Vietnam Veterans Memorial
The Vietnam War Memorial, erected (for the most part) in 1982, is a monument erected to honor those who served in the armed forces during the Vietnam War. In addition, it is a monument that provides a place of reflection for those who lost someone in the war. The monument itself is comprised of two large granite walls that come together in an elongated ‘V’. As one walks down the line of either arm of the ‘V’ shape, one walks down a gradual slope that continues downward until reaching a low point at the crotch of the ‘V’. The wall itself mirrors the slope of the ground, rising many feet above ground-level at its center while shrinking to nothingness at its ends. Upon the wall itself is the most striking aspect of the memorial: the names of every American soldier, in order of estimated date of death, that died during the conflict.

I think that the one of the best qualities of the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial is its apparent simplicity. It (the main portion, at least) does not have any statues, fountains, flames, or other complex structures; it only has two sloping, engraved granite walls. In this way, the memorial does not seem to force a specific deeper meaning or symbolism on the viewer. Rather, the viewer is allowed to take as little or as much as he would like – he is allowed to interact with the memorial in the way that seems best to him.

Even so, there is much thought that went into the design of the seemingly simple memorial. The black granite, when viewed from afar, looks like a black scar scratched into the earth, symbolizing the way war and conflict scars the land it is fought upon and also those who did the fighting. Additionally, the memorial is v-shaped. As the letter ‘V’ is the first letter in Vietnam, this reminds the viewer of where the war was actually fought. However, as the v-shape is very subtle and seems to be very much a secondary thing when compared with the key component of the memorial: the names etched into the wall. This is telling of how the people, rather than the place (or anything else), are the most important part of any war.

Even with this symbolism and simplicity, I believe that the single best aspect of the wall is its personal touch. The Vietnam Memorial’s the granite walls are highly polished, allowing the viewer to look into the wall and see himself in much the same way that he would look into a mirror. This helps the viewer to feel as if he is a part of the memorial and thus helps the viewer to make a stronger connection with those names etched into the wall. Also, when standing next to the wall, the viewer can touch the names, feeling them beneath his fingertips. Again, this strengthens the connection between the viewer and those people whose names are etched into the granite wall. Additionally, the names being listed in date-of-death order (rather than alphabetically) allows one to view the wall as a sort of timeline, allowing those who fought in the war (or had loved ones who did) to walk through their past, fondly remembering those who were lost.
**Rock ‘n Roll Is Here To Pay (Inside Covers)**

The visualization found on the inside of the front and back coves of the book *Rock ‘n Roll Is Here To Pay* is a graphical display of the history of pop and rock music from the mid 50s until the mid 70s. The visualization is displayed on a set of axes, the horizontal axis representing time and the vertical axis representing the percent of total record sales that could be attributed to pop and rock music. Starting around zero at the beginning of 1955, the line representing the time-to-percent-of-total-record-sales function jumps up quickly with the onset of Elvis and his contemporaries. From there, it continues rising until 1975, indicating how, once it emerges, the genres of pop and rock quickly became the dominant force in the music industry. In addition to showing the time-to-percent-of-total-record-sales relation, the visualization also shows the emergence of different music genres (such as folk rock and progressive soul), the lifespan (birth to break-up) of key musical groups, and connections between different musical groups.

For whatever reason, I find myself very intrigued by this interface (probably because almost all of the musical artists I listen to can be found somewhere on this chart). It isn’t a perfect visualization (it is hand drawn, after all, and thus is most likely not totally accurate), but, because it has managed to pull me (and my roommate) in, must nevertheless be a good interface.

One very nice thing about the visualization is how it provides an easy means of seeing which bands influenced which other bands and also which bands were contemporaries of which other bands. Additionally, the visualization is drawn in such a way that it almost looks like a river or stream, with different musical genres and groups acting as quasi-tributaries that add to the larger whole of pop/rock music. By creating the visualization in this way, the artist imbues the visualization with a very natural left-to-right flow. This not only makes the visualization intuitive and easy to ‘read’, but makes for a very aesthetically pleasing display.

Ultimately, then, I believe that it is the pick-up-and-immediately-know-what-it-means aspect of this visualization that is its best quality. When browsing through the pages of Tufte’s book, I did not need to read the caption above the Rock ‘n Roll visualization to discover what information it was trying to relay; it seemed quite obvious: a good visualization indeed. One minor issue I have with the visualization is that I wish that individual contributions to record sales could be somehow shown. However, because of the dynamic nature of the music industry, displaying such information could potentially make the visualization unreadable. Thus, it perhaps is something that need not be ‘fixed’. Additionally, if more musical genres were included (such as progressive rock), I think it would make the visualization better (my great liking of many progressive rock bands probably has something to do with my wont to include it).

**Figurative Map of Napoleon’s Russian Campaign**

The ‘Figurative Map of Napoleon’s Russian Campaign’ visualization is a visualization that documents (as the name suggests) Napoleon’s march to Moscow and the resulting retreat. To represent the path taken by Napoleon’s army across the Russian soil, the artist chose simply to draw a line on top of a map. This line, in addition to showing the path that the army took, also shows, through its thickness, the size
of Napoleon’s army. The thicker the line is at a given point, the larger Napoleon’s army was when it was at that location. The visualization also differentiates between Napoleon’s offensive and defensive troop movements. When Napoleon’s army was advancing, the line is drawn as a brown line; when his army was retreating, the line was drawn as a black one. The visualization also manages to display the temperature of the Russian winter during key points of Napoleon’s Retreat. This information is displayed on a separate graph below the map where the vertical axis of the graph is the temperature and the horizontal axis is location.

This visualization is almost certainly the finest visualization I have ever seen. It manages to relay so much information (the position of Napoleon’s army in two dimensions, the size of his army at any given location along his march, both his advance and retreat, and the temperature of the Russian winter during his retreat) without seeming cluttered. Additionally, this visualization, like any good visualization, is very easy to understand. It took me only as many seconds as I took to read the title of the visualization to understand how to ‘read’ the visualization.

The visualization also has the great advantage that Napoleon advanced and retreated along two very close yet slightly different paths. This provides a very easy means of comparison of the difference in the size of Napoleon’s army and also the number of casualties suffered during the advance and the retreat. Additionally, because Napoleon’s advance began and his retreat ended in essentially the same place, it is very easy for one to compare the size of the army at the beginning and at the end of the march.

Again, then, it is this visualization’s apparent simplicity that is its greatest quality. Upon first viewing it, one is not intimidated and is thus willing to continue to look at and attempt to draw information from the visualization. In doing so, the visualization essentially encourages learning and furthering one’s knowledge of the subject of Napoleon’s march to Moscow and the heavy losses he suffered to the frigidly cold winter that harassed him for the entirety of his retreat.