lance Corporal James Farley. The pictures begin with a smiling, big eared, all-American man who has not yet been touched by the war.

![Lance Corporal James C. Farley, crew chief of Yankee Papa 13](image)

Figure 4: Lance Corporal James C. Farley, crew chief of Yankee Papa 13

By the day’s end, Farley has been unable to save one man and had another die in his arms.
Figure 5: Powerless to save YP3 (Yankee Papa 3) copilot James Magel, Farley and Hoilien bandage Owens.

In this picture, Burrows could not make the dead man’s flak vest cover his face so *Life* was forced to airbrush in an extension. The next set of photographs in the series show the young Lance Corporal as he breaks down, until he finally surrenders in his barracks.

Figure 6: The mission over, Farley gives way.
These photos were seen by most people in America, since one of the photos in the series was on the cover of the magazine. The images would have been impossible to overlook as they so poignantly tell a visual story of how one young man broke down.

The effect that these visuals must have had on the American public is obvious. Decades later, I saw these pictures for the first time and could not help but cry myself. I had never before seen images of the war but I had seen images of other wars. I saw images of smiling soldiers, clapping each other on the back. I had not seen images so striking as the series on James Farley. The first set of photographs illustrates a sweet, young man who is eager to serve his country. The next set of photographs show that young man thrust into a situation that no one could be prepared for, yet he saved someone’s life. The next set shows another young man dying and it is followed by watching James Farley as something inside of him breaks. These photographs tell that story so clearly and make it so plainly obvious what the war was doing to our men. The television programs accomplished that, as did the photojournalists and the magazines and newspapers. The American people were unable to tear their eyes away from these images because they were so engrossing. Finally, I was left with one thought after researching the images of the Vietnam War. One thought that left me haunted. Every time there was a program on television or a series in a magazine, some mother actually got to watch her son die. It is no wonder that the American people rose up in protest against this war.
CHAPTER 4: LIFE AFTER THE WAR

The war in Vietnam had many effects on the American people but none as horrific as the effect on the veterans themselves. Many veterans were physically wounded and those that were not suffered from the effects of the incidents they had witnessed or done. While many veterans have managed to adjust to life out of the military, there is just as many who have struggled with their memories. A society cannot be healthy and whole until all of its members are healthy and whole. Leaving Vietnam and returning home was an enviable situation when compared to the alternative of dying. Many would never know what it felt like to leave that horrific situation. For several, they would watch their brethren return home, but only in a body bag. Some would return home with a debilitating injury, which would compound the issues of rejoining society. Others would return home to a volatile reception, nightmares, flashbacks, and difficulties with the relationships they left behind. Homecoming receptions were surely joyous occasions; however, for many soldiers, adjusting to civilian life proved a difficult task. In this chapter, I will discuss what is commonly referred to as “shell-shock” but is now known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, hereafter referred to as PTSD. I will also discuss the effect the war had on the individual’s concept of identity and, lastly, I will discuss the effect the war had on the soldier’s relationships and family life. The effects of the Vietnam War on its soldiers is wide and varying, with each individual’s experience being unique. Many of the war’s participants found it difficult to speak out immediately after their return. However, much information has become known in recent years, once the young men found out that they were not alone in experiencing these difficulties.
The prospect of leaving Vietnam and coming home to the United States was not only a happy prospect. For some soldiers, it meant leaving a thrilling situation and replacing it with a boring life. As Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Parson state in their book *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery*, “After the thrill of Vietnam, going home for some meant being thrust into an unintriguing, humdrum existence” (43-44). Furthermore, many also felt guilty at leaving trusted and beloved comrades behind to continue fighting. Yet, most soldiers looked forward to going home as the event that would solve all their problems. These men were shocked to discover that the world had not changed as they had changed. The world that the veteran had become accustomed to, the world of Vietnam, had become the “real-world” for these soldiers and the world back home was a world that seemed false. The Vietnam veteran felt “he had special knowledge about life and death that most people around him did not have” (Brende and Parson 45-46). Brende and Parson go on to state that the veteran was habitually conditioned to respond in battle by reflex to reality (Vietnam), he was now jittery, nervous, a mild fluttering in his stomach, a continuous feeling of disorientation” (46). These feelings of disorientation and nervousness were helpful in the life and death situations in Vietnam, but now only served to make the veteran seem like a stranger to the world he to which he had just returned. In their book, Brende and Parson interviewed a young Vietnam veteran, identified only as “Lucas”, as he discovered these difficulties in reintegration. Lucas states:

After a short while, my girlfriend told me she didn't know how to relate to me; or how she really felt about me now… She also said that I wasn't the loving guy she used to know and love, that something horrible must have happened to me over there to change me so completely… She said that the look in my eyes was the look of a deeply terrorized person… I didn't know what any of these people were
saying. I knew I was getting pissed off more and more by hearing all of this bullshit, I know that... I myself was not fully aware of just how profound my transformation had been. I guess killing and hurting human beings have a way of catching up with you; just seeing so many guys die, some died in my arms; seeing guys die of snake bites; getting sick from malaria; feeling so tired and emotionally drained for so long, feeling so intensely angry and used; being terrorized myself so many times, so many close calls. I got hit three times with bullets. I guess that can change somebody, maybe most people. (Brende and Parson 46-47)

With all of those horrific experiences, Lucas had been left scarred and, even worse than being scarred, he was unaware of how deep these wounds truly were. Not only did these young men have to suffer these experiences, they were treated with intense scorn upon their return. As Brende and Parson state, “…anger and hostility over the war were displaced onto the veteran, and blaming the veteran became the American modus operandi. Because of the unwillingness of the government and the people to take responsibility for the war, the soldier became the victim of the war” (48). The stories of a veteran being spat at and labeled a “baby-killer” are too numerous to document; however, just such scenes would happen all the time to anyone who admitted to being a veteran. The American people were extremely angry about the war and many felt impotent. Instead of directing that anger positively, they turned it around onto the Vietnam veteran, who was victimized twice. Many soldiers never wanted to go to war because they were drafted against their will, and yet, they would be treated in such a disrespectful manner. Many soldiers would be told that they were foolish to fight in an immoral war, even if they had no choice in whether they went or not. Then the soldier would be told he had fought in a war that America had crushingly lost. Worse still, the soldier would be told it was not, in fact, war and
that the proper term was conflict, which only succeeding in minimizing their experiences.

Subsequently, the soldiers would be attacked personally and labeled by the media as depraved, immoral, drug-crazed, and psychopathic. Lastly, a soldier was “…accused both directly and indirectly by family and peers of killing wantonly because he enjoyed it, and that he was and will hopelessly remain an ‘animal’” (Brende and Parson 49). All of these demoralizations and accusation would combine in a soldier’s mind and, at best, confuse him as to the experiences he had in Vietnam.

Most of the returning young men expected the homecoming their fathers and grandfathers received when they returned home. One soldier described coming home to a party his family had planned for him, only to find out that his father disapproved of him going to Vietnam. The young man recounts his father’s reaction, “He downplayed the war, and put me down—right down with it. I was really sick. I wanted him to feel proud of me. But he wasn’t” (Brende and Parson 51). The reaction of family and friends either to downplay the experiences of the veteran or to ignore the trauma they had been through only served to hurt the soldiers even more. However, many veterans report that “the feeling of having been disowned by their country was the greatest and most profound insult” (Brende and Parson 56). The country these young men fought and died for had disowned them, discarded them, and labeled them as depraved. The media had convinced their mothers that their sons were committing despicable crimes, killing innocent people, and taking drugs. With these perceptions, many people treated the Vietnam veteran as a stranger and distanced him from society, if they did not flat out try to harm him psychologically.

The term “shell-shock” is no longer in use today; instead, the term Post-Traumatic Stress disorder is applied for someone suffering from symptoms related to experiences in war. The military tried several strategies to combat the effects war had on its soldiers. One such strategy
was to assign military chaplains as counselors; however, there was only one chaplain for every fourteen hundred men (Brende and Parson 71). In addition, the military began to give periodic rest and relaxation, “R & R”, in a safe zone to soldiers who were doing well in the war, which meant that the individual had a high body count for that week. For many, these trips were not helpful in reversing the effects of combat. The last tactic employed by the military to prevent severe psychological trauma was the institution of a policy that would limit the tour of duty to twelve months, and thirteen months for a Marine, except for those who reenlisted. According to Brende and Parson, “This plan, called DEROS (Date of Expected Return from Overseas), was believed to have a major effect on reducing the psychiatric casualty rate compared to that of World War II combatants” (71). While this plan seemed to be working on reducing the effects, in fact, it was hidden by the use of narcotics among the troops.

The military policy of quick reintegration meant that a soldier was discharged from Vietnam and back home in roughly thirty-six hours. This gave the person little to no time to prepare himself for life in civilized society. This proved disastrous for the veteran who felt he had no place to talk about the events he had participated in or witnessed. For those who had been injured, they had more time and occasion to talk about their experiences. As one soldier recounts:

When I left Vietnam I was seriously wounded and spent 21 months in Walter Reed Hospital recovering. There were a lot of other guys from Vietnam in the hospital when I was there. The nursing staff didn't understand us, either ignored us or wanted us to stop talking about what we went through. So we would get together off in the comer and rap about what happened. After spending almost
two years doing that, I got it all out of my system. I haven't had a need to talk about it since that time. (Brende and Parson 73)

Just being able to talk with someone who understood the seriousness of what they had all been through proved helpful to the injured and they seem to have suffered less serious effects due to Post-Traumatic Stress disorder. Many injured soldiers suffered severe emotional/psychological effects, worse than those without grave injuries. However, the emotional/psychological disturbances suffered by the “average” soldier were severe enough. One veteran states, “We can't work. We can't get along with people, and our disability is just as severe as those who are physically disabled. But we sometimes look normal to people so they expect much more out of us than we can give. We'd rather have an arm or a leg missing” (Brende and Parson 73). For many men, the absence of a physical disability left them feeling as though they were misunderstood. Since they did not exhibit the physical traits of a wounded man, many did not recognize that they were severely psychologically injured. The sad truth for Vietnam veterans is that, while many returned home, many still were dying in a violent nature after their return. According to Brende and Parson, in 1971, the National Council of Churches reported that roughly 49,000 veterans had died by a violent nature and that the trend has continued at 800 a year. “Their deaths have often been of a violent nature: suicides, vehicular accidents, drug overdoses, police shootouts, and the like” (Brende and Parson 75). With an attitude of self-destruction, these young men came home accustomed to violence and drugs. This pattern only continued upon their return until many of them had died. For those individuals who did seek help, many of them were misdiagnosed with schizophrenia. It was not until 1980 that the American Psychiatric Association created a new diagnosis, specifically for Vietnam veterans. This diagnosis was called PTSD and was described in detail, which included an account of
flashbacks, emotional numbing, extreme anxiety, depression, and increased irritability (Brende and Parson 77-78). With this new diagnosis in place, veterans could seek professional help and the world became more understanding of how deeply the war had affected them. No longer did they have to pretend that everything was normal. However, the creation of the diagnosis did not solve all of the issues a veteran faced.

According to authors Charles Figley and Seymour Leventman in their book Strangers at Home: The Vietnam Veteran Since the War, the Vietnam War “sent more permanently disabled veterans back into civilian society than any previous war” (xxi-xxxi). This proved true, not only in the aftereffects of PTSD, but also in a profound change in their identity. While the military seeks to train the individual to give up their identity, the Vietnam War seemed to have this effect even more so than previous wars. The average age of the Vietnam soldier was just nineteen, which is an age in which a young man is just beginning to figure out who he is and how he will shape his character. The military took these green young recruits and provided them with a new identity and a cause. As Brende and Parson state, “…he was not only an impressionable 18-year-old soldier looking for a cause and a sense of identity but, bereft of any other identity, he was now receptive to the ‘indoctrination’ process…” (86). These men left basic training encoded to kill the enemy, believing that they were now part of a cause larger than themselves. However, the reaction as these men returned was one that told them to be ashamed of their actions. Studies differentiate between two types of violence that a veteran may have committed, which would have compounded the symptoms of PTSD. One type of violence is the planned violence involving raids and bombings. The other type of violence is a recreational form, in which the soldier would have gunned down a civilian just for fun (Brende and Parson 91). These acts would have contributed to a veteran’s loss of conscience, an element of his identity. Many
veterans hold the belief that they themselves are filled with some kind of evil that has perpetuated itself in their lives. As Brende and Parson state, “Some veterans have the feeling of being possessed or contaminated by evil. One veteran "confessed" of this inner sense of contamination: ‘ever since I came back from 'Nam, I have felt as if I was possessed and lost my soul’” (98). Sadly, many of these guilt-ridden veterans never received the treatment or help they so desperately needed and too many ended up committing suicide.

Vietnam veterans returned home, expecting to return to the lives they had known before they left. They saw girlfriends, wives, mothers, fathers, siblings, and friends, expecting to feel the same way they had before the war. When these expectations turned out to be false, many veterans became violent or watched their relationships fragment and dissolve before their eyes. The devastating losses back at home are not to be discarded either. Many women now found themselves to be widows and many children were now without a father. The Vietnam War had a profound effect on American family life due to these losses but also due to the number of men who came home disabled physically or psychologically. The first effect that proved destructive for the domestic life of the returned soldier was the idea of hyper vigilance. This reaction in Vietnam proved useful in keeping a soldier alive, since he was acutely aware of his surroundings at all times. However, once home, the soldier found it impossible to prevent his hyper vigilance which “plagues the family relationship with suspicion, blame, and anger” (Brende and Parson 104). Oftentimes, the veteran would accuse his family of events that did not occur. This led to a destruction of trust in the family unit, which led to more anger in the veteran and in his family members. Combining this hyper vigilance with the aforementioned symptoms of PTSD and the loss of identity, and the veteran was a less than ideal candidate for a mate. His depression, flashbacks, emotional numbness, and inability to relate to even himself could only create an
environment of distrust and hostility. Most of these men had to learn how to numb their emotional responses to their world just to survive combat. However, once learned, this numbing response is not something easily forgotten. They found themselves unable to relate to the world, their spouses, and their children. These relationship failures only served to compound their issues involving PTSD, loss of identity and the inability to relate. As Ken, a combat veteran, said of his children, “I want to be a good father to my kids. They're great kids, but I can't. I need help” (Brende and Parson 109). Many children suffered if their fathers had committed crimes against children in the war. A particularly horrific tactic used by the Vietcong was to booby-trap children and load them with explosives. Most of these children were too young to understand their fate and went towards the G.I.’s, hoping for food or clothing. After the tactic became clear, soldiers were forced to shoot the children, to prevent them from exploding and killing many others. A Vietnam soldier named Jim recalls just such an incident and describes the guilt he feels for killing just such children. He now sees those children in his own children and fears someone will kill them, the way he did. These “lost children” also witnessed great difficulties within their parents’ marriages. This emotional numbing response created feelings of loneliness within the parental unit. The wives of these veterans feel a lack of intimacy in their marriages and attempt to reach out to their husbands, who cannot reach back. Jim is a veteran of the Tet offensive and his wife has stated, “He keeps everything bottled up inside and I just can't reach him, can anyone? I am about to give up. What about me? He doesn't care” (Brende and Parson 110). These women feel abandoned and adrift in a marriage they cannot affect because they do not know how to reach their loved ones. They feel forgotten about within their own lives and simply want to give up trying.
The war had unfortunate effects on the men who were forced to fight. The psychological problems that have arisen in the ensuing years have devastated these men, their wives, and their children. They are angry, violent, upset, and hurt. They lash out for no reason other than they cannot escape their own memories. They distance themselves from the ones they love out of fear of rejection and judgment. They distance themselves emotionally because they have been trained to do so, to save their own psyches from the tragedies of war. Compounded by their own issues, the reception they received from family and friends, and even society as a whole, only served to fuel their guilt and self-loathing. Having committed atrocities, witnessed atrocities, friend’s deaths, or been injured themselves, these men suffered severe exposure to violence and were told that this was normal. Even if they had been brought up in a pacifist home, the level of violence in the Vietnam War did not allow them to stay sensitive for long. The only way to survive the war on their own psychological processes was to either numb themselves or embrace the violence. When they arrived back home, they expected to be treated with respect, the way their fathers and grandfathers had been before them. Instead, they were called names, isolated, treated as strange, which only exacerbated their existing problems. Irrevocably damaged, they were not given the help they needed. They were not recognized. They were told to forget their nightmares, delete their memories. Emily Mann’s *Still Life* and her portrayal of the treatment of Vietnam veterans accurately describe this environment.
CHAPTER 5: STILL LIFE: A DOCUDRAMA

Emily Mann is known as one of America’s foremost female playwrights and directors. She was born on April 12, 1952 in Boston. She attended the University of Chicago Laboratory in 1966 where she first worked on props, make-up, and design. She tried acting and then moved to directing, which became her passion. She began directing at the age of sixteen and also tried to write plays. However, she truly found her place after reading material assembled for an oral history project that Mann was working on with her father. Christopher Bigsby quotes Mann in his book *Contemporary American Playwrights* as saying:

I thought, “I have to talk to people. I have to get it down, to have it in their own words”, because you could hear, from the page, the cadences and rhythms of the Czech woman, as opposed to those of her daughter who was American born. And both of them reaching out across a language barrier, as well as an experiential barrier. It was extraordinary. (137)

This was only Emily Mann’s senior year of college and yet, she managed to find her lifelong passion. The first play that Mann would write would be someone else’s words. *Annulla, An Autobiography* is an autobiographical work about Mann’s trip to Europe. In an attempt to discover her family history in Poland, Mann met Annulla, her college-roommates aunt. Two years later, Mann transcribed the words of this woman into her first docudrama (Bigsby 138). After Mann finished her first play, she continued to move forward with the next topic that she felt important to American culture. She has said, “I have been obsessed with violence in our country ever since I came of age in the 1960s” (qtd. in Bigsby 145). Growing up during the Vietnam War herself affected Mann greatly and prompted her to discuss this issue in her own...
work. The play came into existence when the real life counterpart of one of the characters, “Nadine”, saw a production of Annulla, An Autobiography. The woman persuaded Mann to meet the real Vietnam veteran, who told Mann of the atrocities he witnessed and committed during the war. While writing this play, Mann waded through 180 hours of transcript, which needed to be distilled into a two-hour play. Mann felt it most important to focus on providing what she called, “a theatrical voice for each person” (qtd. in Bigsby 146). Despite the fact that it won six Obie Awards during its first production, Emily Mann found it difficult to locate a theatre that would produce the play. She eventually staged it at the Goodman Studio Theatre in Chicago, Illinois. Currently, Mann is a playwright and continues to serve as the artistic director of the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. Since Mann took on the role of artistic director, the focus of the McCarter Theatre had moved towards creating and developing new works.

According to John W. Frick and Stephen M. Vallillo in their book Theatrical Directors: A Biographical Dictionary, “Her [Mann’s] ‘theatre of testimony’ is a subjective form of docudrama which allows the writer the freedom to create both the strongest moral statement and the deepest catharsis” (259). This “theatre of testimony” is a title that Mann adopted to describe her works which are verbatim testimonies rearranged in a stylistic manner to create what she believes is the strongest statement. Emily Mann’s plays are categorized as theatre of testimony or docudramas are: Annulla, An Autobiography, Execution of Justice (the story of Dan White, who killed two city officials), Greensboro (the story of a Ku Klux Klan rally and protest where five KKK members were killed), Having Our Say, The Delaney Sisters First 100 Years (transcribed from the book and portrays the story of two African-American sisters), and Still Life. For Still Life, Mann wrote a Playwright’s Note, which discussed the reason for utilizing the documentary style and a general introduction to the issues the play raises:
Still Life is about three people I met in Minnesota during the summer of 1978. It is about violence in America. The Vietnam War is the backdrop to the violence at home. The play is dedicated to the casualties of the war – all of them. The play is a “documentary” because it is a distillation of interviews I conducted during that summer. I chose the documentary style to ensure that the reality of the people and events described could not be denied…The play is also a personal document…I have been obsessed with violence in our country every since I came of age in the 1960s. I have no answer to the questions I raise in the play but I think the questions are worth asking. The play is a plea for examination and self-examination, an attempt at understanding our own violence and a hope that through understanding we can, as Nadine says, “come out on the other side.”

(Mann 34).

Mann’s intent is clear: these questions of the war and violence must be asked in order to reach some kind of understanding of ourselves. Through self-examination, Mann hopes to provide the conduit for America to ask questions that have been heretofore unasked. These questions of violence help maintain the play’s relevance beyond times of war. Despite the opportunity, Mann provides no answers of her own and offers no answers in the play. In this chapter, I will give a scriptural and character analysis of Still Life, especially focusing on the aspects of images in the media and the aftereffects of the war on the characters.

Still Life is simply three characters sitting at a table, talking mainly to the audience, telling stories that illuminate their views on each other and the Vietnam War. The play consists of three people: Mark, a Vietnam veteran, his wife, Cheryl, and his lover, Nadine. The structure of Still Life is notable because the author has appropriated the words of others and the stylistic
rearrangement of those words. Mann has done this in order to create a dramatic piece of art. As John Istel asserts in his article “Emily Mann: Searching for Survivors”, “Mann compares her playwriting process to that of a sculptor who must find the form amid the raw material. By pruning and compressing the words of these various survivors, she creates what South African director Barney Simon and playwright Mbongi Ngema told her was best termed a ‘theatre of testimony’” (44). This is an apt description of how Mann creates her work. She has taken the raw material, the words of survivors, and created a form that best represents the events in an artistic way. Istel also notes Mann’s use of direct address, stating:

…each play relies on multimedia and direct address to evoke the double trauma that Mann suggests is at work in Still Life… As the onstage characters give witness to their experiences… the audience is implicitly asked to serve as witness as well. (44)

Mann uses direct audience address throughout the whole play. As the characters look at the audience directly, the audience is brought into the experience and is no longer a passive observer. The event has become experiential and the audience can no longer sit passively in their chairs; the audience must now react as they stare into the actor’s eyes.

The pace of Still Life is staccato at times since the words used are short and contain sharp consonants. For example, in Act Three, all three characters are telling different stories. The staccato pace connects each story at this integral part:

Nadine: Oh, God.

Cheryl: Oh, God.

Mark: The only way I could cry was to write to my dad. “God, Dad. I’m really scared. I’m really terrified.

Cheryl: Oh, God. He could pick out people. (Mann 105)
The pace is also more lyrical at other times, when there are more words used, longer sentences, and softer consonants. For example, shortly after the previously mentioned scene, Nadine has a long speech in which she discusses her fears regarding her daughter’s safety:

I worry I have these three beautiful daughters (pieces of life) who I have devoted my whole life to, who I’ve put all my energy into – bringing up – raising – and then somebody up there goes crazy one day and pushes the “go” button and phew! bang [sic], finished, the end. (Mann 109)

Mann includes a brief set of Production Notes at the beginning of the play which instruct, “The rhythms are of real people’s speech, but may also at times have the sense of improvisation one finds with best jazz musicians: the monologues should sometimes sound like extended riffs” (35). This is not meant to be taken literally and is not an instruction for the actors to add any type of musicality to their vocal inflection. This is not meant to be taken literally but is to be used as an image for the actors. She wants it to sound like real people talking in real life rather than the poetry of a playwright. For instance, Cheryl has an exceedingly long monologue about a spaghetti dinner that Mark is giving, in which she is the only character who speaks for several pages. She speaks in the vernacular; however, the length of the speech requires a cadence in order to be understood. In contrast, at the end of the play, Mark is reciting the list of men in his unit who died. As he recites this list, Nadine interjects the summation of her ideas regarding Mark, the war, and the future. The staccato rhythm written into the play forces the audience to listen more closely to the words each character is speaking. As Don Ringnalda indicates in his book Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War, “Almost like a musical score, this play is an investigation of consonant and dissonant relationships” (185). It is simply a means in which
Mann reveals the intricacies of the complicated relationships that are at the heart of *Still Life*. In addition to this, the script for *Still Life* is non-linear. Each character jumps time and tells a story that may have come before or after the preceding story. There is little character interaction. Physical action is almost non-existent. The play revolves around each character telling a story from their past or about some event that includes Mark. The first time I read the play the structure was very jarring for me. Despite this initial reaction, I grew to understand and appreciate the structure as a necessary element to help tell the story of Mark’s environment.

The main conduit through which Mann draws the audience’s attention and interest is the use of multimedia. The title of this play, *Still Life*, does not simply indicate how all three character’s lives have “stopped” or “have been stilled”. It is also meant to evoke the literal meaning of that style of painting. A still life is exactly what it implies it is: an artistic representation of anything that does not move. In *Still Life*, Mark creates still life pictures through the medium of photography. He displays pictures of his wife, his mistress, and the war throughout the play in a narrative form, allowing the photographs to propel the story forward. As Christopher Bigsby states, “Mark (an artist and photographer) tries to find a correlative for his feelings in art, which becomes a means to contain the anarchy of his feelings, to fix his memories, a means to force others to 'listen’” (149). His pictures range from funny and absurd (he includes a picture of his foot “…because if I ever lost it, I wanted to remember what it looked like” (Mann 40)), to the grotesque. Near the end of the second scene, Mark is running through a catalog of pictures of graves and injured people; finally, the stage directions indicate, Mark stops at a picture that is too gruesome to look at and expresses regret: “Oh, Jesus. Yeah…We have to be patient with each other” (Mann 80). Mark has been desensitized to these images and realizes too late that the audience may be horrified by images that seem commonplace to him.
Nadine and Mark talk often of the “artist world” that Mark now inhabits. This is, in fact, how Nadine and Mark met. She has visited his shop for supplies and he approached her. This “artist world” they both inhabit became the bond between them that was only strengthened by her understanding of his actions during the war. Cheryl does mention Mark’s artistry but only in the effort to criticize him and prove the point that he is not mentally stable. Cheryl describes a jar that Mark has made with a picture of her, tied to a stake, surrounded by broken glass. Her overall response to Mark’s need for expression is best expressed through a quotation of Cheryl’s: “I think that’s why I’m so against the artist world. I just can’t take his work a lot of it [sic]. It’s because he’s done that to me” (Mann 79). Cheryl and Nadine have extremely different viewpoints regarding this matter. Nadine states, “Those jars he makes are brilliant, humorous. He’s preserving the war” (Mann 45). Cheryl views these jars as violent and indicating Mark’s desire to burn her at the stake. Nadine views these jars as having a sense of humor whilst still making a statement that the war cannot be forgotten. Mark uses the art form of still life to express his anger, his fear, and his humor. Nadine uses the art form to connect with Mark and understand him. Cheryl uses the art as a conduit through which she can express her anger both with Mark and the war.

The overall effect of the characters, the structure of *Still Life*, the direct audience address, and the incorporation of photography in the production is cumulative. The audience watches these people go through emotions ranging from laughter to tears. The climax of the play is Mark’s confession in which he reveals the killing of an entire Vietnamese family. His guilt and self-hatred are evident. He not only describes the killing and its aftermath; he then describes the discrepancy he felt upon his return, “Sometimes I look at a news story. I look at something someone goes to prison for here, I think about it. There’s no difference. It’s just a different
place” (Mann 120). The final moments of the play are especially touching as Mark lists the names of his friends who died in combat. He then displays a photograph of “two grapefruits, an orange, a broken egg, with a grenade in the center on a dark background. Also some fresh bread, a fly on the fruit. From far away it looks like an ordinary still life” (Mann 131). He describes an event in which his unit was attacked and reveals that the Marine Corps sends a basket of food when a unit suffers heavy losses. The final words of the play, Mark’s final words are, “What can I say? I am still alive – my friends aren’t. It’s a still life. I didn’t know what I was doing” (Mann 132). The double entendre used by the term “still life” is obvious. All three of these characters’ lives have come to a standstill. Mark is unable to let go of the past; Cheryl is unable to face Mark’s past; Nadine is unable to integrate the realities of Mark’s past. The past has choked these characters until they are unable to breathe and they have become still. The still life photograph that Mark displays is a contradiction. A reward for losing lives, the food represents what was once beautiful and pure and is now tainted by the fly and the grenade.

The characters in Still Life are real people. The words in Still Life are their words. I believe this is important to remember so that the line between audience and stage, reality and fantasy, cannot remain clear. Emily Mann’s purpose is to blur this line and remind the audience that this is not a fictional story.

The first character I will discuss is Mark. He is the main character and the connection between the other two characters present in this play. He is a Vietnam veteran who enjoys photography and even makes art from these photographs. The play marks the passage of time through his photographs, as each photograph from the war brings up a different memory for Mark. The set is simple: one table, three chairs, and a screen for slide projections. The play is centered on Mark and his photography, which is mostly of the war.
In the beginning of the play, Mark states, “I don’t want this to come off as a combat story” (Mann 45). However, this story can come off as nothing else. It seems to be all Mark can think about, talk about, and is also the sole focus of his photographic arts. His wife, Cheryl, states, “He blames it all on the war…but I want to tell you…don’t let him” (Mann 43). The perspective Mark’s wife has of him is not shared, however, by the perspective of his mistress. She asserts her opinion in one short sentence, “He’s the greatest man I’ve ever known” (Mann 42). On several occasions throughout the play, Mann indicates Mark’s feelings of guilt through statements such as, “If I gave you the information, I couldn’t wash my hands of the guilt, because I did things over there. We all did” (47), “It’s become a personal thing. The guilt. There is the guilt” (59), “I look at my face in a mirror, I look at my hand, and I cannot believe…I did these things” (63). These quotes continue throughout the play as Mark recounts more of the war and the bigger the ordeal, the larger his guilt.

Mark also describes how people behaved towards him after he returned, especially describing his parents’ reaction of avoidance. Cheryl describes how he would send objects home from Vietnam; once he sent home a bone of a man he killed. Cheryl states that she would have felt compelled to ask what was happening to him and that his parents never asked. Mark interjects and comments upon the story by saying, “I know. I really wanted them to ask” (Mann 50). He continues to say that he walked in the door from returning home and his mother’s first reaction is to nag him about drinking coffee. Nadine states later in the play that, “Do you know, to this day his father will not say the word Vietnam” (Mann 101). Obviously, this was not the response that Mark and other veterans would be hoping for or expecting. Instead of attempting to understand the new person who has just survived a horrific war, his family pretended that nothing had changed. Mark maintains, “See, I wanted to get back into the society and I wanted to
live so much life, but I couldn’t‖ (Mann 93). The expectation that life would continue as it had before was present not only in Mark’s parents but also in himself. The inability to live up to this expectation left him adrift. He also discusses the response of friends or people that he had just met and indicates his paranoia, “I was afraid….I thought everybody knew what I did over there, and that they were against me” (Mann 94). The fear of rejection, fear of judgment, prevents Mark from creating meaningful relationships that may have eased his feelings of guilt and fear. 

Nadine sums up the feelings and reactions of the country succinctly by saying, “God, we hated those vets” (Mann 103). The comments made by Mark and Nadine indicate not only the country’s response to Vietnam veterans but also the response of the veterans to the feelings and culpability that had to be waded through in order to gain perspective. Mark desperately needs to delve into his feelings of guilt but cannot. Emily Mann ultimately reveals that at the end of the play when, through confession, Mark reveals the worst crime he has committed: he has killed three children, a mother, and a father on the belief that they had information regarding an attack in which a friend of his was killed. The last comment he makes regarding this confession scene is, “I’m shell-shocked” (Mann 125). Mark has not found peace within himself, nor has he found the perspective necessary to move on. He is stuck within his memories and within his own mind.

Cheryl, Mark’s wife, is young and jaded. Mark’s first comment of Cheryl is, “She’s been through a lot” (Mann 39). Through much of the play, Cheryl makes derogatory comments towards Mark that, over time, seem to build up on top of both Mark and Cheryl. Despite this accumulative effect, Cheryl attempts to bury her emotions. She states, “I want it suppressed as fast as possible” (47). Instead of expressing a desire for these issues to be dealt with in a healthy way so they can be overcome, Cheryl chooses the word “suppress.” She wants the memories, the violence, the entire war suppressed in an effort to make it disappear. Cheryl describes herself as
being naïve; however, she believes that she is no longer naïve when it comes to men. She sees herself as jaded now and, yet, unable to relate to Mark. While he constantly brings the war into their everyday lives with his art, his stories, and his overall emotional/mental stability, Cheryl desperately attempts to bury it all. Not only does she attempt to bury the past, she aims to replace this focus onto their child. This goal is not as altruistic as it might sound. Cheryl is seeking to put the entire focus of their lives on social standing within their community and have that all revolve around their son. She continually claims to be devoted to her son, however, when discussing Mark’s lack of discipline, Cheryl states, “But when it comes to discipline, that kid’s a little brat, I mean he is” (Mann 118). The contradiction of her statements regarding being naïve and wanting to suppress both her and Mark’s emotions as well as the contradictions of claiming such devotion and yet calling her child a “brat” indicate Cheryl as the antagonist in Still Life. In Scene IV, Cheryl has a four page monologue criticizing Mark’s enjoyment of cooking and the spaghetti dinner he has once a year. In this monologue, she describes in detail the mess that Mark leaves behind. However, she also states that the people who attend love this dinner and “…stuff themselves to death” (Mann 115). The simple fact that Cheryl focuses on this one evening and cannot see how enjoyable it is for Mark and everyone who attends indicates a selfishness in Cheryl that she accuses Mark of having. Despite this character trait, Cheryl is able to see the scope of the problem. She recognizes how many men have suffered and returned traumatized. Early in the play, Cheryl states, “There are so many men like him now” (Mann 41) and at the end of the play Cheryl again states, “Because ninety percent of the men never straightened out” (Mann 129). Cheryl also discusses Mark violence towards her. She reveals, “…he pushed me down the stairs. He hit me a couple of times” (Mann 64). However, her response to his violence is the same as her reaction the war. Cheryl simply forgets these memories, while simultaneously
punishing Mark. Her observations and reactions are indicative of the response of the people to Vietnam veterans and illuminate the resulting relationship issues.

Nadine is the last of this dysfunctional triumvirate. She is Mark’s mistress, an artist, a mother of three daughters, an activist, and a divorcee. She represents the clarity and focus that Mark needs in order to move on; however, she also represents the new thinking that evolved from the 1960s regarding women’s rights. She is quite aware of Mark’s past, not only his actions during the war but the current issues involving his wife. She casually discusses these issues when she says, “He’s so honest he doesn’t hide anything. He told me he beat her very badly” (Mann 41). Her nonchalance towards his violence could indicate an inability to deal with this truth, however, Nadine presents a different reason for her attitude. In several quotes from Still Life, Nadine exposes the violence present in every person. She states, “Everything Mark did was justified. We’ve all done it. Murdered someone we love, or ourselves” (Mann 60). She then divulges her own violent tendencies by expressing her own anger, “I understand because I’m convinced that I am even angrier than Mark. I went off in a different direction, that’s all” (Mann 61). Nadine never discloses what this different direction is; however, I believe she has channeled that anger towards accomplishing her goals and taking care of her family. Despite this clarity, Nadine admits that she herself has been physically violent with her ex-husband. She blames much of it on her drinking and her anger, which culminated in beating her husband. She then compares this situation with Mark’s spousal abuse by stating, “And I see Mark. The fact that he beat his wife. I understand. I don’t like it. But I understand it” (Mann 65). She is the character that helps the audience truly feel sympathy for Mark, who could have come across solely as a violent, wife-beating man who is unable to deal with his own actions. Through Nadine, the audience sees the gentler side of Mark. Furthermore, the audience is able to view their own
tendencies towards violence, regardless of their gender. Nadine makes no apologies for her personality. She simply indicates that she is constantly learning and growing. Her view of Cheryl, however, is colored with disdain, not understanding. This is understandable considering that Cheryl is Mark’s wife and Nadine is Mark’s mistress. Nevertheless, I believe this has more to do with Nadine seeing a broader scope of Mark’s issues and of life. In one passage, Nadine discusses how she used to view her life in terms of the traditional 1950s homemaker and that she has since learned her own value in terms of providing for herself. She even goes so far as to criticize Cheryl’s desire for status and money by saying:

But between us, I can’t understand why a woman her age, an intelligent woman, who’s lived through the sixties and the seventies, who’s living now in a society where women have finally been given permission to drive and progress and do what they’re entitled to do… I mean, how can she think that way? (Mann 85)

In *Still Life*, Nadine represents an alternate view of Mark, a new type of thinking towards gender roles in society, and the ability to see in ourselves the violence apparent in Mark.

The play was not well received when it first opened at the American Place Theater in 1981. Frank Rich reviewed the production in the *New York Times* and said, “Because of fuzzy-headed writing, Miss Mann has devised a play that not only leaves the audience cold, but also tends to trivialize such issues as the plight of the Vietnam veteran, war atrocities and feminism” (“Stage: ‘Still Life’ By Emily Mann at American Place.”) However, the play won six Obie Awards that year, one for playwrighting. Despite receiving those negative reviews, the play has gone on to see success in the theatre. A recent production done at the 78th Street Theatre Lab was reviewed on *Backstage.com* by Marc Miller. Miller’s view of the production is that it was “compelling” and “sharply rendered” (Miller “Still Life”). I also disagree with the statement
written by Rich regarding the writing of the play or regarding the audience’s reaction. In the year 2005, I was fortunate enough to perform in a production of *Still Life* with the Valencia Character Company. During this production, I became innately intimate with the play and saw its beauty. I enjoyed the process. The only change I would have made for this production is to mirror the set design in the original production. I would have liked to have seen three separate platforms for each character, illustrating their isolation. With the exception of this one change, I would not have altered anything else in this production. As a dramaturg, I would offer several suggestions to the director that would attempt to increase the audience’s knowledge of the Vietnam War. My first suggestion would be a fifteen-minute lecture given by myself prior to each performance. My second suggestion would be providing each audience member with a slip of paper bearing the name of a Vietnam soldier. At the end of each performance, the audience member would be able to check a list in the lobby display and find out if their name was one of the millions of soldiers who died during the war. I believe that this would help counteract any lack of knowledge regarding the war and provide connection to current events.

As Bigsby states, “It *[Still Life]* exists as a testimony, as a means of confronting the past and as a way of giving form to otherwise unfocused anxieties” (149-150). Only by confronting the past can it be understood and can a person move on from its pitfalls. *Still Life* is an attempt at providing this for all the survivors of the Vietnam War and for those who previously did not understand them.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The Vietnam War presented a wonderfully dramatic backdrop in which many writers chose to tell a story. Vietnam Protest Theater reacted immediately to the war vociferously and with many different types of plays. As Nora M. Alter states in her book Vietnam Protest Theatre: The Television War On Stage, “By 1970, when the war reached its full development, at least twenty plays had been staged” (6). Before the war had reached even its official conclusion, plays were being staged discussing not only the issues still ongoing in Vietnam but also the problems of the returning veterans. The response was immediate and important; the theatrical world wanted to contribute to the protests and the cause of bringing home our young men from a war that could not be won. This response was not solely seen in America; Ms. Alter notes that between the years of 1966 and 1976, between fifty and sixty plays had been produced in America and in Europe. The entire world responded to this crisis by creating drama on epic proportions. The influx of horrific images, the massive loss of life, and the problems returning veterans faced meant that no one could stay silent, including American playwrights.

The role of the media in influencing the American public must be noted, not only for the climate that it created; it must be noted for how this climate affected the American playwright. Alter remarks:

…photographed and televised war in Vietnam was happening not only in Vietnam but also ‘back in the USA,” through the transmission of all manner of ideological messages that were then incorporated – more or less consciously, visibly or audibly – into virtually all cultural production and reproductions. (xii)
The images that were inundating the American culture were everywhere, including the theatre. It was impossible to escape these images so, instead of denying their existence, theatre and the American public embraced them. In truth, they were unable to tear their eyes away. Alter quotes Jean-Marie Serreau as proclaiming:

> Whether now these pictures are stage props or photographic pictures – we are the first humans who have a photographic or audiovisual memory – the theatre picture, the poetic picture, the film picture, the television picture, all have strongly influenced the intellect of all these writers. (xiv)

These pictures not only affected these writers, they influenced them into writing their plays, creating images that utilized pictures of war, and creating a response to the tragedies witnessed every evening on the nightly news.

The plays of Vietnam Protest Drama not only dealt with what was happening in the war, how to bring the soldiers home and why the war began. These plays also tended to deal with the reintegration of veterans into society. Alter observes that the tragedy in a large majority of Vietnam Protest drama revolved around the issue of desensitization and that, witnessing this violence “…disturbed them [American G.I.’s] to the point that they could not fit back into the warp and woof of American society without seriously destabilizing it” (140). Playwrights of Vietnam Protest Drama realized how difficult the return was for the Vietnam veteran and incorporated these struggles in an attempt to present them to the audience. They also realized the extent of the effect that these men would have on the society once they returned home. The ensuing destabilization of society seemed inevitable. Alter also reveals that in this type of drama, “The veterans are all the more pathetic because they appear to have done nothing wrong to deserve harsh treatment at home” (144). While this is not entirely the case in Still Life, Emily
Mann certainly evokes pity for the character of Mark in his reception by his parents, his wife, and his friends. His erratic and violent behavior seems more understandable in the context of all that he has suffered. This is a form of dehumanization of the veteran as a means of presenting the atrocities, degradation, horror, and tragedy of war (Alter 146). Another form of dehumanization was to present the veteran as a mindless killing machine with a complete loss of moral values. Alter notes that, “Dealing death sometimes becomes for G.I.’s ‘second nature’…” (146). Emily Mann carefully avoided this by describing the guilt that Mark feels regarding the actions he has committed in Vietnam. The purpose of this “re-humanization” of the Vietnam veteran is clear: if these men were mindless killing machines, then an audience could have no sympathy. Mann depicts Mark as overwhelmingly guilt-ridden to evoke the sympathy of the audience in regards to the experience of the American Vietnam veteran.

My analysis of *Still Life* encapsulated much of my research on the war itself. To understand the playwright’s overall intention, I believe it is important to first understand certain aspects surrounding the war. In the first four chapters of this thesis, I have attempted to provide cultural and historical context in which to examine and understand the play. Having done so, I realize now how deeply any dramaturgical analysis could become, if one starts digging and continues to dig. This study provided context I would then utilize to inform the actors and production crew. The research would also be central in the program’s dramaturg notes and compel me to be more creative in my attempts to provide this information to the audience.

After I had finished my research for my particular focus, I began to wonder what the effect of a staging of *Still Life* could have on the current political state, particularly the American occupation of Iraq. The comparison between the two conflicts has already been made, which Jeffrey Record and W. Andrew Terrill describe in their book, *Iraq and Vietnam: Differences,*
Similarities and Insights. The two writers state, “The United States has, [observers] argue, stumbled into another overseas ‘quagmire’ from which there is no easy or cheap exit” (vii). Record’s and Terrill’s most pertinent point in discussing the similarities of the Iraq and Vietnam conflicts revolves around the attempt of the respective governments attempting to create and sustain a government that the indigenous people would accept and defend as their staunchly as their own. At the time of this writing, the building of a government in Iraq is still in progress and, therefore, impossible to predict its sustainability. While much of the book discusses the inconsistencies in this analogy, it is important to note that the comparison has been made by the American people and the policy-makers. Michael E. O’Hanlon presents a differing opinion in his article “Iraq without a Plan” when he states that the war in Iraq has “…consequences for the nation [that] have been far worse than any set of military mistakes since Vietnam” (33). Many believe that the Iraq war is worse than the war in Vietnam and will produce more dire consequences than have been seen previously. The response by American officials to these accusations and analogies has been to dismiss them and to degrade the people who state their opinions until recently when President Bush has admitted that the Iraq War could become another Vietnam War. On the other hand, President Bush is careful to focus the issue on American support. Pippa Crerar, in an article in The Evening Standard titled “Yes, Iraq Could Be New Vietnam”, quotes President Bush as declaring, “They believe that if they can create enough chaos, the American people will grow sick and tired of the Iraqi effort and will cause the government to withdraw” (16). His focus on the opinion of the American people implies that the protestations where what ended the Vietnam War when it is arguable that the length of the war alone caused it to end. Crerar then comments, “The President appeared to suggest that if the US held its nerve it could avoid a repeat of history” (16). The implication in this statement is that the
United States did not hold its nerve in the instance of the Vietnam War. I propose that the constant bombardment of the American people with the images and life of the war in Vietnam was more than the collective psyche could handle and that it had very little to do with the United States being able to “hold its nerve.” I believe that Still Life and the collective of plays like it prove to us that there is only so much that any psyche can tolerate. I also believe that this creates relevance for this play and others like it.

If there is a communal belief that the Iraq War has, at least, some similarities to the Vietnam War, it is not too far a leap to assume that the drama being presented on the stages today will mimic the drama of Vietnam Protest Theatre. As an appropriate example, I offer up the current production of a play called What I Heard in Iraq, which had its first production in Hollywood. The play centers on the English experience in the Iraq War but has surprising similarities to Still Life. As Richard Phillips reports in his article “New Iraq Drama Isn’t Just about What’s Happening - It Is What’s Happening”, “The play - which uses the words of real people caught up in the Iraq conflict - is being constantly updated…” (2). The play falls into the category of “theatre of testimony”, yet it is constantly updated as more English men die in Iraq. The similarities between the two plays do not reside only there. What I Heard in Iraq also utilizes war photographs to convey the message behind the play. Veronica Lee wrote a review of What I Heard in Iraq in The Evening Standard titled, “Real Voices from the Front Line” in which she states, “is that rare thing, an impassioned and dynamic piece of verbatim theatre, using the words of Bush, Blair, Rumsfeld, Rice, serving soldiers and civilians caught in the war zone” (34). The play has been well received and will tour England in the coming year. I believe that it has been well received now due to the influx of information regarding the beginning of the war. The attitude towards the war has changed since it first began, as has public perception. As Lee
writes, “It's [the play is] highly partial, but when the world's most powerful politicians obfuscate, directly contradict themselves and downright lie over numbers of casualties and weapons of mass destruction, it's hard not to be” (34). This perception seems to be common and I believe that it allows this type of work to be seen and understood. As has been previously mentioned, much of the information surrounding Vietnam had not been declassified in 1981, when Emily Mann’s *Still Life* had premiered. I do not believe the country was ready for this work in 1981, which is why more recent productions of the play have met with more success. These more recent productions provide resonance regarding PTSD and the experience of the soldier, regardless of which war the play discusses. I believe that these productions also continue to remind audiences of their own capacity for violence and they force an audience member to ask what he/she would do in the same situation.

The influx of new plays regarding the Iraq War is important, however, it is also important to note that recent productions of *Still Life* still has an effect on audiences. In a 2006 production at Truman College in Chicago, Barbara Vitello wrote a review in the Daily Herald in which she proclaimed:

> The play resonates because the trauma remains. One cannot watch “Still Life” – based on Mann’s 1978 interviews with a Vietnam vet, his wife and his lover about the war’s effect on them – with wondering (despairing?) how the current military action will affect U.S. soldiers. Will it devastate this generation like it did their predecessors? Only time will tell. But if what's past is prologue, Iraq will likely produce a still life of its own. (32)

*Still Life* will always have, at the very minimum, some effect on audiences, as long as Vietnam remains in our memories. As the nation continues to become polarized over issues such as war, it
is the theatre and plays similar to Still Life that cast illumination. They force society to witness its own destruction and admit its fractures.

When I first began this research paper, I realized quickly that I could not write about the Vietnam War until I had researched the Vietnam War. As a potential source for a director, I needed a better understanding of the history of the war, the climate in which it happened, and what the response was of the people involved. I have not only read the play Still Life; I have performed in the show as the character Nadine. Nevertheless, even performing in that production, I still had such a miniscule amount of knowledge regarding my own American history. For much of my research, I felt angry and upset about my lack of education. I could not understand why I was taught so little about such a significant period of American history. I remember reading my history book in high school and noting that the Vietnam War was only given one page of information. However, I soon realized that the knowledge was always out in the world for me to find. I just needed to search for it. After I had performed in the play two years prior to the writing of this thesis, I knew I had to write a dramaturgical study of it to understand the play and the period better. After learning even the most cursory of knowledge, I felt I had to write this paper for the thousands of men who died and those who still do not understand why they died or how those who survived had suffered. The Vietnam War has never left the American memory; it remains in the hearts of the men who survived the war. It remains in the minds of the officials in government. It remains etched forever in the memory of America on the Vietnam Memorial. Still Life is a true testament to the horrors of Vietnam and the effects that it had on the men who returned. What remains to be seen is the effect Still Life, and other post-Vietnam drama, will have on the plays written by today’s writers regarding the conflict in Iraq.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Kreyche, Gerald F. "We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema during World War II."
USA Today (Society for the Advancement of Education) Mar. 2007: 79+.


