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AMERICA'S SHADOW

An Anatomy of Empire

William V. Spanos



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Chapter 3

Vietnam and the *Pax Americana*

A Genealogy of the "New World Order"

> Swerve me? ye cannot swerve me, else ye swerve yourselves! man has ye there. Swerve me? The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents' beds, unerringly I rush! Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!
>
> — CAPTAIN AHAB, in Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

> Robert "Blowtorch" Komer, chief of COORDS, spook anagram for Other War, pacification, another word for war. If William Blake had "reported" to him that he'd seen angels in the trees, Komer would have tried to talk him out of it. Failing there, he'd have ordered defoliation.
>
> — MICHAEL HERR, *Dispatches*

> "Kill Nam," said Lieutenant Calley. He pointed his weapon at the earth, burned twenty quick rounds. "Kill it," he said. He reloaded and shot the grass and a palm tree and then the earth again. "Grease the place," he said. "Kill it."
>
> — TIM O'BRIEN, *In the Lake of the Woods*

Introduction: The Question of the American Cultural Memory

All too many "progressive" academics are now affirming that the various emancipatory discursive practices precipitated by the Vietnam War have established a revisionary cultural momentum that promises to affect the sociopolitical site of American, indeed of global, being in a decisive way. This, it would seem, is suggested by the significant transformation of the canonical curriculum accomplished in the academy and other institutions of cultural production since 1968. It is also suggested by the increasingly vocal representation of this transformation by the cultural and political Right as a usurpation of power by a radical Left, one that has imposed a totalitarian discourse of political correctness — a new McCarthyism in reverse. Yet one cannot escape the feeling in 1999 that the emancipatory "postmodern" discursive practices precipitated during and by the occasion of the Vietnam decade to resist the

evils of racism, patriarchy, and, especially, postcolonial colonialism have reached an impasse, if not an exhausted dead end. Despite the surface optimism in the academy, this feeling of exhaustion, in fact, pervades the intellectual climate of North America as a paralyzing virus. Its signs are discoverable everywhere. One finds it in the futile predictability — the indifference — of a differential "cultural critique" of the so-called postmodern agencies of knowledge transmission and in its loud muteness about the global cultural and sociopolitical conditions precipitated by the West's representation of the events of 1989–90 in China, and in Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union, not simply as the "fall of communism," but even more triumphantly as the "end of history" and the "advent of the New World Order." This sense of exhaustion can even be discerned in the very "emancipatory" cultural and political practices — the so-called multicultural initiative at both the domestic and international sites — that these agents of countercultural production have in large part enabled. And this impasse, in turn, has instigated a disabling reorientation of critique on the part of many of the most vitally provocative Left critics writing in America today, more specifically, a refocusing that, on the basis of the "decline of the nation-state" and the emergence of transnational capitalism, would abandon the site of "America" as a determining planetary force in favor of a global perspective in which "America" as a national culture is represented maximally as an outmoded or minimally as a subordinate category.[1]

The rhetoric usually employed to articulate this feeling of impasse circulates around the terms "institutionalization" or "professionalization."[2] The original revolutionary impulse that would have undermined the American discourse of hegemony, it is claimed, has been co-opted and pacified by its success: its (self-)incorporation in the discourse of "America," by which I mean the liberal humanist discourse of a nation-state whose "truths" have become planetary. This thesis is superficially true. But in its theoretical abstraction, it is symptomatic of precisely what theory in its historical origins discovered to be one of the most powerful political strategies of the discourse of hegemony. It displaces historically specific conflict, *where imbalances of power — injustices — determine praxis,* to the rarefied and free-floating space of liberal debate, *where all positions are equal:* to a context that enables this kind of reformist thinking to accommodate resistant voices.

In this chapter, I want to retrieve the virtually forgotten historical origins of what has come to be called postmodern theory. This, not simply for its own sake, but also to suggest the one needful thing capable of breaking through the impasse into which the emancipatory discursive practices enabled by postmodern theory have become mired. I mean the

retrieval of the Vietnam War *as event* from the oblivion to which the custodians of the American Cultural Memory have systematically relegated it and consequently the need to rethink the critical imperatives *this* historically specific war — it *cannot* be represented as simply any war — has disclosed about the post-Enlightenment American/Occidental *episteme*.

The very adversarial discourse the contradictions of this war in large part enabled has, however inadvertently, become complicitous with the dominant culture's amnesiac strategy. If a reconstellation of American criticism to the global scene is an imperative of the contemporary occasion, as, of course, it is, such a reconstellation must always keep in mind the determinative role that the idea of "America" — especially the myth of American exceptionalism — continues to play in the formulation and disposition of the cultural and sociopolitical issues of this expanded space: Kosovo, for example. The failure to do so, I submit, constitutes a disabling blindness to the essence of the globalization of the questions that confront postmodern men and women in the "post"–Cold War era. The impasse confronting emancipatory discursive practices in the aftermath of the "revolutions" in Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union and the apparently decisive triumph over a despotic state in the Gulf War is not so much symptomatic of the anachronistic status to which these discursive practices have been relegated by their institutionalization. It is primarily the result of their insistent failure to think the radically critical imperatives spontaneously disclosed by the *self*-destruction of the exceptionalist discourse of "America" in the decade of the Vietnam War. I mean by this the hegemonic discourse that, since the Puritans' "errand in the wilderness," has increasingly — right up to the present — taken upon itself the "burden" of fulfilling the planetary promise ordained by the *Logos* of God or by History, the promise, of course, betrayed by a "decadent" Old World.

This blindness becomes tellingly ironic if, as its unrelenting force and massive scope demand, one reads the dominant culture's multifaceted effort to bury Vietnam as a subliminal recognition that its ghost continues to haunt the American Cultural Memory in the post–Cold War era.

The Forgetting of Vietnam and the Hegemony of the End-of-History Discourse in the Post–Cold War Era

What, after the revelatory event of Vietnam, should be astonishing to anyone living in the present historical conjuncture is the enormous power of the end–of–the–Cold War discourse. This, as I have reiterated, is the discourse, common to both cultural conservatives and liberals,

that represents the successful "revolutions" against Stalinist communism first in the Eastern Bloc and then in the Soviet Union itself, the brutal suppression of the uprising in Tianamnen Square by the Old Guard communist regime, and the surgically executed military victory against Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War as the "fall of communism," that is, as the irreversible manifestation of the universal illegitimacy of the founding principles of socialism. Conversely, and more tellingly, it is the discourse that represents the global events of the late 1980s and early 1990s as a decisive manifestation of the *universal* legitimacy of the *idea* of American democracy. I am referring to the theory, most starkly exemplified by Francis Fukuyama's Hegelian interpretation of these events, that interprets the end of the Cold War as the culmination and fulfillment of a dialectical historical process that has precipitated liberal capitalist democracy as the "absolute" or planetary form of government and, in so doing, has brought the "developmental" dialectical economy of historical differentiation to its noncontradictory fulfillment and end in a totalized and identical self-present world order.[3] Despite a certain toning down of the triumphalist rhetoric compelled by the ongoing civil/racial strife in Bosnia, Kosovo, and other parts of the world and the reassessment of the "decisive" defeat of Saddam Hussein, this triumphalist American representation of the contemporary post–Cold War occasion continues to determine the content and parameters of cultural and sociopolitical discourse and practice not simply in the West but everywhere in the world. (It is a mistake to conclude, as too many on the Left have, that the continuing strife these post–Gulf War events reflect has effectively delegitimated the end-of-history discourse. The dominant culture's representation of America's global role has not abandoned this triumphalist vision. Rather, as in the case of Richard Haass's *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War,* it has accommodated these events to America's perennial, historically ordained, exceptionalist mission.)[4] As such, this triumphalist representation has effectively obliterated or accommodated any differential event the contradictory force of which might legitimate a resistant impulse, not least the history of the Vietnam War. In so doing, it has also empowered itself to demonize any such resistant impulse as "political correctness." Symptomatic of the inordinate power of this global post–Cold War discourse (and of the inadequacy, if not obsolescence, of the traditional and even postmodern Left-oriented problematics) is the dearth of significant challenges to this representation of the end of the Cold War as the end of history. The principal spokespersons of the various oppositional discourses that have emerged in the academic marketplace as "victors" over deconstruction and other discourses focusing on the

ontological question have not only largely ignored this epochal end-of-history thesis. They have also paid little attention to the practices it has enabled: the American invasion of Panama, the Gulf War, the "relief" of Somalia (Operation Hope), the intervention in Haiti, and, more recently, the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo (though not, for example, in Rwanda) and, in the name of securing the world from the threat of "weapons of mass destruction," once again in Iraq. Most of these discourses (they include not only the New Historicism, critical genealogy, and the various neo-Marxisms that derive from the "critical theory" of the Frankfurt School and from the interpretation of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, but also much of black criticism, feminist criticism, and even postcolonial criticism) practice their adversarial criticism as if this triumphalist end-of-history discourse did not exist or is too trivial to warrant serious attention. They seem to have forgotten their provenance *in* the Vietnam War, in the spectacle of an Occidental state practicing something like genocide (by means, in part, of an army largely conscripted from its oppressed minorities) in the name of *the fundamental principles* of liberal democracy (the "free world").

How, then, is one to account for the present cultural power of this triumphalist discourse of the New World Order? Why is it that an adversarial postmodernist discourse instigated in large part by the unequivocal exposure during the Vietnam War of the contradictory imperial violence inhering in the "benign" political discourse of Occidental "freedom" — what Foucault has called "the regime of truth" — has been reduced to virtual silence in the face of the reaffirmation of America's global errand in the aftermath of the Cold War? The Vietnam War bore witness to the decisive self-destruction of the logical economy propelling the American intervention in Vietnam, a self-destruction synecdochically enacted in the mad rationality of the American military officer who made history by declaring to his interlocutor that "we had to destroy Ben Tre in order to save it."[5] Why, then, do the adversarial discourses that emerged from the rubble of this self-destruction seem now without recourse to confront the dominant liberal capitalist culture's representation of the end of the Cold War as the advent of the New World Order, which is to say, as the *Pax Americana*? Why, on the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Saigon, does this oppositional discourse tacitly acknowledge the culture industry's decisive pronouncement that Robert McNamara's strategically timed memoirs as secretary of defense in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations constitute the definitive and final resolving act of the Vietnam War?

In this confessional book, after all, McNamara simply reiterates the

long-standing "liberal" rationalization of the war: that he and his governmental colleagues made "an error not of [American] values and intention but of judgment and capabilities."[6] And by thus containing critique to such damage-control management he vindicates the idea of "America."[7] More important, the discourse he employs to confess his and his Pentagon colleagues' "mistakes" remains the same terribly banal "problem-solving" American discourse that destroyed Vietnam. Despite the fact that his very account of the failure to "win the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people to American values symptomatically exposes to view the life-destroying inhumanity of this banal instrumental reasoning, this "educated" McNamara is incapable of seeing it. In his recollection of General Westmoreland's and the Joint Chiefs' fateful argument for escalating the war in 1965, for example, he writes:

> Although I questioned [their] assumptions during my meetings with Westy and his staff, the discussions proved superficial. Looking back, I clearly erred by not forcing — then or later, in Saigon or Washington — a knock-down, drag-out debate over the loose assumptions, unasked questions, and thin analyses underlying our military strategy in Vietnam. I spent twenty years as a manager, identifying problems and forcing organizations — often against their will — to think deeply and realistically about alternative courses of action and their consequences. I doubt I will ever fully understand why I did not do so then.[8]

I am not presumptuous enough to assert that the questions I have asked above are amenable to easy answers, let alone to proffer them here. But I do believe that a beginning in this direction is possible on the basis of what I take to be a glaring — I am tempted to say "studied" — unthought in the various practice-oriented emancipatory discourses that are now subsumed under the term "postmodern." It is, I suggest, an unthought the thinking of which would go far to explain their inadequacy to the task of resistance, to say nothing about their contribution to a positive alternative to the dominant idea of the *polis*. But to inaugurate a thinking of this crucial unthought that haunts these adversarial discourses, a thinking, that is, which is adequate to the conditions of the present global occasion, will require a detour into the productive technology of forgetting endemic to the American Cultural Memory *as this amnesiac technology has worked itself out in the twenty years following the fall of Saigon.*

No war in American history, with the possible exception of the Civil War, has affected the collective American psyche so profoundly and for so long as the Vietnam War. Though World War I and especially

World War II were far wider in scope and larger in scale, brought far more of the American population directly in contact with war, and killed and wounded far more American youth, the Vietnam War has remained a national obsession. Some indefinable "thing" about the justification and conduct of the war — something having to do with the name "America" — instigated a national anxiety, a collective psychic trauma (from the Greek *trauma:* wound) that has become the spectral "measure" of the intelligibility of the domestic and international cultural and sociopolitical discourse and practice of the United States, regardless of the historically specific context, since the 1960s and especially the Tet Offensive of 1968. This is clearly suggested by the continuing outpour of histories, documentaries, biographies, autobiographical reminiscences, memoirs, films, fiction, videos, even comic books specifically about the war and by the repeated official and media-sponsored stagings of national rituals of "remembrance,"[9] most notably what Sacvan Bercovitch would call American jeremiads.[10] It is also — and more insidiously — suggested by the ever-extending capillary saturation of this obsession into adjacent and even remote spaces of cultural production. I am referring, for example, to the concerted and increasingly widespread and strident representation of the multicultural initiative in American colleges and universities by the National Association of Scholars and other conservative intellectuals as a "new McCarthyism of the Left"[11] and to the unrelenting effort of both conservative and liberal humanists alike to demonstrate the causal relation between Paul de Man's and Martin Heidegger's Nazi politics and the "antihumanism" of their "post-Enlightenment" philosophical thought.[12] Given the scope and depth of this national anxiety and the manifestly massive and multisituated need to allay by reifying its indeterminate "object" — its spectral presence, as Derrida might say of this *revenant* — it is quite clear that the American Cultural Memory has been intent since the end of the war on forgetting/repressing a momentous disclosure about its collective self. What precisely it was that thus showed itself and would be forgotten — what continues strangely to haunt the period-oriented American Cultural Memory, to *visit* its perennial *visitor,* as it were — will be a fundamental purpose of this chapter to think.

I could, of course, name this specter at the beginning, but to represent "it" as such an abstraction would attenuate the profoundly dislocating ontological, cultural, and sociopolitical implications of the United States's intervention and conduct of the war in Vietnam for its historical, including present, self-representation. I choose, therefore, to undertake a detour within this detour into the Vietnam War guided by the manifest anxiety afflicting the American Cultural Memory. Given the importance

of discovering the repressed origin that nevertheless continues to haunt the present post–Cold War occasion, it seems to me preferable as a provisional imperative of such a genealogy to retrieve the historically specific symbolic forms in which this national obsession to forget Vietnam has manifested itself since the end of the Vietnam War. Attentive to this national anxiety as a forestructure, we must, in Heidegger's terms, first enter the hermeneutic circle in the spirit of "care" (*Sorge*): "primordially and wholly."

What we discover, in thus retrieving the history of the American culture industry's representation of the Vietnam War — and by "culture industry" I mean not simply the media, but also the institutions of knowledge production — is that this history has constituted a process of remembering that, in fact, has been a willful forgetting of the actualities of the war. And it takes broadly four different but increasingly assertive forms according to the chronological and psychological distance from the defeat of the United States, an assertiveness enforced by a series of historical events determined and/or represented in some fundamental ways by this recollective will to forget. It is, of course, impossible to do justice to the massive textual archive that, after a decade of silence, has been produced since the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982 for this purpose of forgetting Vietnam or, to anticipate the metaphorics associated with this recuperative project, of "healing the wound" in the American collective consciousness "inflicted by" the war. (In its ritualized memorial character, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is itself a crucial instance, indeed, the inaugural act, of this sustained recuperative effort.)[13] That larger genealogy must wait for another time.[14] Here it will have to suffice to invoke a small number of synecdochic texts from an immense stock of cultural capital that have been decisive in the virtually undeviating effort of the American Culture Memory to renarrativize the recalcitrant event of the Vietnam War: to bring the contradictory history of this first postmodern war to its closure.[15]

The first phase of this recuperative national project, in fact, preceded the end of the war, but indirectly acknowledged imminent defeat. It was characterized by a belated but proleptic effort to rehabilitate the shattered image of the American military mission by placing the blame for its failure to achieve its announced goal on the alleged complicity between the media, which by 1968 had in some degree turned against the war, and the protest movement in the United States. This inaugural phase is epitomized by John Wayne's *Green Berets,* produced, with the support of the Lyndon Baines Johnson faltering presidency, in 1968, the year, we might say, of the apparition of the specter that was increas-

ingly to haunt the discourse of "America" in the following years. This epochally imagined American jeremiad is fundamentally about representation. At a briefing staged for journalists by the Green Berets, Colonel Kirby (Wayne), the pioneer-like commander of a detachment of Green Berets, who has been assigned to establish and hold a base camp in the heart of enemy territory in Vietnam, challenges a prestigious antiwar reporter for a powerful American newspaper, Beckworth (David Jansen), to reconsider his typically negative representations of the American Mission in the Vietnam wilderness. He tells Beckworth that the antiwar sentiments he transmits to the American public are grounded in hearsay; that, like the liberal American press he represents, he is, in fact, the unwitting dupe of the ideological fictions of a dangerously expanding subversive element in the United States. And he concludes by telling the reporter that if he were there in Vietnam to *see and experience* the "real" war for himself, he would realize the damage his ideologically mediated antiwar writing was doing to the noble national cause of truth, freedom, and human dignity in the "free world's" struggle in behalf of the threatened Vietnamese people against a savage enemy who was himself the puppet of the Soviet Union.[16] Beckworth is thus "compelled" by Kirby's "reasonable" appeal to this hegemonic discourse to accompany the colonel's Green Berets to Vietnam. Thus interpellated by America's call, Beckworth experiences "immediately" both the cowardly and grotesque brutalities of the Asiatic hordes, especially against the innocent Montagnards (which include the raping of their children), and the pioneer-like self-reliance, the courage, and the selflessness of the Green Berets (and their South Vietnamese allies): their Alamo-like defense of the base camp and their winning of the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese Montagnards.[17] Beckworth thus undergoes a conversion to the "Truth." This "immediate" Truth is, of course, an ideological representation intended to rehabilitate the shattered official image of America's allegedly benign mission in Southeast Asia. It simply superimposes the American culture industry's commodified narrative of America's representation of the American frontiersman's violence against the Other as a heroic struggle against a savage enemy, who diabolically impedes the providentially ordained mission to settle the "virgin land," on the complex and recalcitrantly differential reality of the people's war being fought in Vietnam: "Fort Dodge," as the base camp is named in the film, on the Vietnamese "wilderness."[18] By way of this perennial American distrust of mediation, this commitment to "immediate" (empirical) experience, what was in reality a brutally aggressive act on the part of the United States is represented by the American culture industry as the enactment of the perennial and historically validated disinterested

goodwill of America toward a distant people suffering under the yoke of oppression.

The second phase of this amnesiac representational history was characterized by a (very audible) national silence about the war that had just been lost, especially about the returning veterans. Unlike the triumphant veterans of World War II, the veterans of the Vietnam War were ignored by the American culture industry. In the resonant rhetoric Thomas Pynchon uses to trace the genealogy of Protestant/capitalist American modernity back to the Puritan errand in the wilderness, they were "preterited" or "passed over." But this preterition of the Vietnam veteran was in effect a symptomatic representation by the National Memory that rendered them scapegoats for the American defeat in Vietnam. As late as 1977, Philip Caputo recalls and laments the senselessly heroic death of a Marine comrade in arms in the bitterly ironic terms of Wilfred Owen's anti-Horatian (and -imperial) "Dulce et Decorum Est":

> You died for the man you tried to save, and you died *pro patria.* It was not altogether sweet and fitting, your death, but I'm sure you died believing it was *pro patria.* You were faithful. Your country is not. As I write this, eleven years after your death, the country for which you died wishes to forget the war in which you died. Its very name is a curse. There are no monuments to its heroes, no statues in small-town squares and city parks, no plaques, nor public wreaths, nor memorials. For plaques and wreaths and memorials are reminders, and they would make it harder for your country to sink into the amnesia for which it longs. It wished to forget and it has forgotten. But there are a few of us who remember because of the small things that made us love you.[19]

This second phase, which is historically represented by its non-representation, initiated a collective strategy of rationalization by the American Cultural Memory that became more clearly differentiated and increasingly forceful after the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982: in the third and especially the fourth, post–Cold War, phase. The silence of this second phase, that is, implicitly intimated the *betrayal* of the principles informing "America" by those conducting and fighting the war in Vietnam. In doing so, it foreclosed any question, despite persuasive marginal voices both in the United States and abroad, like those of Noam Chomsky, Martin Luther King, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Bertrand Russell, about the culpability of the very *principles* themselves.

The third and decisive phase was initiated during the Reagan administration and was concurrent with the massive initiative to regain a culturally and politically conservative — and militaristic — national

consensus in behalf of its imperial interventions in Granada, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Middle East, in behalf, that is, of the Cold War against Soviet communism. In Reagan's rhetoric, this was the initiative that would "build the city on the hill" against the global threat of "the evil empire." Not incidentally, this third phase was also concurrent with the highly visible "reform" initiative in higher education inaugurated by Harvard University in 1978 with the publication of the "Harvard Core Curriculum Report" and promulgated by the Reagan administration under the direction of William J. Bennett, director of the National Endowment for the Humanities and later secretary of education. I am referring to the initiative that was intended to recuperate the core curriculum, which, according to the representation proffered by the Harvard faculty (and nationally mediatized by the American press), was "eroded" by the "promiscuous" demands of students, women, blacks, and ethnic minorities in the 1960s, but which, in effect, was intended to accommodate the gains made by the civil rights and women's movement to the hegemonic center. That is to say, it was in reality intended to forget the complicity of the American colleges and universities with the State's intervention and conduct of the war in Vietnam.[20]

Specifically, this third phase of the renarrativizing process was inaugurated when the preterited veterans began to demand recognition for the sacrificial services they had performed in behalf of their country's call, a momentum that culminated in the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 1982. This national ceremony was accompanied by a deluge of retrospective cultural production — movies, fiction, video documentaries, histories, autobiographical accounts of veterans' experiences — that in a virtually monolithic way represented the post-Vietnam American occasion as a time for reconciliation, a sentiment expressed in terms of the pervasive and resonant (but never rigorously interpreted) metaphor of the national need to "heal the wound." What, in the historical context, this ubiquitous trope meant generally — at the conscious level — to the American public was the national imperative to rehabilitate the dignity and honor of the vilified and ostracized Vietnam veteran and to reintegrate him (*sic*) into American society. At a deeper ideological level this trope was a hegemonic (jeremiadic) call of the American public to itself to reconcile the sociopolitical divisions precipitated by the war in behalf of the recuperation of the national consensus. This meant, in effect, a call to free itself from the seductive discourse of a certain social constituency that, in its continuing contestation of the rationale and conduct of the war, exacerbated the festering laceration inflicted on the American body politic. More accurately, it meant a call to recuperate the health of the American psyche —

its traditional collective self-representation — that had been shattered by a defeat largely caused by this same vocal minority that had resisted the war, that is, had prevented America from winning it.

This third phase of the recuperative representational process can be broadly subdivided into two moments. The first includes the letters home (*Dear America: Letters from Vietnam* [1985]); the oral histories (*Everything We Had* [1981], *To Bear Any Burden* [1985], *Nam* [1981], and *Bloods* [1984]); the autobiographies (John Caputo's *A Rumor of War* [1977] and Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* [1976]); and the spate of Hollywood films initiated by *The Deerhunter* (1978) and *Coming Home* (1978) but epitomized ideologically by the *Rambo* trilogy (1982, 1984, 1988) (and its multiple offshoots having their point of departure in the MIA issue).[21]

Rehearsing John Wayne's fraudulent distinction between a "false" (mediated) protestant representation of America's involvement in Vietnam and a "true" representation based on *being there,* the first moment of this third phase is epitomized by Al Santoli's best-selling oral history of the Vietnam War, *Everything We Had.* It takes the form of a prefatorial direct address to an implied American public that was perilously confused about its national identity and invokes an unmediated (objective) "reality" — seeing the Vietnam War "as it was": with the eyes of the "thirty-three [representative] soldiers who fought it" — against a "prevailing" mediated (and ideologically negative) representation that could only exacerbate the collective psychic "wound":

> In our book we hope you will see what we saw, do what we did, feel what we felt. Until the broader public fully comprehends the nameless soldier, once an image on your television screen, the nation's resolution of the experience called Vietnam will be less than adequate.
>
> The American people have never heard in depth from the *soldiers themselves* the complicated psychic and physical realities of what they went through in Vietnam.[22]

In implicitly positing the "individual's" eyewitness as more authentic than any mediated standpoint, the texts of this group, like John Wayne's *The Green Berets,* reduces *this* war — the Vietnam War — to war-in-general, and "the raw experiences" of the American soldier fighting in *this* war to the timeless and noble agony of the universal soldier. It thus displaces the disturbing current focus on the United States's historically specific cultural and sociopolitical conduct of the Vietnam War (and on the dislocating psychological consequence of its defeat by a Third World people) in favor of a represented focus that celebrates the heroism and

dignity — the "triumph" — of the (American) human spirit in the face of the carnage of war, which, in this internalized discourse, is referred to as "the supreme test of manhood." Nor should it be overlooked that this triumph of the individual is precisely the characteristic that, according to a fundamental motif of this hegemonic discourse — one that is also exploited in *The Green Berets* — distinguishes the "American" (Occidental) self from the "Asiatic hordes." This, finally, is the ideological agenda of the numerous "letters home" and "oral histories" that would "heal the wound" by substituting the American soldier's immediate account of the war for representations that were "adulterated" by (Left) politics. As Santoli puts this ideologically compelled internalization and universalization of specific American political history in the last of the three epigraphs of *Everything We Had* — without consciousness of the contradiction of quoting an Oriental:

> Though it be broken —
> Broken again — still it's there,
> The moon on the water.
> — Chosu

The second subdivision of this third phase — epitomized by Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo* trilogy — repeats the representational imperative "to see what we saw, ... feel what we felt" against the mediated representations of the ideologically radical Left. The difference between this representation and that of the earlier oral and epistolary histories (besides the fact that it constitutes a self-parody of the latter) is, however, that its recuperative narrative strategy is bolder. It is not accidental that this more assertive recuperative initiative was coincidental with the emergence of a strident reactionary cultural discourse, represented by Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball, David Lehman, Dinesh D'Souza, Hilton Kramer, and the members of the National Association of Scholars, that represented the institutions of higher learning in America — indeed, the cultural agencies of knowledge production and transmission at large — not simply as a process of randomizing the curriculum as the "Harvard Core Curriculum Report" had alleged in 1978, but as having been taken over by now "tenured radicals" of the 1960s (white postmodernists, feminists, and blacks) who resisted the Vietnam War. Unlike the universalist accounts projected by the earlier oral histories that individualized and universalized the war, this revisionary discourse represents the mediated accounts of the Vietnam War as the primary cause of the American defeat in Vietnam.

The subversive protest movement in America, according to this emboldened representation, succeeded in passing off its ideologically

grounded representations of the Vietnam War as the truth of this history not only to determinative segments of the political and military leadership of America, but also to the American public at large. It thus established juridical, sociopolitical, and military constraints that made it impossible for the American soldiers to win the war. That is to say, it precluded the fulfillment of "America's" global mission to resist the insidious imperial machinations of the evil empire in the name of the free world.

The *Rambo* trilogy, for example, begins (*Rambo: First Blood*) with the return of a disillusioned Green Beret veteran to "the world" (in the form of a typical small American town in the Pacific Northwest). The film establishes the viewer's sympathy for this alienated and bitter Rambo at the outset by representing his return as a visit to the parents of his dead black comrade (a representation, not incidentally, that turns the black soldier into a symbol of the betrayed American ideal). What he discovers instead is that the world not only does not want his like in its midst, but, when he insists on his rights as an American citizen, treats him as if he were a psychopathic killer, spawned by the Vietnam War, who threatens the order and tranquillity of this typical American community. In the process of depicting Rambo's cunningly ferocious resistance against an America turned into a Vietnam in reverse, the film transforms the Green Beret (the American warrior of John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier") into a cross between a technologized Natty Bumppo and a Vietcong guerrilla. It thus draws the emergent revisionary conclusion that America lost the war not because its brutal conduct destroyed the credibility of its justification for intervening in Vietnam, but because John Rambo and his valiant and ultrapatriotic comrades in arms against the global aspirations of communism were not allowed by the misled, indeed, corrupted, deputies of the American body politic to win it.[23]

The trilogy then passes through a reductive melodramatic narrative, *Rambo: First Blood II,* reminiscent of the western captivity film, which represents the hero as the lone and silent American frontiersman who has learned his deadly craft from his savage enemy, a representation whose genealogy extends from dime westerns of the 1890s back through Francis Parkman's histories of the French and Indian Wars to Judge James Hall's "The Indian Hater" (1829) and Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1837).[24] This film, playing on the question of the MIAs that the Reagan presidency inflated into a national political issue in the 1980s, depicts Rambo's single-handed (and ferociously single-minded) effort to rescue some American prisoners in Vietnam. In the process, it reiterates the perennial official — and calculatedly staged — Cold War representation of the Vietnamese insurgency as the narrative

project of an underdeveloped and inferior race of puppets utterly controlled by strings emanating from Moscow. The trilogy, which from the outset assumes the "negatively interpellated" point of view of the saving remnant, ends with the reaffirmation of a national consensus in the struggle of a small minority in the United States against a massive domestic momentum that would betray "America" and against the "evil empire" (and its "domino" strategy) now waging war in Afghanistan(!) (*Rambo: First Blood III*).

This revisionist ideological initiative was not restricted to the simulacral productions of Hollywood. It was, in fact, the essential project of the culture industry at large. This is emphatically suggested by such immensely popular "documentaries" as Al Santoli's *To Bear Any Burden* (1985), which, in collecting the personal "testimony" about the "Vietnam War and its aftermath" of "Americans and Southeast Asians" "who remember,"[25] duplicates this melodramatically imagined transformation of a recuperative ideology of reconciliation (i.e., accommodation) to a more aggressive attack against the countermemory. "After the publication of *Everything We Had,*" Santoli writes in his preface, "I realized that the recognition given to it and to Vietnam veterans in general is only one step in our coming to terms with the Vietnam trauma. The larger story is more than one of combat by American soldiers in Vietnam, or one that ends with America's direct involvement there. It seemed necessary to take a look at the revolution that preceded America's involvement, as well as the effects of the Communist victory in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos" (*BAB,* xvi–xvii). The "truth" to which this "objective" (retrospective) look bears witness is suggested in a paragraph preceding this one: "I did not want to see the Communists succeed or the lives of my friends wasted. But with no mandate for victory, and a senseless obsession with body-counts, I felt that our lives and ideals meant nothing. We were just cold statistics in Washington's political computers. Everything I ever believed in was turned upside down" (*BAB,* xvi). Hidden behind Santoli's appeal to a cross-section of eyewitness accounts is a self-confirming future-anterior selective process ("the effects of the Communist victory in Vietnam") as recounted by "a larger community of veterans" (*BAB,* xvii) — not only Americans (soldiers, journalists, diplomats, relief workers), but Cambodian refugees and former Vietnamese insurgents themselves. It is, in other words, a process that, like the *Rambo* trilogy, articulates a narrative that would bring a war that refused to end to decisive closure by demonstrating the "negative" consequences for the Vietnamese and for adjacent Southeast Asian peoples of the United States's withdrawal from Vietnam. Santoli's book attributes this withdrawal, of course, to a neurotic

protest movement that did not allow the American military to win the war. With this symbolic denouement, the "wound" suffered by "America" has been utterly, if not explicitly, healed. To invoke an analogous metaphor, the ghost that has haunted the collective American psyche is exorcised. The internal divisions within the American body politic have not only been reconciled; the reconciliation has rendered the *res publica* stronger and more dedicated to the principles of American democracy in its struggle against radicals and communist imperialism. But what, in the context of the emergence of the end–of–the–Cold War discourse, needs to be thematized is that the metaphor of *trauma* has undergone a telling metamorphosis: the metaphor of the wound, which implies healing, that is, ideological reconciliation, has become — or is at the threshold of being represented as — a collective psychological illness, a national "syndrome," which implies the imperative to blame a negative ideological cause.

The fourth and "final" phase of the American culture industry's renarrativization of the Vietnam War was inaugurated on the concurrent occasion of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the United States's surgically executed "victory" against Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War. What is especially telling about the official representation of this historical conjuncture, especially by the television networks, is that, from beginning to end, it was this contrasting negative measure of Vietnam that utterly determined its narrative shape: the linear/circular structure of decisive victory. From the inaugural debates about the question of the legitimacy of America's intervention in the face of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait through the brief period of the war itself to its immediate aftermath, it was the specter of the Vietnam War — the "divisive" and "self-defeating" national anxiety precipitated by its radical indeterminacy — that the narrative structure of closure, enabled by a "victory" by the United States in the Cold War, was intended to decisively efface. This transformation of a national anxiety into a productive negative image was symptomatically reflected by President Bush's virtually unchallenged guarantee to the American public on the eve of the war that it would not be "another Vietnam"[26] and, more strategically, by the exclusive mediation of the events of the Gulf War by the American military information agencies in a way that the events of the Vietnam War had made unthinkable. And it was the long process of cultural forgetting, which had ostensibly (re)constituted the actual defeat of the United States into a drastically mistaken withdrawal from Vietnam, that had prepared the ground for this cultural transformation. In short, the representational forgetting of the actualities of the war systematically undertaken by the ideological state apparatuses had gradually arrived at a form of remem-

bering it that attributed the defeat of America to the infectious impact of the multisituated protest movement in the United States on the American public and its intellectual deputies.

In this "final" phase, that is, the earlier public need to "heal the wound" — a recuperative and conciliatory gesture of forgetting — became, in the words of President George Bush and official Washington, a matter of "kicking the Vietnam syndrome."[27] Aided and abetted by the culture industry, this early gesture of forgetting metamorphosed at the time of the Gulf "crisis" into a virulently assured assumption that the resistance to America's intervention and conduct of the war in Vietnam in the 1960s was a symptom of a national neurosis. (This interpretation of the active resistance to the Vietnam War was not a sudden reactionary political initiative enabled by the circumstances of the Gulf War. Its origins can be traced back to the period of the Vietnam War itself, to the reaction against the protest movement by such influential conservative and liberal humanist intellectuals as George Kennan, Walter Jackson Bate, and Allan Bloom, among many others. The disruptions of the traditional white Anglo-American and male-dominated cultural value system in American colleges and universities — whether in the form of the common body of shared knowledge informing the general education program [the *litterae humaniores*] or the canon of great books — were undertaken in the name of relevance. In the name of high seriousness, these anxious traditionalists reduced this emancipatory initiative to an unhealthy or neurotic obsession with novelty and/or vulgarity and represented it — as Arnold had represented the rise of working-class consciousness in late Victorian Britain — as a symptom not simply of a "centrifugal" process precipitating a dangerous cultural "heterogeneity," but as a collective "death wish" [Bate] on the part of the American academy.)[28] Whatever its limitations, the protest movement in the Vietnam decade was, in fact, a symptomatic manifestation of a long-overdue and promising national self-doubt about the alleged legitimacy of America's representation of its internal constituencies (blacks, women, gays, ethnic minorities, the poor, the young, and so on) and about the alleged benignity of its historically ordained exceptionalist mission to transform the world (the barbarous Others) in its own image. In this last phase of the amnesiac process, this healthy and potentially productive self-examination of the American cultural identity came to be represented as a collective psychological sickness that, in its disintegrative momentum, threatened to undermine "America's" promised end.[29] By this I mean the end providentially promised to the original Puritans and later, after the secularization of the body politic, by History: the building of "the city on the hill" in the "New World," which is to say, the advent of the New World Order and the end of history.

In the wake of the Cold War, and especially the defeat of Saddam Hussein's army — and the consequent representation of the shattered American consensus occasioned by the Vietnam War as a recovery of a collective mental illness — there came in rapid and virtually unchallenged succession a floodtide of "reforms," reactionary in essence, intended to annul the multiply situated progressive legacy of the protest movement(s) of the Vietnam decade by overt abrogation or accommodation. Undertaken in the name of the "promise" of "America," these reforms were intended to reestablish the ontological, cultural, and political authority of the enlightened, American "vital center" and its circumference and thus to recontain the dark force of the insurgent differential constituencies that had emerged at the margins in the wake of the disclosures of the Vietnam War. At the domestic site, these included the coalescence of capital (the Republican Party) and the religious and political Right into a powerful dominant neoconservative culture (a new "Holy Alliance," as it were) committed to an indissolubly linked militantly racist, antifeminist, antigay, and anti-working-class agenda; the dominant liberal humanist culture's massive indictment of deconstructive and destructive theory as complicitous with fascist totalitarianism; the nationwide legislative assault on the post-Vietnam public university by way of programs of economic retrenchment affiliated with the representation of its multicultural initiative as a political correctness of the Left;[30] the increasing subsumption of the various agencies of cultural production and dissemination (most significantly, the electronic information highways) under fewer and fewer parent, mostly American, corporations; the dismantling of the welfare program; and, symptomatically, the rehabilitation of the criminal president, Richard Nixon. At the international site, this "reformist" initiative has manifested itself as the rehabilitation of the American errand in the world, a rehabilitation exemplified by the United States's virtually uncontested moral/military interventions in Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, the Middle East, and Kosovo; its interference in the political processes of Russia by way of providing massive economic support for Boris Yeltsin's democratic/capitalist agenda against the communist opposition; its unilateral assumption of the lead in demanding economic/political reforms in Southeast Asian countries following the collapse of their economies in 1998; its internationalization of the "free market"; and, not least, its globalization of the instrumentalist version of the English language.

What needs to be foregrounded is that these global post–Cold War "reformist" initiatives are not discontinuous practices, a matter of historical accident. Largely enabled by the "forgetting" of Vietnam — and of the repression or accommodation or self-immolation of the emer-

gent decentered modes of thinking the Vietnam War precipitated — they are, rather, indissolubly, however unevenly, related. Indeed, they are the multisituated practical consequences of the planetary triumph (the "end") of the logical economy of the imperial ontological discourse that has its origins in the founding of the idea of the Occident and its fulfilled end in the banal instrumental/technological reasoning in the discourse of "America." In thus totally colonizing thinking, that is, this imperial "Americanism" has come to determine the comportment toward being of human beings, in all their individual and collective differences, at large — even of those postcolonials who would resist its imperial order. This state of thinking, which has come to be called the New World Order (though to render its rise to ascendancy visible requires reconstellating the Vietnam War into this history), subsumes the representative, but by no means complete, list of post–Cold War practices to which I have referred above. And it is synecdochically represented by the massive mediatization of the amnesiac end-of-history discourse and the affiliated polyvalent rhetoric of the *Pax Americana.*

Understood in terms of this massive effort to endow hegemonic status to the transformation of the metaphorics of the "wound" to (neurotic) "syndrome," the *forgotten* of the systematic process of forgetting apparently accomplished by the renarrativization of history since the humiliatingly visible fall of Saigon in 1975 takes on a spectral resonance of epochal and planetary significance. As such, it calls on the differential community of oppositional intellectuals to undertake a genealogy of this end-of-history discourse that would retrieve (*wiederholen*) as precisely as possible the essence of *that which* the United States's intervention in Vietnam and its conduct of the war disclosed, *that which* the American Cultural Memory, in the form of a "new Holy Alliance," has feverishly attempted to bury in oblivion by way of its multisituated and long-term labor to hegemonize a demonic representation of this (self-)disclosure.

The Logical Economy of the American Intervention in Vietnam

> The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.
>
> — KARL MARX, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

> In dread, as we say, "one feels something uncanny [*unheimlich*]." What is this "something" and this "one"? We are unable to say what gives "one" that "uncanny feeling." "One" just feels it generally. All things, and we with them, sink into a sort of indifference. But not in the sense that everything simply disappears; rather, in the very act of drawing away from us

> everything turns towards us. This withdrawal of what-is-in-totality, which then crowds round us *in dread,* this is what oppresses us. *There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, is this "nothing."*
>
> Nothing begets dread.
>
> — MARTIN HEIDEGGER, "What Is Metaphysics?"

> Ghost or *revenant,* sensuous-non-sensuous, visible-invisible, the specter first of all sees *us.* From the other side of the eye, *visor effect,* it looks at us even before we see *it* or even before we see period. We feel ourselves observed, sometimes under surveillance by it even before any apparition. Especially — and this is the event, for the specter is *of* the event — it sees us during a *visit.* It (re)pays us a visit. Visit upon visit, since it returns to see us and since *visitare,* frequentive of *visere* (to see, examine, contemplate), translates well the recurrence of returning, the frequency of a visitation.
>
> — JACQUES DERRIDA, *Specters of Marx*

It is impossible in this limited space to undertake a fully articulated genealogy of the end-of-history discourse that now, albeit in a more nuanced form, saturates American cultural production and sociopolitical practice. But the increasingly abyssal gap between the logical economy of the representation of the Vietnam War by the dominant culture and the recalcitrant differential actualities of the war's history — what, adapting Derrida to my purposes, I having been calling its spectrality — enables us at least to suggest a persuasive provisional outline of such a genealogical project. For this all-too-visible spectral gap foregrounds a virulent imperial will to reduce an irreducible differential occasion to decidability. It reveals, as it were, that this will is tantamount to torturing the Other into a confession of a preestablished "truth."[31] As such, it repeats at the level of cultural discourse precisely the undeviating essentialist "logic" of the United States's conduct of the war against the Vietnamese Other: the "European" or "imperial" logic informing its expectation of the decisive battle that ended not in a conclusive victory, but in an inconclusive defeat. And it is precisely this spectral gap — or rather, this indissoluble relay of spectral gaps — that is at stake in the argument.

The American intervention in Vietnam was not determined solely by the Cold War scenario as such. It was not undertaken simply in the name of the capitalist economic/political "base." It was also, and indissolubly, undertaken in the name of the (superstructural) discourse of (Occidental/American) "Truth," that is, the ontological *principles* informing liberal/capitalist democracy. I mean the Enlightenment's representation of being that conferred legitimacy to "freedom and equality": those values insistently invoked by the end-of-history discourse to characterize the universal essence of the economic/political system that, it claims,

has emerged triumphantly from the dialectical process of Universal History.[32] It is a seriously disabling mistake, in thinking the epochal event we call Vietnam, to subordinate, as all-too-much oppositional criticism has done, the ontological site — consciousness or theory — to the site of economics and/or politics, as if the latter were a base to the former's superstructurality; as if, that is, the essential — and essentialist — *principles* of liberal democracy were simply a matter of false consciousness.[33] And it is a mistake, not incidentally, that derives in large part from the "Marxists' " sundering and hierarchizing of Marx's de-centering of the "Hegelian" "consciousness" and yoking it by this violence to the "real life-process" of men and women. "Consciousness," Marx writes, "can never be anything else than *conscious existence.*"[34] All too characteristic of Marxist or Left critique of the United States's intervention in Vietnam, the restriction of interrogation to the economistic/political terms of the Cold War problematic (the privileging of the imperialist/capitalist motive) renders the ontological representation of the United States's imperialist intervention in Vietnam epiphenomenal. Which is to say in effect, *unthinkable.* As such, this reduction of an indissoluble relay of lived experience to single and determinative base has predisposed criticism to be blind to the most crucial disclosure — certainly for the post–Cold War moment — of the Vietnam War: the disclosure that the hegemonic discourse of forgetting has occulted. Assuming provisionally that this blindness is the case, we are compelled to put the ontological principles informing the American intervention in Vietnam and its conduct of the war back into play, not as a base to economic, political, and military superstructures, but as a lateral site of representation indissolubly, if unevenly, related to these.

The "mission" of the American Mission in Saigon was from the beginning of the United States's involvement in Vietnam exceptionalist. Its self-ordained responsibility was to "win the hearts and minds" of the postcolonial Vietnamese to the self-evident truth principles of "the (always new) free world" in the face of their profound contempt for European — Old World — imperialism. This representation of the American Mission in terms of its original "errand in the wilderness," which set America off from the rapacious and decadent Old World, is clearly suggested by the pervasive New Frontier rhetoric that accompanied the inauguration of President Kennedy's administration — a rhetoric integrally related to Kennedy's establishment of the Special Forces, better known as the Green Berets. This was the cultural as well as military arm that was given the motto *De opresso liber* (To free the oppressed) and deployed in an advisory capacity in Vietnam with the intention of recalling and exemplifying to the world at large — both to the Soviet

Union and to a Europe recovering from the self-inflicted catastrophe of World War II — the perennial pioneer spirit of "America." The American Mission, that is, represented its illegal and aggressive intervention in the civil struggle following the decisive defeat of the French by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 not simply by contrasting its benignly disinterested motive to bring the principles of "freedom" to the Vietnamese people with the totalitarianism of Soviet and Chinese communism. The New Adamic American Puritans justified their colonization of the "New World" by contrasting their exceptionalist errand in the wilderness with the repressive and exploitative practices of a spiritually decadent Europe. Similarly, the American Mission in Vietnam attempted to legitimate its intervention by insistently differentiating its democratic ethos not only from communism but also from the decadent racist colonialism of France, the European imperial power that had ruled and exploited the Vietnamese people for a century before World War II and that, despite the war's activation of a global anticolonialism, would continue to do so after the war.

This deeply backgrounded and resonant cultural opposition was fundamental to the official and mediatic representation of the United States's involvement in Vietnam from the beginning of this involvement in the aftermath of the Geneva Convention. The testimony of the foreign policy of the Eisenhower administration and, not least, of such nationally popular Cold War and anti–Old World texts as Dr. Tom Dooley's memoirs *Deliver Us from Evil* (1956) and Eugene Burdick's and William Lederer's *The Ugly American* (1958) bears witness to this, the former, in apotheosizing by enacting the noble American frontier spirit in Vietnam, and the latter, in castigating the America mission in Southeast Asia for having abandoning it. But it was the English novelist Graham Greene who disclosed the (neo)imperial significance of this exceptionalist ideology in *The Quiet American* (1955), a novel that, predictably, was condemned in the United States as a reactionary affirmation of the anachronous Old World ethos, more specifically, as " 'an exercise in national projection' by a member of the British Empire history had passed by."[35] Graham Greene's development of the exceptionalist cultural motif is integrally related to his satiric critique of the murderously innocent intentions of Alden Pyle (Greene's fictionalized version of the legendary American counterinsurgency figure Colonel Edward Lansdale, whose task was to develop a native "Third Force" in Vietnam that was neither French colonialist nor communist). And it is epitomized by the following conversation between Greene's narrator, Fowler, the cynical and not entirely reliable English reporter, who, though he condemns French colonialism, prefers it to the colonialism that is practiced dev-

astatingly in the name of anticolonialism by the United States, and "the quiet American," Alden Pyle, the unquestioning ephebe of the influential American Asian expert (we would now, in the wake of Edward Said's great book, call him an "Orientalist") York Harding, whose "objective" analysis of America's mission in the world, Greene implies, is utterly determined by the Cold War scenario. They have been caught in a tower manned by two young and frightened French Vietnamese soldiers at nightfall on their return to Saigon from a Caodaist festival at which Fowler accidentally learns that Pyle is secretly contacting a certain General The, the leader of this "Third Force," in behalf of the American Mission:

> "You and your like are trying to make a war with the help of people who just aren't interested."
>
> "They don't want Communism."
>
> "They want enough rice," I said. "They don't want to be shot at. They want one day to be much the same as another. They don't want our white skins around telling them what they want."
>
> "If Indo-China goes..."
>
> "I know the record. Siam goes, Malaya goes. Indonesia goes. What does 'go' mean?..."
>
> "They'll be forced to believe what they are told, they won't be allowed to think for themselves."
>
> "Thought's a luxury. Do you think the peasant sits and thinks of God and Democracy when he gets inside his mud hut at night?"
>
> "You talk as if the whole country were peasant. What about the educated? Are they going to be happy?"
>
> "Oh no," I said, "we've brought them up in *our* ideas. We've taught them dangerous games, and that's why we are sitting here, hoping we don't get our throats cut. We deserve to have them cut. I wish your friend York was here too. I wonder how he'd relish it."
>
> "York Harding's a very courageous man. Why, in Korea..."
>
> "He wasn't an enlisted man, was he? He had a return ticket.... These poor devils can't catch a plane home. Hi," I called to them, "what are your names?"... They didn't answer.... "They think we are French," I said.
>
> "That's just it," Pyle said. "You shouldn't be against York, you should be against the French. Their colonialism."[36]

If the ameliorative benignity of America's exceptionalist errand that differentiated it from the imperial rapacity of the Old World was self-evident to the American Mission, it was not to an Oriental people deeply rooted in another, radically different, culture. This indifference

and/or resistance to the American Mission's effort to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese precipitated an American reaction that has been well documented, but the crucial significance of which has not adequately been understood *and* thematized by the historians of the Vietnam War. The refusal of their assent to these "self-evident" New World truths instigated an American practice that, however reluctantly, was characterized by the increasing visibility of the will to power informing the benign truth discourse of liberal democracy. To adapt Jacques Derrida's rhetoric to my purposes, it compelled the "center elsewhere" of the American Mission's freedom discourse, which is normally "beyond the reach of free play," down into the visible arena of the free play of criticism.[37] The "first" symptom of this "contradiction" was, of course, the American Mission's violent remapping of Vietnam — its representation of this single ancient culture as two distinct countries — and then the *imposition,* or, rather, the recurrent imposition, of a "legitimate" government in South Vietnam (the "Third Force," in the language of the Cold War scenario) that was represented as being "committed" to the "disinterested" discourse and practice of liberal democracy.

Indeed, it might be said that the successful military strategy of the National Liberation Front (NLF, misleadingly represented by the American Mission as the "Vietcong") and, later, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) — their practice of the "nomadic" hit-and-run tactics of guerrilla warfare — against an infinitely more formidable army was in some fundamental way based on their awareness of this resonant contradiction in the logical economy of the discourse of Occidental liberal democracy. It is as if, having deciphered the imperial imperatives informing the ontological structure of the collective Occidental self during the long and painfully oppressive period of French colonial rule — the European perception of being in terms of the binary opposition between center and periphery and the linear/circular (decidable) narrative this binary enables — the Vietnamese Other discovered the Achilles' heel of America's (anthropo)logic and mounted their military resistance precisely in order to exploit this vulnerability. As Herman Rapaport observes in a brilliant Deleuzian reading of the "anticlimactic" art of war practiced by the NLF and the NVA:

> Truong Son of the N.L.F. reports that the North Vietnamese took very much into account the American expectation that one ought to win "decisive battles" in Vietnam. "Though somewhat disheartened, the Americans, obdurate by nature and possessed of substantial forces, still clung to the hope for a military solution,

> for decisive victories on the battlefield." Truong Son's comments are based on the perception that an American view of an all-or-nothing victory can easily be converted to a tactic by which the "superior forces," anxious for quick victory, are by way of a certain fracturing, reduced to something less than victory. That is, the North Vietnamese immediately realized that a molecularization of its forces among those of the Southern resisters would force the United States to spread its resources thin. Son's assessment of this American strategy is that "it did not specifically center on anything" and that "the Americans and their puppets had no definite way of utilizing their mobile and occupation forces. . . ." For this reason, even when conflict was "head on," that conflict would be articulated in terms of a certain passivity, since action did not necessarily lead to anything more than action itself. Moreover, the communists saw to it that the "corps" would be disarticulated along various mobile "fronts" all at the same time. In doing so they insured that "action" would be reduced to random or marginalized events which even if successfully won by the Americans would not mean victory.[38]

Put negatively, the Vietnamese Other refused to resist the American military machine in the binary narrative terms prescribed by the logocentric discourse of the Occident. Rather, this Eastern Other countered the Occidental discourse and practice of structuration by de-structuring its (anthropo)logic: by a devious practice that drew the will to power informing its "disinterestedness" out *as* a futile, however destructive, contradiction glaringly visible to the world. Specifically, the NLF and NVA chose a strategy of absence (of invisibility, of silence) in the face of a massive and formidable military force that, whatever its exceptionalist claims, was utterly and pervasively inscribed by a European cultural narrative of presence. I mean the "Roman" narrative of decidability, the (meta-physical) logical economy of which articulates, at the site of military practice, a distanced and totalized field of directional references and coordinates that facilitates an end (or objective) understood as the decisive battle. The strategy of the Vietnamese Other, on the other hand, was analogous to that of the Eastern martial arts (most notably those deriving from the Tao), which, grounded on a comportment toward being that acknowledges the harmonious belongingness of being and nothing, privilege a "passivity" that allows the aggressor to defeat himself.[39] Based on the predictability of the American reaction, this "feminine" Vietnamese strategy of resistance fragmented and disarticulated a totalized military structure inscribed by a logocentric ontology and its

privileged panoptic vision and oriented futurally toward a preconceived and decisive end: victory.[40]

This ironic exploitation of the Occidental dread of Nothing and its imperially logocentric imperative to reify or spatialize (make visible and graspable) its temporal differentiations[41] is borne witness to by virtually all the American soldiers who fought in Vietnam, as the insistently visible negatives in their symptomatically anguished reminiscences overwhelmingly testify. It is, for example, the reiterated witness of Philip Caputo in his autobiographical confession, *A Rumor of War:*

> Forming a column, my platoon started toward its first objective, a knoll on the far side of the milky-brown stream. It was an objective only in the geographical sense of the word; it had no military significance. In the vacuum of that jungle, we could have gone in as many directions as there are points on a compass, and any direction was as likely to lead us to the VC, or away from them, as any other. The guerrillas were everywhere, which is another way of saying nowhere. The knoll merely gave us a point of reference. It was a place to go, and getting there provided us with the illusion we were accomplishing something.[42]

It is also the testimony of Tim O'Brien in his novel *Going after Cacciato:*

> They [the American soldiers] did not know even the simple things: a sense of victory, or satisfaction, or necessary sacrifice. They did not know the feeling of taking a place and keeping it, securing a village and then raising the flag and calling it victory. No sense of order or momentum. No front, no rear, no trenches laid out in neat parallels. No Patton rushing from the Rhine, no beachheads to storm and win and hold for the duration. They did not have targets. They did not have a cause. They did not know if it was a war of ideology or economics or hegemony or spite. On a given day, they did not know where they were in Quang Ngai, or how being there might influence larger outcomes. They did not know the names of most villages. They did not know which villages were critical. They did not know strategies. They did not know the terms of the war, its architecture, the rules of fair play. When they took prisoners, which was rare, they did not know the questions to ask, whether to release a suspect or beat on him. They did not know how to feel.[43]

The American Mission systematically divided the ineffable and volatile Vietnamese land into four clearly defined and manageable units — I Corps, II Corps, III Corps, IV Corps — and within these large units

imposed and reimposed smaller tables providing reference points to facilitate communication and directionality to the war effort. Despite this panoptic cartographic and classificatory strategy, which, as I suggested earlier in this book, constitutes the essential technology of the developed (post-Enlightenment) imperial project, Vietnam, like no other land mass on which the United States army has fought in modern times, refused to be reduced to this spatialized, classificatory, manageable — and banalized — abstraction. As virtually everyone who was "in country" bears witness, it remained for such technologically inscribed eyes a dread-provoking and malevolent labyrinth with no exit.[44]

Indeed, the related invisibility of the insurgents within the dislocating Vietnamese landscape was so baffling to the American soldier that it precipitated a common and — given their deeply inscribed positivistic ("American") frame of reference — an ontologically resonant rhetoric of spectrality. Commensurate with the rhetoric of invisibility that determines the meaning of Caputo's and O'Brien's representative testimony about the Vietnamese "enemy," the autobiographical literature of the Vietnam War is saturated with a *culturally induced* language that can do nothing other than identify the invisible Vietnamese insurgents with a dread-provoking substantial insubstantiality, with "spirits," "phantoms," "wraiths," or "spooks" that "haunt" the American hunter:

> We called the enemy ghosts. "Bad night," we'd say, "the ghosts are out." To get spooked, in the lingo, meant not only to get scared but to get killed. "Don't get spooked," we'd say. "Stay cool, stay alive." Or we'd say: "Careful, man, don't give up the ghost." The countryside itself seemed spooky — shadows and tunnels and incense burning in the dark. The land was haunted. We were fighting forces that did not obey the laws of twentieth-century science. Late at night, on guard, it seemed that all of Vietnam was alive and shimmering — odd shapes swaying in the paddies, boogie-men in sandals, spirits dancing in old pagodas. It was ghost country, and Charlie Cong was the main ghost. The way he came out at night. How you never really saw him, just thought you did. Almost magical — appearing, disappearing. He could blend with the land, changing form, becoming trees and grass. He could levitate. He could fly. He could pass through barbed wire and melt away like ice and creep up on you without sound or footsteps. He was scary. In the daylight, maybe, you didn't believe in that stuff. You laughed it off. You made jokes. But at night you turned into a believer: no skeptics in foxholes.[45]

The patrol that morning had the nightmare quality which characterized most small-unit operations in the war. The trail looped and twisted and led nowhere. The company seemed to be marching into a vacuum, haunted by a presence intangible yet real, a sense of being surrounded by something we could not see. It was the inability to see that vexed us most. In that lies the jungle's power to cause fear: it blinds. It arouses the same instinct that makes us apprehensive of places like attics and dark alleys. (*RW,* 80)[46]

Oh, that terrain! The bloody, maddening uncanniness of it! When the hideous Battle of Dak To ended at the top of Hill 875, we announced that 4,000 of them were killed; it had been the purest slaughter, our losses were bad, but clearly it was another American victory. But when the top of the hill was reached, the number of NVA found was four. Four... Spooky. Everything up there was spooky, and it would have been that way even if there had been no war. You were there in a place where you didn't belong, where things were glimpsed for which you would have to pay and where things went unglimpsed for which you would have to pay, a place where they didn't play the mystery but killed you straight off for trespassing. The towns had names that laid a quick, chilly touch on your bones.[47]

The valley floor was even more eerie than the mounds. The rain continued. It was nearly impossible for Alpha to establish their precise position. Surrounded by fog and high grass they could not sight landmarks. The flat valley revealed no clues....

Cherry sat where he had been standing.... For extended hours they all humped without speaking. For hours he marched seeing only the one man before him and at times not even seeing him. Cherry longed for a CP meeting. He looked to his rear.... An uneasy feeling came upon Cherry. He looked left then right. Somebody was watching. He looked over his shoulder again at McCarthy. The mist was so thick it blurred his image. Cherry could feel eyes on the back of his neck. He glanced around anxiously. He could see nothing but dense walls of elephant grass. Maybe it's better not to look, he thought. He tried to ignore it. His stomach tightened. He felt as if something was about to reach out and grab him.[48]

Crazy Earl holds his bottle by the neck and smashes it across a fallen statue of a fat, smiling, bald-headed gook [a Buddha]. "This ain't a war, it's a series of overlapping riots. We blow them away.

> They come up behind us before we're out of sight and shoot us in the ass. I know a guy in One-One that shot a gook and then tied a block of C-4 to him and blew him into little invisible pieces because shooting gooks is a waste of time — they come back to life. But these gooks piss you off so bad that you got to shoot *some* thing, *any* thing. Man, half the confirmed kills I got are civilians and the other half is water boes.[49]

The last of these representative passages bearing witness to the bafflement of the American soldier in the face of the invisible enemy is perhaps the most telling. This is not only because the bafflement precipitated by the Other's invisibility most starkly discloses the utter inefficiency and wastefulness of the rigorous and efficient logic of decidability to which it is necessarily (culturally) restricted: its inability to name and contain the mysterious Other. It is also because, in its deployment of this restricted narrative logic, it self-destructs. To anticipate, it makes explicit the symbiotic relationship between the discursive practices of instrumental reason and spectrality: the seer/hunter becomes the seen/hunted.

In thus overdetermining the spectrality of the invisible "enemy," this baffled writing, which would come to terms with the event of Vietnam, betrays what a purely political or economic analysis of this war, in its reliance on the disciplinary imperatives of positive "science," is precluded from attending to. It does not simply disclose the blindness to alterity — to the Other, the lack, the difference, the trace, that is, the Nothing — *of* the imperial "truth" discourse informing this writing. As the grotesquely rigorous reasoning of the last passage makes chillingly clear, it also discloses the unthought violence that informs the logical economy of its narrative.[50]

The response of the American Mission to the "de-structive" strategy of the elusive Vietnamese Other was not to readjust its "European" military tactics of decidability to a kind of warfare in which the spectral enemy was always hauntingly invisible and unknowable, in which, in other words, the differential Other refused to *obey* the Western rules of warfare. The American Mission, that is to say — and it is important to emphasize this — did not reorient its Western logocentric concept of war in the face of an enemy that refused *to answer to* the fundamental epistemic imperatives of the European Enlightenment: those emanating from the grounding principle of differentiation (within a larger identical structure). I mean by this last, the knowledge-producing disciplinary table (uniforms, insignia, rank, and so on) that would distinguish soldiers from civilians (and women and children) and its linear/circular impe-

rial tactical geometries that would render the enemy's moves locatable, predictable, and masterable. On the contrary, the American response to these unexpected and psychologically and practically baffling conditions precipitated by the enemy's refusal to adhere to the structural imperatives of the hitherto self-evident liberal democratic narrative was — *predictably* — reactive. As is well known (despite the official effort to repress this knowledge), the Pentagon managers and the American Mission in Saigon simply substituted one European form of warfare for another, the frontal assault that would end in the decisive battle for a war of attrition. The "body count," it was hoped, would eventually deplete the spectral numbers of the Vietnamese Other's army to — in a telling locution — the point of no return. True to this unrelenting American will to convert the spectral to verifiable numbers (tabulation), this technologization (and routinizing) of death — Caputo refers to his soul-destroying duties as "Regimental Casualty Reporting Officer" as keeping "Wheeler's [his commanding officer's] scoreboard" (*RW*, 159)[51] — the American Mission retaliated by unleashing a technological firepower against the recalcitrantly invisible and undifferentiated Other unprecedented in (nonatomic) military history:

> We took space back quickly, expensively, with total panic and close to maximum brutality. Our machine was devastating. And versatile. It could do everything but stop. As one American major said, in a successful attempt at attaining history, "We had to destroy Ben Tre in order to save it."[52]

It was, if we recall the testimony of the Bertrand Russell International War Crimes Tribunal of 1968 in Stockholm, a firepower that, in the scope, violence, and, above all, the necessary *indiscriminateness* of its application, bordered on genocide.[53]

When this indiscriminate violence against the Vietnamese people and their earth at large became inescapably visible to the American public, a significant — and still to be adequately questioned — transformation of the representation of America's involvement in Vietnam began to manifest itself in the hegemonic discourse of the culture industry and in that of many government officials and intellectuals who had hitherto supported or had acquiesced to it, a transformation that eventually aligned itself with that of the prominent antiwar spokespersons. The brutal conduct of the war came increasingly to be represented as a political *betrayal* of the principles of liberal democracy. As I have been suggesting in demonstrating the impossibility of differentiating the ontological representation and the military practice of America in Vietnam, it is of crucial importance to remark about this turn that the genocidal — leveling — as-

sault on the Vietnamese people was not simply a military violence aimed at achieving an economic/political objective. It was also and indissolubly a violence at the sites of ontology and culture, not to say of race and gender. The ugly justification by General Mark Clark, one of the great American commanders of World War II, for the obliterative B-52 bombings of North Vietnam in 1968 was no accident: "I don't think it's necessary to have an invasion of North Vietnam. And it would be just exactly what the enemy wants. He'd like us to put down 100,000 men in the field. He'd put down 100,000. They're willing to lose half of theirs, and ours is a precious commodity. And I wouldn't trade one dead American for 50 dead Chinamen."[54] (It is beyond the scope of this chapter to apply Clark's racist logic to the demographics of death within the American military body. Given the obvious fact that proportionately far more blacks than whites were fighting "Chinamen" in Vietnam, one is compelled to ask whether the dominant culture that Clark represents believed that the black man was, in the general's typically "American" rhetoric, as precious a commodity as his white counterpart.)

This indissoluble relay of quantified violence mounted by the United States against the spectral Other (the Military Mission called this indiscriminate violently reductive process "pacification") is clearly suggested by Frances FitzGerald in *Fire in the Lake* (1972). It is a book that remains one of the most profound meditations on the Vietnam War and one that, despite its predating of the posthumanist occasion, deserves to be carefully considered in any rethinking of the Vietnam decade in the post–Cold War period, especially that aspect of the war pertaining to the question of the relationship between cultural representation (narrative) and practice:

> At the Guam conference [April 1967] President Johnson took the long-awaited step of putting all civilian operations under the command of General Westmoreland. His move signified that Washington no longer gave even symbolic importance to the notion of a "political" war waged by the Vietnamese government. The reign of the U.S. military had begun, and with it the strategy of quantity in civilian as well as military affairs.
>
> As an assistant to Westmoreland, Robert Komer had something of the general's notion of scale. After all the history of failed aid programs, he believed that the only hope for success lay in saturation.... The U.S. government had no choice but to force its supplies upon the Vietnamese people: thousands of tons of bulgar wheat, thousands of gallons of cooking oil, tons of pharmaceuticals, enough seed to plant New Jersey with miracle rice, enough fertilizer for the same, light bulbs, garbage trucks, an atomic re-

> actor, enough concrete to pave a province, enough corrugated tin to roof it, enough barbed wire to circle it seventeen times, dentists' drills, soybean seedlings, sewing kits, mortars, machine tools, toothbrushes, plumbing, and land mines.
>
> In part, of course, this aid was absolutely necessary, for the U.S. military was at the same time bombing, defoliating, and moving villages at such a rate that all the aid the United States could ship would not have been excessive as refugee relief.[55]

In other words, this *Logos*-enabled totalizing and reifying will to narrative decidability manifests itself at this juncture of America's involvement in Vietnam in a promissory instrumental logical economy gone mad — a mono-mania, as it were. Like Wallace Stevens's jar in Tennessee, as Michael Herr puts the synecdochic instance of the "Battle" of Khe Sanh, it "took dominion everywhere":

> All that was certain was that Khe Sanh had become a passion, the false love object in the heart of the Command.... In its outlines, the promise was delicious: Victory! A vision of as many as 40,000 of them out there in the open, fighting it out on our terms, fighting for once like men, fighting to no avail. There would be a battle, a set-piece battle where he could be killed by the numbers, killed wholesale, and if we killed enough of him, maybe he would go away. In the face of such a promise, the question of defeat could not even be considered, no more than the question of whether, after Tet, Khe Sanh might have become militarily unwise and even absurd. Once it was all locked in place, Khe Sanh became like the planted jar in Wallace Stevens' poem. It took dominion everywhere.[56]

In *Ariel and the Police,* Frank Lentricchia brilliantly appropriates Herr's historically resonant insight into the affiliation between planting a promissory discourse and its taking dominion everywhere (the affiliated imperial metaphorics of the center and the periphery should not be overlooked) for his "New Americanist" project. In the process, he suggests how deeply backgrounded in the American national self this nexus between knowledge production (the quantification/technologization of the spectral nothing) and imperial power is. He invokes the critiques of its imperial operations by such otherwise unlikely representative figures from quite various sites of American cultural production and times of American history as Stevens, William James, and Herr:

> Had Wallace Stevens lived through our Vietnam period he might have had the right answer to the question posed by Norman Mailer in 1967: *Why Are We in Vietnam?* Had he forgotten

what he knew, long before our military intervention in Southeast Asia, he would have been (had he lived so long) reminded by Michael Herr who at the end of his book *Dispatches* (1970) wrote: "Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there." Herr maybe in part knew what he knew because he had read Stevens, who taught him about where we've all been, all along: "Once it was all locked in place, Khe Sanh became like the planted jar in Wallace Stevens' poem. It took dominion everywhere." Herr's perversely perfect mixed metaphor of the "planted jar," if it might have struck Stevens as an incisive reading of his poem, might also have awakened in him an obscure memory of one of the powerful philosophical presences of his Harvard days, William James, writing out of the bitterness of his political awakening, writing on 1 March 1899 in the *Boston Evening Transcript* against our first imperial incursion in the Orient: "We are destroying down to the root every germ of a healthy national life in these unfortunate people.... We must sow our ideals, plant our order, impose our God." James might have ended his letter: "The Philippines the Philippines the Philippines, we've all been there."[57]

But Herr's resonant genealogical insight should not be restricted to the site of (geo)politics alone, as Lentricchia tends to do. This providentially justified promissory planting that took dominion everywhere was not — and has never been — confined simply to geopolitical space. It was, from the beginning (when the Puritans — the "saving remnant" or "seed-bearers" — planted the Massachusetts Bay Colony), carried out by America all along the indissoluble continuum of being, from the ontological (which is to say, the site of thinking as such) through the cultural, sexual, and racial to the sociopolitical sites. Indeed, as Herr's quite revealing focus on representation (the futural power of the promise informing the metaphorical planting) suggests, it is even arguable that America overdetermined the central ontological site, rendered it, that is, the basis of it polyvalent conduct of the Vietnam War. It did not simply serve as the ultimate justification for, but also as the enabling *principle* of, the indiscriminate genocidal military practice of attrition.

What I am suggesting in thus demonstrating the complicity between the principles informing the American project of "winning the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people and the genocidal devastation of Vietnam — indeed, the priority of these principles over the (superstructural) latter — is that the savagely civilized execution of the war disclosed a terrible but essential contradiction in the discourse of "America." It is a contradiction that, if it did not decisively delegitimize its

claims to universal truth at that time, has haunted them ever since. The pursuit of the end of its instrumentalist logical economy by the United States — of its "objective," as the affiliated rhetoric of military tactics would put it — ended in the self-de-struction of that logic. The "America" that intervened in Vietnam as early as the end of World War II represented itself as that exceptionalist collective cultural identity that had its origins in the Puritans' New Adamic errand in the wilderness (a wilderness haunted by the native "salvages," who appeared to the Puritans as Satanic "spirits"). It was thus an "America" that represented its intervention in Vietnam as a benign New World mission intended to plant the Word (the universal principle of freedom) that Europe, in the form of a decadent French colonialism, had forgotten in its selfish materialist pursuit of power. In the process of fulfilling what it represented as its historically ordained mission, "America" (like Aeneas vis-à-vis Turnus at the end of the *Aeneid*) showed itself to be informed by a murderous (onto)logic, a logic of over-sight that, at a certain critical point in the encounter, justifies and compels the practical obliteration of any differential and resistant force that would undermine its claim to universal truth and thus to its universal authority.

Indeed, the self-destruction of America's cultural identity showed that this informing essentialist and imperial onto-logic rendered the process of obliteration productively possible by its reifying specular or panoptic imperatives. I mean the inherent power of this metaphysical logic to reduce difference (*physis*) to identity from above (*meta*), to name the nothing and the spectral differences it disseminates and thus to "comprehend" them: to make them *totally graspable* (*com+prehendere*), an "it" that thus becomes "practically assailable," as it were. Thus, like Oedipus in Sophocles' de-struction of the emergent positivist discourse of seeing in classical Greece (or Darius in Herodotus's analogous reversal of the hunter/hunted relationship in his paradigmatic account of the Scythians' defeat of the invading Persians) and the detective of the postmodern anti–detective story,[58] the self-certain American detective in this antinarrative turns out to be the criminal; the judge turns out to be the judged; the man of reason turns out to be the madman. In short, to invoke the metaphorics that saturates the literature of witness emanating from the Vietnam War — and which I have said is intrinsic to the imperial project — the *see*-er turns out to be the *seen*.

"Search and destroy": this ubiquitous phrase in the discourse of the Vietnam War — by now reduced to a cliché emptied out of the horrible content it acquired with the exposure of such atrocities as the My Lai massacre — is, in fact, a codification of the indiscriminate violence *mandated* by the reactive military strategy developed by the

relay of commands constituting Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) to defeat the uncannily invisible and elusive enemy in Vietnam. In thus putting ontological representation (and its origins in Roman imperialism) back into play in this genealogical retrieval of the event called "Vietnam" that would contribute to the writing of the history of the present global occasion, I want to suggest that this sedimented locution must be understood in more than simply military terms. It must also be read as the fulfillment in practice — as the material *end* — of the benign logical economy of the "disinterested" pursuit of truth. It must, that is, be understood as the violent process of reification, inaugurated by imperialist Rome, privileged and developed by Enlightenment Europe, and appropriated by an "exceptionalist" America in modernity, that reduces the differential and elusive nothingness of being — its "spectrality" — to an identical *something* in order to bring "it" to light under the commanding and encompassing gaze of the concentering imperial eye.

This delegitimizing contradiction in the logic of "America" — this complicity between the representation of being and power, seeing and domination, that is, searching out and destroying — manifested itself a quarter of a century ago in the epochal decade of the Vietnam War. But this chronology should not be allowed to justify the politically conservative interpretation of this disclosure that views it as an irrelevant aberration within American history (Francis Fukuyama and James Ceaser, for example). Nor should it be allowed to justify the politically liberal interpretation, which views it as an "error of judgment" (Arthur Schlesinger, Robert McNamara, and Richard Rorty, for example). It should not, that is, occlude the perception of the indissoluble continuity between the America of the Vietnam War and the America of the historical "revolutionary" past and of the post–Cold War present. As the rhetoric I have underscored to foreground its essence suggests, this resonant contradiction in the discourse and practice of "America" was, for example, the proleptic testimony of Herman Melville, whose epochal witness, especially in *Moby-Dick,* has been consensually obliterated by the custodians of the American Cultural Memory, not only by the enraged "Americanists" of his generation, but by the idolatrous founders of American literary studies — F. O. Matthiessen, Lionel Trilling, Richard Chase, R. W. B. Lewis, Quentin Anderson, and so on — at the outset of the Cold War.[59] For in that anticanonical, indeed, subversive, novel, Melville recognized that Captain Ahab's deadly *mono*mania was the fulfillment and end of the (onto)logic the "first" European settlers of America: the Puritans' New Adamic representation of being and its providentially ordained historical errand in the wilderness. He recognized, in other words, that Ahab's unrelenting and

unerring pursuit of the elusive white whale was precisely an American search and destroy mission against a spectral enemy that, like the American Mission's in Vietnam, was informed, legitimized, and enabled by the (American) Word. Reconstellating Melville's witness into the context of the Vietnam War, one can no longer read the following "canonical" passage from *Moby-Dick* without visualizing the systematic torching of Vietnamese villages, the defoliation of the Vietnamese landscape, the chemical poisoning of the rice paddies, the relentless B-52 bombings — all undertaken in the name of "saving Vietnam" for the free world:

> The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east reverenced in their statue devil; — Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it.[60]

This complicity between an ontology of presence and a concentering violence is also and fundamentally the symptomatic testimony of virtually all the American soldiers — not simply of Lieutenant William Calley's notoriously visible account of the My Lai massacre — who have written about their "experiences" in Vietnam, even as they try desperately to transform the brutal *thisness* — the historical specificity of America's brutal conduct — of the Vietnam War into war in general. Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War,* for example, is a retrospective meditation on the always and increasingly dislocating evanescence of the enemy — and the consequent "irresistible compulsion to do something." It culminates in a recollection of his fateful decision to order the cold-blooded execution of two young Vietnamese boys suspected of being Vietcong, who, along with the girl who was beaten in the process, turned out to be civilians. In his agonized effort to render his act of

murder intelligible, Caputo has recourse to a rhetoric that is remarkably similar to Melville's representation of Captain Ahab's state of mind:

> My thoughts and feelings over the next few hours are irretrievably jumbled now, but at some point in the early evening, I was seized by an irresistible compulsion to do something. "Something's got to be done" was about the clearest thought that passed through my brain. I was fixated on the company's intolerable predicament. We could now muster only half of our original strength, and half of our effectives had been wounded at least once. If we suffered as many casualties in the next month as we had in the past, we would be down to fifty or sixty men, little more than a reinforced platoon. It was madness for us to go on walking down those trails and tripping booby traps without any chance to retaliate. *Retaliate.* The word rang in my head. *I will retaliate.* It was then that my chaotic thoughts began to focus on the two men whom Le Dung, Crowe's informant, had identified as Viet Cong. My mind did more than focus on them; it fixed on them like a heat-seeking missile fixing on the tailpipe of a jet. They became an obsession. I would get them. I would get them before they got any more of us; before they got me. I'm going to get those bastards, I said to myself, suddenly feeling giddy. (*RW,* 298–99)[61]

Caputo symptomatically resists the reductive charge of murder leveled by the Marine Command in its characteristically cynical effort to exonerate itself (and "America") of culpability. But like virtually all of the testimony of those "eye witnesses" who fought the war, he fails to conceptualize adequately the necessarily analogical relation between the logic informing his private act and that intrinsic to the United States's public practice. Instead, he attributes his temporary aberration to the dehumanizing effects of "the war," whereas his text at large points to the absolute complicity between his *American* (anthropo)logic and the culminating act of violence. In a way that Melville does not, Caputo fails to perceive or resists acknowledging that the logic that drove him to this act of murder is the logic of the culture he represents. He cannot see or resists admitting that this reifying logic is one that finally and inexorably manifests itself in an obsessed "focus" and "fixing," a "monomaniacal" reification, as it were, of the omnipresent uncanny force of the spectral Other intended, as Melville says of Ahab's objectification of the white whale into Moby Dick, to render "it" "practically assailable," that, in other words, it constitutes the necessary replication *in miniature* of the identifying logic of the collective totality of which he is an inscribed individual part. I do not simply mean the instrumental logic pursued

by the military court that is trying Caputo's "case," the logic of *closure* that obliterates the Vietnam War (including the political motives of the United States) in the blank — spectral — space of the trial's formal detective-story scenario. I also, and above all, mean the founding New Adamic/frontier logic and practice of "America" at large in Vietnam. This is what Caputo does not quite say in his agonized climactic effort against his inscribed grain to read the "conspicuously blank" square on the official form containing — and predisposing once and for all — the "truth" of the history of his "case":

> There was a lot of other stuff — statements by witnesses, inquiry reports, and so forth — but one square on form DD457 was conspicuously blank. It was the square labeled EXPLANATORY OR EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SUBMITTED HEREWITH. Early in the investigation, I wondered why the investigating officer had not submitted any explanatory or extenuating circumstances. Later, after I had time to think things over, I drew my own conclusion: the explanatory circumstance was the war. The killings had occurred in war. They had occurred, moreover, in a war whose sole aim was to kill Viet Cong, a war in which those ordered to do the killing often could not distinguish the Viet Cong from the civilians, a war in which civilians in "free-fire zones" were killed every day by weapons far more horrible than pistols and shotguns. The deaths of Le Dung and Le Du could not be divorced from the nature and conduct of the war. They were an inevitable product of the war. As I had come to see it, America could not intervene in a people's war without killing some of the people. But to raise those points in explanation or extenuation would be to raise a host of ambiguous moral questions. It could even raise the question of the morality of American intervention in Vietnam; or, as one officer told me, "It would open up a real can of worms." Therefore, the five men in the patrol and I were to be tried as common criminals, much as if we had murdered two people in the course of a bank robbery during peacetime. If we were found guilty, the Marine Corps' institutional conscience would be clear. Six criminals, who, of course, did not represent the majority of America's fine fighting sons, had been brought to justice. Case closed. If we were found innocent, the Marine Corps could say, "Justice has taken its course, and in a court-martial conducted according to the facts and the rules of evidence, no crime was found to have been committed." Case closed. Either way, the military institution won. (*RW*, 305–6)[62]

If Caputo's witness against America is distorted by his vestigial inscription by "America," specifically by the postwar therapeutic discourse of universalism, Michael Herr's is not in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive in 1968. The tragic horror in Melville's antebellum text becomes the ludic horror of carnival in Herr's own postmodern testimony, as the intonations recalling the Hollywood frontiersman voice of John Wayne in the last sentence of the inaugural passage of his great book suggest. But, like Caputo's symptomatic testimony, Herr's text bears witness not only to the specter that haunts both the American grunt and the collective totality of which he is a member, but also to the complicity of their monomaniacal — indiscriminately violent — search and destroy logic:

> *At the end of my first week in-country I met an information officer in the headquarters of the 25th Division at Cu Chi who showed me on his map and then from his chopper what they'd done to the Ho Bo Woods, the vanished Ho Bo Woods, taken off by giant Rome plows and chemicals and long, slow fire, wasting hundreds of acres of cultivated plantation and wild forest alike, "denying the enemy valuable resources and cover."*
>
> *It had been part of his job for nearly a year now to tell people about that operation; correspondents, touring congressmen, movie stars, corporation presidents, staff officers from half of the armies in the world, and he still couldn't get over it. It seemed to be keeping him young, his enthusiasm made you feel that even the letters he wrote home to his wife were full of it, it really showed what you could do if you had the know-how and the hardware. And if in the months following that operation incidences of enemy activity in the large area of War Zone C had increased "significantly," and American losses had doubled and then doubled again, none of it was happening in any damn Ho Bo Wood, you'd better believe it.*[63]

Thinking the Specter of Vietnam

> The Question of the nothing puts us, the questioners, in question.
> — MARTIN HEIDEGGER, "What Is Metaphysics?"

> Pyle said, "It's awful." He looked at the wet on his shoes and said in a sick voice, "What's that?"
>
> "Blood," I said. "Haven't you ever seen it before?"
>
> He said, "I must get them cleaned before I see the Minister."
> — GRAHAM GREENE, *The Quiet American*

We are now, after this lengthy detour, prepared to address the question posed earlier about the unabated persistence of the national obsession

over Vietnam long after the end of the war, indeed, after the official announcement of the end of its end in the wake of the United States's victory over the Iraqi army in 1991. I mean the question about the unrelenting and unassuagable anxiety that continues to afflict the American national self: What, precisely, has the post-Vietnam American cultural agenda of forgetting been trying obsessively to forget? What, as it were, is the specter that has haunted "America" since its intervention a half-century ago in a people's war in a Third World country in Southeast Asia? The foregoing retrieval of the historical specificity of the Vietnam War suggests that the answer to this question lies precisely in the American Cultural Memory's systematic (if not conspiratorial) occlusion of its historicity by metaphorizing the actual cultural and sociopolitical effects of the war, first in the therapeutic terms of "healing a wound" and later, in the context of the end of the Cold War, of "kicking" a national neurosis (the Vietnam syndrome). The retrieval of the *thisness* of the Vietnam War from its generalization, in other words, suggests that what is at stake in the obsessive national effort to allay this ghost is far more ideologically important than the belated rehabilitation of the American veteran. Indeed, the ideological stakes are far more important than the recuperation of the national (good)will (as it has been iteratively claimed by those consensus builders who are calculatively aware of this amnesiac process) or, for that matter, than America's loss of its first war (as it is claimed by those adversarial intellectuals who would resist this amnesiac process). The retrieved historical context suggests, rather, that this would-be forgotten is nothing less than the symptomatic recognition of the abyssal aporetic space opened up in the logic of liberal democracy by the disclosure of the necessary complicity between the ontologically derived principles of American democracy not simply with imperialism, but also with the violent practice of genocidal power. It is a complicity that, in keeping with the Enlightenment's "repressive hypothesis," had heretofore been occluded by the alleged incommensurability between the principles and the violence. The retrieval of the *thisness* of the Vietnam War suggests, in short, that this would-be forgotten — this spectral trace, as it were — is the dreadfully intolerable because culturally and politically disabling awareness of an epistemic break. I mean a break that has rendered the truth of the *idea* of "America" vulnerable to radical interrogation at a moment when it is loudly representing itself as the plenary "end" — the noncontradictory truth — of History.

By thus remembering the spectral reality that the American Cultural Memory would forget and "naming it" an "epistemic break," I am not restricting my critique to a constituency of the dominant culture that would employ power overtly in the name of the self-evidently be-

nign principle of "America." I am also, and above all, pointing to the delegitimation of an "alternative" — liberal/recuperative — but finally continuous critique that represents this resonantly spectral contradiction as an *accident* of American history: as the consequent, that is, either of a "mistake" of individual and/or national judgment (Robert McNamara, for example) or of a political "betrayal" of the positive principles of liberal American democracy (Senator William Fulbright, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Richard Rorty, for example). By "epistemic break" I mean, rather, like Foucault, the decisive and irreversible disintegration and delegitimation of the indissoluble relay of representational discourses — ontological, epistemological, cultural, sociopolitical — that collectively, however unevenly, constitute what a period at large assumes and represents to be the self-evident universal truth. I mean specifically the (self-)exposure of the latent obliterating violence against being — we are entitled now to call it "the Ahabism" — informing the logical economy of the principles of freedom and equality professed by exceptionalist "America": "America," that is, understood in terms of the secularization of the Puritan errand in the wilderness in the period of the Enlightenment (the American Revolution and the making of the American Constitution) and its expansionist practice in the nineteenth century in the name of Manifest Destiny.[64] To appropriate Antonio Gramsci's historically specific terms, I mean the self-de-struction of the hegemonic discourse of the American cultural identity and its radical and decisive delegitimation. Henceforth, "America" will no longer be able to repress the Other or accommodate it within its imperial structure; the Other will always already manifest itself as a specter that haunts the "truth" of "America." This decisive appearance of the spectral gaze is what I have taken and continue to take the "postmodern condition" to mean — if it is recognized that America's global mission is the consequence not of its self-professed exceptionalist status, but of its self-proclaimed assumption of the burden of fulfilling the *mission civilisatrice* that Europe (the Old World) betrayed in its decadence.

Let me recall at this critical conjuncture the post–Cold War Hegelian theorization of the dominant culture's general representation of the end of the Cold War as the planetary triumph of liberal capitalist democracy and the end of history. Reconstellated into the historical context I have retrieved — the context that this neo-Hegelian problematic would, because of its "historical superfluity," obliterate as a "distraction" from "the larger [completed] pattern" of History[65] — this post–Cold War representation of contemporary history comes to seem remarkably hollow. It takes on the lineaments of a kind of desperate rewriting — or "airbrushing"[66] — of history that liberal democratic Cold Warriors always

and relentlessly accused communist Cold War historians of perpetrating. As its deletion of this epochally transformative hot moment of the Cold War suggests, in other words, this "objective" representation of the post–Cold War global scene becomes itself, like the monomaniacal logic that propels Captain Ahab's inexorable pursuit of the white whale, the self-confirming imperial end of the *all*-inclusive and ruthlessly repressive Cold War narrative inaugurated at the end of World War II to contain any thought or action — both within and beyond America's borders — resembling Marxist communism. Or, rather, this end-of-history discourse becomes the decisive resolution *in theory* of that recuperative phase of the relentlessly undemocratic democratic Cold War narrative undertaken to pacify the threat to the national consensus posed by the withdrawal of spontaneous consent to the "truth" of "America" by a large constituency of American society in response to the self-disclosure of the terrible contradictions — the genocidal violence — informing the benign logic of America's intervention in the Vietnam "wilderness" and its conduct of the war. That is to say, this end-of-history discourse can be seen as the fulfillment of the postwar cultural imperative "to heal the wound."

But the implications of this retrieval of the terrible specificity of the Vietnam War are not limited to the exposure of the historical occlusions thematized by the amnesiac end-of-history discourse. In foregrounding the inordinately important role played by ontological representation in the renarrativization of the Cold War after the decisive self-destruction of the discourse of "America" during the decade of the Vietnam War, this retrieval also suggests why the presently privileged oppositional discourses are inadequate to the task of resisting the dominant culture's representation of the global post–Cold War occasion as the end of history (the *Pax Metaphysica*) and the advent of the New World Order presided over by the United States: the *Pax Americana*. I am referring specifically to the neo-Marxist discourse deriving from Fredric Jameson's identification of postmodernism with the cultural logic of late capitalism, to the New Historicism, to the cultural and postcolonial criticisms that in large part derive from the former, and to that postnational discourse, exemplified by Bill Reading's, that, in attempting to overcome the ineffectuality of these, would assume a global perspective focused on transnational capital that represents "America" as obsolete.

It will be the purpose of the remaining chapters of this book to analyze the inadequacies of these "postmodern" discourses to the task of resisting the discourse of the *Pax Americana* and to proffer prologomemally an alternative on the basis of this critical analysis. Here, it will suffice to suggest that these oppositional discourses are, each in its

own particular way, blinded by their insights not only to precisely what, in the present historical conjuncture, is strongest in the discourse of the dominant liberal/capitalist culture of the post–Cold War period: its justification of global power on the *basis* of an ontological representation of temporal history (being) that ends in the triumph of the cultural, social, political, and especially economic formations that are constructed on its foundation. In failing to perceive what is strongest in the "triumphant" imperial discourse of liberal/capitalist democracy, each of these oppositional discourses, in turn, is also blinded to what is weakest and most vulnerable in it. I mean, to repeat, the ontological contradiction — what I have been calling the specter — at the enabling center of its "benign" global discourse: the violent genocidal will to power that was the "end" of the (onto)logical economy that justified America's intervention in Vietnam and its indiscriminately murderous conduct of the war.

All of which is to say, finally, that an adversarial discourse that would be adequate to the task of resisting the New World Order — that, in Noam Chomsky's aptly ironic phrase, would be capable of "deterring democracy"[67] — would do well not simply to reconstellate and rethink "Vietnam" in the context of the annunciation of the end of history, but, in doing so, to take its directives precisely from the *spectral contradictions* (the radical differences) precipitated by the "fulfillment" of the imperial logic of the American *anthropologos* in the Vietnam War. In other words, the retrieval of the repressed history of the Vietnam War points to an adversarial strategy that would refuse to engage its infinitely more formidable antagonist according to the terms prescribed by the latter's imperial problematic, would not, that is, be answerable to the "truth" of its visibly invisible metanarrative. It calls for the adoption of a strategy that exploits its adversary's essential weakness: the powerful will to closure that hides behind its tolerance of difference, its alleged pluralism. It calls, that is, for an adversarial strategy that, like the strategy of the Vietnamese Other in the face of the utterly predictable narrativity of the American invaders' metaphysically structured discourse and practice, takes the form of an itinerant spectrality. I mean a nomadic phantasmagoric absence, a mobile nonpresent presence, a haunting invisibility, that reverses the panoptic gaze of the dominant culture in transforming itself as seen into absent see-er. In short, the retrieval of the repressed history of the Vietnam War calls for a de-structive strategy that, like the Vietnamese Other vis-à-vis "America," resists identification and thus frustrates the will to closure of the triumphant culture and in so doing dis-integrates its discourse of decidability and arrival, which is to say, disempowers and delegitimizes its imperial power and legitimacy.

Commenting on the representation of the Vietnam War by the American Mission and the legion of American correspondents based in Saigon who got their truths from it, Michael Herr writes decisively:

> [I]n back of every column of print you read about Vietnam there was a dripping, laughing death-face; it hid there in the newspapers and magazines and held to your television screen for hours after the set was turned off for the night, an after-image that simply wanted to tell you at last what somehow had not been told.[68]

It is not simply the story — the "secret history"[69] — that had somehow not been told by the American media that now, in the post–Cold War occasion, calls for retrieval. What the collective will to forget this story demands beyond that imperative is that we *think* the laughing death-face — the polysemous specter of Vietnam — that remained to haunt our information-filled American living room long after we turned our television set off. For in that haunting apparition there resides a "reality," a "saying," that, precisely because of its "unreality" and its unsayableness, can have no proper place in the tables of the New World Order. To say that this "reality" — this "saying" — can have no proper place in the tables of the New World Order is to say, of course, that "it" constitutes a mortal threat to the "triumphant" technological "age of the world picture."

of Mourning, and the New International, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 64; hereafter cited in the text as *SM.*

92. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: International Publishers, 1948), 8.

93. See Vasilis Lambropoulos, "Writing the Law," in *Rise of Eurocentrism,* 215–31.

94. Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter," *New Left Review* 209 (January/February 1995): 96. A cursory review of Eliot's editorial contributions to *The Criterion* will reveal the inordinate degree to which the Virgilian reference presides. See also Gereth Reeves, *T. S. Eliot: Virgilian Poet* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), esp. chapter 4, "Empire and the Agrarian Ideal," 96–116.

95. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 256.

96. Constantine Cavafy, "Waiting for the Barbarians"; my translation. It is no accident that J. M. Coetzee invokes Cavafy's poem as the title of his great postcolonial novel *Waiting for the Barbarians.*

3. *Vietnam and the* Pax Americana

1. This initiative is evident in the work of such diverse late postmodern critics as Fredric Jameson, Michael Hardt, Paul Bové, Masao Miyoshi, Ronald Judy, and Wlad Godzich. But it is most succinctly and provocatively exemplified by Bill Readings in *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996). I am in full agreement with Reading's critique of the nationalist localism of North American critical thinking in the present historical conjuncture and with his general recommendation that American critical inquiry be reconstellated into the global scene. Indeed, I would go further to say that only acute and rigorous attention to the planetary context will enable the realization of the full extent and depth to which the university and its inherited critical paradigms have been rendered virtually useless by the new transnational "reality" that these global transformations have produced. I am referring, above all, to the planetary triumph of "technological" thinking, a thinking that, in bringing the third, anthropological phase of the ontotheological tradition to its end (fulfillment), has compelled the adversarial cultures to think their opposition in terms of the logical economy of the triumphant imperial discourse. But there is, in Reading's recommendation for such a displacement, the implicit suggestion that new forms, languages, and forums abandon the "local" site of "America" in the process. This representation of the site of America as having been rendered obsolete by current historical events — the emergence of transnational capital as overdetermined site of inquiry — strikes me as an evasion, if this revisionary strategy does not involve the role "America," if not the United States of America, has played and continues to play in the post–Cold War period in shaping the global context Readings privileges. Reading's recommendation, I suggest, constitutes a circumvention of the historical specificity of the transformational history culminating in the overdetermination of the planetary scene. It thus inadvertently repeats the fateful forgetting of the question of being that has characterized the representation of history by the dominant, especially American, culture ever since the fall of Saigon in 1975. I mean, as I will show, the

systematic forgetting of the epochal disclosures vis-à-vis the American *episteme* precipitated by the Vietnam War.

2. There are, on the other hand, critics — the optimistically "progressive" critics referred to above — who interpret the professionalization of "theory" as evidence of the positive political impact that contemporary criticism has had not only in the academy but in the "world." See, for example, Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London: Verso, 1993).

3. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest* 16 (summer 1998): 3–18; and Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1993); hereafter cited in the text as *EH*. Basing his reading of Hegel on Alexander Kojève's interpretation of the dialectical history of the Absolute Spirit, Fukuyama attempts to overcome the weaknesses of the deterministic reading of Hegel (which he associates with a totalitarian — Hegelian Marxist — politics) by identifying it with "historicism" and "liberal democracy": "While Hegel may not have been the first philosopher to write about history, he was the first *historicist* philosopher — that is, a philosopher who believed in the essential historical relativity of truth. Hegel maintained that all human consciousness was limited by the particular social and cultural conditions of man's surrounding environment — or, as we say, by 'the times.' Past thought, whether of ordinary people or great philosophers and scientists, was not true absolutely or 'objectively,' but only relative to the historical or cultural horizon within which that person lived" (*EH,* 62). But Fukuyama insists on the "directionality" (*EH,* 55–70), the *progress,* of history toward an end understood as both termination and fulfillment (maturation) of an initial seminal potential, that, in other words, dialectically annuls its conflictual temporal character — negates its negativity. This qualification clearly betrays its reinscription in the Enlightenment (anthro-logical) version of metaphysics, an ontology of presence that *informs* the differential events of history, thus reducing them to a complicated matter of "mere" *appearance:* "Where Hegel differed from Fontenelle and from more radical historicists who came after him was that he did not believe that historical process would continue indefinitely, but would come to an end with an achievement of free societies in the real world. There would, in other words, be an *end of history*" (*EH,* 64). The complicity of this Hegelian dialectic with Eurocentrism and European imperialism is everywhere manifest in Hegel's *Philosophy of History,* trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956): "At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.... What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Underdeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History" (99). "The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning" (103). It is the terrorism of this Hegelian dialectic, which reduces the being of peoples whose cultures it cannot accommodate to nonbeing, that haunts Fukuyama's thesis. For a powerful indictment of Hegel's dialectical philosophy of history as it pertains to the "immaturity" (*Umreife*) of the civilizations of pre-Columbian Latin America, see the chapter titled "Eurocentrism" in Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the "Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 19–26.

4. Richard Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Foreign Affairs, 1997). The very title of Haass's book, which invokes a variant of the metaphorics of Manifest Destiny that justified the United States's Westward expansionism in the nineteenth century, bears witness to the continuity of its ontologically ordained imperial project.

5. Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991 [1977]), 71.

6. Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), xvi.

7. On the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Saigon, CNN presented a two-hour reprise of the Vietnam War in which a number of "leading" participants, including the North Vietnamese commander General Giap, were interviewed. The structural arrangement of this ritualized media event and the perspective of the questions it posed to the actors in its narrative were clearly oriented to distance the war. Like all the other periodically staged ritual remembrances of the war, they were designed to convey to the American public the sense that it was finally over and thus to exorcise its ghost.

8. McNamara, *In Retrospect,* 203. After McNamara left the Johnson administration in 1968, he became director of the World Bank, where, in the name of ameliorating the conditions of "undeveloped" Third World nations, he brought this same dehumanized problem-solving thinking to the reorganization of this powerful global capitalist institution. One of the legacies of his directorship is the present economic, political, and ecological catastrophe that has overtaken many of the Third World countries of Southeast Asia. For a critical analysis of his directorship of the World Bank, see Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 37–57, 118ff.

9. The latest of these is the CD-ROM *The War in Vietnam: A Multimedia Chronicle,* produced by CBS News and the *New York Times* (New York: Macmillan Digital U.S.A., 1996), and the American media's programming of documentaries, interviews, and symposia commemorating the watershed year of the Vietnam War, 1968. See, for example, the C-Span 1998 symposium on the twentieth anniversary of the Tet Offensive moderated by Marvin Kalb, which included David Halberstam, Stanley Karnow, and Barry Zorthian, and the 1998 PBS documentary *1968: The Year That Shaped a Generation,* written and directed by Steven Talbot.

10. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978): "I approach the myth [of 'America'] by way of the jeremiad, or *political sermon,* as the New England Puritans sometimes called this genre, meaning thereby to convey the dual nature of their calling, as practical and as spiritual guides, and to suggest that, in their church-state, theology was wedded to politics and politics to the progress of the kingdom of God. These sermons provide most of the evidence in my discussion of early New England. But I draw widely on other forms of the literature as well — doctrinal treatises, histories, poems, biographies, personal narratives — in order to place the jeremiad within the large context of Puritan rhetoric, and... the much larger context of American rhetoric, ritual, and society through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.... I argue that... the Puritans' cries of declension and doom were part of a strategy designed to revitalize the errand ['in the wilderness']." Bercovitch

adds tellingly: "Even when they are most optimistic [however] the jeremiads express a profound disquiet. Not infrequently, their affirmations betray an underlying desperation — a refusal to confront the present, a fear of the future, an effort to translate 'America' into a vision that works in spirit because it can never be tested in fact" (xiv). The American jeremiad, in other words, is a cultural mechanism designed to remember the American calling by forgetting its actuality, but what it represses in thus memorializing the calling always returns to haunt this memory. It is in this sense that Bercovitch's analysis of the American jeremiad can be applied to the amnesiac remembering of Vietnam in the post-Vietnam period.

11. For exemplary instances of this now-pervasive equation, see Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

12. See, for example, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *Heidegger and Modernity,* trans. Franklin Philip (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism,* trans. Mary Schnackenburg Cattani (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990); David Lehman, *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of De Man* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991); David H. Hirsch, *The Deconstruction of Literature: Criticism after Auschwitz* (Hanover, N. H.: Brown University Press, 1991); Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) (the volume contested by Jacques Derrida for its inclusion of an unapproved translation of one of his pieces on Heidegger in a context patently intended to lend Derrida's authority to the sustained effort to delegitimize Heidegger's thought); Robert Holub, *Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), esp. the chapter titled "The Uncomfortable Heritage," 148–201; Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

13. See *Vietnam in America: Ten Years after the Fall of Saigon,* a special issue of the *New York Times Magazine,* March 31, 1985.

14. This project is in process, tentatively titled *Representing Vietnam: The American Cultural Memory and the Forgetting of Vietnam.*

15. Virginia Carmichael, in *Framing History: The Rosenberg Story and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), has shown how the American culture industry exploits (re)narrativization to bring "undecidable" historical events — and the national anxiety they activate (the doubts about the legitimacy of power) — to closure. Her instance is the disturbing execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg as Soviet spies in 1953, which was motivated more by American Cold War ideology than by legal evidence. Understood in terms of this renarrativizing project, the Gulf War of 1991 was to the national trauma activated by the Vietnam War what the "tapes [allegedly acknowledging the Rosenbergs' contribution to the Soviet Union's production of its first atomic bomb] said to have been made by Khrushchev" was to the national trauma precipitated by the execution of the Rosenbergs.

16. As in *The Green Berets,* the enemy in virtually all the films, documentaries, and oral histories "remembering" the Vietnam War is invariably represented as a faceless abstraction — a "gook," "dink," "slope" (a metonymy that evokes the species "Oriental hordes"), or simply a "Charlie" (which suggests the ventriloquized puppet). They are also represented as male, despite the obviously dislocating fact that women played a significant part in the struggle of the Vietnamese people against the United States army. A significant exception to this frame of representational reference is Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket,* a film in which the brief end, which discloses the faceless murderous Vietcong sniper to be a young girl, deconstructs the perennial self-representation of the American soldier as benign deliverer (of women and children) to reveal him as a racist male phallus-killer.

17. The self-parodic degree to which the representation of the "reality" of Vietnam in *The Green Berets* is determined by the (popular) American imaginary is measured by its structural similarity with the Hollywood western epic *The Alamo* (1960), produced and directed by John Wayne.

18. Not accidentally, the American soldier invariably referred to the combat mission that took him out of a "base camp" into the Vietnamese "wilderness" as a foray into "Indian country": "It is midafternoon. The company is strung out along the trail on the north bank of the river. There is no front in this war, but we are aware that we have crossed an undefined line between the secure zone and what the troops call 'Indian country' " (Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1977], 102). The genealogy of this pervasive locution has its origins, of course, in the discourse of the American frontier, which represents the space beyond the white settlements as a dark wilderness inhabited by savages. But it is also one that became common currency in the canonical racist/imperialist writing of nineteenth-century American historians of the period of the French and Indian Wars. See, for example, Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (New York: Library of America, 1984 [1851]). In tracing the origins of Pontiac's "conspiracy," Parkman, for example, writes: "[S]oon after, a report gained ground that every post throughout the Indian country had been taken, and every soldier killed. Close upon these tidings came the enemy himself. The Indian war-parties broke out of the woods like gangs of wolves, murdering, burning, and laying waste; while hundreds of terror-stricken families, abandoning their homes, fled for refuge towards the older settlements, and all was misery and ruin" (494; see also 627, 637). Tellingly, the rhetoric Parkman, like virtually all the custodians of the American memory of the time, invariably uses to refer to Indian country is deeply inscribed by the Romans' inaugural identification of the barbarian with the (uncultivated) forest (*silvestris:* "savage," literally "of the woods [*silva*]"): "To rescue [this history] from oblivion is the object of the following work. It aims to portray the American forest and the American Indian at the period when both received their final doom" (Parkman, preface to the first edition, 347).

19. Caputo, *Rumor of War,* 213. Tellingly, however, as the last line of the quotation suggests, Caputo here, and in his agonized confessional narrative that articulates his disillusionment about the war, draws the wrong conclusion from his insight into the American public's amnesiac longing. Caputo's "autobiography" is more politically suggestive than the numerous other projects of that moment to "remember" the war by way of "eyewitness" accounts against

the American public's "ideologically induced" will to forget it. Nevertheless, it goes far to reinscribe that form of re-presentation epitomized by John Wayne's *The Green Berets* and the numerous personal narratives about the war published in the 1980s. See note 21 below.

20. See William V. Spanos, *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), especially the chapter titled "The Violence of Disinterestedness: A Genealogy of the Educational 'Reform' Initiative in the 1980s," 118–61.

21. Bernard Edelman, ed., *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985); Al Santoli, ed., *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Thirty-Three American Soldiers Who Fought It* (New York: Random House, 1981) (the Ballantine paperback edition of this book had gone through twenty-one reprintings as of May 1988); Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden: The Vietnam War and Its Aftermath in the Words of Americans and Southeast Asians* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1985); Mark Baker, ed., *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (New York: William Morrow, 1981); Wallace Terry, ed., *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984); Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977); and Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977). The other Hollywood movies include the popular melodramatic action films starring Chuck Norris, *Missing in Action* (1984), *Missing in Action II* (1985), and *Missing in Action III* (1988). On the ideological stakes surrounding the MIA issue, see Bruce Franklin *MIA, or Mythmaking in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993); and Elliot Gruner, *Prisoners of Culture: Representing the Vietnam POW* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

22. Santoli, *Everything We Had,* xvi; Santoli's emphasis.

23. For a radically different, indeed, antithetical, version of this reversed *mis en scène,* in which the American soldier as Leatherstocking-figure fights a guerrilla war against his corrupted country, see Robert Stone's novel *Dog Soldiers* (New York: Penguin, 1987 [1974]). In this resonant "American" novel, the "errand" of the idealist American frontier hero (Ray Hicks), who has been utterly disillusioned by the America that is conducting the war in Vietnam ("You can't blame us too much. We didn't know who we were till we got here," his friend says. "We thought we were something else" [57]), is reduced to drug running against a decadent America symbolized by a corrupt FBI agent and his criminal deputies. In a deliberately staged symbolic reversal of the westward American narrative, which now moves from the Vietnamese East to the American West, Stone brings the American "adventure" of this contemporary Natty Bumppo to its end in the southern California desert, where, in a shoot-out, he comes to understand himself as a Vietcong doing battle with the massive American war machine:

> I'm the little man in the boonies now, he thought.
>
> The thing would be to have one of their SG mortars. He was conceiving a passionate hatred for the truck — its bulk and mass — and for the man who sat inside it.
>
> The right side for a change. (296)

The Rambo trilogy thus could be understood as an ideological effort to revise Stone's earlier parodic representation of the Leatherstocking-figure by making him the last American patriot: the saving remnant. As such, this alienated Rambo-figure becomes the fictional precursor of the emergent paramilitary movement that, adopting the imagery (minutemen, militia) of the American Revolution, represents the monolithic United States government as the betrayer of "America," and that figure's devastation of the town becomes the precursor of the type of violence enacted by the Oklahoma City bombing. For a brilliant analysis of the "negative interpellation" that determines this reversal (and of which Rambo is a proleptic instance), see Donald Pease, "Negative Interpellations: From Oklahoma City to the Trilling-Matthiessen Transmission," *boundary 2* 23 (spring 1996): 1–33.

24. For a powerful early cultural/psychological analysis of this perennial American archetype, see the chapter titled "The Metaphysics of Indian-hating," in Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1984), 144–51. It is from this chapter that Richard Drinnon draws the title of his inaugural cultural study of America's genocidal Westward expansionism, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

25. Santoli, *To Bear Any Burden,* xviii; hereafter cited in the text as *BAB.*

26. Reported by the *New York Times,* January 9, 1991.

27. George Bush to a group of state legislators, reported in *Newsweek* 117, March 11, 1991: "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all" (30). The phrase was omnipresent in the discourse of the Bush administration and of the media both before the American decision to go to war and after the war ended. See, for example, the issues of *Time* and *Newsweek* at that time. This post–Gulf War euphoria incumbent on the overcoming of the specter of Vietnam was not restricted to the media. For a representative "historical" version, see Mark Clodfelter, "Of Demons, Storms, and Thunder: A Preliminary Look at Vietnam's Impact on the Persian Gulf Air Campaign," *Looking Back on the Vietnam War: A 1990's Perspective on the Decisions, Combat, and Legacies,* ed. William Head and Lawrence E. Grinter (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 145–60.

28. For extended critiques of this negative representation of the emergence of national self-questioning in the Vietnam decade and after, see William V. Spanos, "*boundary 2* and the Polity of Interest: Humanism, the Center Elsewhere, and Power," in *On Humanism and the University I,* special issue of *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 and 13, no. 1 (spring/fall 1984): 173–214; Spanos, "Destruction and the Critique of Ideology: A Polemic Meditation on Marginal Discourse," in *Repetitions: The Postmodern Occasion in Literature and Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 277–313; and Spanos, *End of Education,* 243–44.

29. See Lauren Barritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 105. The latest version of this reactionary agenda to "forget" Vietnam in behalf of recuperating "our national pride" and the "promise" of America is articulated by the politically reformist American pragmatist Richard Rorty in his aptly titled *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-*

Century America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998): "One consequence of that disastrous war was a generation of Americans who suspected that our country was unachievable — that the war not only could never be forgiven, but had shown us to be a nation conceived in sin, and irredeemable. This suspicion lingers. As long as it does, and as long as the American Left remains incapable of national pride, our country will have only a cultural Left, not a political one" (38).

30. See William V. Spanos, "Rethinking 'Rethinking SUNY': The Costly Ideology Informing 'Cost Efficiency,' " *Crossings: A Counter-disciplinary Journal of Philosophical, Cultural, and Literary Studies* 1 (spring 1997): 164–77.

31. I am invoking here the rhetoric of Page duBois, *Torture and Truth: The New Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 1991). In this provocative but quite unevenly argued book, duBois attempts to show, by way of analyzing a number of classical Greek texts (including Plato's), the absolute complicity of Western truth discourse (the quest for the concealed) with the practice of torture (*basanos*). Her book provides historical textual evidence for my claim that Occidental ontology — its reification of being (to Being) and its representation of the ineffable truth of being in terms of a violently forced movement from darkness into light — finds its ultimate fulfillment in a willful practice of power epitomized by the phrase "search and destroy." Unfortunately, duBois's ideological agenda in this genealogical project is to implicate Martin Heidegger's "concept" of truth (*a-letheia*) with Nazi practice. As I understand it, Heidegger's "truth" (*a-letheia*) constitutes an effort to free itself from a certain Platonic impulse in post-Socratic thinking that would reduce being to *eidos* (one taken over and codified by the Roman *veritas*). Taking her point of departure from Victor Farias's *Heidegger et le nazisme* (1987), duBois, on the other hand, reads Heidegger's *a-letheia* as a continuation of Greek Platonism. Like many recent humanists who have grasped at the opportunity afforded by Farias's book to recuperate the ground humanism lost to postmodern theory since the Vietnam War, duBois thus misrepresents Heidegger's understanding of the relationship between thinking and political practice by viewing it within the traditionalist humanist problematic that restricts politics to the binary opposition between democracy and totalitarianism. This willful misreading of Heidegger's text is epitomized by duBois's failure to note that the Greek thinker Heidegger invokes above all to think being against a certain metaphysical Plato, the post-Socratics, and the Romans is the pre-Socratic Heraclitus: precisely the philosopher, according to duBois, whose thought, in opposition to the "totalitarianism" of Plato's, lends itself to democratic practice.

32. Following Hegel's modern interpreter Alexandre Kojève, Francis Fukuyama, in fact, antedates the end of history to the Enlightenment, specifically to the Battle of Jena (1806). It is a "developmentalist" reading that allows him to represent the seventy-year hegemony of communism as an ancillary agent of liberal democracy — a historical detour that, in its forceful immediacy ("at the time"), obscured the emergent larger historical pattern, retarding the recognition of the final triumph of liberal democracy: "The center of Kojève's teaching was the startling assertion that Hegel had been essentially right, and that world history, for all the twists and turns it had taken in subsequent years, had effectively ended in the year 1806.... [B]ehind this seemingly odd conclusion is the thought that the principles of liberty and equality that emerged from the French

Revolution, embodied in what Kojève called the modern 'universal and homogeneous state,' represented the end point of human ideological evolution beyond which it was impossible to progress further. Kojève was of course aware that there had been many bloody wars and revolutions in the years since 1806, but these he regarded as essentially an 'alignment of the provinces.' In other words, communism did not represent a *higher* stage than liberal democracy, it was part of the *same* stage of history that would eventually universalize the spread of liberty and equality to all parts of the world. Though the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions seemed like monumental events at the time, their only lasting effect would be to spread the already established principles of liberty and equality to formerly backward and oppressed peoples, and to force those countries of the developed world already living in accordance with such principles to implement them more completely" (Fukuyama, *End of History,* 66). The analogy with the fate of the actual history of the Vietnam War under the ruthless commanding eye of this Hegelian/Kojèvian historiographic perspective should not be overlooked.

33. Raymond Williams warned against this structuration of being quite some time ago in *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): "In the transition from Marx to Marxism, and then in the development of expository and didactic formulations, the words used in the original arguments were projected, first, as if they were precise concepts, and second, as if they were descriptive terms for observable 'areas' of social life. The main sense of the words in the original arguments had been relational, but the popularity of the terms tended to indicate either (a) relatively enclosed categories or (b) relatively enclosed areas of activity. These were then correlated either temporally (first material production, then consciousness, then politics and culture) or in effect, forcing the metaphor, spatially (visible and distinguishable 'levels' or 'layers' — politics and culture, then forms of consciousness, and so on down to the 'base'). The serious practical problems of method, which the original words had indicated, were then usually in effect bypassed by methods derived from a confidence, rooted in the popularity of the terms, in the relative enclosure of categories or areas expressed as 'the base,' 'the superstructure.'

"It is then ironic to remember that the force of Marx's original criticism had been mainly directed against the *separation* of 'areas' of thought and activity (as in the separation of consciousness from material production) and against the related evacuation of specific content — real human activities — by the imposition of abstract categories" (77–78).

But Williams's warning against this separation and spatialization of "conscious existence," which is especially applicable to the analysis of the Vietnam War and the advent of the New World Order, has not been heeded — perhaps because it has not been understood — either by Marxists or New Historicists.

34. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology, Part One, with Selections from Parts Two and Three, together with Marx's "Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy,"* ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 47. Of course, Marx's rhetoric in *The German Ideology* circulates around the base/superstructure nexus and thus contributed massively to the eventual sundering of this resonant oxymoron in the discourse of "Marxism." But his overdetermination of this rhetoric is motivated not by a Transcendental Signified, but by the historically specific circumstances of the German occasion, specifically the primacy of the (Young) Hegelians' "Word": their positing of

"consciousness" as external to and determinative of the "actual life-process" of men and women.

35. John Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). The quotation is from a review of *The Quiet American* by A. J. Liebling in the *New Yorker,* April 7, 1956, 148–54. Some sense of the utter blindness of American intellectuals at that time to the ideological implications of Greene's satirization of the American national identity in the figure of Alden Pyle can be gleaned from the flippantly vacuous style and content of the following passage from this review: "I should perhaps explain here [after interrupting his account of the 'main incident of the book' (the 'messy explosion in downtown Saigon') to tell his readers that he had decided to finish the novel in order to 'kill the two last deadly hours' of his flight to Idlewild so that he 'could give it to the hostess, a brunette from Rye, New York'] that the book begins with Pyle in the morgue. That is the big gag: A Quiet American. It then goes on to the events that led up to his arrival there. The trouble that starts immediately and keeps on happening is known technically as Who Cares?" (149). The massive pertinence that *The Quiet American* came to have in the United States, as its deepening involvement in Vietnam increasingly exposed the abyssal gap between its self-representation and its actual practice, constitutes a terrific irony that should not be overlooked at this post–Cold War conjuncture. The reviews of Greene's novel published by the American culture industry at the outset of America's intervention in Southeast Asia were intended to bury it. But this resonant text has risen from its grave to haunt its grave-diggers.

36. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 94–95.

37. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 279.

38. Herman Rapaport, "Vietnam: The Thousand Plateaus," in *The Sixties without Apologies,* ed. Sohnya Sayres et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 138.

39. Alan W. Watts's account of the Taoist *wu-wei* constitutes a remarkable verification of the analogy I am drawing: "[C]oupled with the doctrine of Tao is the teaching of *wu-wei,* the secret of mastering circumstances without asserting oneself against them.... Actually it is the principle underlying *ju-jutsu*..., the principle of yielding to an on-coming force in such a way that it is unable to harm you, and at the same time changing its direction by pushing it from behind instead of attempting to resist it from the front. Thus the skilled master of life never opposes things; he never yields to their full force and either pushes them slightly out of direct line or else moves them right round in the opposite direction without ever encountering their direct opposition. This is to say, he treats them positively; he changes them by acceptance, by taking them into his confidence, never by flat denial. Perhaps *wu-wei* can best be understood by contrast with its opposite, *yu-wei.* The character for *yu* is composed of two symbols — hand and moon — thus signifying the idea of clutching at the moon — as if it could be seized and possessed. But the moon eludes all attempts at grasping, and can never be held still in the sky anymore than circumstances can be prevented from changing by conscious striving. Therefore while *yu* is trying to

clutch what is elusive (and Life as Tao is essentially elusive) *wu* is not only *not* clutching but also the positive acceptance of elusiveness and change.... It is the principle of controlling things by going along with them, of mastery through adaptation" (*The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work, and Art in the Far East* [New York: Grove Press, 1958], 37). I am indebted to Jeannette McVicker for alerting me to this analogy: "In martial arts, the point is to anticipate your enemy's move, and *let it happen,* because it is your enemy who is expending his energy. You let his energy put him into a position of vulnerability so that you can thus take advantage of it — to 'fight without violence.' Americans interpreted the Vietnamese insurgents' mode of fighting the war as feminine, passive, and cowardly weakness; rather, it was a subtle harmonizing strategy of great insight that utilized nature and the earth all directed toward the 'goal' of letting the Americans defeat themselves through their arrogant indifference to the land (*Xa*) and disrespect for 'the Way' " (letter, July 7, 1998).

40. See Tom Englehardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

41. See the epigraph to this section from Martin Heidegger's "What Is Metaphysics?" trans. R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick, in *Existence and Being,* ed. Werner Brock (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1949), 336; see also *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 231–32 and 393ff. It has been one of my abiding concerns as a literary critic to draw attention to the appropriatability of Heidegger's distinction between the dread that has no thing and the fear that has some thing as its object to the project of tracing the genealogy of the privileged status of narrative in the Western literary tradition back to the foundation of the idea of the Occident and demonstrating its complicity with the imperial will to power over the Other. See chapter 1 above. Here, I am extending this restricted focus to include its appropriatability to the genealogy of the metanarratives privileged by the Occident in general and America in particular.

42. Caputo, *Rumor of War,* 107; hereafter cited in the text as *RW.*

43. O'Brien, *Going after Cacciato* (New York: Dell, 1989 [1978]), 240; hereafter cited in the text as *GC.*

44. As I suggested in chapter 2, the map, the sine qua non of the imperial project, is endemic to the anthropological (Enlightenment) phase of the ontotheological tradition. Not accidentally, an acute awareness on the part of the American Military Mission of the utter ineffectuality of the map was pervasive in the discourse of the Vietnam War. One of the most consciously articulated instances of this awareness is to be found in John M. Del Vecchio's Melvillian *The 13th Valley* (New York: Bantam, 1982). In this novel the incommensurability of the (Ahabian) narrative quest (to find and destroy an NVA headquarters and communications center) with the appended visual maps that represent its "progress" (toward the final catastrophe) becomes the structural principle of the narrative. Michael Herr's meditations on the Vietnam War in *Dispatches* are instigated by this destructive relation between the being of Vietnam and the imperial map: "If dead ground could come back and haunt you the way dead people do, they'd have been able to mark my map [of Vietnam under French rule] *current* and burn the ones they'd been using since '64, but count on it, nothing like that was going to happen. It was late '67 now, even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore; reading them was like trying to read

the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind" (1; see also 92–93).

45. Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 228–29; see also O'Brien, *Going after Cacciato,* 77.

46. See also Caputo, *Rumor of War,* 55.

47. Herr, *Dispatches,* 95.

48. Del Vecchio, *13th Valley,* 381.

49. Gustav Hasford, *The Short Timers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 73.

50. To retrieve my discussion of the peripatetic Herodotus in the preceding chapter, this decentering and demolecularizing strategy of invisibility practiced by the Vietnamese insurgents is proleptically theorized in his remarkable account of the bafflement and eventual withdrawal of Darius's more formidable invading Persian army due to the guerrilla tactics of the nomadic (barbarian) Scythians, who lived on the margins of the *oikoumene.* Herodotus prefaces this account in the following way: "The Scythians, however, though in most respects I do not admire them, have managed one thing, and that the most important in human affairs, better than anyone else on the face of the earth: I mean their own preservation. For such is their manner of life that no one who invades their country can escape destruction, and if they wish to avoid engaging with an enemy, that enemy cannot possibly come to grips with them. A people with fortified towns, living, as Scythians do, in wagons which they take with them wherever they go, accustomed, one and all, to fight on horseback with bows and arrows, and dependent for their food not on agriculture but upon their cattle: how can such a people fail to defeat the attempts of an invader not only to subdue them, but even to make contact with them?" (*The Histories,* trans. Aubrey de Selincourt and A. R. Burn [Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1972], 286). For an extended analysis of Herodotus's account of the Scythians' defeat of the invading Persian army that focuses on this baffling nomadic strategy, see the aptly titled chapter "The Hunter Hunted: Poros and Aporia," in François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History,* trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 34–60.

51. The American strategy of attrition (the body count) was nothing more than an allotrope, indeed, the fulfillment of the trope informing the traditional European concept of warfare — that is, the table, which, to be effective, must reduce the differential otherness of the Other to calculative quantity: "Once the [casualty] reports were filed, I brought Colonel Wheeler's scoreboard up to date. Covered with acetate and divided into vertical and horizontal columns, the board hung behind the executive officer's desk, in the wood-framed tent where he and the colonel made their headquarters. The vertical columns were headed, from left to right, KIA, WIA, DOW (died of wounds), NON-HOST, VC-KIA, WIA, and VC-POW. The horizontal columns were labeled with the numerical designations 1/3 for 1st Battalion. 3d Marines, 2/3 Battalion, and so forth. In the first four vertical columns were written the number of casualties a particular unit had suffered, in the last three the number it had inflicted on the enemy. After an action, I went into the colonel's quarters, erased the old figures and wrote in the new with a grease pencil. The colonel, an easy going man in most instances, was adamant about maintaining an accurate scoreboard: high-ranking

visitors from Danang and Saigon often dropped in unannounced to see how the regiment was performing. And the measures of a unit's performance in Vietnam were not the distances it had advanced or the numbers of victories it had won, but the number of enemy soldiers it had killed (the body count) and the proportion between that number and the number of its own dead (the kill ratio). The scoreboard thus allowed the colonel to keep track of the battalions and companies under his command and, quickly and crisply, to rattle off impressive figures to visiting dignitaries. My unsung task in that statistical war was to do the arithmetic. If I had been an agent of death as a platoon leader, as a staff officer I was death's bookkeeper" (Caputo, *Rumor of War,* 159–60).

52. Herr, *Dispatches,* 71.

53. John Duffet, *Against the Crime of Silence: Proceedings of the International War Crimes Tribunal,* with an introduction by Bertrand Russell and a preface by Noam Chomsky (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968). The American Mission did not, needless to say, represent this undiscriminating military initiative in terms of genocide. It felt, characteristically, that "saving Vietnam" from communist totalitarianism at any cost was logically justified by the universal principles of liberal democracy. Only when critics of the war such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell began referring to America's conduct of the war as genocidal did the "gap" between the ontological principles justifying the intervention and the indiscriminate violence of America's conduct of the war begin to manifest itself. It was only after these critics began comparing American aggression in Vietnam to Nazi genocide that the word came to assume a resonant significance in the debates over the question of the culpability of those conducting the war in Vietnam. (See, for example, General Telford Taylor, *Nuremberg and Vietnam: An American Tragedy* [Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970].) It was, I suggest, the specter of that terrible contradiction that brought the war to its shuddering end. And it is the disclosure of the relationship between the two that the official memory has tried to forget. It is this relationship that a posthumanist discourse has to remember.

54. Television interview, quoted in Emile de Antonio's documentary video, *The Day of the Pig* (1968). Later in the interview, in response to a question about the quality of the "Vietcong" soldier, Clark adds, "Oh, there's no question about it. They're willing to die readily, as all Orientals are. And their leaders will sacrifice them and we won't sacrifice ours." This typically grotesque racist/political view of the Asian Other was entirely shared by General Curtis Lemay: "Our every American instinct makes us want to jump in with both feet to get an unpleasant job over with as soon as possible. But traditional Oriental patience makes them willing to carry on the struggle into generation after generation if necessary. We're fighting a war over there with a commodity most precious to us and held far more cheaply by the enemy: the lives of men." What is especially telling is that this formulaic ideological relay was not restricted to politically reactionary militarists, then euphemistically called "hawks." It was also essential to the "liberal" discourse of all-too-many so-called liberal doves. Thus, for example, Tounsend Hoopes, the undersecretary of the Air Force who became a leading advocate of withdrawal after the Tet Offensive, wrote: "We believe the enemy can be forced to be 'reasonable,' i.e., to compromise or even capitulate, because we assume he wants to avoid pain, death, and material destruction. We assume that if these are inflicted on him with increasing severity,

then at some point in the process he will want to stop suffering. Ours is a plausible strategy — for those who are rich, who love life and fear pain. But happiness, wealth, and power are expectations that constitute a dimension far beyond the experience, and probably beyond the emotional comprehension, of the Asian poor." To this Noam Chomsky replies: "Hoopes does not tell us how he knows that the Asian poor do not love life or fear pain, or that happiness is probably beyond their emotional comprehension. But he does go on to explain how 'ideologues in Asia' make use of these characteristics of the Asian hordes. Their strategy is to convert 'Asia's capacity for endurance in suffering into an instrument for exploiting a basic vulnerability of the Christian West.' They do this by inviting the West 'to carry its strategic logic to the final conclusion, which is genocide....' At that point we hesitate, for, remembering Hitler and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we realize anew that genocide is a terrible burden to bear. Thus by their willingness to die, the Asian hordes, who do not love life, who fear no pain and cannot conceive of happiness, exploit our basic weakness — our Christian values which make us reluctant to bear the burden of genocide, the final conclusion of our strategic logic. Is it really possible to read these passages without being stunned by their crudity and callousness?" ("On War Crimes," in *At War with Asia* [New York: Pantheon, 1970], 298–99).

55. Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 433.

56. Herr, *Dispatches,* 106–7. Herr is acutely conscious of both the polyvalent leveling power of the Mission's "American" narrative and its contradictory consequences: the terrible absurdity of its beginning-middle-end logic. His account of what the American Mission and the culture industry in the United States represented as a Dien Bien Phu overlaid with the heroic image of the Alamo and called "The Battle of Khe Sanh" or "The Siege of Khe Sanh" ends as follows: "A token American force was kept at Khe Sanh for the next month, and the Marines went back to patrolling the hills, as they had done a year before. A great many people wanted to know how the Khe Sanh Combat Base could have been the Western Anchor of our Defense [as General Westmoreland has narrativized the occasion] one month and a worthless piece of ground the next, and they were simply told that the situation had changed. A lot of people suspected that some kind of secret deal had been made with the North; activity along the DMZ all but stopped after Khe Sanh was abandoned. The Mission called it a victory, and General Westmoreland said that it had been 'a Dien Bien Phu in reverse' " (163). I made this point about the narrative-obsessed American structure of consciousness in an essay written during the Vietnam War titled "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination," *boundary 2* 1, no. 1 (fall 1972): 147–68; reprinted in *Repetitions,* 13–49, and in *Early Postmodernism: Foundational Essays,* ed. Paul Bové (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 17–39. There, I invoked the representation by the then secretary of defense in the Nixon administration, Melvin Laird, of the well-"rehearsed" (*New York Times*) and "perfectly executed" (*Time*) American rescue mission staged against the Son Tay prisoner of war camp in North Vietnam, which ended in finding no one there: "Despite this mockery 'of our contrived finalities' [Iris Murdoch], these revelatory glimpses into the horror, the secretary,... like the detective in his "Retrospective,' was driven to declare reiteratively in the aftermath that the Son Tay affair was a successfully com-

pleted operation. It is this metamorphosis of the absurd into manageable object, into fulfilled objective, into an accomplishment — this deus ex machina, as it were — that is especially revealing. For the obvious incommensurability between the assertion of successful completion and the absurd and dreadful non-end constitutes a measure of the intensity of the need that the power complex and the people that depend on it feel for definite conclusions. Returning to the ontological level, it is a measure of modern Western man's inscribed need *to take hold of the Nothing* that, despite or perhaps because of his technic, is crowding in on him" (165).

57. Frank Lentricchia, *Ariel and the Police: Michel Foucault, William James, Wallace Stevens* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 20–21.

58. This postmodern literary genre, I suggest, was, in part, instigated by the Vietnam War or related modern wars bearing witness to the wholesale slaughter of the "criminal" Others unleased in the name of the West's self-appointed task to win their hearts and minds.

59. See especially Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writing in Cultural Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); and Pease, "New Americanists: Revisionary Interventions in the Canon," in Pease, ed., *New Americanists,* a special issue of *boundary* 2 17 (spring 1990): 1–37.

60. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or The Whale,* ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library), 184. Melville's insight into this productive relay between a meta-physical ontology that reduces "all" to one (*monos*) and an obliterating practice taking the form of a technological weapon that is identified metaphorically with the human heart (see the passage below from Philip Caputo's *Rumor of War*) is not accidental. This is made clear by the fact that Melville repeats and amplifies this insight later in the chapter: "Ahab's full lunacy subsided not, but deepeningly contracted; like the unabated Hudson, when that noble Northman flows narrowly, but unfathomably through the Highland gorge. But, as in his narrow-flowing monomania, not one jot of Ahab's broad madness had been left behind; so in that broad madness, not one jot of his great natural intellect had perished. That before living agent, now became the living instrument. If such a furious trope may stand, his special lunacy stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its concentrated cannon upon its own mad mark; so that far from having lost his strength, Ahab, to that one end, did now possess a thousand fold more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any one reasonable object" (185). For a full amplification of this reading of Melville's novel, see William V. Spanos, *The Errant Art of* Moby-Dick: *The Canon, the Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995). In working out the continuity of American history from the Puritans' ontologically justified New Adamic errand in the wilderness through the devastating expansionism legitimated by Manifest Destiny to the "imperial"/genocidal practice of "America" in Vietnam, I have relied heavily on Sacvan Bercovitch's important, if also disablingly flawed, book, *The American Jeremiad;* John Hellman's *American Myth,* which extends Bercovitch's analysis of American cultural history to the Vietnam period; and Richard Drinnon, *Facing West.*

61. See also 301. That this symptomatic testimony is at the heart of Caputo's

memoir is made clear by his summation of its progress in the prologue: "At times, the comradeship that was the war's only redeeming quality caused some of its worst crimes — acts of retribution for friends who had been killed. Some men could not withstand the stress of guerrilla-fighting: the hair-trigger alertness constantly demanded of them, the feeling that the enemy was everywhere, the inability to distinguish civilians from combatants created emotional pressures which built to such a point that a trivial provocation could make these men explode with the blind destructiveness of a mortar shell" (xix).

62. The violence inflicted on the truth in the name of (American) truth by the military court martial is epitomized by the ironies informing the defense strategy of Caputo's lawyer:

> "I don't want you to get bitter. I want you to do well on the stand today. I can tell you that I admire you for the way you've borne up under all this. Don't mess it up now. Really, I would've cracked long ago."
>
> "Well, I don't break, Jim. That's one thing I'm not going to do. I broke once and I'm never going to break again."
>
> "Hell, when did you ever break?"
>
> "That night. The night I sent those guys out there. I just cracked. I couldn't take it anymore. I was frustrated as hell and scared. If I hadn't broken, I would've never sent those guys out."
>
> "Oh, that. We've been over that a dozen times. No drama, okay? This is the real world. We've been over that, over and over. You told them to capture those Vietnamese and to kill them if they had to. You didn't order an assassination. That's what you'll say on the stand and you'll say it because it's the truth." (*Rumor of War,* 307)

63. Herr, *Dispatches,* 2.

64. The specter of the genocide of the natives of North America and of the abduction and enslavement of millions of Africans has, of course, haunted the Occidental epistemic memory ever since the period of the Enlightenment, the period in which the achievement of global domination by the West is represented simultaneously as its moral triumph. But these specters have been kept at bay by the West's (especially America's) interpretation of these horrors as aberrations in the epistemic logic of the Occident that have been corrected. Similarly, it could be said that the epistemic break I am attributing to the period of the Vietnam War, in fact, occurred earlier in this century. I am referring to World War II, when Nazi Germany called the differential nothing that allegedly threatened the identity and peace of Europe "the Jews" and, in the name of Europe and according to its logic, undertook "the final solution": the systematic extermination of this Other — spectral — people. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has said: "In the Auschwitz apocalypse, it was nothing less than the West, in its essence, that revealed itself — and that continues, ever since to reveal itself" (*Heidegger, Art and Politics,* trans. Chris Turner [London: Blackwell, 1990], 35). But because the other Western democratic nations — Great Britain, France, the United States — were allied against fascist Germany in what they represented as a just war being fought in the name of the fundamentally benign principles of Western civilization, this epochal revelation was occluded until it exploded into view as unmistakable in the course of the Vietnam War, that is, when the logic of liberal democracy ended in a genocidal practice that, according to many serious

thinkers at the time, was *in essence* the same as the genocidal practice enabled by the logic of German Nazism.

65. Fukuyama, *End of History,* 45. It is not my concern in this essay to specify what the end-of-history discourse means by "liberal democracy." It will suffice, paraphrasing Fukuyama's representative definition, that it involves the integral relationship between the "liberal" rational drive to satisfy material desires (capitalism) and the "aristocratic" emotional drive for recognition (*thymos*) (a relationship in which Fukuyama would give more weight to the aristocratic *megalothymia* in order to counter the enervating effect of liberal equalitarian *isothymia*) and that this definition itself poses problems that preclude easy assent. What does concern me immediately — in the context of my retrieval of the history of America's intervention in Vietnam — is where Fukuyama locates this political formation: namely, at a moment of modern history that, in being represented as "the end of the Cold War" or the "triumph of liberal democracy over communism," occludes a history the witness of which would destroy — disclose the delegitimating aporia in — such a triumphal representation.

66. I am thinking of Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), in which he foregrounds the literal practice of this tactic of forgetful remembering in communist Czechoslovakia enabled by a totalizing Universal History: "In February 1948, Communist leader Klement Gottwald stepped out on the balcony of a Baroque palace in Prague to address the hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens packed into Old Town Square. It was a crucial moment in Czech history — a fateful moment of the kind that occurs once or twice in a millennium.

"Gottwald was flanked by his comrades, with Clementis standing next to him. There were snow flurries, it was cold, and Gottwald was bareheaded. The solicitous Clementis took off his own fur cap and set it on Gottwald's head.

"The Party propaganda section put out hundreds of thousands of copies of a photograph of that balcony with Gottwald, a fur cap on his head and comrades at his side, speaking to the nation. On that balcony the history of Communist Czechoslovakia was born. Every child knew that photograph from posters, schoolbooks, and museums.

"Four years later Clementis was charged with treason and hanged. The propaganda section immediately airbrushed him out of history and, obviously, out of all the photographs as well. Ever since, Gottwald has stood on the balcony alone. Where Clementis once stood, there is only bare palace wall. All that remains of Clementis is the cap on Gottwald's head" (1).

67. Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

68. Herr, *Dispatches,* 219.

69. Ibid., 50. "Straight history, auto-revised history, history without handles, for all the books and articles and white papers, all the talk and the miles of film, something wasn't answered, it wasn't even asked. We were back-grounded, deep, but when the background started sliding forward not a single life was saved by the information. The thing had transmitted too much energy, it heated up too hot, hiding low under the fact-figure crossfire there was a secret history, and not a lot of people felt like running in there to bring it out" (ibid., 49–50).