POSTIMPERIAL NARRATIVE:
PAUL AUSTER, DON DELILLO, AND TIM O'BRIEN

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I
Introduction: "Homo Americanensis Politicus Paranoicus" 1-20

Chapter 2
Don DeLillo: A Paranoid "Counterhistory" 21-83

Chapter 3
Paul Auster: A "Music of Chance" 84-132

Chapter 4
Tim O'Brien: An Unending Narrative "March" of Postimperial America 133-182

Chapter 5
Conclusion: Postmodern or Postimperial? 183-206

Bibliography 207-223

Chapter 1

Introduction: "Homo Americanensis Politicus Paranoicus"[1]

In the beginning all the World was America.

--John Locke[2]

I will argue in this dissertation that, contrary to a widely accepted understanding that postmodernism is a subversive cultural practice meant to undermine the dominant conventions and ideologies, postmodern American fiction has a tendency to reaffirm the traditional American cultural imagination. To explore the persistence of cultural tradition in postmodern American fiction, I will discuss the works of three contemporary novelists: Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, and Tim O'Brien. Writing in an age of the "postmodern condition," these writers have often been acclaimed for undermining traditional American cultural conventions, particularly by blurring the boundaries between fiction and history, the imaginary and the real, the past and the present, and the personal and the communal. Weaving into their fictional narratives complex cultural moments selectively culled from American history, they critically represent the traditional American ideals of culture, history, nature, nation, and the self. I will argue, however, that their subversive strategies are recontained by the same cultural tradition they attempt to undermine. Their exorbitant use of the cultural tropes and ideals produced and cherished by that tradition, such as the notion of individual freedom and democracy, the idea of the frontier as a unique American space, the

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[1] Walker Percy, Love in the Ruins (New York: Ivy Books, 1989) 316.

[2] John Locke. Quoted in Ellen Meiksins Wood, The Origin of Capitalism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999) 89.

idea of an errand into the wilderness, and various apocalyptic sentiments, returns these postmodern writers to affirmation rather subversion.

Neither of the "two clearly opposed 'camps' in the postmodern wars" (Hutcheon 17) have paid much attention to the relationship between postmodernism and American cultural heritages. They have focused either on the socio-economic relationship between postmodernism and post-industrial capitalism or on the aesthetic and philosophical achievements of postmodernism. To unsympathetic Marxist critics, postmodernism is an inevitable outcome of "late capitalism" or "post-Fordism." Fredric Jameson, for example, contends that postmodernism is "the cultural logic of late capitalism," which suppresses our historical consciousness (Postmodernism 25). David Harvey also maintains that the need of post-Fordist capitalism to acquire a more "flexible accumulation" has given birth to the postmodern "structure of feeling" that is characterized by "fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or 'totalizing' discourse" (Condition 9, 47). Non-Marxist advocates, on the other hand, have maintained that postmodernism is a cultural critique of modernism's presumably totalitarian metanarratives. In The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,[3] the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard asks us to declare "a war on totality" in order to "activate the differences" (82). Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern fiction or what she calls postmodern "historiographic metafiction" critically "de-naturalizes" "the convention and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces" by using an ironic strategy of "complicitous critique," which "at once inscribes and subverts" those forces (11).

[3] As Lyotard himself makes clear, this foundational book on postmodernism/postmodernity "is a report on knowledge in the most highly developed societies" (xxv). Of course, the "most highly developed societies" means the ones in North America, or more specifically, America. His claims I quote are from the appendix to the book entitled "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" I believe this appendix is as important as the main text for understanding postmodernism in "the most highly developed societies."

Few attempts have been made to understand postmodernism in the context of the American cultural imagination. According to Kaplan and John Carlos Rowe, recent trends in American Studies like postcolonial studies and the "internal colonization thesis" often repeat the traditional "paradigm of denial" or even reinforce the thesis of American exceptionalism by overlooking the "American imperial heritage" in focusing exclusively on the issue of "internal colonization" of race, gender, and class minorities (Kaplan 3; Rowe 6). The same myopic tendency can be seen in the postmodern debates. Leaving the American cultural tradition out of the exploration of postmodernism/postmodernity, critics have often dehistoricized American-led postmodern cultures. For a better understanding of American postmodern fiction, we thus need to examine how the traditional American cultural imagination is reintroduced into and reaffirmed by it.

The traditional American cultural imagination has developed an idea of freedom in terms of the spacious land of the New World, privileging the logic of spatial expansion over historical consciousness. As often interpreted by cultural historians, America was founded as an attempt to escape from corrupted (old European) history. From John Winthrop's "city on a hill" to contemporary media's portrayal of space explorations, American culture has indeed focused more often on the spatial imagination than on historical consciousness. As Charles Olson argues, spatial imagination has thus become a cultural episteme of American civilization: "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America..." (11). Or, as Brian Jarvis maintains in his Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture, "always the land itself loomed large in the imagination of America" (1). According to Jarvis, we need to recognize

> the central role that geography plays in the American imagination .... Many of the key words in the discourses of American history and definitions of that nebulous

> entity referred to as 'national identity' are geocentric: the Frontier, the Wilderness, the Garden, the Land of Plenty, the Wild West, the Small Town, the Big City, the Open Road. The geographical monumentality of the New World has inspired feelings of wonder and terror. The discursive stratagems central to the traditions of representing space have been consistently characterized by a predilection for hyperbole, an excess that constitutes a polemical impersonation of the sheer scale of New World topography. The problematics and the promise of space lie at the heart of cultural practices through the colonial, revolutionary, romantic and modern eras. (6)

Hence it is not surprising when Walt Whitman, the democratic American poet, imagined American cultural ideals in terms of geographical metaphors. In his "Facing West from California's Shores," which could be read as a contemplative addendum to his more famous "Passage to India," for example, the Whitmanesque persona is looking afar across the Pacific from the West Coast, dreaming "the circle almost circled":

> Facing west from California's shores,
> Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,
> I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migration, look afar,
> Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled;
> For starting westward from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmere,
> From Asia, from the north, from the God, the sage, and the hero,
> From the south, from the flowery peninsula and the spice islands,
> Long having wander'd since, round the earth having wander'd,
> Now I face home again, very pleas'd and joyous,
> (But where is what I started for so long ago?
> And why is it yet unfound?) (266-7)

To describe this focus on space in the collective American imagination, Wai-chee Dimock in Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism argues in a similar yet more critical vein that what she calls the "spatialization of time" has contributed to the expansionist discourses of America, particularly the discourses of Manifest Destiny, which presuppose an indefinite putting off of the "imperial fate" of "temporal decline" by a unique

"subordination of time to space" (15).[4] I would call this cultural imagination the American expansionist imagination, which is not necessarily coterminous with the historical expansion that might be dubbed American expansionism. Though a close interdependence between these two realms cannot be denied, the American expansionist imagination has been working more on a cultural level, or more correctly, in a mythical dimension from which it has repeatedly recreated American national identity for the collective (un)consciousness of the American people. What Jarvis means by "hyperbole" or "excess" must be related to the ideological aspect of this American expansionist imagination rather than to the historical expansion of American territory and power per se.

Indeed, space has been a unique problematic for self-fashioning of American identity. Thus a genealogy of American culture can be drawn on the basis of its unique tropes of spatial logic: John Winthrop's "City on the Hill," Samuel Danforth's "Errand into the

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[4] This "spatialization of time" is also important for its implication that the American expansionist imagination is closely related to capitalism that has best flourished in modern America. George Lukács, from whom Dimock borrows the notion of the "spatialization of time," explains the excessive emphasis on space as a prototypical characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. In History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, he discusses the issue of capitalist "reification" (87), which inevitably result from the "universality of the commodity form" (88). In a similar way as Marx Weber in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism does for a portrayal of the rationalizing spirit of capitalism, which, according to him, is based on the "Protestant ethic," Lukács maintains that the capitalist "principle of rationalization" (88) leads to degradation of "time to the dimension of space":

> As labour is progressively rationalized and mechanized [man's] lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative. The contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man's consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e. a perfectly closed system, must likewise transform the basic categories of man's immediate attitude to the world: it reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space.
>
> Marx puts it thus: "Through the subordination of man to the machine the situation arises in which men are effaced by their labour.... Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at the most the incarnation of time. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything: hour for hour, day for day...."
>
> Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objective 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space. (89-90)

Wilderness," Jefferson's "the eye [that] composes itself" in the sublime landscape of the State of Virginia, Thoreau's "Walking," Emerson's "transparent eyeball," John O'Sullivan's "Manifest Destiny," Frederick Jackson Turner's "end of the frontier" thesis, John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier"; outer space as the final frontier in contemporary American media cultures; and most recently, the postmodern hyperspace and a sudden explosion of geography discourses in contemporary cultural studies. This exorbitant emphasis on space is still much alive in American culture, both in popular and academic realms. Thus Captain James T. Kirk (Jean-Luc Picard) of the Enterprise sonorously declares in the beginning of each Star Trek episode, which is repeatedly rerun on the glossy American TV screens: "Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its 5-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before!" We find a more serious consideration of the spatial dimension in the works of contemporary critics of postmodernism/postmodernity, particularly in the works by those who are presumably on the left. Henri Lefebvre is one of the earliest thinkers who have focused on the issue of space in the study of the urban and the quotidian. Harvey has focused on the relationship between urban space and capital accumulation. And Jameson emphasizes the importance of the "postmodern cultural space" in understanding the contemporary world.

Edward W. Soja is probably the most conspicuous theorist claiming from the left that cultural studies have suppressed the dimension of space. In Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory, Soja points out that the predominance of history/historicism has contributed to this regrettable lack of attention to space in cultural studies. His critique is particularly leveled at nineteenth-century historicism, but his suggestion of "postmodern critical human geography" is a critical attempt to explore space-

oriented contemporary American cultures. Relying on theories of space/power/ knowledge presented by Lefebvre and Michel Foucault, he proposes a "spatialization of critical thought" (23) that would help us free ourselves from the "despatialization of social theory" (38). His goal is to "reassert" the problematic of space/geography into contemporary human and social sciences.

This theoretical reclamation of the spatial dimension is understandable given the fact that one major concern for the materialist critique has been to explore the flexible movement of capital, which is closely related to geographical expansion(s). This effort to reassert the dimension of space into the materialist/Marxist paradigm, however, could be a Trojan horse for the materialist critique or Marxism because postmodern culture itself has a strong thrust of (re)spatializing culture and society. This is ironic because materialist/Marxist critique, which has often been blamed for its obsession with historical imagination, is now making a paradigm shift away from it by conforming to an injunction of contemporary culture that is endlessly encouraging us to forget history. Thus a theory apparently most critical of the prevalence of postmodernism/postmodernity is subsuming itself to the cultural logic of postmodernism/postmodernity.

This ironic "resurgence of the geographical imagination" (Soja 45) by theorists from the left gives us an insight into the persistent role of the spatial imagination in American cultural history because it reveals how critical discourses can also be uncritically recontained by the traditional cultural episteme of America. A country that started with an attempt to escape from history has now reached an acme of its cultural ideal, which is to realize a time-less, utopian space of "city on a hill." Now both the dominant culture and its critical theories work together for contributing to the predominance of space that has been consecrated by the

American cultural tradition. As Whitman's persona sings in "Facing West from California's Shores," the American cultural circle seems indeed to be "almost circled" in the age of postmodernity.

As the last lines of Whitman's poem, "(But where is what I started for so long ago?/ And why is it yet unfound?)," which are ironically emphasized by parentheses, reveal, this unique geographical imagination of America has not always reached a safe home at the end of its journey to an origin/end. The emphasis on space has thus often brewed a certain type of paranoia and apocalypticism, especially when its logic of spatial expansion encountered an (imagined) exhaustion or constriction of free space. As Norman Mailer has suggested in Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery, America "was built on the idea of the expansive imagination of people who kept dreaming about the lands to the west," and thus when "the frontier was finally closed, [the American] imagination inevitably turned into paranoia" (723). Particularly in moments of socio-cultural crisis that are encountered by the collective American imagination, this spatial imagination has transformed itself into a cultural paranoia or apocalypticism.

This paranoia or cultural apocalypticism has in fact a deeper root in what in Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 Richard Slotkin calls "Puritan anxiety" (40) or "the anxiety of the emigration trauma" (118), by which he means the cultural anxiety that the first colonists felt "about having broken those ties of blood, custom, fealty, obligation, and religion that bound them to England" (40). This original cultural anxiety, which is similar to "separation anxiety" in child psychology, has produced two interrelated phenomena: the notion of the "errand into the wilderness" that was emphasized by the Puritans to justify their emigration from England and to "quiet the inner

voice that called them back to England" (41); and a unique Puritan apocalyptic sentiment that imagined an "advent of judgment" (105) by God. Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, A True History of Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, for example, reveals "ambivalent feelings of desire (for emigration) and guilt (for "deserting" England) – feelings that undergulf the earlier writings – by casting her emigration [into the Indian country] as an unwilling captivity to heathens [Indians] and not as a crusader's quest but as a sinner's trial and judgment" (107-8). Thus the paranoia and apocalypse caused by an (imagined) spatial constriction could be a déjà vu of the apocalyptic sentiment shared by the early Puritans, which has repeatedly resurfaced to the collective American cultural imagination.

But what is more important about American anxiety/paranoia/apocalypticism is that they have often worked as a regenerative cultural device to reawaken the collective mind of the American people. According to Richard Hofstadter in The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays, American culture, particularly its political culture, has invented a "paranoid style" to solve the problems caused by "national anxiety." Characterized by being "overheated, overconspicuous, overaggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic in expression" and based on "systemized delusions of persecution and of one's own greatness," this paranoid style has restablized American culture in moments of crisis (4). According to Hofstadter, anti-Masonry, Populism, McCarthyism, and various conspiracy theories are examples of this paranoid style that has functioned as a wakeup call both for its critics and for its advocates. Sacvan Bercovitch in The American Jeremiad maintains in a similar way that the "American jeremiad" narrative has worked as a unique discursive device for cultural regeneration, which has awakened the collective American consciousness when it was faced with the lost "errand into the wilderness" (11). The American cultural imagination has thus cultivated a unique

brand of cultural paranoia because of its excessive reliance on the spatial logic, a somewhat megalomaniacal response to the (imaginary) threats to the expansionist realm of freedom, which in turn works ironically as a regenerative strategy by reconfirming the cultural ideals and values of America.

I want to claim in this dissertation that a similar tendency can be found in the works of the postmodern writers I will discuss. By reintroducing the logic of spatial expansion/ constriction and the cultural apocalypticism in a more universalized way, the postmodern aesthetic of Auster, DeLillo, and O'Brien revitalizes the traditional American ideals, values, and anxieties, and provides an imaginary "elsewhere" for the disoriented individual/national self of postmodern America. As often pointed out by critics, they are highly critical of the cultural legacies of American empire. Their critical desires, however, work within a continuum of the American cultural imagination that cannot be separated from the expansionist imagination.

DeLillo in White Noise defines contemporary America as a pseudo-fascist society dominated by the overwhelming power of images, consumerism, and the nebulous masses. Nevertheless, or rather naturally, he revitalizes through a creative use of paranoia/apocalypse and conspiracy theories the traditional American ideals of democracy, which are based on the transcendental ideals of the individual self. Particularly his redefinition of the novel as a "counterhistory" enables him to re-present the live voices of the common people as Whitman dreamed in his democratic poems of/on America. To counter the culture of the "death of the individual" in postmodern America, DeLillo reveals his democratic concern for the singularity of each and every moment of the common people. Auster uses the wild logic of

chance to represent the cultural history of America, but he still dampens his own critical desire with an obsessive recycling of the traditional American cultural tropes and episodes. Moreover, he at least formally replicates the expansionist imagination by giving an almost imperial authority to Lady Chance in a way similar to what early Puritans and the nineteenth-century intellectuals often attributed to the graceful Providence of God or to the universal law of civilization. As a Vietnam veteran writer, Tim O'Brien is highly critical of the imperial desires and practices undertaken by the American establishment. Yet again, he is deeply saturated by the dominant cultural ideologies that emphasize the transcendental innocence of American intention with regard to its imperial adventures and the consecrated ideal of the small-town America as a communal "city on a hill."

Concerning the constriction of linguistico-psychological as well as socio-cultural spaces, Richard Poirier argues in A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature that a major cultural mission of the canonical American writers has been to create "an imaginary environment" or a "world elsewhere (6-7) for the "ideal national self" or the "expansive character" of America (3-4). In the postmodern aesthetic of Auster, DeLillo, and O'Brien, I will argue, this "elsewhere" is expanded more widely and also develops into what I would call "postmodern orientalism," though it is not as triumphant as the earlier orientalist attitudes. Boundaries between history and the novel, fact and fiction, past and present, and the individual and the communal are utterly dissolved into an ever-expanding narrative web of contingencies, coincidences, and chances in their postmodern novels. The expanded postmodern "elsewhere" created by these writers provides an imaginary elbow room for their protagonists, who often suffer physical, psychological, or cultural constriction, or who are, simply, disoriented and thus paranoid.

Bill Gray, a "lost man of letters" in DeLillo's Mao II, is a typical paranoid self. He confesses to Brita Nilsson, a photographer documenting "missing" writers, that the future belongs not to novelists but to terrorists. The loss of the traditional cultural mission as a novelist makes this latter-day man of culture experience a unique claustrophobia combined with "self-exaggeration": "The only private language I know is self-exaggeration. ... I exaggerate the pain of writing, the pain of solitude, the failure, the rage, the confusion, the helplessness, the fear, the humiliation. The narrower the boundaries of my life, the more I exaggerate myself" (37). As John Whalen-Bridge points out, this paranoid self attempting to survive its own "shrinking" is a prototype of the traditional American cultural self: "Unconditioned existence, in which one can become like Emerson's 'transparent eyeball,' is often discussed as the essence of American selfhood.... Even if the American expectation of limitless possibilities has long been on a crash course with itself, we are still faced with a variation on the same old theme: the limitless individual is trapped within a shrinking, oppressive world" (171). Trapped in this "shrinking" space, DeLillo's "men in small rooms" attempt escape: Bill Gray enters the global world of terrorism after he stops revising his novel in this dark room: Jack Gladney in White Noise indulges himself in the continuing appeal of fascist ideology or in excessive shopping sprees in order to overcome his fear of death; and Lee Harvey Oswald in Libra makes a self-imposed history-making journey of expatriation and repatriation, which ends up with his assassination of John F. Kennedy and his own assassination by Jack Ruby while he is watching his own death on TV cameras.

Once called "Mr. Paranoia," DeLillo writes a "counterhistory" against the shrinking space by using a "poetics of paranoia." The prosody of "poetics of paranoia" is to connect anything to everything, allowing the readers to enter a mysterious narrative web of paranoia

and conspiracy freed from the constraining realities. In Underworld, for example, the red spots on Gorbachev's forehead and the scars of a baseball are semantically connected, an American ball game and a Soviet nuclear experiment are cosmically related, and the number 13 is a crucial paranoid signifier that weaves complex narrative elements into an unending narrative web of counterhistory. Through his poetics of reconnection, DeLillo excavates the singular undercurrents of contemporary American society, particularly those of the common people that have been suppressed by the unofficial as well as official histories.

Contrary to Walter Benjamin's prophecy of the disappearance of aura in the age of mechanically reproduced images, DeLillo discovers a postmodern aura hidden in and on the disenchanted surfaces of contemporary American culture. As we can see in the episode of the "most photographed barn in America" in White Noise, photographed images of a barn not only replace the "real" barn but also "reinforce[] the aura," or the "American magic and dread" (13-9). DeLillo's representation of a "postmodern sunset" in the same novel even reminds us of the Romantic sublime. Supermarkets, signboards, bookstores, highways, and motels are also represented as American places where the postmodern aura resides. DeLillo's creative capture of postmodern aura is most conspicuously ritualized in the Trinitarian form of TV commercials such as "MasterCard, Visa, American Express," which is portrayed as a pseudo-religious chant for the God of Capital (White Noise 100). While DeLillo himself does not subscribe to the aura of the postmodern God of Capital, he still seems to persuade us to have a glimpse of the seeds of redemption through the flimsy epiphanies revealed on the surface of images.

Auster's postmodern anti-detective novels use a wild out-of-the-blue logic, or the "music of chance," in order to deconstruct the traditional narrative conventions and create a

postmodern "elsewhere" of chances, contingencies, and coincidences freed from ideological, cultural, or historical restrictions. In Auster's uncanny "Poe-land" or "Neverland," "anything is possible" and "everything connects" (Moon Palace 14, 105). Auster's narrative logic thus "wanders aimlessly" in an "inexhaustible space [or in] a labyrinth of endless steps," only to prove the fact that "nothing is real except chance" (New York Trilogy 3-4). His characters, like Whitman's somnambulist persona or Jameson's postmodern "pure material signifiers," freely roam in or even "levitate" over Manhattan, New England, the deserts of Utah or New Mexico, or an imaginary Timbuktu. Thus at least in terms of formal logic of chance that wildly expands its narrative imperium, Auster replicates what I call the American expansionist imagination.

Auster's imagining of Poe-land or Neverland, however, is not simply a nihilistic escape from American society. It raises a socio-cultural critique of American values such as the "perils of consumerism" (Timbuktu 64). This critique is often expressed in an "ascetic quest" or a "militant refusal to take any action at all." Marco Stanley Fogg in Moon Palace, for example, attempts to raise nihilism "to the level of an aesthetic proposition" and "turn[s] [his] life into a work of art" by voluntarily starving in Central Park (20-1). Anna Blume in In the Country of Last Things desperately wanders through an Orwellian, post-historical city of "last things," writing a doomed but also critically inspiring letter to an outside reader. And Mr. Bones, the dog-protagonist of Timbuktu, travels through New England, suffering various masochistic experiences that reflect the Godlessness of contemporary American society. This ascetic quest develops in Leviathan into a more violent environmental terrorism. Benjamin Sachs, a prototypical Austerian writer-as-protagonist, suddenly abandons writing and gets "ready to march out into the wilderness and spread the word, ready to begin all over again,"

just as the early Puritan minister Samuel Danforth preached in "Errand into the Wilderness" (256). In order to reawaken the American people to their forgotten Thoreauvian quest for non-materialist freedom, Benjamin Sachs, alias the "Phantom of Liberty," sets bombs in replicas of the Statue of Liberty, reminding us of the paranoid cultural critique by the "Unabomber."

In O'Brien's revisionist anti-Vietnam War novels, the reader can observe how an American imperial mission goes wrong in the rainy Asian wilderness. Caught within the boundaries of American "imperial overstretch," O'Brien's soldiers dream of escaping to the glorious Paris at the end of World War II (Going After Cacciato), to infantile past memories of the Midwest (Northern Light), or to non-American places such as Canada, Switzerland, Cuba, or Fiji (The Things They Carried and other novels). O'Brien's soldiers, however, are always recontained by a circular ideological web of American nationalism, as we can see in his pseudo-autobiographical protagonists' repeated surrender to the draft notice or to the small-town, middle-class American values of family, community, courage, and masculinity.

A Puritan notion of the uncanny and unknowable "Indian Country," or the "swamp" wilderness, is also revived in O'Brien's Vietnam wilderness:

> The countryside seemed spooky.... 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. ... 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. (Things 229)

In this "Indian Country," disoriented American soldiers march aimlessly but endlessly: "it was just the endless march ... without purpose, nothing won or lost. They marched for the

sake of the march" with "no sense of strategy or mission" (Things 15). We can interpret this disoriented yet endless march as a critique of American imperialism. This critique, however, is not immune from the traditional American way of looking at "Other" cultures because it is also based on a reaffirmation of the traditional American imagination that emphasizes the cultural binaries such as the "city on a hill" versus the dark "Indian Country," an orientalist signifier that was also used for Vietnam by American soldiers. This ironical recontainment complicates his critique of the Vietnam War. To explore the indelible legacies bequeathed to O'Brien by the traditional American cultural imagination, I will compare his pseudo-autobiographical novels with the Puritan narratives of the "Indian Wars," particularly with the narratives of King Philip's War written by Mary Rowlandson and other early Puritans who believed that America was founded to realize the "errand into the wilderness" under God's Providence.

The protagonists in Auster, DeLillo, and O'Brien are also threatened by a kind of "endism" or cultural apocalypticism: an end of history or of history writing, an end of the novelistic narrative or of writing in general, an imminent catastrophe of the world or of the American empire of liberty, and an end to the consecrated ideals of individualism as the essential basis of American freedom and democracy. This endism is often expressed in a paradoxical form of narrative about the end of narrative itself. As Peter Brooks points out, presupposing an end is part of the desire to defer the end of narrative (102-3). Or, one could say, the end of narrative is used as a regenerative narrative/cultural device. Narrativizing the end has been a major cultural strategy for American narrative from the Puritan jeremiad narrative to a more recent "exhaustion" thesis by John Barth. Endism or cultural

apocalypticism, I will argue, thus ironically makes postmodern American narrative proliferate. Talking about postmodernism, Jameson points out an "unforeseeable return of narrative as the narrative of the end of narratives" (Postmodernism xii).

This endism, which is ceaselessly un-ending itself, also explains why I propose in Chapter 5 the "postimperial" instead of the postmodern as a way of critically understanding the cultural conditions of contemporary America, particularly "postmodern" fiction. America has not eagerly engaged in the nineteenth-century form of European imperialism characterized by a ceaseless desire to conquer other areas of the world, which ended in the wake of the Second World War and consequent national liberation movements. America, however, has still brewed a unique brand of its own imperial tradition, which has often defined its identity as a model empire that will civilize other cultures, as the figurative expressions such as "empire for liberty" and "empire of freedom" imply. While the historical imperialism of nineteenth-century Europe has lost its appeal in the twentieth century, America's unique imperial desires to civilize the world in its own image are still very much alive in the age of postmodernity. Or more correctly, they even seem to have survived the age of postmodernity. This fact justifies our understanding of contemporary America as something similar to what Harry Magdoff has called "imperialism without colonies,"[5] though our understanding of it is focused on cultural, mythological dimensions working in and for the collective American imagination, whereas he meant by it a new type of economic imperialism that tries to retain the outmoded imperialist networks by means other than a direct conquest. Thus "post-" is the post of both modernity and postmodernity, and "imperial" is mythological yet persistently imperialistic.

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[5] Harry Magdoff, Imperialism Without Colonies (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003). He first presented this idea in 1970.

In chapter 2, "Don DeLillo: A 'Counterhistory'," I will discuss DeLillo's "poetics of paranoia" as a postmodern narrative strategy to write counterhistory against imagined ends. Through a paranoid reimagining of disjointed cultural moments into a multi-layered narrative web, DeLillo's counterhistory carves out a sublime temple of imagination where both the God of Capital and the schizophrenic American cultural self reside enjoying postmodern aura, which is renascent from/on the banal postmodern cultural surfaces. In this postmodern "elsewhere," traditional orientalism also comes back in a newly depoliticized form, as we can see in Mao II when Brita Nilsson, an American arch-individualist photographer, violently takes the hood off the face of a collectivist boy terrorist (236).

Chapter 3, "Paul Auster: A 'Music of Chance'," will discuss Auster's "narrative of chance." Auster contributes to the postmodern aesthetic by displacing the disenchanted world with an imaginary one fraught with chances, coincidences, and contingencies. Anything can happen; everything is mysteriously connected; ergo, anything can be written. Once thus freed from the causal necessities, Auster's postmodern narrative expands its imaginary imperium and readers are invited to live as multiple identities freely within it. This chapter will also discuss Auster's obsessive recycling of American cultural traditions: the Western frontier, Custer's Last Stand, American landscape paintings, the Puritan yearning for an Adamic language, and, most of all, pseudo-historical episodes connected to the lives of the canonical American writers such as Hawthorne, Whitman, Poe, and Thoreau. While attempting to undermine the cultural ideals of these writers, Auster ironically expands the same cultural imagination of these traditional American writers.

In chapter 4, "Tim O'Brien: An Unending Narrative March of Postimperial America," I discuss how narrative of the end contributes to a perpetuation of the American narrative tradition, with a particular focus on the march of American soldiers represented in O'Brien's novels. The archetypal American "errand into the wilderness" has mutated into a Freudian "same-but-different" pattern. It has been transformed from the forced "removes" of Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, through the Whitmanesque "manifest" march of the civilizational pioneer, and to the lost march of the American soldiers in O'Brien's (anti-) Vietnam War novels. The march of the American soldiers in O'Brien's autobiographical novels works as a synecdoche for the fate of contemporary American narrative. It marks another symbolic closure to the American expansionist frontier, because it lacks any will and destination. On the other hand, however, O'Brien's portrayal of the disoriented but unending march ironically allegorizes an unending narrative march of the American cultural self in the postmodern age. This narrative/cultural march of America confirms what Auster's author-narrator in Leviathan says: "And even if there was an end, it seemed doubtful that I would ever know about it – which meant that the story would go on and on, secreting its poison inside me forever" (272).

In chapter 5, "Postmodern or Postimperial," I will discuss the inefficacy of the postmodern as a defining term for contemporary American fiction and thus will suggest instead the "postimperial" as an alternative, by which I mean a paradoxical characteristic of the contemporary American cultural discourses which consciously criticizes the American imperial heritages but unconsciously repeat it, making oxymoronic ideas such as "imperialism for freedom" genuinely significant. This chapter will include a theoretical discussion of the endisms of Francis Fukuyama and Jean Baudrillard. Fukuyama's revival of

the Hegelian "end of history" thesis at a moment of the "right" triumph of American liberal democracy asks us to believe that human history has ended with the Pax Americana and its hegemonic discourses. Baudrillard's proclamation that Americans are now living past the "dead point" of history (Selected Writings 190) supplies an alibi for American-led global postmodernism. I will show how these post-history discourses are related to the "new world order," which produces both anxiety and triumphalism in the collective American expansionist imagination, but also to the proliferation of the postmodern(ist) discourses. As Jameson points out, these endisms "express the feeling of the constriction of Space in the new world system," as Turner's "end of the frontier thesis" did before (Cultural Turn 90).

Contemporary American fiction uses postmodern strategies, but it also reaffirms the American liberal tradition in a more universalized and depoliticized way, ushering the imperiled American cultural self into a new global but still Americano-centric postmodernism. Cornel West once said that "postmodern culture looks more and more like a rehash of old-style American pluralism with fancy French theories" (519). I think his observation should also be applied to the expansive aspects of American postmodern fiction. Is the idea of the novel cherished by Auster, DeLillo, and O'Brien, that is, the novel as a "democratic shout," totally different from American republicanism or from the "carnivalistic" polyphony of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theory has become an item of industry in this country of what Washington Irving called "logocracy" (144)? It seems to me: if poetry was a democratic form for Whitman, who risked having too much pride in American cultural ideals, the postmodern aesthetic of these novelists reveals the same tradition expressed through a different genre, whether we call the tradition logocracy, republicanism, democracy, or American postimperialism.

Chapter 2

Don DeLillo: A Paranoid "Counterhistory"

> So, of all countries in the world, America is the one in which the precepts of Descartes are least studied and best followed. No one should be surprised at this.
>
> --Alexis de Tocqueville[1]

From various eschatological warnings to secular misgivings over nuclear catastrophes or environmental disasters, apocalyptic sentiment has been familiar to the collective cultural consciousness of America throughout history.[2] Contrary to its apparent apprehension over an imminent end of the world, however, American apocalypticism has frequently worked as a regenerative device to make American cultural ideals and values more dynamic and resilient, particularly by reaffirming foundational dreams of an American-led millennial future. In this sense, as Daniel Wojcik points out in The End of the World As We Know of It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America, American apocalypticism is closely related to themes of American destiny (6).

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. George Lawrence (New York: HarperCollins, 1969) 429.

[2] As Douglas Robinson points out in American Apocalypse: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature, American literature has also been heavily influenced by the idea of the end of the world:

> Images of the end of the world abound in American literature, and with good reason: the very idea of America in history is apocalyptic, arising as it did out of the historicizing of apocalyptic hopes in the Protestant Reformation. Discovered by Europeans in the sixteenth century, America was conceived as mankind's last great hope, the Western site of the millennium. Settled by millenarian religious groups, most notably the Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, its future destiny was firmly and prophetically linked with God's plan for the world, and the national dream of an American Age, a great paradisal future to be ushered in by America, remains strong even into our own time. (xi)

American cultural apocalypticism was first formulated in the jeremiad narrative, a sermon genre that was prevalent among the second and third generation Puritan ministers. According to Sacvan Bercovitch in The American Jeremiad, the Puritan jeremiad narrative expressed an "unshakable optimism" (7) despite its "mode of denunciation" (6). While warning against an imminent, inevitable punishment by God for the declension of the Puritan ideals, it inculcated in the colonists a desire to launch a new cultural beginning by "inverting the doctrine of [God's] vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, [and by] affirming to the world ... the inviolability of the colonial cause" (6). Dialectically combining "lament and celebration," the American jeremiad thus helped revitalizing the "America's mission" to build an ideal theocracy that would ultimately lead to a millennial age (11).[3]

This apocalyptic narrative repeatedly reminded the colonists that America had been founded by God's providence. Seen in the light of the Puritan mythology, America was from the beginning a project to escape from the corrupt human histories of the old worlds, which were presumably confined between the beginning and end of time. Other cultural myths based on a similar understanding of time were later added to it, two of them being, as Richard T. Hughes argues in Myths America Lives By, the myths of Nature's Nation and of the Millennial Nation.[4] According to Hughes,

> The notion of Nature's Nation pointed Americans to a mythic time

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[3] Michael Wigglesworth was one of the most pessimistic ministers of this period. To defend Puritanism from "declension" and also to prove that certain natural and social phenomena were signs of God's vengeance for the declension, he wrote The Day of Doom: Or, A Poetic Description of The Great and Last Judgment, the "most popular book ever published in America" since its publication in 1662 (Mark Ludwig, "Introduction" to The Day of Doom, Tucson, AZ: American Eagle Publications, 1991: 1), and God's Controversy with New England: Written in the Time of the Great Drought Anno 1662. Yet, as Bercovitch agues, "[e]ven Michael Wigglesworth's God's Controversy with New England (1662), usually cited as the prime example of clerical despair, ends with the promise that God's 'heart is with you all/ And shall be with you maugre Sathan's might'" (55).

[4] Hughes lists in this book five essential American myths: the myth of the "Chosen Nation," of "Nature's Nation," of the "Christian Nation," of the "Millennial Nation," and of the "Innocent Nation."

> when the world first began and all was good and right and true – the time of Eden before the fall. It was easy to imagine that the United States was a virtual re-creation of this golden age, an age that stood on the front end – and therefore outside the boundaries – of human history.
>
> At the same time, the notion of the Millennial Nation pointed Americans to another golden age that would conclude the human saga. Because the millennium was also characterized by perfection, it, too, stood outside the boundaries of human history, this time on the back end. By restoring the virtues of the first perfect age, Americans imagined they would usher in the second perfect age and thereby bless the world.
>
> By identifying itself so completely with these mythic periods of perfection, America lifted itself, as it were, above the plane of ordinary human history where evil, suffering, and death dominated the drama of human existence. America became, as the Great Seal of the United States so clearly states, a novus ordo seclorum, a new order of the ages. (155)

The American Revolution was understood as a concretizing moment of this novus ordo seclorum. As Anders Stephanson argues in Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right, the American Revolution "made prophetic sense. The New World could be demarcated in sharper ways from the Old, reconfirming that America was indeed the fulfillment of the sacred promise, the beginning, perhaps, of the end, another victory on the way to the millennial conclusion" (13). America as an independent nation was conceived as a "new kind of empire," a new imperium that would be "the [ultimate] enlargement of the realm of law and civilization" (17). Later territorial expansion was also understood as a process of realizing the apocalyptic notion, whose "fullest vision of the end of history" can be found in the Book of Revelation (9).

American apocalypticism became more secularized during the nineteenth century. Two conspicuous examples are John O'Sullivan's well-known 1845 doctrine of "Manifest Destiny," which claimed that America had a special mission to "overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of [America's] yearly multiplying millions" (Stephanson xi), and the "end of the frontier" thesis presented by Frederick Jackson Turner in

1893. Whereas O'Sullivan's doctrine was a populist claim representing mid-nineteenth-century American triumphalism, Turner's thesis was more theoretical and historical. Though it expressed an ostensible anxiety over the then officially declared exhaustion of the frontier as a limitless fountain of American civilization, the Turner thesis nonetheless worked as a regenerative cultural device by retroactively confirming or, rather, reinventing traditional American ideals such as freedom, individualism, and the "expansive character of American life" (Turner 37).[5] As America exerted greater influences in the global arena since the Spanish-American War in 1898, apocalypticism has evolved into a more confident self-understanding of American civilization that aspired to civilize non-American cultures according to its own image.

Apocalyptic sentiments still loudly resonate in contemporary American life, as we can see in the almost hypochondriac concerns over high cholesterol or low-carb diet frequently hyped by the mass media, in Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis presented in 1989 on the occasion of the fall of the Soviet bloc, in the mass suicide case of the members of the Heaven's Gates orchestrated by Marshall Applewhite in 1997, and in the technological alarmism of the Y2K bug around the turn of the third millennium. How, then, does American postmodern fiction, which allegedly dismantles the traditional cultural ideologies, represent

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[5] According to Richard W. Van Alstyne, the Turner thesis, which "romanticized the American West as the mother of political democracy," is in fact an "expression of parochial nationalism" because it over-emphasizes the importance of the American frontier in understanding American civilization in general (101). Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History " is also closely related to O'Sullivan's doctrine despite its apparent differences from it. Though the first and last paragraphs briefly mention the fact that, according to the 1890 Census report, "the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history" (Turner 38), this essay is full of glorification of the expansionist colonization of the American West.
A more pessimistic example of secular apocalypticism is Henry Adams's idea of the "final and fundamental necessity of Degradation" that will soon and unavoidably result from "the ultimate degradation of the energy," a thesis formulated in the first decade of the twentieth century. Henry Adams, The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma with an Introduction by Brooks Adams (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 208, 230. According to Perry Miller, Adams's "eschatological vision, an apocalyptical lament over the approaching and simultaneous extinction of both solar and historical energy" was, however, a "complete contradiction of the dominant tendencies of the age" (from the back cover of Adams).

apocalypticism? To examine some responses to this question, I will discuss in this chapter Don DeLillo's fiction, mainly focusing on his portrayal of postmodern American culture in White Noise and on his exploration of the politics of the novel in Mao II.[6] I will particularly discuss his depiction of the endangered status of the individual in the age of postmodernity.

Introducing DeLillo for a reading held at the 92nd Street Y in New York City in early 2001, Jonathan Franzen, author of The Corrections, hailed him as "a beacon of hope for American culture."[7] Franzen himself did not provide detailed reasons for the claim, but his near apotheosis of DeLillo provides us with a good starting point for interpreting his fiction, which is often acclaimed to be a unique literary response to postmodern cultures. After his earlier years of relative reclusiveness,[8] DeLillo has recently participated more often in public

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[6] Robert Towers calls this novel a "history novel" (Robert Towers, "History Novel," New York Review of Books 38. 12 (June 27 1991): 17-8), but I think it is more political than historical.

[7] On February 5, 2001, DeLillo read part of The Body Artist, his just published novella on art, memory, and time. This quotation is from my own notes.

[8] In "Missing Writers," Thomas LeClair lists DeLillo as one of the four major "missing" writers in contemporary America, three others being J. D. Salinger, Thomas Pynchon, and William Gaddis. See also: LeClair ("An interview with Don DeLillo," 1982); Robert R. Harris ("A Talk with Don DeLillo," 1982); Ann Arensberg ("Seven Seconds," 1988); Maria Nadotti ("An Interview with Don DeLillo," 1993); Jonathan Bing ("The Ascendance of Don DeLillo," 1997); Jorg Burger ("Mr. Paranoia," 1998); and Richard Williams ("Everything Under the Bomb," 1998). Most of these interviews start with introductory comments on DeLillo's personal reclusiveness and aesthetic elusiveness. A few examples: "He is also one of the most elusive. While his novels are located in America's fascinations – entertainment, big-time sport, intrigue – they are written with a detachment that causes reviewers to praise him for very different, sometimes contradictory intentions. The books are elusive because, for DeLillo, fiction draws its power from and moves toward mystery. Elusive, too, because DeLillo has not joined the literary auxiliary: he does not sit on panels, appear on television, judge contests, review books, or teach creative writing" (LeClair, "Interview" 19); "He does not like to discuss his work" (LeClair, "Interview" 19); He "lives quietly and privately" (Arensberg 338)); "'Neutrality' and 'anonymous' are probably the correct adjectives to describe him" (Nadotti 86); "DeLillo emerged from the shadows of a well-protected life in an undisclosed suburb" (Bing 1); "He is now hailed as one of the stars of our literary pantheon. His personal tendency to eschew book publicity has proven to be the best kind of publicity, deepening the aura of intrigue surrounding his books" (Bing 3); "You rarely give interviews, and if you do never on television. Thus you made it into the list of reclusive authors published recently by Entertainment Weekly – ranking third, trailing only Thomas Pynchon and J. D. Salinger" (Burger 1); and "From Americana, his debut in 1971, to Mao II in 1991, the author remained a virtually unseen presence" (Williams 1). DeLillo himself has helped building an aura around his reclusivenessss by claiming that he prefers "detachment" to exposure to the public: "'I don't want to talk about it'" (LeClair, "Interview" 19); "Silence, exile, cunning, and

events, raising his voice on such issues as freedom of speech and universal human rights.[9] Like Bill Gray, his fictional alter ego in Mao II,[10] he has tried to make an impact on the inner conscience and consciousness of the American public as well as of the global intellectual communities. This public engagement, which is similar to that of the French intellectuals in the mid-twentieth-century, must be one reason Franzen calls him "a beacon of hope." DeLillo has more recently become a cultural idol among his sympathetic readers for his choosing of an apocalyptic image for the book cover of his 1997 masterpiece, Underworld, as if he had been prophesying the September 11 terrorist attacks on the American homeland in 2001, particularly those on the Twin Towers in New York City.[11] According to this

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so on. It's my nature to keep quiet about most things" (LeClair 20); "I've always tried to maintain a certain detachment. I put everything into the book and very little into what happens later I've finished it" (Harris 26); and "I just want to keep a little bit of anonymity" (Burger 1).

[9] See, for example, "The Artist Naked in a Cage," his speech delivered on May 13, 1997 at the New York Public Library's event, "Stand In For Wei Jingsheng," an event held to support this Chinese refugee, and "Statement from the Rushdie Defense Committee USA," which he co-authored with Paul Auster in February 14, 1994. These two documents reveal DeLillo's particular emphasis on the novel as a "democratic shout" ("Statement"). The former statement focuses on "the artist's enduring effort to realize his role – a writer in opposition to the state." Comparing the condition of the writer to the "hunger artist" portrayed in Kafka's short story, "A Hunger Artist," and to a Russian performance artist's impersonation of a dog in a cage in Soho, New York, DeLillo here foregrounds the image of the artist as critically opposing the oppressive state and cultural regimes.

[10] There are differences between DeLillo and his protagonist Bill Gray, one of them being the age difference. But we also find certain similarities between them. Both are reclusive but also concerned with the status of the writer in postmodern society, which is overwhelmed by the power of the mass media, the celebrity cult, and the commodification of art, etc. DeLillo denies that Bill Gray is imagined after his own self-image, by saying he used the name "just as a provisional name," but we still find in him DeLillo's own voice as a novelist, as the shared phrase "democratic shout" reveals. Besides, the name "Bill Gray" had been used for DeLillo himself even before writing Mao II: According to Vince Passaro, he "used to say to friends, 'I want to change my name to Bill Gray and disappear.' I've been saying it for 10 years. But he began to fit himself into the name, and I decided to leave it'." ("Dangerous Don DeLillo 37)

[11] Nan Graham, DeLillo's editor at Scribner, hired a photo researcher to find an image for the cover of Underworld because the one that DeLillo himself had chosen was too religious. Surprisingly, the picture brought up by the specialist was exactly the same one DeLillo himself first suggested: a photo by Andre Kertesz. Passaro writes about the uncanniness produced by this eerie coincidence as well as by the starkly prophetic content of the picture. According to him, the cover of Underworld shows "the two towers, dark and enshrouded (by fog, much as they had been by smoke early last Tuesday [9/11] morning). Before them stood the stark silhouette of the belfry of a nearby Church (perhaps Trinity, or St. Paul's, down Broadway; perhaps the now-partially-destroyed St. Bernard's...); and off to the side, a large bird, a gull or a large pigeon, making its way toward Tower One [of the World Trade Center]. It's eerie and religious. At first DeLillo, after finding

retrospective acclaim, DeLillo indeed seems to be a beacon of American culture, though it is not clear yet if he is one of hope or one of dark apocalypse. Or, whether he is indeed a beacon of hope speaking against the deracinated cultural conditions of America or, as the "media political right" commentator, George Will, has derogatively called him, a "bad citizen" senselessly condemning consecrated American values (Lentricchia, Introducing Don DeLillo 3) will depend on which hermeneutic frame one adopts to read his literary aesthetic.

It has been disputed among critics whether DeLillo is a (late) modernist obsessed with the artist's critical distance from adverse cultural conditions, a postmodernist who conforms to the Baudrillardian hyperreality of America, a Dickensian realist who portrays complex socio-cultural realities of the age, or even a romantic who cherishes the idea of the author as a prophetic bard,[12] but there remains one constant in his fiction: critical engagement in the

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this picture, thought it altogether too religious, according to his editor, Nan Graham at Scribner. A photo researcher was hired to find an image for the cover of the book; she came back with the same image DeLillo had found on his own. In the context the past week, the image is deeply disturbing, one more bit of testimony to his remarkable tuning." Passaro also points out that DeLillo has also made a prophesying comment on the politics of terrorism that is more fully explored in Mao II: " People who are in power make their arrangements in secret, largely as a way of maintaining and furthering that power. People who are powerless make an open theater of violence. True terror is a language and a vision. There is a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts, and they infiltrate and alter consciousness in ways that writers used to aspire to." More importantly, DeLillo treats in his fiction "the fragmented narrative of modern violence" ("Don DeLillo and the Twin Towers" 68-9). A passage that is related to this picture can be found in the main text of Underworld, where he describes J. Edgar Hoover's apocalyptic vision after hearing about the Soviet atomic test: "Death everywhere, Conflagration in many places, Terror universal, the crows, the ravens in silent glide, the raven perched on the white nag's rump, black and white forever, and he thinks of a lonely tower standing on the Kazakh Test Site, the tower armed with the bomb, and he can almost hear the wind blowing across the Central Asian steppes" (50). His 1979 novel, Players, is about a specific bombing of the New York Stock Exchange building by an elusive international anti-capitalist organization, marking another prophetic moment of DeLillo's career because this novel seems to have foreseen 1993 bombing of the Towers, which is in the neighborhood.

[12] DeLillo's novels have been hotly debated in terms of literary trends or movements. Diverse categorizing concepts have been used for his fiction: romanticism, according to Paul Maltby ("The Romantic Metaphysics of Don DeLillo") and Lou F. Caton ("Romanticism and the Postmodern Novel: Three Scenes from Don DeLillo's White Noise"; realist, according to William Boyd ("DeLillo is a realistic novelist..." "The Course of True Life" 2); modernist, according to DeLilo himself (see below in this note); and postmodernist, according to most academic critics, particularly those of White Noise. Or, as John Whitworth calls him in a book review on Mao II, "DeLillo is the modern Carlyle" (35). I believe this dispute on DeLillo's literary style reflects current cultural, theoretical situations of American humanities, rather than essential characteristics of his novels. Though DeLillo cannot be categorized as a historical novelist per se in its traditional sense, his novels can also be called postmodern historical novels. The two novels I discuss in this chapter, White Noise and Mao II, are far

socio-cultural conditions of contemporary America. Following Thomas LeClair, we could say that, "DeLillo's books offer a precise and thorough anthropology of the present" (LeClair, "Interview" 19). Or, according to James Walcott, DeLillo might be "America's leading literary diagnostician."[13] Or rather, he could be a critic of postmodernity, not just a postmodernist as he is often dubbed by earlier critics of White Noise. As a "connoisseur of [postmodern American] cultural surfaces" (Simmons 44) who simultaneously simulates and critically diagnoses them, DeLillo provides a unique critique of the overflow of images, of the predominance of consumerism, and of the acephalous crowds that might be called the postmodern masses.

DeLillo's fiction is also shot through with depictions of various apocalyptic issues. From fear of death to anxieties over environmental disasters (White Noise), from Cold War paranoia (End Zone, Underworld) to the endangered fate of the author in an age of terrorism (Mao II), and from the status of the individual threatened by (the images of) violence and catastrophe (White Noise) to multi-layered postmodern conspiracy theories (Libra, Running Dog, and Cosmopolis), his fiction obsessively revisits apocalyptic situations. Rather than presenting them in a moralizing way as the traditional narratives often did, however, his portrayal of contemporary (pseudo-)apocalypses takes an ironic, self-reflective mode of the postmodern historical imagination, which neither complies with nor debunks in toto the

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from historical novels. Yet, they treat the most current historical issues in contemporary culture, particularly those of terrorism, the power of image, the emergence of the masses, and the fate of the art. Directly treating the Rushdie affair, Mao II is also engaging world historical phenomena in which terrorism and art are in conflict. According to Richard Williams's "Everything Under the Bomb," an article for The Guardian based on an interview with him, DeLillo is somewhat uncomfortable with the labeling of his fiction as "postmodern": "'Post-modern seems to mean different things in regard to different disciplines,' he said. 'In architecture and art it means one or two different things. In fiction it seems to mean another. When people say White Noise [sic] is post-modern, I don't really complain. I don't say it myself. But I don't see Underworld [sic] as post-modern. Maybe it's the last modernist gasp. I don't know'." "'I felt the need for some element of the spirit of the times, that spirit of anarchic comedy...'" (Williams 6).

[13] Quoted in Jonathan Bing, "The Ascendance of Don DeLillo," The Publishers Weekly, 11 August, 1997.

current cultural conditions. By creatively using these apocalyptic images, DeLillo in fact opens up a new possibility for the novel in the age of postmodernity.

American culture has encouraged its people to imagine a unique individual/national identity in terms of limitless freedom and egalitarian democracy that would be realized first in America and then spread to other areas of the world. This cultural self-fashioning, which has been repeatedly recreated by American authors and intellectuals, is now presumably in danger in the age of postmodernity, particularly because of the emergence of the masses and the mass media. DeLillo's aesthetic ultimately rescues this imperiled American cultural self by restabilizing the status of the author. His understanding of the author is analogous to that of the Romantics: the author in both cases is supposed to speak for the society from the margins. As Raymond Williams reminds us, the English Romantics celebrated the poet as a creative redeemer heroically confronting the cultural dominant of the age despite, or rather, because of her/his being marginalized by the emergent market-system.[14] The figure of the author for DeLillo is similarly threatened by a new, postmodern cultural condition that is overdetermined by the mass media, crowds, and terrorists. DeLillo particularly juxtaposes the author as an arch-individualist figure against the nebulous masses basking in the sunshine of post-industrial affluence. Be it a fictional one like Bill Gray or a real one like DeLillo himself, his author figure speaks from depthless cultural surfaces, capturing fleeting moments of postmodern aura that will provide a safe if illusory haven for the imperiled American cultural self.

Another strategy DeLillo adopts to critically engage postmodern cultures is to presuppose that everything is connected to everything else. By (re)connecting apparently unrelated cultural moments of contemporary America, DeLillo creates what he calls a

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[14] Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 30-48.

"counterhistory." His fiction excavates cultural undercurrents that have been suppressed by the dominant ideologies. Disjointed undercurrents are reconstructed in his fiction into a multi-layered narrative web tantamount to a sublime aesthetic temple, where what I would call the God of Capital and the late imperial American self reside harmoniously, sharing a postmodern aura which is renascent from and on the glossy cultural surfaces. Though often called "Mr. Paranoia" (Burger 1) or "the chief shaman of the paranoid school of American fiction" (Begley 275), DeLillo's strategy of (re)connecting sundry cultural moments reveals his unique imaginative power to create a new literary space for the American cultural self. His definition of the novel as a "democratic shout" (Mao II 159), which is expressed through Bill Gray's voice, and his revision of it as a counterhistory are attempts to recover the live voices of the street corners in cotemporary America, particularly those of New York City, the most "forlorn" city according to one of Paul Auster's characters in The New York Trilogy (94). Through revitalizing the status of the author and of the individual, DeLillo's fiction thus salvages democratic ideals of America.

Mao II,[15] DeLillo's tenth novel, explores questions of the "disappearance of writing" and of the "death of the individual" (Carmichael 214-5), two interrelated cultural symptoms of postmodern America. Motivated by two apparently unrelated photo images, one of a Moonie mass-wedding ceremony held in Seoul in 1988[16] and one of J. D. Salinger, author of

[15] As described in the novel, the title is based on Andy Warhol's "pencil drawing called Mao II" (62), or more correctly, on his "New Series 1972-74," which is often called the "Mao Series." The same images were chosen by DeLillo himself for the cover of the book's first edition. See Nadotti, "An Interview with Don DeLillo," 96.

[16] This event took place in Seoul, not in Yankee Stadium as fictionalized in the novel. "It all started with a photograph. I happened to come across a picture of a mass wedding, a ceremony which took place in an industrial warehouse in South Korea. Sixteen thousand people ["about 13,000 people" according to his interview with Nadotti, and "six thousand five hundred couples" according to its description in the novel– see next note] were involved. It was one of those mass weddings of the Unification Church, an organized, orderly

The Catcher in the Rye who is better known as an epitome of the reclusive writer,[17] DeLillo in Mao II portrays a complex cultural politics of contemporary America. Juxtaposing such cultural polarities as the novel vs. the media, the novelist vs. the terrorist, and the individual vs. the masses, he foregrounds the endangered status of the author and of the individual. As Louis Menand points out in his review, the two main characters of Mao II, hyper-reclusive Bill Gray and "deprogrammed" Moonie girl Karen Janney, represent the paranoid individuals endlessly haunted by new cultural forces (83). Through these characters, DeLillo reveals that Americans are now living on the emptied-out cultural surfaces of postmodernity that threaten the ideals of the individual self, which is the politico-cultural and socio-economic foundation of American civilization.

Bill Gray, the writer-protagonist of Mao II, retains a unique sense of cultural mission as a novelist: "to alter the inner life of the culture" (41). As he argues against George

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crowd. From that point I began thinking about the psychology of the crowd, of the obliteration of distinction, of how people lose themselves in the multitude, of the need to belong to the multitude. This made me reflect immediately on the juxtaposition between the regimented crowd and the writer who is trying to understand this phenomenon, who lives alone, who could be a reclusive like Bill Gray (the main protagonist of Mao II), and who keeps himself secluded, away from the roar of our culture, away from the world of images" (Nadotti, "Interview" 88-9). I believe this summary on the motif of Mao II leads us to the two main concerns of this chapter, the issue of individualism and the issue of what I call postmodern orientalism, which I will discuss later.

[17] "And I had another photograph – it was a picture that appeared on the front page of the New York Times, in the summer, I think, of 1988, and it was a photograph of J.D. Salinger. They sent two photographers to New Hampshire, to stalk him. It took them six days, but they found him. And they took his picture. He saw them and they saw him. When they took his picture he came at them. His face is an emblem of chock and rage. It's a frightening photograph. I didn't know it at the time, but these two pictures would represent the polar extremes of 'Mao II,' the arch individualist and the mass mind, from the mind of the terrorist to the mind of the mass organization. In both cases, it's the death of the individual that has to be accomplished before their aims can be realized." (Vince Passaro, "Dangerous Don DeLillo," The New York Times May 19, 1991, Sec.6: 34-7; 76-7.)

The juxtaposition of these two different, unrelated cultural moments or events in order to explore the cultural undercurrents of contemporary America is a good example of the unique DeLilloesque virtuosity. Another conspicuous example can be found in Underworld, where he, motivated by two news pieces on the same newspaper front page, the news of the 1953 baseball game in the Polo Ground and the news of the Soviet experiment of nuclear bomb, unravels the whole gamut of the cultural, political undercurrents of the Cold War decades by using fictional and historical characters and facts. Though the case of Underworld works for DeLillo more as a motif for or clue to his imaginary reconstruction of the Cold War counterhistory, this novel, like Mao II, reveals DeLillo's imaginative power to combine two unrelated events into a seamless whole of multi-layered fictional space.

Haddad, a professor-spokesman for a Middle East Maoist group, he tries to preserve this consecrated ideal of the novel as a democratic art form that promotes the values of the individual self:

> Do you know why I believe in the novel? It's a democratic shout. Anybody can write a great novel, one great novel, almost any amateur off the street. I believe this, George. Some nameless drudge, some desperado with barely a nurtured dream can sit down and find his voice and luck out and do it. Something so angelic it makes your jaw hang open. The spray of talent, the spray of ideas. One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next. Ambiguities, contradictions, whispers, hints. And this is what you want to destroy. (159)

This Bakhtinian notion of the novel as a polyphonic genre for e pluribus unum, however, coexists in Bill Gray's mind with a deeper sense of cultural apocalypticism. Recognizing that the novel is now losing its traditional cultural status because of the mass media, the masses, and the celebrity cultures, he has retreated to a secret realm in upstate New York to enjoy the genuine sense of his self as an author, though ironically under a Foucauldian surveillance by his aficionado, Scott Martineau, who not only speaks for him but also virtually confines him to the hideout presumably against the hazardous media cultures. What this "lost man of letters" (39) does in his shrine is endlessly revise a novel without any specific intention of publishing it.

This fear of cultural endangerment of the novelistic narrative creates a unique paranoia in this latter-day man of culture: "The only private language I know is self-exaggeration. I think I've grown a second self in this room. ... I exaggerate the pain of writing, the pain of solitude, the failure, the age, the confusion, the helplessness, the fear, the humiliation. The narrower the boundaries of my life, the more I exaggerate myself" (37). Left with the lost mission of the novel, Bill Gray thus experiences a feeling of spatial constriction that amounts to claustrophobia, which in turn develops into a paranoid "self-exaggeration." As John

Whalen-Bridge maintains in Political Fiction and the American Self, this imperiled cultural self attempting to survive its own shrinking is a prototype of the contemporary American cultural self (171), which might be a modified version of the Turner thesis that I mentioned in connection with the exhaustion of the free frontier space around the end of the nineteenth century.

There are two interrelated cultural forces that threaten Bill Gray's notion of the novel. The first is the mass media culture invasive into every corner of American society. To Bill Gray, the "image world is corrupt" (36). And, as his self-assigned assistant Scott speaks for him to Brita Nilsson, a photographer searching for missing, or more correctly, endangered writers, "Bill has the idea that writers are being consumed by the emergence of news as an apocalyptic force" (72):

> The novel used to feed our search for meaning. Quoting Bill. It was the great secular transcendence. The Latin mass of language, character, occasional new truth. But our desperation has led us toward something larger and darker. So we turn to the news, which provides an unremitting mood of catastrophe. This is where we find emotional experience not available elsewhere. We don't need the novel. Quoting Bill. We don't even need catastrophe, necessarily. We only need the reports and predictions and warning. (72)

Talking about the apocalyptic aura photographed images produce as an after-effect of human beings, Bill Gray himself tells Brita that he is now living at his own wake:

> I'm at my own wake. Sitting for a picture is morbid business. A portrait doesn't begin to mean anything until the subject is dead. This is the whole point. We're doing this to create a kind of sentimental past for people in the decades to come. It's their past, their history we're inventing here. And it's not how I look now that matters. It's how I will look in twenty-five years as clothing and faces change, as photographs change. The deeper I pass into death, the more powerful my picture becomes. Isn't this why picture-taking is so ceremonial? It's like a wake. I'm the actor made up for the laying-out. (42)

Simulating "death" of his authorial/individual self, here he seems to point to the precarious cultural condition of a Baudrilliadian hyperreality, which never allows the existence of the

authentic individual self as an indivisible entity. He seems to be living in a post-novelistic, post-individual, and posthistorical age dominated by simulacra.

A second threat to Bill Gray's consecrated ideals of the novel and of the individual self is the mass(-mediated) events that mostly originate from the cultural, religious, or political movements of the Third World: Mao and his followers holding up the notorious red book in China; Khomeini and his followers wailing at his funeral in Iran, the Unification Church mass-wedding ceremony taking place in Seoul or in imaginary Yankee Stadium; and the faceless terrorist groups in Beirut.

As if anticipating the post-9/11 world of terrorism, Bill Gray considers terrorism to be the most hazardous threat to novelistic narrative. As he confides to Brita, "There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence.... Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness" (41). The novelist is thus "giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders and cameras, to radios, to bombs stashed in radios" (42). Or simply, "[w]hat terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous" (157). Thus probably "Beckett is the last writer to shape the way we think and see. After him, the major work involves midair explosions and crumbled buildings. This is the new tragic narrative" (157).

Now it seems natural that Bill Gray is forced to confront in person the real world of terrorism. Charles Everson, his editor-publisher, asks him to participate in a public reading in

London as part of a rescue effort on behalf of a Swiss poet who was kidnapped by a Middle East Maoist group while exercising a UN mission. Charlie says:

> You have a twisted sense of the writer's place in society. You think the writer belongs at the far margin, doing dangerous things. In Central America, writers carry guns. They have to. And this has always been your idea of the way it ought to be. The state should want to kill all writers. Every government, every group that holds power or aspires to power should feel so threatened by writers that hunt them down, everywhere. (97)[18]

Thus, this literary impresario goes on, "I want one missing writer to read the work of another. I want the famous novelist to address the suffering of the unknown poet. ... Don't you see how beautifully balanced?" (99) Bill accepts the offer, hoping to practice humanitarianism. Or, he accepts the offer because it fits into his understanding of the role of the author, which is romantically inflated in his paranoid mind. Probably the offer might prove the power he imagines he has an author. A latter-day Byron, he lets himself enter the real world where he could realize his authorial power by other means.

Charlie's project, which is motivated by commercial as well as by political interests, is, however, doomed to fail, as is subtly hinted by his confession of his sterility. Though he is enthusiastically enjoying his sex life, his sexual organ produces nothing since his doctors

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[18] Compare this with another passage from his speech at the New York Public Library' event "Stand in for Wei Jingsheng":

> The total state wants to drain all conviction from the writer. It wants to absorb the dissident writer. In the West, every writer is absorbed, turned into breakfast food or canned laughter. But the more nearly total the state, the more vivid the dissident artist. The artist is so vivid and singular, so unassimilated into the state machine, that the state must find a way to make him disappear. ("The Artist Naked in a Cage" paragraph 7)

This quotation reveals DeLillo's close connection to his fictional alter ego, Bill Gray, but it also betrays his representation of the paranoid authorial imagination in which the author as a romantic hero should have a pseudo-omnipotent power to make a historic contribution to human civilization by countering the state, like David countering Goliath in the Old Testament, particularly by countering the totalitarian state. This has been a romantic dream of the author from the age of patronage to contemporary postmodernity in which commodification of the authorial figure is rampant. Thus rather than a Girardian triangular envy, Bill Gray's and DeLillo's inflated notion of the role of the author is a thought-food for us to rethink the generic fate of the novel in the context of postmodernity, which ironically presupposes the existence of pre- and proto-modern societies over the globe. See also note 9 in this chapter.

"had to reroute [his] semen" because of some prostate trouble: "Nothing comes out"; "It goes back inside" (127).[19] The reading session is aborted as a bomb goes off. Bill Gray then enters a deeper world of terrorism by going to the Middle East to trade his own body/self for that of the poet held hostage by the terrorists. But this new gesture of engagement turns out to be doomed as well. He dies a worthless death on a ship heading for the Middle East because of a mysterious injury caused by the bomb explosion in London. His nameless death in a foreign sea symbolically represents a "lost game of [the American] self" (46). Or, it could be a post-Byronic, postmodern death in the sense that it is unheroic, uncertain, and meaningless.

This representation of a reading session in which a novelist is supposed to read a poem written by a kidnapped poet reminds us of DeLillo's own readings for Salman Rushdie, whose 1988 novel The Satanic Verses provoked Khomeini to issue the notorious fatwa in 1989, and for Wei Jingsheng, who was imprisoned by the Chinese government for his activities related to democratization movements. What is more important, however, is that this representation of the writer-protagonist confronting terrorism reveals DeLillo's own

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[19] This issue of sterility of a middle-class white male reminds me of an interesting, though not so convincing, insight made by Lenin in 1913. In "The Working Class and Neomalthusianism," he declares that the "so-called neomalthusianism (the use of contraceptives)" is a sign of the world-historical fact that the "petty bourgeois sees and feels that he is heading for ruin, that life is becoming more difficult, that the struggle for existence is ever more ruthless, and that his position and that of his family are becoming more and more hopeless." Mr. Astrakhan, who welcomes the unconditional legalization of artificial abortion, speaks "as a representative of a class that is hopelessly perishing, that despairs of its future, that is depressed and cowardly. There is nothing to be done ... if only there were fewer children to suffer our torments and hard toil, our poverty and our humiliation – such is the cry of the petty bourgeois." And because the "working class is not perishing, [rather] it is growing, becoming stronger, gaining courage, consolidating itself, educating itself and becoming steeled in battle," and because the future children of them "will be victorious," they are "unconditionally the enemies of neomalthusianism, suited only to unfeeling and egotistic petty-bourgeois couples, who whisper in sacred voices: 'God grant we manage somehow by ourselves. So much the better if we have no children'" (The Emancipation of Women: From the Writings of V. I. Lenin 28-30). I am not claiming that this somewhat dogmatic summary of the relation between the number of children and the fate of the bourgeoisie as a class has any sociological or demographic validity, but I believe it gives an insight into the racialized question of the white, middle-class paranoia that I will discuss soon. Georg Lukács presents in History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics a more theoretical consideration about the "tragic fate" of the bourgeoisie in terms of individualism. According to him, the bourgeoisie is "cursed by its very nature with the tragic fate of developing an insoluble contradiction at the very zenith of its powers," a contradiction it must annihilate itself" (61). The "bourgeoisie endowed the individual with an unprecedented importance, but ... that same individuality was annihilated by the economic conditions to which it was subjected, by the reification created by commodity production" (62).

politics of the novel as an art form of engagement. For both Bill Gray and DeLillo, the public reading is more than simply political. It is an extension of the cultural mission of the novel to engage the current conditions of humanity in general. As Bill Gray's not so tragic death implies, however, DeLillo's depiction of the politics of the novel seems to be less promising, though his real readings for Rushdie and Wei turned out to be successful.[20]

Mao II thus can be read as a fictional requiem for the near death of the novel. Bill Gray's apocalyptic notion of the novel as an endangered art form and his clumsy if innocent acts of engagement in real politics are perhaps the only available mode a serious novelist can take in the age of postmodernity. It is also related to the postmodern narrative of the end, which I will discuss in the conclusion of this dissertation. An irony here is, however, that Mao II is nonetheless a successful work of art that simulates the death of the genre it belongs to. In other words, this novel is successful to the extent that it represents a self-reflective mode of imagination that rethinks the whole tradition of the novelistic narrative and its endangered status in contemporary society. Or, it is successful because it problematizes the status of the novel in the age of postmodernity, reimagining an ideal status of the novel that reflects and recreates its own role as a cultural critique. Thus though Scott tells Brita that Bill Gray as a novelist is gaining more "celebrity by doing nothing" (52), he is in fact indulging an inner self-reflection concerning the fate of the novel in connection to civilization, rather than literally "doing nothing." By the same token, though Bill Gray dies a worthless death while practicing a politics of the novel by other means, DeLillo himself becomes a more

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[20] Both Rushdie and Wei now live in the U. S., a second home for many postcolonial intellectuals. Rushdie's life in the U. S., however, does not seem to be safe enough yet, though his sentence to death is lifted now. A special event scheduled at the 92nd Street Y in New York City on September 24, 2001, "Salman Rushdie – A Reading and Paris Review Writers-at-Work Live Interview," was cancelled because of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This is understandable given the fact that the 92nd Street Y is a Jewish cultural center and Rushdie's The Satanic Verses had been considered to be a Satanic curse to Muslim. This event was resumed on April 24th, 2002, only under tight security measures.

serious writer by fictionalizing this cultural endangerment, epitomizing an irony of the postmodern cultural condition. His unusually keen yet paranoid understanding of the death of the novel and of the individual thus suggests a new problematic that raises political and philosophical questions concerning the possibility of the novel as a cultural form and of the individual as a democratic agent ideally residing in the narrative space of the novel. These issues will be ultimately answered by his redefinition of the novel as a "counterhistory," which I will discuss at the end of this chapter.

Bill Gray's cultural apocalypticism develops into a more generalized problem in Karen Janney's case: the death of the traditional individual self in postmodern American culture. As Douglas Keesey claims in Don DeLillo, Karen is threatened by two opposing cultural forces competing with each other over her body and self: the Unification Church, which is better known in America as Moonism,[21] and her own middle-class parents (183).

As emphatically foregrounded in the prologue of the novel, "At Yankee Stadium," and in other scenes where she appears, the utterly un-American religious practices of Moonism, such as, for example, mass-wedding ceremonies and weird communal living combined with business activities, seriously threaten Karen's self. Though the mass wedding is supposed to

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[21] Contrary to a common misconception among Americans, Reverend Moon's last name "Moon" has nothing to do with the mysterious, exotic, or scary feelings that the moon invokes to them: it is from the Chinese character used for his name, which means literature, letters, writing, or culture. This name, however, does not necessarily mean its connection with family business or family origin. Remember Saussure: it is just a sign. Reverend Moon's unusual religious practices and suspicious business activities using his church members have been notorious for several decades in America. He made another venture recently in March 2004 by holding a "deeply weird coronation" ceremony in the Dirksen Senate Office Building while several American politicians were attending. Though the Congressmen present at the ceremony later told that they were uninformed about the Reverend's and his wife's coronation as "King of Peace," and thus claimed that they were hoaxed, this event and newspaper reports on it reveal an unchanging ambition of Reverend Moon and the cultural scare it causes in the collective American mind. Now this group also uses its new name, "The American Family Coalition," aiming for a "Peace United Nations" by combining every religious and cultural element of the world under its umbrella organization. This group became more secular but a more universalistic postmodern religion, which is not separated from the secular non-religious sectors of the society. For his recent coronation, see John Gorenfeld, "Hail to the Moon King," Salon.com.

promise a higher and grander collective selfhood known as "the body common" (77), Karen, standing in Yankee Stadium as a bride to a Korean Moonie, Kim Jo Pak, experiences the loss of traditional American comfort. When she tells Kim, whom she met just two days ago, "This is where the Yankees play," the would-be "husband-for-eternity" (8) who "knows about eight words of English" (5) simply "nods and smiles blankly" (8). He is thus a total stranger to the cultural significances of the ballpark, which is the American symbol of "democratic clamor" and "openness of form": "'Baseball,' she says, using the word to sum up a hundred happy abstractions, themes that flare to life in the crowd shout and diamond symmetry, in the details of a dusty slide. The word has resonance if you're American, a sense of shared heart and untranslatable lore. But she only means to suggest the democratic clamor, a history of sweat and play on sun-dazed afternoons, an openness of form that makes the game a kind of welcome to my country" (9).[22] What makes Karen more uncomfortable is that "[n]othing about him strikes her so forcefully as his hair, which is shiny and fine and ink-black, with a Sunday-comics look. It is the [only] thing that makes him real to her" (8). This Moonie is indeed an umbra that might darken her self and being with an abysmal unrecognizability.

Karen thus cannot be completely "programmed" into the Unification Church. "She believed deeply in Master [Moon] and still thought of herself as a seeker, ready to receive what was vast and true. But she missed simple things, parents' birthdays, a rug underfoot, nights when she didn't have to sleep in a zipped bag" (78). She thus "begin[s] to doubt and fear and mind-wander" (78), and when she becomes more impatient with living in a van with

[22] Probably signifying something more than coincidence, all three postmodern white male writers discussed in this dissertation are fascinated with baseball, an American game of freedom, fairness, openness, and, most of all, "a sense of shared heart," as Karen thinks. DeLillo uses baseball as a thematic motif, for example, in Underworld; Paul Auster focuses on the game in "Why Write?" and other works and has even invented a paper baseball game, though he failed to sell it to commercial toy companies; and, Tim O'Brien makes baseball cap part of his routine outfit. I believe this phenomenon reveals one aspect of the cultural connection between postmodernism and the traditional values of American civilization.

other Moonie sisters, frantically selling peanuts, flowers, and candies, she is saved, or more correctly, kidnapped by her own parents and put through a "deprogramming" process.

Karen's middle-class parents, who kidnap their own daughter in order to deprogram her back to her presumably American self, however, are yet another threat to her. While trying to locate his daughter among the mass brides and grooms at Yankee Stadium, Rodge Janney, who represents the prototypical American values such as healthy individualism and the nuclear family, thinks this strange mass wedding is a clear and present curse to American cultural values. He feels "uneasy" at (3) and even "scared" by the "millennial hysteria" (80) shown by "an undifferentiated mass" (3) of people from fifty countries gathered in the very symbolic diamond of America:

> They all feel the same, young people from fifty countries, immunized against the language of self. They are forgetting who they are under their clothes, leaving behind all the small banes and body woes, the daylong list of sore gums and sweaty nape and need to pee, ancient rumbles in the gut, momentary chills and tics, the fungoid dampness between the toes, the deep spasm near the shoulder blade that's charged with moral reckoning. All gone now. They stand and chant, fortified by the blood of numbers. (8)

The chant led by Reverend Moon "brings the End Time closer. ... They chant for one language, one word, for the time when names are lost" (16). "They take a time-honored event and repeat it, repeat it, repeat it until something new enters the world" (4). As the narrator of the novel concludes the prologue, it seems indeed to the perplexed American eyes of Rodge that the "future belongs to the crowds" (16), marking a cosmic moment of the death of the American individual self.

His discomfort with this alien cult is thus closely related to the traditional American values: "There is strangeness down there that he never thought he'd see in a ball park" (4); "I see a lot of faces that don't look American. They send them out in missionary teams. Maybe

they think we've sunk to the status of less developed country" (5); and, most of all, Reverend Moon "is a man who lived in a hut made of U.S. Army ration tins [during the Korean War] and now he is here, in American light, come to lead them to the end of human history" (6).[23] Rodge feels as if certain body snatchers, or soul snatchers, are here in the core of American civilization, threatening the American values:

> When the Old God leaves the world, what happens to all the unexpended faith? He looks at each sweet face, round face, long, wrong, darkish, plain. They are a nation, he supposes, founded on the principle of easy belief. A unit fueled by credulousness. They speak a half language, a set of ready-made terms and empty repetitions. All things, the sum of the knowable, everything true, it all comes down to a few simple formulas copied and memorized and passed on. And here is the drama of mechanical routine played out with living figures. It knocks him back in awe, the loss of scale and intimacy, the way love and sex are multiplied out, the numbers and shaped crowd. This really scares him, a mass of people turned into a sculptured object. It is like a toy with thirteen thousand parts, just tootling along, an innocent and menacing thing. He keeps the glasses trained, feeling a slight desperation now, a need to find her and remind himself who she is. Healthy, intelligent, twenty-one, serious-sided, possessed of a selfness, a teeming soul, nuance and shadow, grids of pinpoint singularities they will never drill out of her. Or so he hopes and prays, wondering about the power of their own massed prayer. When the Old God goes, they pray to flies and bottletops. The terrible thing is they follow the man because he gives them what they need. He answers their yearning, unburderns them of free will and independent thought. (7)

If Bill Gray has a feeling that democratic ideals of the novel are being sabotaged by the power of images and terrorists, Rodge here feels deeply humiliated because his cherished American cultural values, particularly that of "healthy" individualism, are being snatched away by this un-American man, who is now claiming to lead his dear Karen and other young individuals "to the end of human history," posing himself hubristically as "none other than humanity's Savior, Messiah, Returning Lord and True Parent" (Gorenfeld 1).

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[23] If he were smarter, he could have said, like the paranoid protagonist of 1993 movie Falling Down: A Tale of Urban Reality, "You're Korean? You have any idea how much money my country has given your country?" In this film, the protagonist Bill Foster (Michael Douglas), a.k.a. D-Fens from his license plate, reveals a middle-class white rage when he is caught in a traffic jam on his way home. He becomes extremely violent when a Korean shopkeeper, Mr. Lee (played by Michael Paul Chan, a Chinese-American actor), first denies him a change for coins for making a call and then charges him 85 cents for a can of soda.

Little wonder, then, that Rodge launches a cultural project for his American daughter: to deprogram her back to "free will and independent thought." Hiring her cousin Rick, "who'd put his hand in her pants when they were ten" (79), and a couple of sinewy American boys in black suits, Karen's parents kidnap her and lock her up in a motel room. While she is under tight surveillance, a Christian woman keeps "mechanically" telling her: "You were brainwashed. You were programmed. You have the transfixed gaze" (79); "They forced her to agree that the [Moonie] church had made a drone of her. She chanted, [they m]ade me a drone, made me a drone" (82). Thus, as Keesey argues, Karen's parents are "ostensibly out to rescue her from the cult [of Moonism] but actually forcing her to submit to the standardized values of contemporary American society" (Keesey 183). In other words, Karen is forced to admit that the alien cult has "immunized" her "against the language of [the American] self" (8). Thus Karen's own American parents are trying to get a totalitarian hold of her already lost soul, posing another threat to her flimsy self, instead of providing her with the comfort of "simple things" that she misses. Karen finally escapes from her own parents.

While wandering in a Midwestern town away from both the "True Parent" Moon and her own American parents, she is picked up by Scott and starts living with him and Bill Gray, serving them in every possible way, including sex. "[D]rift[ing] and spin[ning]" (142) in Bill Gray's shrine of arch-individualism, however, Karen's soul now becomes addicted to the images of mass(-mediated) catastrophes by developing a weird habit of watching TV with the sound off. She obsessively watches news images of mass catastrophes from around the world: the disaster in a London soccer game, the rally and its brutal crackdown in Tiananmen Square, and the Iranian crowds wailing "in unison" at the funeral ceremony of Khomeini. Her passive but obsessive watching of the mass events on TV signifies that her disoriented,

or rather, emptied-out self is satisfied neither with the foreign cult of Moonism nor with the traditional American self, be that her parents' moderate version or Bill Gray's paranoid brand of arch-individualism. If Bill Gray and Rodge Janney feel discomfort with these symptoms of new mass cultures, Karen experiences a silent but total immersion in them. The formidable power of mass images becomes like a new cultural epidemic. According to Bill Gray, Karen's self, or non-self, indeed "carrie[s] the virus of the future" (119): the future without core, self, history, or any other cultural depth.

The frequent introduction of the scenes of the mass events, either through the narrative or through the black-and-white images inserted between sections of the novel,[24] exemplifies a unique DeLilloesque device to emphasize that, in contemporary America, there is no safe haven for the traditional individual self. Repeated representations of the Texas Highway Killer or of the apocalyptic sentence repeatedly uttered by the legendary standup comedian Lenny Bruce in Underworld, "We're all gonna die!" (507), are similar examples of this device used to foreground the hazardous cultural conditions of America, which are losing their traditional cultural contents. In DeLillo's postmodern America, these images of (mass) catastrophes endlessly repeat without signifying anything except the formal logic of repetition itself.[25] Thus as Margaret Scanlan writes in "Writers Among Terrorists: Don DeLilo's Mao II and the Rushdie Affair," it seems indeed that "History is dead" in DeLillo's

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[24] The images inserted between the pages of Mao II are: the mass rally in Tiananmen Square, the Moonie mass wedding ceremony, the commotion in a British soccer game, Khomeini's funeral, and two boys hiding in a ruined Middle East rubble, one of them making "V" sign with his fingers. Though the last image is signaling messages of hope to the reader, all other images are negative: a fact that is related to what I will discuss later in connection to DeLillo's postmodern orientalism.

[25] As is well known among his critics, this adoption of repeated images by DeLillo reveals his indebtedness to Andy Warhol and Jean-Luc Goddard. For his fascination with repetition of images, see Jeremy Green, "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies 45.3 (Fall 1999): 571-599, and Mark Osteen, American Magic and Dread (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000), particularly its first chapter, "Children of Goddard and Coca-Cola: Cinema and consumerism in the Early Fiction."

America, and "image alone remains" (245), particularly the apocalyptic ones that evoke "a crowded twisted vision of a rush to death" (Mao II 34).

DeLillo's depiction of the "fear of crowds" (The Economist 1) or of the "death of the individual" (Carmichael 215) is similar to the attitude toward the masses expressed by modern Euroamerican intellectuals. There were serious concerns about the emergence of the masses as a major cultural threat to the individual self, specifically in the writings of Sigmund Freud, José Ortega y Gassett, and other cultural critics. The fear of crowds has also a strong tradition in Anglo-American cultures, as we can see in John Stuart Mill's preference for the individual's "eccentricities" over the "majority rule" or in the everyday celebration of individual freedom in contemporary America.

Following Gustav Le Bon, whose The Crowd described "group psychology" in terms of its unique characteristics such as unusual sentiment of bond, tendency of contagion, and susceptibility to suggestions (Freud 9-11), Freud provides a psychoanalytic explanation of the masses in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. According to Freud, group psychology results in the "disappearance of the conscious personality" (11), manifesting our "regression to a primitive mental activity" (70). After summarizing Le Bon's ideas on the "collective mind which makes [a group] feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual would feel..." (7), he locates the origin of group psychology in the "herd instinct" (63) of the "primal horde" (70), which has been suppressed by civilization but is still active in human unconscious.

Freud's psycho-socio-cultural analysis of group sentiments as a "regression" to "the weakness of intellectual ability, the lack of emotional restraint, the incapacity for moderation

and delay, the inclination to exceed every limit in the expression of emotion and to work it off completely in the form of action" (62) seems to epitomize a typical modern(ist) fear of the collective impersonality of the masses, which was a main cultural threat to the cherished ideals of Europe. Freud thus prophetically describes emergent fascist ideologies: "The leader of the group is still the dreaded primal father; the group still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force; it has an extreme passion for authority; in Le Bon's phrase, it has a thirst for obedience. The primal father is the group ideal, which governs the ego in the place of the ego ideal" (76).

DeLillo's portrayal of crowds seems to basically repeat Freud's analysis and fear. We have discussed the Moonie mass wedding and other mass events represented as an antithesis to healthy individualism. We find in Libra a similar depiction of the de-individualized crowds that are susceptible to "bond," "contagion," and "suggestion." When the American crowds are gathered in Dealy Plaza to see the Kennedys' motorcade,

> Street by street the crowd began to understand why it was here. The message jumped the open space from one press of bodies to the next. A contagion had them here, some mystery of common impulse, hundreds of thousands come from so many histories and systems of being, come from some experience of the night before, a convergence of dreams, to stand together shouting as the Lincoln passed. They were here to be an event, a consciousness, to astonish the old creedbound fears, the stark and wary faith of the city [Dallas] of get-rich-quick. ... They were here to surround the brittle body of one man and claim his smile, receive some token of the bounty of his soul. (393-4)

This depiction of the crowds is also related to the fascist ideology of mass-mobilization DeLillo presents through Jack Gladney's voice in White Noise, which is close to Freud's understanding of it, as I will discuss later.

Another analysis of crowds was presented by Ortega y Gasset in 1930. Echoing Le Bon/Freud and prefiguring DeLillo, he begins The Revolt of the Masses with these sentences:

> There is one fact which, whether for good or ill, is of utmost importance in the public life of Europe at the present moment. This fact is the accession of the masses to complete social power. As the masses, by definition, neither should nor can direct their own personal existence, and still less rule society in general, this fact means that actually Europe is suffering from the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization. Such a crisis has occurred more than once in history. Its characteristics and its consequences are well known. So also is its name. It is called the rebellion of the masses. (11)

This "evil" phenomenon of "agglomeration" (17) threatens the "select minorities" of the society (15) by "imposing its aspirations and its desires by means of material pressure" (17). According to Ortega, we thus have lost the precious Western cultural ideals since the triumph of "hyperdemocracy" (17) or the "rebellion of the masses" has been established in the early twentieth century: "The ... commonplace mind ... has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will. ... The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated" (18).

As one of the most famous non-American Americanists, Alexis de Tocqueville also recorded a prophetic, though somewhat simplistic, observation of the earlier American democratic masses:

> The nearer men are to a common level of uniformity, the less are they inclined to believe blindly in any man or any class. But they are readier to trust the mass, and public opinion becomes more and more mistress of the world.
>
> Not only is public opinion the only guide left to aid private judgment, but its power is infinitely greater in democracies than elsewhere. In times of equality men, being so like each other, have no confidence in others, but this same likeness

> leads them to place almost unlimited confidence in the judgment of the public. (435)

We can see on this side of the Atlantic similar laments over the near disappearance of the traditional personality as a genuine basis of the cherished individualism. Especially in the twentieth century, which might be called a century of the masses, American scholars have produced various theories of the negative aspects of the masses, as we can see in Daivd Riesman's description of the emergence of the "other-directed" personality or in Christopher Lasch's critique of "culture of narcissism" in the age of "diminishing expectations." Serious concerns over the masses are, however, not limited to the modern(ist) thinkers. Following the tradition of Adorno, who deplored the mass phenomena in modern culture industries or of Marcuse's critique of American society as "one-dimensional" culture, postmodern theorists such as Charles Newman and Fredric Jameson also critically diagnose the disappearance of the individual, who is overwhelmed by "inflation" (Newman) or by the loss of the "style" (Jameson).[26]

I am not suggesting here that DeLilllo's representation of the masses is outmoded or misguided. I just want to emphasize the fact that there is a certain continuum of ideals developed around the notion of the individual self in both modern and postmodern Euroamerican cultures. Cultural tradition recreates itself by endlessly modifying its elements, but it nonetheless retains traces of its past that often work as a burden to the tradition itself.

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[26] Of course there has been a strong tradition in Marxism that has emphatically affirmed the role of the masses/proletariat in creating historically meaningful activities. Just two examples will suffice. The Masses, a radical magazine edited by Max Eastman in the early twentieth century in New York City, and its sequel, The New Masses, edited by Michael Gold, the American literary commissar. A more recent example is Empire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who emphasize the importance of the networked masses that are controlled not by any party leadership but by their inner and imminent desires to radically democratize the world. Well exemplified by the scattered but united anti-globalization demonstrations in Seattle and Davos in the nineteen nineties, this new mass/crowd they call "multitude" seems to be critically important enough to be exclusively explored by their new book, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire (New York: Penguin, 2004).

One major trace of the past found in DeLillo's representation of the masses is his orientalist attitude. Characters in Mao II rarely acknowledge the value of the non-Western collective self. This undervaluing of the non-Western collectivity can be seen most clearly in Brita's picture-taking session in a Maoist camp headquartered in Beirut, in which she violently takes the hood off the face of a terrorist boy (Mao II 236). While Bill Gray's post-Byronic adventure to insert his self into history by trading his own body/self for that of the kidnapped poet fails because of his aborted journey, Brita's adventure to the headquarters of the terrorist leader has some results, which are meaningful in two senses. Her successful arrival at the Maoist camp signifies the power of camera/image that can survive the age of the print culture epitomized by Bill Gray, revealing DeLillo's acute understanding of the historic socio-cultural transformations that are taking place in contemporary world. But her successful interview with the terrorist leader also reveals a persistent oritentalist tendency that overshadows DeLillo's own imagination because her interview session exemplifies a moment in which traditional orientalist legacies resurface. According to John McClure in Late Imperial Romance,

> If Bill is defeated in his half-hearted effort to enact a Christ-like romance of sacrificial substitution, the photographer, Brita Nilsson, does get through to the headquarters of the terrorist chief Bill wants to see, and there she wins what seems, in the context of the novel, to be a symbolic victory. The soldiers around the terrorist leader all wear hoods (much has been made in the course of the novel of the veils worn by Karen and other women at the mass wedding, the veils worn by all women in Khomeini's Iran, and the headscarfs worn by Arab men). When Brita asks about the hoods, she is told that "the boys who work near Abu Rashid have no face or speech. Their features are identical. They are his features. They don't need their own features or voices. They are surrendering these things to something powerful and great" (234). Brita's response is decisive. After she has finished photographing Rashid, [she runs through the roll, leaving a single exposure, and on an impulse] she "walks to the boy at the door and removes his hood. Lifts it off his head and drops it on the floor. Doesn't lift it very gently either. She is smiling all the time. And takes two steps back and snaps his picture" (236). (148)

Here Brita's camera eye, which symbolizes what I would call the "postimperial eye," violently imposes its own cultural logic of Euroamerican individualism on the non-Western collective self of the boy terrorist. Or her Euroamerican individualist self armed with a camera eye forcefully cuts through the boy's collective self and aggressively possesses his undisclosed inner identity, ironically violating one of the most important criteria in defining individualism, the interiority of the self.[27]

Bill Gray's adventure into the world of the Middle East terrorism reflects a more significant cultural thrust that might be called the "postmodern orientalism." Mao II as an American novel reveals an unspoken yet persistent cultural logic that, when the traditional Euroamerican literary, cultural self is (supposedly) endangered, it needs to incorporate an Other, imaginary or real, into the domain of its cultural imagination, so that it can acquire a new reserve space where it can achieve an ideological regeneration through renewed cultural adventures. The American cultural imagination cannot stop this journey into "elsewhere" even in the age of globalization because its undying "will to romance" persists (McClure 28). The world of Mao II reveals this postimperial thrust to create an "elsewhere." As I discussed before, Charlie, who is sterile because of the rerouting of his semen, also needs to "reroute" his imperiled cultural self into a new, unknown "elsewhere." Organizing a public reading for a French-speaking Swiss poet held hostage by the non-Euroamerican terrorists, he invites Bill Gray and Brita as well as his own self into a new Other "elsewhere."

The dark image of the terrorist group is an image DeLillo appropriates to connect the real world of contemporary America with the alleged threat of the de-individualized/de-

[27] It might be argued that this is not DeLillo's own perspective, but if we consider his consecrating of the image of the free individual self, I believe Brita Nilsson's and Bill Gray's glorification of individualism and of the individual self is very close to that of DeLillo himself. Besides, Brita could also be DeLillo's new alter ego who replaces the outmoded perspective of Bill Gray, who can survive the end of the narrative/novelistic art caused by the emergence of the age of the mass media and spectacles.

individualizing crowds. By making Bill Gray attempt to rescue his imperiled cultural self from the threat of the mass-mediated world, DeLillo creates a reserve space for the imperiled imperial American cultural self. In this imagined cultural space, he recreates a prototype of the traditional Other(s) quite similar to that of the Conradian Congo represented in Heart of Darkness. In this recreated "elsewhere," all happenings related to the "masses" or "crowds," such as the homeless people in Tompkins Square in New York, the mass politics of China, Lebanon, Iran, and other non-American areas, and the Moonie mass-wedding in Seoul, are indiscriminately represented as a common threat to the cherished American cultural self. These imagined threats, however, ultimately contribute to a revalidation of the Euroamerican cultural self by doubly reconfirming its values through negative, antithetical examples.

A problem with this juxtaposition of the Euroamerican individual self and the hazardous masses is that it is predicated on the traditional Euroamerican cultural imagination that presupposes an essential binarism: the Western Us vs. the Oriental Them. This binarism works on the basis of a negative logic, which identifies all things alien as the same Other and imagines the Self through/against the Other(s). Thus as we will see in Jack Gladney's white paranoia represented in White Noise, this orientalist tendency does not care much whether one's ethnicity/nationality ends with "-esian" ("Melanesian, Polynesian, Indonesian") or "-ese" ("Nepalese, Surinamese, Chinese"), unless it is a Euroamerican one. In terms of ethnic, cultural, and political entities, the same logic of de-differentiation applies indiscriminately. Nor is there any recognition of singularities among the Chinese Mao, the Lebanese (post-)Maoists, the (post-)Christian Moonies, and the fundamentalist Khomeini and his followers.[28]

[28] McClure goes a bit too far in his discussion of this binarism. According to him, DeLillo's Bakhtinian notion of the novel as a "democratic shout" or as a polyphonic form, which rejects both the "total control" of terrorism and the "totalitarian" "poems" of Mao, is also based on this Eurocentric self-understanding: "The novel is a shout, all right, a shout of Western frustration and a call for action" (149). This harsh criticism is based on his

DeLillo's adventure into the orientalist tradition can also be found in several other moments in Mao II. The Unification Church mass-wedding is portrayed as taking place at Yankee Stadium, though it was held "in a soft-drink warehouse" in Seoul. Through this imaginary/imaginative displacement/merger of the two antipodal cultural venues, DeLillo easily confirms his aesthetic/political thesis of the fear about "the death of the individual" (Passaro 76). As I have discussed, an exaggerated representation of this fear is expressed through Karen's and Rodge's naive (or DeLillo's own ironically sophisticated) statement: "This [Master Moon] is a man who lived in a hut made of U.S. Army ration tins and now he is here [at Yankee Stadium], in American light, come to lead them to the end of human history" (6).

Karen also tells her would-be-husband Kim that "[t]he word [baseball] has resonance if you're American, a sense of shared heart and untranslatable lore. ... [S]he ... means to suggest the democratic clamor, a history of sweat and play on sun-dazed afternoons, an openness of form that makes the game a kind of welcome to my country" (9). Baseball as a prototypical American game with a mythically "untranslatable lore" symbolizes here the democratic American spirit, whereas the Moonie mass wedding is portrayed as a negative force that is weird, eerie, and most of all, un-American.[29] DeLillo's imagination thus here

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belief that "DeLillo conveniently forgets that the West has for centuries been present in the East as an unwanted and undemocratic other, a force that rules through military or economic coercion in the name of its alien interests. And it has used the rhetoric of democracy itself not so much to promote progressive unveilings as to provide an ideological veil for acts of manifestly self-interested economic, political, and military intervention" (149). As I will discuss later, DeLillo's understanding of the novel as a "democratic shout" is revitalized by his redefinition of it as a "counterhistory," which excavates the live voices of the common people on the streets. By concretizing the Bakhtinian "democratic shout" into a more Whitmanesque "democratic chants," I believe he expands the possibility of the novel as a genre for the common people.

[29] Anybody who has been to the ball games in New York City (home of the Yankees and the Mets) can see that the sacred myth of this American ball game as free, fair, and most of all, democratic is in fact just a myth, or if it were not a myth, its traditional values have now been lost because of excessive commercialism and an American brand of collectivism. The flow of the game is intermittently interrupted by numerous commercial occasions and logos on the wide electrical signboards. But more seriously, the presumably free and fair souls

represents common American people's paranoid fears that the alien Moonism could threaten American democracy. Moonism is not "welcome[d] to [their] country" because it implies the American death of the transcendental ideal of the individualist self.

Two Korean words are used in connection with the Unification Church: "Pali-pali" ("Quickly, quickly") and Mansei ("Long Live," equivalent to Japanese Banzai). The use of "Pali-pali" is a good example of DeLillo's sharp "ear for street speech" (Howard 7), his ear for the multicultural languages of the streets or deli stores in New York City. His use of this particular alien adverb in connection to Moonism, however, creates negative cultural implications: "World in pieces. It is shock of shocks. But there is plan. Pali-pali. Bring hurry-up time to all man" (9); "Team leader said, Gotta get goin', kids. Pali-pali" (13); and "Gotta hurry hurry hurry. Pali-pali, kids" (15). Portraying this adverb as an icon of Moonism's apocalyptic fever makes it automatically sound like a fanatic chant. This radical association of an un-American phrase with the "cult" (9) of Moonism runs the risk of racializing an alien language, Korean in this case.

DeLillo's focusing on one specifically literal, or rather, Japanised meaning of Mansei suppresses the word's more peaceful shades of connotation: "Master leads the chant, Mansei, ten thousand years of victory. The blessed couples move their lips in unison, matching the echo of his amplified voice" (15). By reducing the multi-layered semantic of this word to its narrower meaning, an aggressive "victory," Delillo here "represents," in both meanings of

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sitting in the stadium are forced to follow whatever the injunctions written repeatedly on the signboards. When it blinks "CHARGE," you have to shout, "Charge!" When it writes "DE-FENSE," you should pull down the fence ("de-fence") of your individual self and immerse into the nameless masses, "immunized against the language of self," shouting "Defense!" in "one language, one word" into the sky like a "drone" "fortified by blood of numbers," as DeLillo's narrator describes about the Moonie mass wedding at Yankee Stadium. Spectators are indeed supposed to "move their lips in unison, matching the echo [of the American collective commercialism's] amplified voice."

the word, American people's fear of the Other cult's "victory" over or of its incursion into America, the sacred venue of free individuals.[30]

Thus in DeLillo's paranoid universe, there is no difference between Reverend Moon's apocalyptic chant and the two phrases picked up from his native language. Nor is there any difference between the two antipodal cities, a Far Eastern city in Korea and the (postmodern) "cultural capital of the world," New York City. This imaginary displacement of geo-cultural singularities is a good example of DeLillo's imaginative power. It nonetheless easily makes his readers "hurry-up" to jump to a wildly imagined connection between the un-American cult(ures) and the alleged death of the Euroamerican individual self, confirming the paranoid imagination that he seems to share with his characters, which in turn reflects the cultural atmosphere of the late nineteen-eighties and early -nineties when many Americans feared the so-called "Asian invasion ."[31] Again, this fear is also related to the white paranoia Jack feels in White Noise, as I discuss below.

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[30] This fear of alien incursion is also related to what I will call "white paranoia" in connection with White Noise. "Mansei" has in fact more defensive, survivalist connotations connected to the ordeals of modern Korean history, which has been exposed to an unprecedented cruelties of the Japanese militarism. Thus though both mansei and banzai are from the same origin of the Chinese "ten thousand years," the connotations are almost opposite, mansei signifying "let's survive this ordeal as a group/nation," whereas banzai signifies something similar to kamikaze aggressively sacrificing one's life to the glory of the militarist emperor who is considered to be God. Another case of DeLillo's violation of verisimilitude is Karen's "husband for eternity" (8), "Kim Jo Pak," chosen by Reverend Moon himself for her. I believe this name sounds like a concoction from three Korean family names, rather than a common combination of last and first names. This kind of creative misunderstanding is common to Western writers. I will discuss a similar case for Tim O'Brien in Chapter 4.

[31] Another example of DeLillo's wild imagination concerning the Korean peninsula can be found in his thirteenth novel, Cosmopolis, about international financial market and conspiracies related to it. In this 2003 novel, a very unlikely assassination happens in North Korea: "The man down was Arthur Rapp, managing director of the International Monetary Fund. [He] had just been assassinated in Nike North Korea. Happened only a minute ago. Eric watched it happen again, in obsessive replays, as the car crawled a choke point on Lexington Avenue. He hated Arthur Rapp. ... [Rapp] was killed live on the Money Channel. It was past midnight in Pyongyang and he was making final comments to an interviewer for the benefit of North American audiences after a historic day and night of ceremonies, receptions, dinners, speeches and toasts. Eric watched him sign a document on one screen and prepare to die on another" (33). In this typical DeLilloesque passage that is not necessarily related to the main plot of the novel, Eric Packer the protagonist, who is a young billionaire asset manager in New York, is obsessively watching the live assassination by repeatedly replaying it in his lavishly customized white limousine. What is interesting about this passage is that, though the novel is set

DeLillo's eighth novel White Noise, which has now become part of the postmodern canon of American fiction, also portrays the endangered status of the individual self as a predominant cultural symptom of contemporary America, focusing on a paranoid white middle-class family, particularly on its pathological fear of death. Jack Gladney, a.k.a. J. A. K. Gladney, a world-famous Hitler specialist, is proud of his social status. When a mysterious "airborne toxic event" (117) threatens the safety of his comfortable Midwestern college town, he reassures his children by smugly telling them:

> These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main effect of natural and man-made disasters. People in low-lying area get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornadoes. I'm a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? We live in a neat and pleasant town near college with a quaint name. These things don't happen in places like Blacksmith. (114)

He is, however, not completely content with his life. Rather, he repeatedly feels emptiness in his heart. Mentioning his fake initials, J. A. K., he says to himself: "I am the false character that follows the name around" (17).

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in New York on one day in April, 2000, DeLillo imaginatively pre-empts a future state of North Korea, probably motivated by the historic summit meeting held in Pyongyang between the two Koreas' leaders on June 15, 2000, which was the first summit since this peninsula was divided by the two Cold War superpowers. In DeLillo's novel, North Korea is portrayed as fully incorporated into the global capitalist system, though not quite stable yet as this imagined assassination testifies. In this live assassination scene, which is similar to J. F. K.'s and Lee Harvey Oswald's live death in Libra or to the home-videotaped assassination by the Texas Highway Killer in Underworld, we find another trace of DeLillo's orientalist attitude: an American high official is assassinated in this imagined future North Korea "after a historic day and night of ceremonies, receptions, dinners, speeches and toasts." Does he, like J. Edgar Hoover, have an apocalyptically prophetic sense to see a catastrophic disaster in the midst of jubilation over a historic reunion, either between two Koreas or between the U.S. and the D. P. R. K., the two parties of the Korean War? Another element picked up from Korean culture for this novel is related to the word hwa-byung. To describe the extreme anger of Benno Levin, who is another assassin in this novel, this time that of the protagonist, Eric himself, DeLillo uses hwa-byung, a pseudo-medical word for highly distressed feeling of being mistreated or victimized usually by the stronger or the superior: "When I try to suppress my anger, I suffer spells of hwa-byung (Korea). This is cultural panic mainly, which I caught on the Internet" (56). If one suffers real hwa-byung, however, s/he ultimately dies due to the psychosomatic disease, rather than taking revenge in a justified way or not. Its etiology is related to an absolute unfairness that can never be rectified, either by legal procedures or by taking the law into one's own hands. Only if/when one cannot take revenge at all, the anger turns into a genuine psychosomatic disease called hwa-byung. Thus Levin's "anger" seems to be short of being a hwa-byung.

More seriously, Jack and his wife, Babette, are suffering an excessive fear of death. They talk, think, and worry about death; they have nightmares and hallucinations of death; and their lives are distorted because of their unusual fear of death. "Who will die first?" (15) is a question that keeps haunting them.[32] And "[t]he dead have a presence" in this couple's life (98), as Jack says to himself: "When I read obituaries I always note the age of the deceased. Automatically I relate this figure to my own age. Four years to go, I think. Nine more years. Two years and I'm dead. The power of numbers is never more evident than when we use them to speculate on the time of our dying" (99). The Gladneys thus adopt several strategies to overcome this pathological fear of death: Jack's own simulating of death by mimicking Hitler; his wife's secret taking of Dylar, a wonder drug that supposedly cures fear of death; shopping sprees as an important family adventure; and the family's collective watching of mass disasters on TV.

Jack's own effort to survive his fear of death is related to his profession. As founder/ chairperson of the first Hitler studies program in North America at the College-on-the Hill,[33] he wears dark glasses and capes in order to simulate the sublime aura of fascism but also to become intimate with the power of death. His spurious initials, J. A. K.,[34] were also invented to create a mysterious aura around his being so that he can hide his vulnerable self behind it. Most of all, Jack understands the psycho-social appeal of fascism. According to his course titled "Advanced Nazism," for example, he emphasizes "the continuing mass appeal of

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[32] "One of DeLillo's working titles for this novel was The American Book of the Dead." Leonard Orr, Don DeLillo's White Noise: A Reader's Guide (New York: Continuum, 2003) 28.

[33] It is not difficult for American readers to relate the name of this cozy Midwestern private college to the ideal of "the city on the hill" first presented by John Winthrop on the ship Arabella in 1630.

[34] As any regular American reader can imagine, these initials sound like J. F. K., whose assassination by Lee Harvey Oswald is portrayed in DeLillo's Libra.

fascist tyranny" (25) that originates from its power of mass-mobilization. His course is thus focused on "parades, rallies and uniforms" (25):

> Every semester I arranged for a screening of background footage. This consisted of propaganda films, scenes shot at party congresses, outtakes from mystical epics featuring parades of gymnasts and mountaineers.... Crowd scenes predominated. Close-up jostled shots of thousands of people outside a stadium after a Goebbels speech, people surging, massing, bursting through the traffic. Halls hung with swastika banners, with mortuary wreaths and death's-head insignia. Ranks of thousands of flagbearers arrayed before columns of frozen light, a hundred and thirty anti-aircraft searchlights aimed straight up – a scene that resembled a geometric longing, the formal notion of some powerful mass desire. There was no narrative voice. Only chants, songs, arias, speeches, cries, cheers, accusations, shrieks. (25-6)

This description of, or rather Jack's own fascination with, the "mass desire" of fascism, whose details are probably based on Leni Riefenstahl's documentary, The Triumph of the Will, is similar in many ways to other DeLillo characters' ambivalent obsession with the mass events. This early twentieth-century phenomenon of "crowds" thus has apocalyptic significances similar to those of the "millennial hysteria" foreshadowed by the disorientated (non-)self of Karen in Mao II.

Jack also understands the phenomenon of mass death as an unavoidable human experience. When the showing of the collective images ends, Professor Gladney's class discussion moves to the relation between plot and death, revealing DeLillo's imaginative power to connect the two apparently distant problems, a socio-cultural issue of mass death and a literary, aesthetic question of plot. In a passage that might be read as a good fictional summary of Peter Brooks's Freudian interpretation of narrative plot in Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative, Jack, or DeLillo himself, explores: "All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot. It is

like a contract that all must sign, the plotters as well as those who are the targets of the plot" (26). This unusually keen but apocalyptic understanding of the self-betrayal of human "plots in general" is directly related to DeLillo's own views on history and culture. Particularly the two epiphanic sentences, "All plots tend to move deathward" and "We edge nearer death every time we plot,"[35] reveal his virtuosity to discern the dark irony shared by modern and postmodern cultures, an irony that the modern(ist) utopian "plot" of fascism turns into a postmodern nightmare. In DeLillo's imagination, thus Jack's Hitler, who "called himself the lonely wanderer out of nothingness" (72), is not only a clear and present threat but also a cultural guide for understanding the power of what Freud once called Thanatos, the eternal and trans-historical death-wish:

> Death. Many of those crowds were assembled in the name of death. They were there to attend tributes to the dead. Processions, songs, speeches, dialogues with the dead, recitations of the names of the dead. They were there to see pyres and flaming wheels, thousands of flags dipped in salute, thousands of uniformed mourners. There were ranks and squadrons, elaborate backdrops, blood banners and black dress uniforms. Crowds came to form a shield against their dying. To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone. Crowds came for this reason above all other. They were there to be a crowd. (White Noise 73)

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[35] DeLillo often uses same or similar expressions repeatedly in different contexts of different novels, giving the reader an impression that he is emphasizing a certain apocalyptic aspect of his aesthetic, cultural visions. One example of repetition emphasizing this connection between plotting and death can be found in Libra, where Win Everett is worried if the original conspiracy to scare shoot J. F. K. might end up with real killing of him, which became the fact as we all know:

> Plots carry their own logic. There is a tendency of plots to move toward death. He believed that the idea of death is woven into the nature of every plot. A narrative plot no less than a conspiracy of armed men. The tighter the plot of a story, the more likely it will come to death. A plot in fiction, he believed, is the way we localize the force of the death outside the book, play it off, contain it. The agencies staged mock battles to parallel the tempests I nature and reduce their fear of gods who warred across the sky. Hw worried about the deathward logic of his plot. He'd already made it clear that he wanted the shooters to hit a Secret Service man, wound him superficially. But it wasn't a misdirected round, an accidental killing, that made him afraid. There was something more insidious. He had a foreboding that the plot would move to a limit, develop a logical end. (221)

Hitler is still alive as an apocalyptic cultural icon in Jack's, or DeLillo's, postmodern America,[36] as we can see in a similar scene portraying crowds in relation to mass death in "The Triumph of Death," the prologue of Underworld.[37] Here the FBI founder/director J. Edgar Hoover reveals an uncannily trenchant prescience of the imminent end of the world when he hears the news of the Soviet Union's atomic test. The test is reported to him while he is watching a historic ball game between then the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants. When Bobby Thompson hits a home run at the bottom of the ninth inning, making the Giants win the almost lost game, fans of the Giants are exhilarated and "All over the city people are coming out of their houses" (47). Right in the midst of this jubilation, however, Hoover sees "a landscape of visionary havoc and ruin" (41), a jamais vu of an apocalyptic future that will be caused by the nuclear rivalry between Us/U. S. and Them/U. S. S. R.

Just after he is informed of the Soviet atomic test and Thompson hits the "Shot Heard Round the World,"[38] he grabs two torn-off pages of Life magazine from the "paper falling everywhere," which is thrown into the Ground by the excited fans (43). In those pages now in Hoover's paranoiacally clean hands is printed an apocalyptic picture: "a sixteenth century

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[36] As Paul A. Cantor argues in "Adolf, We Hardly Knew You," DeLillo seems to believe that there are indeed "parallels between German fascism and contemporary American culture" (51). More specifically, Cantor argues, "DeLillo suggests that the spiritual void that made Hitler's rise to power possible is still with us, perhaps exacerbated by the forces at work in postmodern culture" (49).

[37] This prologue was originally published in Harper's, October 1992, as a separate piece with a its own title, "Pafko at the Wall," and later in 1997 it was published again as a monograph, Pafko at the Wall: A Novella by Scribner, certainly revealing the cooptation of DeLillo's fame by the commercial cultures.

[38] According to DeLillo's interview with Gerald Howard for Hungry Mind Review: An Independent Book Review, Thompson's historic home run acquired this name, probably after Daily News first used it (Hungry Mind Review, 9/01/97, 3). But what is more important is that this labeling figuratively connects the two events, the Soviet atomic test and the Thompson's home run on October 3, 1951, not only in the newspapers at that time but also in DeLillo's imagination. As DeLillo himself writes in "The Power of History," the front page of The New York Times on Oct. 4, 1951, starkly revealed the secret connection of these two apparently unrelated events, invoking in his mind "an unexpected connection, a symmetry that seemed to be waiting for someone to discover it" when he was looking at "a pair of mated headlines, top of the page. Same typeface, same size type. Each headline three columns wide, three lines deep" in a local library (2).

work done by a Flemish master, Pieter Bruegel," whose title, "The Triumph of Death" (50), echoes Riefenstahl's The Triumph of the Will. This gory picture filled with dying bodies, dead bodies, mutilated bodies, skulls, skeletons, and man-hunting dogs works for Hoover, and also for DeLillo himself, as an objective correlative associating modern utopianism ("will") and its apocalyptic end-product ("death"), prefiguring a nuclear Armageddon. So Hoover, or DeLillo himself, can (fore)see:

> The meatblood colors and massed bodies, this is a census-taking of awful ways to die. He looks at the flaring sky in the deep distance out beyond the headlines of the left-hand page – Death everywhere, Conflagration in many places, Terror universal, the crows, the ravens in silent glide, the raven perched on the white nag's rump, black and white forever, and he thinks of a lonely tower standing on the Kazakh Test Site, the tower armed with the bomb, and he can almost hear the wind blowing across the Central Asian steppes, out where the enemy lives in long coats and fur caps, speaking that old weighted language of theirs, liturgical and grave. What secret history are they writing? There is the secret of the bomb and there are the secrets that the bomb inspires, things even the Director cannot guess – a man whose own sequestered heart holds every festering secret in the Western world – because these plots are only now evolving. This is what he knows, that the genius of the bomb is printed not only in its physics of particles and rays but in the occasion it creates for new secrets. For every atmospheric blast, every glimpse we get of the bared force of nature, that weird peeled eyeball exploding over the desert – for every one of these he reckons a hundred plots go underground, to spawn and skein. (50-1)

Hoover as a paranoid master plotter of the Cold War thinks here, like Jack, that "The dead have come to take the living" (49), thematically summarizing the whole 827 pages of Underworld, which is an exemplary DeLilloesque counterhistory meant to excavate the dark undercurrents of the Cold War decades.

By using Bruegel's painting both for the scene and for the title of the prologue, DeLillo proves himself "a master of the age" who "could paint" "a crowded twisted vision of a rush to death" (Mao II 34). As an author with a Catholic upbringing, he also seems to find here seeds of ascetic cultural consolation, ironically in the core of excessive jubilation mixed

with a dark apocalypse. This gesture of forgetting through remembering, or vice versa, does not necessarily cure the postmodern cultural epidemics suffered by DeLillo himself or his characters, but at least it reassures them with a momentary feeling of command and stability through the vivid apocalyptic image. This also implies that DeLillo's creative use of paranoia/apocalypse/conspiracy is significant for understanding his aesthetic/politics of the novel, as I will discuss later.

Shopping together is a major family adventure that makes Jack's mixed family happily (re)united in comfort. Particularly for Jack himself, it is an important psycho-cultural event that restabilizes his ego with a feeling of plenitude, which is provided by what Margaret Crawford calls "the utopia of consumption" in her study of the West Edmonton Mall in Canada and other North American shopping centers (11).[39] Jack analyzes his own utopian feeling of self-realization through conspicuous consumption: "in ... our purchases, in the sheer plenitude those crowded bags suggested, ... in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well-being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls – it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening" (20).[40] He indeed experiences a "sense of replenishment," "well-being," "security," "contentment," and "fullness of being" in this utopia of consumerism:

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[39] Crawford, "The World in a Shopping Mall," Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 3-30.

[40] This "fullness of being" is, of course, "not known to people who need less, expect less." In reality, however, I believe a somewhat deeper worship for consumerism can be found among these people because in supermarkets they go through a more thorough process of what early Puritans called "conversion." Their conversion starts with a painful guilt for their not being ready enough to afford whatever they or their children want, and after an agonizing and humiliating middle stage of penitence in the temple of consumerism, they come out of the "gateway" or "pathway," "recharged" (37) with a stronger determination to make more money by better serving the system. As the religious institutions often try to teach, your faith shall become stronger when your sins were grander and more wicked while you were lost.

> Babette and the kids followed the emporiums and department stores, puzzled but excited by my desire to buy. When I could not decide between two shirts, they encouraged me to buy both. When I said I was hungry, they fed me pretzels, beer, souvlaki. ... They were my guides to endless well-being. People swarmed through the boutiques and gourmet shops. Organ music rose from the great court. We smelled chocolate, popcorn, cologne; we smelled rugs and furs, hanging salamis and deathly vinyl. My family gloried in the event. I was one of them, shopping at last. ... I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped with immediate needs and distant contingencies. I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it. ... I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed. Brightness settled around me. ... I traded money for goods. The more money I spent, the less important it seemed. I was bigger than these sums. These sums poured off my skin like so much rain. These sums in fact came back to me in the form of existential credit. I felt expansive, inclined to be sweepingly generous, and told the kids to pick out their Christmas gifts. ... I was the benefactor, the one who dispenses gifts, bonuses, bribes, baksheesh. (83-4)

This feeling of "fullness of being" elevates to a religious level in DeLillo's representation of post-industrial affluence. According to Murray Jay Siskind, a young "New York émigré" in the cultural studies program at Jack's school, "Supermarkets this large and clean and modern are a revelation" (38). He even develops an analogy between American supermarkets and the Tibetan religion, portraying supermarkets as a limbo, a religious realm that exists between this and nether worlds: "Tibetans believe there is a transitional state between death and rebirth. Death is a waiting period, basically. Soon a fresh womb will receive the soul. In the meantime the soul restores to itself some of the divinity lost at birth. ... That's what I think of whenever I come in here. This place recharges us spiritually, it prepares us, it's a gateway or pathway." (37) This depiction of supermarket as a postmodern temple for the God of Capital reveals DeLillo's keen understanding of the power of contemporary consumerism that absorbs the American selves to reprocess them into a completely new kind of subjects, by baptizing them as the shopping subjects.

DeLillo's portrayal of the new American shopping subjects reminds us of Allen Ginsberg's critique of the "Whole family shopping at night" (29) in his 1955 poem, "A Supermarket in California." Conjuring up Whitman's soul, Ginsberg's cultural persona in this poem sings, or "howls" as s/he does in "Howl," about the hazardous American materialism that is epitomized by the supermarket:

> I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eying the grocery boys.
> I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?
> I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.
> We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.
> Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight? (Howl and Other Poems 29-30)

Ginsberg and DeLillo share one critical element: the death of the traditional individual self caused by consumerism. Jack's visits to shopping malls do not provide a genuine solution to his postmodern American gothic. As Jack confesses, the blessing of consumerism is only fleeting and flimsy for his family: After a shopping spree, "We drove home in silence. We went to our respective rooms, wishing to be alone" (84). Or, as Scott tells Brita in Mao II: many Americans still "eat alone, ... walk alone, ... [and] talk to themselves in the street in profound and troubled monologues" (88). Besides, shopping malls literally contain both physical bodies and cultural selves of America within the glossy matrices of consumerism, which Brita calls a "consumer prison" (Mao II 88). Thus Jack's momentarily swollen ego still needs to ask the same question as Ginsberg's, "Where are we going, Walt Whitman?" though his voice is not as harsh as Ginsberg's.

Yet, compared to Ginsberg's harsh critique of what he calls "Moloch" in "Howl," DeLillo's view of consumerism is more ironic and even benign. It certainly absorbs the

American souls into its matrices; but it could also bless the lost American souls, at least temporarily, by giving illusory but substantial content(s) to them. While criticizing the predominance of consumerism in contemporary American society, DeLillo seems to be ascetically recognizing the momentarily consoling function of the supermarkets for lost American souls. Thus his representation of them as an auratic, pseudo-religious space is not necessarily condemnatory. It is certainly critical of the consumerist culture produced and provided by the post-industrial American civilization, but as a genuine Catholic, DeLillo seems to find seeds of consolation in every moment and corner of contemporary American society, which makes him not a militant but naïve critic after all, but a more philosophical writer.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the postmodern aura that is revealed by the authorial eyes of DeLillo is not totally misleading. We can see in the case of the "most photographed barn" or of the "postmodern sunset" in White Noise that DeLillo is following the tradition of Catholic American literature that has been revived by Walker Percy and other writers in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Like the strange nuns Jack meets in the hospital where he takes Willie Mink to be treated, DeLillo might think, "It is our task in the world to believe things no one else takes seriously. To abandon such beliefs completely, the human race would die. This is why we are here. A tiny minority. To embody old things, old beliefs. The devil, the angels, heaven, hell. If we did not pretend to believe these things, the world would collapse" (318). Just pretending to believe in the existence of heaven and hell is thus a mission for the postmodern nuns, but it is also DeLillo's own catholic role as a "beacon of hope for American culture" in the age of postmodernity (Franzen). Thus he seems to agree with the nuns: "Our pretense is a dedication. Someone must appear to believe. Our

lives are no less serious than if we professed real faith, real belief. As belief shrinks from the world, people find it more necessary than ever that someone believe" (319). Like Baudrillard, DeLillo already knows of the absence of God, but unlike Baudrillard, he understands well that God still presences himself in this world, even as a simulacrum, who is absent but still significant to the lost postmodern souls.[41]

Another effort to overcome the fear of death is made by Jack's wife, Babette, who secretly takes Dylar to cure her pathological fear of death by manipulating chemical processes in the brain. Not satisfied with miracle stories from tabloids as a cure for her unusual fear of death, she starts taking the wonder drug acquired through an illicit sex trade with a murky, eccentric doctor, Willie Mink. Vaguely noticing that his wife is taking strange pills but also committing adultery, Jack finally attempts to kill Mink in a motel room.

What is significant about this tabloid-type spousal cheating and revenge is that DeLillo sets this banal American event within a cultural context related to what might be called "white paranoia." As Tim Engles argues in "'Who are You Literally?': Fantasies of the White Self in White Noise," White Noise can be read as a novel "about the noise that white people make" (755). White middle-class Americans are faced with the fact that "the increasing presence of racialized others challenges certain racial and cultural presumptions" (758). Thus like Rodge Janney in Mao II, Jack feels that alien cultural elements are posing threats to the comfort he believes he is enjoying. This recognition comes to him subtly but suddenly, making him paranoid. At the beginning of Chapter 25, he talks of his suppressed racial anxiety: "Our newspaper is delivered by a middle-aged Iranian driving a Nissan Sentra.

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[41] Baudrillard argues in Simulacra and Simulations that "the pope, the grand inquisitor, and the great Jesuits or theologians all knew that God did not exist; this was their secret and their strength" (Selected Writings 158). Also because of the "omnipotence of simulacra," they wanted to hide the fact "that there has never been any God; that only simulacra exists; indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacra" (Selected Writings 169).

Something about the car makes me uneasy – the car waiting with its headlights on, at dawn, as the man places the newspaper on the front steps" (184). Jack first tries to think it away as mere symptoms related to his age, "the age of unreliable menace" that makes him easily wander through "abandoned meanings" and "unexpected themes" (184). But his discomfort with the Japanese car owned by an Iranian man is not simply an "unreliable menace,"[42] as we can see in the next scene where Jack is looking at the "white tablet" of Dylar he recovered from the family garbage: It is "a streamlined disk with the tiniest of holes at one end" (184). I believe this "white" tablet with a "hole" symbolically represents Jack's own white racial anxiety that he needs to confront in one way or another.[43]

Indeed, white paranoia visits Jack's own backyard when his father-in-law, Vernon Dickey, appears one early dawn. Though Dickey is just paying a surprise visit, Jack's first response to it tells us clearly about the interconnectedness between his whiteness and his fear of death:

> There was someone sitting in the backyard. A white-haired man sitting erect in the old wicker chair, a figure of eerie stillness and composure. At first, dazed and sleepy, I didn't know what to make of the sight. It seemed to need a more careful interpretation than I was able to provide at the moment. I thought one thing, that he'd been inserted there for some purpose. Then fear began to enter, palpable and overwhelming, a fist clenching repeatedly in chest. Who was he, what was happening here? ... I didn't know what to do. I felt old, white. I worked

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[42] Given the fact that this novel was written in 1985, he must be feeling here a more concrete anxiety over his racial/national status. Thus as Engles writes:

> Writing in the early 1980s, DeLillo clearly evokes here the media-generated associations of Iranian men and Japanese cars with threats to American security. The "Iranian Hostage Crisis" had recently occupied much of America's attention, as had the media's focus on a series of incidents that contributed to the general stereotype of Middle Eastern men as potential terrorists. Also alluded to here by Jack's discomfort with the "Nissan Sentra" is the gradual incursion into American markets of Japanese products.... (776)

[43] The word "white" has a significant resonance in this novel. In a supermarket, for example, Murray buys "generic food and drink, nonbrand items in plain white packages" and confides to Jack: "Flavorless packaging. It appeals to me. I feel I'm not only saving money but contributing to some kind of spiritual consensus. It's like World War III. Everything is white. They'll take our bright color away and use them in the war effort" (18). The color of Dylar is also pure white. This emphasis on whiteness is related to Jack's own whiteness.

> my way back to the window, gripping a doorknob, a handrail, as if to remind myself of the nature and being of real things. He was still out there, gazing into the hedges. I saw him in profile in the uncertain light, motionless and knowing. Was he as old as I'd first thought? – or was the white hair purely emblematic, part of his allegorical force? That was it, of course. He would be Death, or Death's errand-runner, a hollow-eyed technician from the plague era, from the era of inquisition, endless wars, of bedlams and leprosariums. He would be an aphorist of last thins, giving me the barest glance – civilized, ironic – as he spoke his deft and stylish line about my journey out. I watched for a long time, waiting for him to move a hand. His stillness was commanding. I felt myself getting whiter by the second. What does it mean to become white? How does it feel to see Death in the flesh, come to gather you in? (242-3)

Questions of whiteness and death are here not just simply juxtaposed; they are two sides of the same coin, Jack's white paranoia. His unconscious but clear understanding of his own whiteness, however, does not yet lead him to a rational understanding of his racial anxiety. Thus like Melville's Ahab, who monomaniacally searches for the meaning of whiteness, he decides to confront the white death, or the death of whiteness physically. He approaches the white figure with "the copy of Mein Kampf clutched to [his] stomach" (244). His carrying of Mein Kampf here as a protective gear reveals that his mimicking of Hitler is indeed an effort to confront/overcome the fear of his own white death, which also implies that his Hitler studies are not just a scholarly business but also a very personal one related to his pathological fear of death.

But Jack makes himself only a mock Ahab by ending up his adventure with an anticlimax that reassures him with his own being still alive, proving that his white paranoia is indeed paranoia. When the shadowy figure slowly turns in his direction, his heroic adventure turns into a postmodern farce: "The sense of eerie and invincible stillness washed off, the aura of knowingness, the feeling he conveyed of an ancient and terrible secret. A second figure began to emerge from the numinous ruins of the first, began to assume effective form, develop in the crisp light as a set of movements, lines and features, a contour, a living person

whose distinctive physical traits seemed more and more familiar as I watched them come into existence, a little amazed" (244).

Jack's more serious confrontation with white paranoia can be found in his showdown with Mink, his wife's secret supplier of sexual and psycho-medical comfort. Recognizing, like Rodge Janney and Bill Gray in Mao II, that the safety of his white self is threatened, he decides to take action to "kill to live" (291). Their meeting in a motel room sums up Jack's racial recognition as a white male. Much like Caliban in Shakespeare's The Tempest, who is not identifiable to the European eyes of Prospero, Mink is undefinable to the eyes of white Jack: "His nose was flat, his skin the color of a Planter's peanut. What is the geography of a spoon-shaped face? Was he Melanesian, Polynesian, Indonesian, Nepalese, Surinamese, Dutch Chinese? Was he a composite?" (307). As a (post-)American subaltern, Mink then asks him, echoing Caliban the postcolonial other, "Why are you here, white man?"; "You are very white, you know that?" Jack's answer to this question, "It's because I'm dying" (310), symbolically speaks for and about the supposedly endangered status of whiteness in general.[44]

This color line, however, becomes ironic when DeLillo blurs it by reversing their positions. After foregrounding the racial/color polarity, DeLillo makes Jack finally shoot Mink. He thinks after the shooting that "Mink's pain was beautiful, intense" (312). More interestingly, Jack makes Mink believe he shot himself, by putting the gun in his hand. Then he feels a sudden "compassion, remorse, mercy" for his alleged victimizer-turned-into-victim, and decides to save him by taking him to the hospital where the postmodern nuns work, or "pretend" to work. He even declares his own "selflessness" in his "redemptive" act:

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[44] See my note 19 in this chapter and related discussion.

> With the restoration of the normal order of matter and sensation, I felt I was seeing him for the first time as a person. The old human muddles and quirks were set flowing again. Compassion, remorse, mercy. ... Using my good hand, I grabbed Mink by his bare foot and dragged him across the blood-dappled tile, the gun still clutched in his fist. There was something redemptive here. ... Something large and grand and scenic. ... I know I felt nervous, I felt blood-stained and stately, dragging the badly wounded man through the dark and empty street. ... He made spent and gasping noises, short of oxygen. I decided to attempt mouth-to-mouth. ... the awkwardness and grim intimacy of the act made it seem all the more dignified under the circumstances. All the larger, more generous. ... I felt large and selfless, above resentment. This was the key top selflessness, or so it seemed to me as I knelt over the wounded man, exhaling rhythmically in the littered street beneath the roadway. Get past disgust. Forgive the foul body. Embrace it whole. ... My humanity soared. ... There was a spaciousness to this moment, an epic pity and compassion. Having shot him, having led him to believe he'd shot himself, I felt I did honor to both of us, to all of us, by merging our fortunes, physically leading him to safety. I took long slow stride, pulling his weight. It hadn't occurred to me that a man's attempts to redeem himself might prolong the elation he felt when he committed the crime he now sought to make up for. (313-5)

This passage reveals DeLillo's ironic twist on white paranoia. More important, however, is the fact that Jack here momentarily restabilizes his white self, in a way similar to Bill Gray's, or DeLillo's own, Euroamerican postimperial self restabilizing itself through imaginary adventures into an Other "elsewhere." Jack experiences: "My humanity soared"; "There was a spaciousness to this moment, an epic pity and compassion." More than just victimizing Mink who was his supposed victimizer, Jack cathartically "redeems" his own imperiled white self. This scene could be just a banal postmodern travesty of the traditional thriller, but it is still a very unique postimperial moment in which the endangered white self regains its human status through a doubly other-ing of the Other. Thus Mink's final question, "Who are you, literally?" does not have any serious resonance in the white conscience/ consciousness of this "passerby": "It doesn't matter," Jack answers (315). Mink here thus serves as a good postimperial other for the restabilization of Jack's self.

Jack's obsession with whiteness and momentary restabilization of his self reveal his recognition of his own racial anxiety as a white middle-class male, which has up to now been conveniently suppressed by the dominant ideologies. As Engles aptly points out,

> Moby-Dick and White Noise both suggest that to turn away from whiteness because its very emptiness strikes a "panic to the soul" is a natural, even primitive response. In addition, both texts are also readable as meditations not merely on the color itself, but on what has been made of the color, particularly the racial deployment of it. A specific terror both novels evoke is that of the construction of the "white race" and of the driving forces that led to its construction. In these terms, the blankness of racial whiteness signals the absence from white consciousness of an historical awareness that would account for its formation as "white." Facing up to this past and its connections to one's own whiteness is indeed discomforting, so much so that generations of whites have repressed it to virtual irrecoverability. (771)

"Like Melville, then, DeLillo depicts this white tendency to turn away from the sense of horror that th[e] history of whiteness can inspire" (Engles 771). But Jack, or DeLillo himself, cannot "turn away" anymore from the white paranoia because of new demographic, socio-cultural conditions of America. Thus, "while DeLillo depicts the unmarked details of 'ordinary' (white, middle-class) American life, he also suggests that ... the white self's troubles ... are just beginning. White people are becoming increasingly marked as white, and their status as ... ordinary American subjecthood [is] threatened" (756). Jack's white paranoia, or what Engles calls the "suppressed white anxiety" (775) is a response to his own whiteness, whose troubles are "just beginning."[45] Rather than developing into a rational understanding, it sadly remains for Jack as paranoia per se.

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[45] In fact a similar example can also be found in Jefferson's unusual observation of abnormal whiteness among the black people. In Notes on the State of Virginia, he points out:

> an anomaly of nature, taking place sometimes in the race of negroes brought from Africa, who, though black themselves, have in rare instances, white children, called Albinos. ... They are of a pallid cadaverous white, untinged with red, without any coloured spots or seams; their hair of the same kind of white, short, coarse, and curled as is that of the Negro; all of them well formed, strong, healthy, perfect in their senses, except that of sight, and born of parents who had no mixture of white blood. (70)

A fourth cultural placebo Jack and his family take as a cure for their fear of death is watching TV all together on Friday nights, "with the sound low" (104), much as Karen does in Mao II. The predominance of TV in contemporary American life is one of the main cultural issues represented in White Noise. According to Murray's expertise as a cultural studies professor, whose ideas are almost literally replicated by early DeLillo critics: "I've come to understand that the medium is a primal force in the American home. Sealed-off, timeless, self-contained, self-referring. It's like a myth being born right there in our living room, like something we know in a dream-like and preconscious way. ...TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth, it welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern" (51). Or, according to Alfonse, Murray's colleague, "For most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set." (66). As the official name of the cultural studies program Murray and Alfonse belong to implies, TV indeed became an essential part of "American Environments" (9).

This formidable power of TV is best expressed through commercials: "Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles, the slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras. ... The medium practically overflows with sacred formulas ..." (51). Like supermarkets, TV commercials have a pseudo-religious status in Jack's, or DeLillo's, postmodern America. Characters of White Noise frequently repeat the

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What could have made Jefferson pay an extra attention to this abnormally white phenomenon among the black people? Was he having an earlier form of white paranoia or of what Engles calls "suppressed white anxiety"? Was he obsessed with his own whiteness because he needed to hide his relationship with Sally Hemings, his colored mistress? Answering these questions is beyond the present concern of this dissertation. One thing is, however, clear: the anomalous whiteness required a certain unusual attention of Jefferson.

"sacred formulas" of TV commercials: "Coke is it, coke is it, coke is it" (51); "MasterCard, Visa, American Express" (100); and "Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida" (155).[46] These commercials strike Jack like an "ecstatic chant" "with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence" (155). The trinominal or Trinitarian commercial "mantras" thus became postmodern religious chants for the God of Capital.[47]

The predominance of TV in shaping human consciousness is most clearly seen when people are separated by it. The very first question raised by an airplane crash survivor sounds like a prayer to the hidden God: "Where's the media?" (92). Without TV, it seems nobody can understand the world. Or, more seriously, we might not be able to live in this postmodern world without a TV set. Thus the Gladneys' most important family business is watching TV together on Friday nights over take-out Chinese food. This postmodern meal, which must be both a realistic representation of contemporary American family meals and a parody of the traditional (Christian) family meals that usually start with prayers to God, has become a new religious ritual. But the problem is that this pseudo-religious family ritual does not give the family any psychological comfort. Rather, TV images completely absorb this family's emptied-out souls. There is no talk, and the sound is off. Images alone predominate. DeLillo's repeated portrayal of the formidable power of TV thus signifies the threat that images pose to the traditional American values such as the individual self, free choice, and independent decision. Indeed, "Television is the death throes of human consciousness" (51).

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[46] I have had a similar experience when my quite Americanized eleven-year-old son told me: "Dad, Coke finally invented a low-cal cola called C2, which is good for cholesterol!" I asked, "Where did you pick up that expression, 'finally invented'?" "I don't know, maybe from TV." I wanted to teach him something serious and critical, by asking: "Do you get paid from Coke?" His answer was, of course, "No!" But, was it really no? I was not sure.

[47] According to Orr, examples of these "repeated phrases in series of threes" are many: "three hotel names [The Airport Marriott, the Downtown Travelodge, the Sheraton Inn] (15), three credit card companies [MasterCard, Visa, American Express] (99[100]), there brands of mints (218), three medicines (276), and 'Random Access Memory, Acquired Immune Deficiency syndrome, Mutual Assured Destruction'(289)" (Orr 45-46).

The Gladneys' efforts to cure the unusual fear of death are thus not successful. On the contrary, these overwhelming postmodern cultural forces make their apocalyptic conditions worse. An "airborne toxic event," one of the major events in White Noise, reveals how persistently apocalyptic are DeLillo's postmodern cultural conditions of America. A "dark black breathing thing of smoke" (111) spilt over by a tank truck approaches Jack's town, Blacksmith, making the whole population of the area evacuate. Much like the ancient diasporas described in the Old Testament, the mass evacuation makes Jack experience an almost religious awe:

> The enormous dark mass moved like some death ship in a Norse legend, escorted across the night by armored creatures with spiral wings. We weren't sure how to react. It was a terrible thing to see, so close, so low, packed with chlorides, benzenes, phenol, hydrocarbons, or whatever the precise toxic content. But it was also spectacular, part of the grandness of s sweeping event, like the vivid scene in the switching yard or the people trudging across the snowy overpass with children, food, belongings, a tragic army of the dispossessed. Our fear was accompanied by a sense of awe that bordered on the religious. It is surely possible to be awed by the thing that threatens your life, to see it as a cosmic force, so much larger than yourself, more powerful, created by elemental and willful rhythms. This was a death made in the laboratory, defined and measurable, but we thought of it at the time in a simple and primitive way, as some seasonal perversity of the earth like a flood or tornado, something not subject to control. (127)

Among the evacuating masses is a black man from the Jehovah's Witnesses. As Reverend Moon in Mao II solidifies Rodge Janney's Bill Gray's paranoia, this non-white male here confirms Jack's apocalyptic vision. Much like the early Puritan ministers, he preaches on the coming Armageddon, particularly by emphasizing the uncontrollable nature of the catastrophe as a signal for the imminent end of the world. When he cries over "Wars, famines, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions" as accumulated evidence for an imminent apocalypse (136), Jack seems to be thoroughly convinced: "I wondered about his eerie self-assurance, his freedom from doubt. Is this the point of Armageddon? No ambiguity, no more

doubt. He was ready to run into the next world. He was forcing the next world to seep into my consciousness" (137).

And as always, Murray gives a final theoretical touch to this (post)modern apocalypse when he talks about Nyodene D, a chemical presumably released by the toxic spill:

> This is the nature of modern death.... It has a life independent of us. It is growing in prestige and dimension. It has a sweep it never had before. We study it objectively. ... We've never been so closer to it, so familiar with its habits and attitudes. We know it intimately. But it continues to grow, to acquire breadth and scope, new outlets, new passages and means. The more we learn, the more it grows. Is this some law of physics? Every advance in knowledge and technique is matched by a new kind of death, a new strain. Death adapts, like a viral agent. Is it a law of nature? Or some private superstition of mine? I sense that the dead are closer to us than ever. I sense we inhabit the same air as the dead. Remember Lao Tse. 'There is no difference between the quick and the dead. They are one channel of vitality.' (150)

The fear of death experienced individually by the Gladneys has become a question of human civilization in general. This sense of cultural apocalypticism is indeed a constant theme of DeLillo's novels. By representing stories of paranoia, catastrophe, and imminent mass death, and also by insinuating the collapse of the traditional cultural imagination, DeLillo represents in his fiction the postmodern apocalyptic structure of feeling, and "The American mystery deepens" (60).

Despite all these gloomy apocalyptic sentiments, there is one element in DeLillo's literary universe that works as an antidote to the endangerment of the individual (self): the role of the author as a cultural critic. As I have discussed, the traditional mission of the novel as a Bakhtinian "democratic shout" is apparently threatened by postmodern cultural forces such as the mass media, consumerism, and, most of all, terrorists. In order to revalidate the status of the novel and that of the author in the age of postmodernity, DeLillo proposes a

modified definition of the novel as a "counterhistory." This redefinition of the novel does not deny its traditional role as a democratic shout; rather, it expands it by aiming to promote the ideals of the individual self on a more singular and concrete level.

According to his essay "The Power of History" published in The New York Times in September 1997, DeLillo defines counterhistory in terms of language. "Language can be a form of counterhistory" (6). Because language can "expose the past to painterly textures" (6), the novelist can "pose[] the idiosyncratic self" "against the force of history" and "imagine deeply, to follow obscure urges into unreliable regions of experience" (5). As is exemplified by E. L. Doctorow's postmodern novel Ragtime, DeLillo argues, the novel thus uncovers "diverse human voices," manifesting that "language can be a democratic experiment" or even "an agent of redemption" (6). In the final section of the essay, DeLillo describes what he wanted to portray, or rather, excavate in his Underworld, which is his own example of counterhistory:

> The glaze of wicker seats on subways, the woman who rapped coin on the window to call her kid in to dinner, the bike riders on summer nights racing toward the spray of the open hydrant, the voices of friends and the barely seen gestures of total strangers – retrieved, remarkably, in the sensuous drenching play of memory.
>
> This is the lost history that becomes the detailed weave of novels. Fiction is all about reliving things. It is our second chance.
>
> There is pleasure to be found, the writer's, the reader's, in a version of the past that escapes the coils of established history and biography and that finds a language, scented, dripping, detailed, for such routine realities as sex, weather and food, for the ravel of a real thread on a woman's velvet sleeve. (8)

What he foregrounds in Underworld is thus the minor but subtle singularities of the common people's life that are woven around the home run ball that gave a historic pennant to the New York Giants, the ultimate point de repère of the complex undercurrents of Underworld. Thus for DeLillo "The novel is the dream release, the suspension of reality that history needs to escape its own brutal confinements" (5). It is a rediscovery of the very singular moments of

the common people during the Cold War decades. By creatively re-presenting these flimsy and fleeting yet epiphanic moments of the underhistory of the lay people, DeLillo shows that "Fiction does not obey reality" (5); it has an "adversarial relationship with history" (5).

To be critical of both the dominant cultural logic of postmodernity and the official histories and ideologies that collude with it, DeLillo takes a strategy that is both subversive and cognitive, and ultimately lends it to the reader so that s/he can relieve her/his imaginative explorations, while experiencing a cathartic letting out of the suppressed desires. DeLillo's socio-cultural commentaries are based on this unique understanding of the novel. His fiction uncovers "obscure" but singular moments in daily lives of the common people from beneath, or rather, on the glossy surfaces of postmodern cultures. By representing their suppressed anxieties and yearnings, he releases the multiple meanings of the human, the humane, and the humanitarian into this world. In this sense, the novel as a counterhistory has a cognitive and heuristic function similar to that of Foucault's "archeology of knowledge" that unearths the repressed realities of the oppressed people, the histories silenced by the official History. Like Foucault, DeLillo retrieves the "lost history," the hidden connections and undercurrents of contemporary American culture silenced by the dominant histories and ideologies.

As we can see in Libra, Mao II, and Underworld, one main concern of DeLillo is to give paranoia and conspiracy theory a creative function that helps us reimagine the "small anonymous corners of human experience" (4). The novel is thus for DeLillo "the textured paranoia that replaces history" (5). This understanding of paranoia/conspiracy as a useful tool for writing/reading counterhistories is somewhat similar to the status of conspiracy theory mentioned by Fredric Jameson in his discussion of postmodern cultures. Calling our attention to the proliferation of paranoia and conspiracy motifs in contemporary films and novels,

Jameson defines conspiracy theory as a half-truth, an incomplete but nonetheless useful understanding of the world dominated by elusive multinational capital. Discussing cultural works that represent what he calls "conspiratorial epiphany" (17), such works, for example, as Thomas Pynchon's novel The Crying of Lot 49 and Sydney Pollack's film Three Days of the Condor, he recognizes in The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System the half-true function of conspiracy theory in representing the late capitalist system that hides behind its own glossy simulacra:

> In the widespread paralysis of the collective or social imaginary, to which 'nothing occurs' (Karl Kraus) when confronted with the ambitious program of fantasizing an economic system on the scale of the globe itself, the older motif of conspiracy knows a fresh lease on life, as a narrative structure capable of reuniting the minimal basic components: a potentially infinite network, along with a plausible explanation of its invisibility; or in other words: the collective and the epistemological. (9)

These "conspiracy thrillers" (15) supply us with a "vivid, if paranoid, cognitive map" (15) to understand the "absent, unrepresentable totality" of late capitalism (10). In an earlier article "Cognitive Mapping," Jameson discusses in a similar way the "omnipresence of the theme of paranoia" that naturally results in "a seemingly inexhaustible production of the conspiracy plots" (356). According to him, "Conspiracy ... is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content" (356).[48] Thus it is a "degraded" or failed mode of cognition, but he still considers it to be useful for our (half-)understanding of the world before us.

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[48] Jameson's theoretical obsession with paranoia and conspiracy theory is interesting because Marxists, especially militant, internationalist ones, often reveal paranoid tendencies that easily rely on conspiracy theories in interpreting issues of real politics of the world. Michael Hardt, co-author of Empire, or "the Communist Manifesto for our time" per Slavoj Zizek, also used an analogy of conspiracy theory when he explained to me about the elusive multilateral networks of power working in what he calls "Empire": "If I were smarter, I would try something like The Matrix, a Hollywood approximation or a dream narrative functioning today. So that obviously, [our understanding, which is] unconscious but [is still] trying to recognize that complexity of rule

I would argue, however, that DeLillo's "cognitive mapping" of postmodern cultures through motifs of paranoia and conspiracy theory is more revealing, not just "degraded" as Jameson suggests. As a Catholic, DeLillo is not so naïve as to believe that what Jameson calls the "intent to totalize" (14), which seems to be borrowed from Georg Lukács, can be realized satisfactorily in this human world, that either be postmodern or pre-postmodern. Or, the totalizing utopianism that we hope to experience in history is not his main concern. It is of course true that DeLillo, like Jameson, may agree with Lukács's Theory of the Novel that the "novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem" (56). But he would not agree with his Hegelian obsession with totality as an ultimate solution. What Lukács calls the "metaphysical homesickness" (61) or "transcendental homelessness" cannot be treated by attempts to regain a lost, or more correctly, imagined totality. DeLillo is more sober, more ascetic, and less totalizing; he understands that this world is eternally left by God; and he knows that no grand project can make the lost God come back to us. Thus rather than easily moralizing paranoia and conspiracy theory by determining their failure to capture a genuine

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that's functioning in a multilateral way. ... Our idea of Empire corresponds in some sense to a number of representations of popular culture, like ... The Matrix. ... [W]e have already ... historically developed the political consciousness to understand a centralized form of rule, so we can understand that George [W. Bush] is dominating us, or the Pentagon is ruling us, or even the IMF is ruling us. [But w]e don't really yet have the political imagination or political consciousness to understand much more different and multifaceted forms of power and rule [working in postmodern Empire]. So that, in lieu of that, as a kind of stand-in, emerge insufficient understandings of it, but nonetheless, partly true. And that partly true is the interesting element of the conspiracy theories.... The partly true is interesting. Probably more interesting is the fact of their being a symptom of complexity of the world we cannot yet grasp." I am not claiming here at all that Jameson or Hardt are paranoid or simplistic. They are utopian, but also realistic. Besides, they are often too erudite to be easily grasped both by sympathetic readers and by critical detractors, producing many silly misunderstandings. I am just pointing out that their particular interest in the "omnipresence of the theme of paranoia" also makes them use these motifs for their own theoretical explorations. This tendency to take paranoia and conspiracy theory seriously is also interesting in terms of the postmodernism/postmodernity debate. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, William Spanos, an "early postmodernist," and other sympathetic theorists of postmodernism/postmodernity often emphasize the "anti-detective story" as "the paradigmatic literary archetype" of the age of postmodernity (Spanos 24). It seems the postmodernism debate is not limited to theoretical realm; it is also divided by preferred modes and genres of cultural production.

totality, he gives them a heuristic, not hubristic, function that, instead of searching for a lost/ imagined totality, finds singular moments in every corner of the lost souls. In some sense he thus ascetically enjoys the very sadness of the human condition, not because he smugly overlooks those lost souls but because he visits them wherever they reside and gives them back their lost language.

Through redefining the novel as a counterhistory, DeLillo not only revalidates the novel as a democratic form, but also expands its cultural politics. By excavating subtle cultural undercurrents that are suppressed by postmodern simulacra, the novel for DeLillo takes a new, a heuristic function that will help promote democratic ideals of the concrete individuals. As I have mentioned before, one conspicuous example of his counterhistory is Underworld. In this novel, DeLillo searches through the vulnerable psychologies and hidden singularities of the common people who were living under the nuclear deterrence during the Cold War periods. Particularly by analyzing in detail the waste endlessly produced by human civilization, from house garbage to nuclear wastes, from landfills to garbage guerillas, and from condomology to Agent Orange, Underworld uncovers the singular undersides and undercurrents of American civilization during those years. Through this excavation, DeLillo "confronts and re-creates American history" (Wood 9).

Another example of his writing counterhistory can be found in Nicholas Branch in Libra, who is hired by the CIA to write a secret history of the Kennedy assassination. He is inundated with snowballing data on the assassination. Like the paper falling everywhere in Underworld, his small room is filled with ever-arriving new data and new analyses.

> Branch is stuck all right. He has abandoned his life to understand that moment in Dallas, the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century. He has his forensic pathology rundown, his neutron activation analysis. There is also the Warren Report, of course, with its twenty-six accompanying volumes of

> testimony and exhibits, its millions of words. Branch thinks this is the megaton novel James Joyce would have written I he'd moved to Iowa City and lived to be a hundred.
>
> Everything is here. Baptismal records, report cards, postcards, divorce petitions, canceled checks, daily timesheets, tax returns, property lists, postoperative X-rays, photos of knotted string, thousands of pages of testimony, of voices droning in hearing rooms in old courthouse buildings, an incredible haul of human utterance. It lies so flat on the page, hangs so still in the lazy air, lost to syntax and other arrangement, that it resembles a kind of mind-spatter, a poetry of lives muddied and dripping in language.
>
> Documents. There is Jack Ruby's mother's dental chart, dated January 15, 1938. There is a microphotograph of three strands of Lee H. Oswald's pubic hair. Elsewhere (everything in the Warren Report is elsewhere) there is a detailed description of his hair. It is smooth, not knobby. The scales are medium-size. The root area is rather clear of pigment.
>
> Branch doesn't know how to approach this kind of data. H wants to believe the hair belongs in the record. It is vital to his sense of responsible obsession that everything in his room warrants careful study. Everything belongs, everything adheres, the mutter of obscure witnesses, the photos of illegible documents and odd sad personal debris, things gathered up at a dying -- old shoes, pajama tops, letters from Russia. It is all one thing, a ruined city of trivia where people feel real pain. This is the Joycean Book of America, remember – the novel in which nothing is left out. (181)

Nothing seems to be left out in this typical DeLilloesque listing of things minor, things trivial, and things easily forgotten. Snowed under by this heap of (counter)historical data, Branch fails to do the job he is originally assigned to. In the midst of ever-accumulating data, he finally concludes that the Kennedy assassination was "a rambling affair that succeeded in the short term due mainly to chance" (Libra 441), epitomizing a case of the postmodernist historian.

A very DeLilloesque irony of this scene is that Branch's recording on his failure to record a secret history of the assassination turns out to be DeLillo's own thick description of the event as well as of the inner psychology of Lee Harvey Oswald. Like Bill Gray's doomed fate in Mao II, Branch's paranoid puzzlement thus turns out to be a unique moment of DeLillo's virtuosity to uncover and record the undercurrents of the Cold War periods. Thus

the "Joycean Book of America" written by the Warren Commission is a shared counterhistory for Lee Harvey Oswald, Nicholas Branch, DeLillo, and other Americans who endlessly reimagine the histories of the past, present, and future. But what is more important is that, by retrieving these singular things, images, and moments from the abysmal depths of Oswald's soul, DeLillo represents the life of the American cultural undercurrents, rather than hackneyed conspiracy theories or Oswald's criminal mind of the assassin, making Libra a historical novel in a very DeLilloesque sense.

DeLillo's critical commentaries on postmodern cultures are thus quite different from traditional critique. He gives a full command to the author's imaginative power to re-present the lives in this disenchanted world, so that s/he can be satisfied neither with a photo-realistic portrayal of the socio-cultural realities nor with a naive critique for critique's own sake. By returning the forgotten but genuine human voices back to the common people themselves, his author recovers the lost histories that were and are lived by the people themselves in/on this world. Like Whitman who explored secular democratic ideals not in some totalizing dogmas or ideals but in singular moments of the concrete anybody and everybody, DeLillo seems to believe that any- and everybody has to have a fair share in creating, and more importantly, living history. Thus his counterhistory is not denying what Bill Gray calls a "democratic shout," but rendering it an expanded yet more singularized expressivity. Thus the woman who raps on the window with a coin to call her kid to dinner is important to DeLillo, as she might have been to Whitman.

Taking his position somewhere between the Romantic bard as a cultural savior and the nihilistic postmodern conformist, DeLillo is looking at both sides, sitting on the borderline between postmodern and pre-postmodern cultural territories. To the romantic and modernist

cultural ideals DeLillo sends a message of nostalgia confirming the utopian ideals of the artist as critic/creator; to the postmodern cultural forces he proposes a philosophical asceticism because the function of the artist as militant yet naïve consciousness-raisers is now easily co-opted by postmodern culture itself, which becomes more monolithic and inclusive and less open and tolerant to its alternatives. Thus if, as Jameson suggests, paranoia and conspiracy theories have supplied the anxious Cold War peoples with an incomplete but reassuring understanding of the world, DeLillo's postmodern depiction of paranoia and conspiracy theory includes more ascetic but also more creative gestures toward the world, which are apparently less critical but much more redemptive. If Jameson is nostalgically looking back to the utopian moments of modernism/modernity while being swept away into the maelstrom of postmodernity like Benjamin's sad "angel of history," DeLillo's creative, heuristic use of paranoia/conspiracy/apocalypse is an attempt to revitalize and recreate the new, democratic postmodern subjectivities which are stuck on the closed cultural surfaces of postmodernity but still continue dreaming of a redemption that would not come as a form of abstract metanarratives but as fleeting but repeatedly returning minor epiphanies in our daily lives.

DeLillo's position on postmodern democratic ideals is quite different from that of other postmodernists. Rather than positively and aggressively (re)claiming the ideas of postmodern multicipliticies, multivocalities, and uncertainties, he tantalizes the eyes of his readers and attract their collective mind to an abysmal "beyond" of meaning, often making us (dis)believe that he might be trying to give a theological lesson on the deep meaninglessness of the world poised on the verge of the banal, depthless pleasures of the world beyond. This ambivalent and somewhat mysterious attitude of DeLillo has a long tradition in American

literature, particularly in the American romantics: Hawthorne's sincere peeping into the darkest corners of humanity, Poe's sharp understanding of the abysmal human frailties; and Melville's apocalyptic vision that glimpses the redemptive epiphanies beyond the whiteness of the whale but still warns us against the doomed fate of any attempt to reach the total meaning of the white whale. Like these traditional American writers, DeLillo finds pleasures in apocalypses, comfort in doomed human fate, and creative energy in the very forgotten moments of the common people.

Though not free from the predominance of postmodern cultural forces that makes him paranoid about the death of the novel, of the individual, and of the democratic ideals, which in turn lets him inescapably rely on imageries borrowed from the outmoded orientalist tradition, DeLillo's creative use of paranoia and conspiracy theory allows him to capture fleeting but reassuring moments of redemption from the glossy postmodern cultural surfaces. These moments of postmodern aura are represented particularly in Jack's youngest son Wilder's mysteriously safe crossing of the highway on his a tricycle at the end of White Noise, in the elusive epiphany of the murdered orphan Esmeralda's visitation on the signboard in Underworld, or in the wedding parade amongst the gunshots and bomb explosions in Beirut that Brita sees at the end of Mao II. These epiphanic moments of hope and redemption reveal the creativeness of DeLillo's imagination, but more importantly, the overlooked but sincere minds of the common people whose lives in routine hustles and bustles are not just a denial of democratic ideals but are fraught with fragmented but nonetheless hope-bound steps.

Indeed DeLillo has a paranoid mind, but it is a creatively paranoid mind that dreams myriad moments of democratic dreams in the very singular moments of the common people

even in the deep belly of the postmodern apocalyptic beast, the derealizing and deracinating cultures of the age. This fact makes us to believe, or "pretend" to believe, as the postmodern nuns in White Noise ironically claim, that DeLillo's creative use of the postmodern paranoia and apocalypses reconnects him to the tradition of the American cultural imagination that has repeatedly recreated itself when faced with critical moments of crises, making itself ever expansive but also ever more secular and democratic.

Chapter 3

Paul Auster: A "Music of Chance"

> The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.
>
> --Proverbs
> 16:33

> And I may not omit here a special work of God's providence. There was a proud and very profane young man, one of the seamen, of a lusty, able body, which made him the more haughty; he would always[s] be contemning the poor people in their sickness and cursing them daily with grievous exe[cr]ations; and did not let [hesitate] to tell them that he hoped to help to cast half of them overboard before they came to their journey's end, and to make merry with what they had; and if he were by any gently reproved, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it pleased God before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first that was thrown overboard. Thus his curses light on his own head, and it was an astonishment to all his fellows for they noted it to be the just hand of God upon him.
>
> --William Bradford[1]

Nicholas Branch, the CIA-hired historian in Don DeLillo's Libra is hopelessly snowed under by ever-accumulating new data on the Kennedy assassination and fails to do the job he is assigned, that is, the job of writing a "secret [but comprehensive] history" of the assassination.[2] He concludes that the assassination was "a rambling affair that succeeded in the short term due mainly to chance" (Libra 441). This conclusion makes him refuse the

[1] William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, Book I, Chapter IX, Norton Anthology of American Literature, 3rd ed., shorter, eds. Nina Baym, et al. (New York: Norton, 1979) 36. This book reveals a prototypical Puritan effort to interpret chance events in the light of God's providence, containing secular events within the wishful Puritan hermeneutic.

[2] DeLillo here shows his artistic virtuosity by presenting the dialectical relationship between history and fiction, particularly by foregrounding through Branch the paradoxical relationship between a failed historian and a successful narrator of the novel.

traditional understanding of history as a progression of objective events governed by causal necessity and open to human understanding. Branch here epitomizes the postmodernist historian.[3] History now for him is nothing but a cryptic network of coincidences. Being a fictional alter ego of DeLillo, he also represents DeLillo's understanding of history. For DeLillo, too, the Kennedy assassination is a chance event that confirms neither popular conspiracy theories nor the official "lone gunman" theory of the Warren Commission. Pure chance as a driving force of history makes possible DeLillo's postmodern literary project because, freed from objective causal necessity, history is now to be excavated by the writer's imagination.[4] Foregrounding chance as a predominant historical force that merges various conspiratorial plottings and Lee Harvey Oswald's megalomaniacal negotiation with history, DeLillo's Libra as a postmodern narrative construct unconceals the undercurrents of the "American Century" that have been flowing through the historic seven seconds in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963. The undercurrents that have been suppressed by both official and unofficial histories but are now reconstructed by DeLillo's imagination compose what DeLillo himself calls "counterhistory."[5]

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[3] Branch in fact exemplifies an extreme case of the postmodern historical consciousness that emphasizes the chaotic, chancy, and random aspect of history. A more widely accepted variant of postmodern understanding of history focuses on the idea that there is no essential difference between fiction and history because both genres of "writing" are based on our subjective narrativization, conscious emplotment, and imaginative fictionalization of deliberately selected facts of the past, which is beyond our reach. Whereas Richard Rorty argues that philosophy is a genre of literary writing, Hayden White claims that history is nothing but a type of imaginative writing: "The older distinction between fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of the imaginable and history as the representation of the actual, must give place to the recognition that we can only know that the actual by contrasting it with or linking it to the imaginable. As thus conceived, historical narratives are complex structures in which a world of experience is imagined to exist under at least two modes, one of which is encoded as 'real,' the other of which is 'revealed' to have been illusory in the course of the narrative" (White 98).

[4] We can see here a DeLilloesque irony, which claims that a contingent occurrence is in fact a locatable originary moment of the age of uncertainty. This complication DeLillo promotes reveals another aspect of his aesthetic, which is often debated among critics as romantic, realist, modernist, or postmodern. See note 12 in Chapter 2.

[5] Don DeLillo, "The Power of History," The New York Times (7 September, 1997): 60-63.

While DeLillo uses pure chance as a narrative device for writing counterhistory, Paul Auster's narrative of chance, or "the music of chance" to use one of his titles, attributes an almost divine function to the power of Lady Chance. According to Auster's narrative logic, human civilization is nothing less than a conglomeration of random events neither controlled nor understood by the humans participating in those events.[6] The narrator of "The Locked Room," the third story of The New York Trilogy, declares: "In the end, each life is no more than the sum of contingent facts, a chronicle of chance intersections, of flukes, of random events that divulge nothing but their own lack of purpose" (256). Or, Marco Stanley Fogg in Moon Palace, announces: "Causality was no longer the hidden demiurge that ruled the universe: down was up, the last was the first, the end was the beginning. Heraclitus had been resurrected from his dung heap, and what he had to show us was the simplest of truths:

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[6] Auster's aesthetic philosophy on the mysteriousness of "real" life is well summarized in his introduction to I Thought My Father Was God and Other True Tales from NPR's National Story Project, a collection of 179 "true" stories from the National Public Radio listeners that he read aloud for "Weekend All Things Considered." Auster here writes about his own injunction to the listeners: "What interested me most, I said, were stories that defied our expectations about the world, anecdotes that revealed the mysterious and unknowable forces at work in our lives, in our family histories, in our minds and bodies, in our souls. In other words, the true stories that sounded like fiction." He also defines that "the spirit of the project was entirely democratic." Hoping the stories submitted to him to be "an archive of facts, a museum of American reality," or "dispatches ... from the front lines" of "private worlds of individual Americans," Auster writes that the collected stories of "coincidence" are shot through with the "inescapable marks of history": "Hilarious blunders, wrenching coincidences, brushes with death, miraculous encounters, improbable ironies, premonitions, sorrows, pains, dreams – these were the subjects the contributors chose to write about. I learned that I am not alone in my belief that the more we understand of the world, the more elusive and confounding the world become. ... Incredible plots, unlikely turns, events that refuse to obey the laws of common sense. More often than not, our lives resemble the stuff of eighteenth-century novels" (I Thought xv-xxi). According to Dinitia Smith's review, "NPR's Story Project Proves Truth Is Stranger: Listeners' Tales Filled with O. Henry's Twists," "Mr. Auster calls the National Story Project 'democracy in action.' After Sept. 11, he said, 'we are questioning the values of our society, thinking about who we are, what do we stand for?' 'We are a democracy,' he said, and added, '"I Thought My Father Was God" is a testimony to the dignity of everyone's experience'" (New York Times 7, Nov., 2001, E1: 1, 8). What is ironic about this summary of the Austerian aesthetic of chance is that, it was none other than Auster himself who gave the guidelines for the stories to the listeners, that is, they should be "true," " one two three pages long," etc., and then Auster himself learns in turn that he is not the only one in this world who believes in the mysteriousness of life. Is it just a chance tautology, or to use an Austerian pun, is it just an effect of Austerology? To give a genuine Austerian touch to the NPR project, Auster confesses that he got involved in it "by accident." His introduction, like his own stories, starts with these sentences: " I never intended to do this. The National Story Project came about by accident, and if not for a remark my wife made at the dinner table sixteen months ago, most of the pieces in this book never would have been written" (xv).

reality was a yo-yo, change was the only constant" (62). In Auster's romans a clef,[7] everything is indeed at the mercy of chance, though everything is connected; anything can happen, while nothing is more mysterious than the "mysteries of life." Little wonder, then, that his most favored phrases are "by chance," "out of the blue," "as luck would have it," "one thing leads to another," "as chance would have it," and "nothing was real except chance." Whenever there is a sudden turn of the story, which is a trademark of his aesthetic, Auster introduces it with one of these expressions.[8]

In this chapter, I will discuss this aesthetic of chance Auster's postmodern narrative explores, focusing on his four fictional works: The New York Trilogy, a collection of three postmodern anti-detective stories problematizing, respectively, the idea of perfect language ("City of Glass"), the conventions of the detective story ("Ghosts"), and the idea of literary originality ("The Locked Room"); Moon Palace, a rewriting of American expansion into the West and cultural anxieties caused by it; Leviathan, a reevaluation of American ideals of democracy, freedom, nature, and civilization; and The Music of Chance, a Kafakesque fable of what Susan Strange calls "casino capitalism"[9] and of the insidious forces operating in it.[10]

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[7] As a unique postmodern narrative technique that destabilizes traditional distance between history and fiction, the personal and the public, and the author and the characters, Auster makes "Paul Auster" appear in his fictional world. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, Tim O'Brien also uses "Tim O'Brien" as his narrator-protagonist. But Auster's romans a clef aim to give an ironic twist to his fiction by inserting "Auster" into the marginal narrative space, whereas O'Brien directly merges the autobiographical and the fictional into the flat surface of his fiction. This is why it is not easy to differentiate O'Brien the author and "O'Brien" the narrator/protagonist in O'Brien's fiction, while it is relatively easy to locate "Auster" the minor character in Auster's narrative. Or, there seems to be less distance between "O'Brien" and O'Brien than between Auster the author and "Auster" the minor character. In this sense, we can say that Auster is more plot-oriented and O'Brien is more focused on the narrative effect of the hyperreal scenes of the Vietnam War.

[8] Two earlier modes of prose, that is, the fairy tale and the picaresque novel, also have these characteristics of sudden turns of the story line. This reveals two interesting points concerning Auster's hermeneutic of chance: he is heavily indebted to those two literary precursors; and postmodernism in its oppositional gestures against the modernist art often goes back to the pre-modern/pre-modernist traditions of art.

[9] Susan Strange, Casino Capitalism (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1986). At the beginning of Casino Capitalism, Strange uses the metaphor of casino to describe contemporary global finance capital: "The Western financial system is rapidly coming to resemble nothing as much as a vast casino. Every day games are played in this

Auster's narrative "wanders aimlessly" with his characters in an "inexhaustible [narrative] space," only to prove that "life is mysterious" and "nothing is real except chance" (Trilogy 3-4). Much like Whitman's somnambulist persona of "Song of Myself," Auster's characters roam around or "levitate" over Manhattan, New England, Utah, or imaginary Timbuktu. Daniel Quinn, the mystery writer in "City of Glass," the first anti-detective story of Trilogy, for example, walks around Manhattan under an adopted identity of the private eye named "Paul Auster," without finding any clue to his suspect, Peter Stillman, Sr. Brown, the private eye hired by White in "Ghosts," the second story of Trilogy, spies on Black around the clock, imagining numerous mystery stories for the case he is assigned to, but without being able to penetrate the dark nothingness of existence. Anna Blume in In the Country of Last Things desperately wanders through an Orwellian, post-apocalyptic city of "last things," writing a doomed letter to an outside reader. Mr. Bones, the canine protagonist of Timbuktu, travels through New England with his soul-mate, Willy G. Christmas. Marco Stanley Fogg, the orphaned protagonist of Moon Palace, traces the streets of New York City and the deserts of Utah, encountering uncanny genealogical mysteries caused by pure chance. And Benjamin Sachs, the writer-protagonist of Leviathan, transforms himself into a terrorist as coincidences guide him. Once freed from the traditional conventions, particularly from what Aristotelian poetics calls the "law of probability," Auster's narrative wildly expands its space, leaving the reader trained in traditional realist or modernist hermeneutics completely "off guard," as one

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casino that involves sums of money so large that they cannot be imagined. At night the games go on at the other side of the world. In the towering office blocks that dominate all the great cities of the world, rooms are full of chain-smoking young men all playing these games." In this "global finance casino," the "matter of luck" governs the ultimate realities of the market, that is, "uncertainty" "rules in the financial world" (1-3).

[10] Though The Music of Chance, Moon Palace, and Leviathan are not directly related to the traditional detective story or to its postmodern version often called the anti-detective story, these novels still critically use major conventions of the detective story, such as crime scenes, the quest motif, and the protagonists' desire to "detect" problems of human affairs.

of his favorite phrases frequently reminds us. When we read Auster's stories, we enter a unique narrative space where chance, coincidence, and contingency are omnipresent. We thus experience the typical postmodern disorientation Auster aesthetically promotes.[11] As a novelist of post-theory, Auster declares pure chance as the ultimate hermeneutic.

In his ever-expanding narrative space where everything is mysterious, Auster obsessively recycles various minor episodes from the archives of American history, such details as related to the foundational myths or to the canonical writers: the Puritan yearnings for an Adamic language and for a New Canaan; the transcendentalist ideals of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman; the dark, apocalyptic stories of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville; and other minor historical episodes. By combining these episodes with various postmodern concerns, Auster creates an aesthetic space where American romanticism and contemporary postmodernism coexist. The logic of pure chance bridges these two apparently distant literary territories. We find in his fiction postmodern concerns such as randomness, undecidability, and unknowability. But we also encounter various themes adopted from the literary traditions of the American romantics.[12] In this sense, Auster can be called a romantic postmodernist or a postmodern romantic.[13]

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[11] We are of course not always lost in every corner of Auster's narrative. Particularly in Leviathan, The Music of Chance, and Moon Palace, we find quite clear flows of storyline. Also in terms of aesthetic, these stories are closer to modernist aesthetic than Trilogy in the sense that they are relatively unified in plot structure and treat the theme of "the art for art's sake." This ambiguity, or artistic virtuosity, of Auster reminds us of an issue concerning the postmodernism debate, that is, the issue of distance/connection between the modern and the postmodern. As the quarrel between history and fiction first raised by Plato and Aristotle or the debate between the pre-moderns and the moderns cannot be clearly closed off, this issue of modernism vs. postmodernism is not unambiguous al all. This is one reason why I suggest the "postimperial" as an alternative to the postmodern in defining contemporary American fiction. Contemporary American fiction generally attempts to undermine the dark histories of the American empire, but it is still contained by those traditions. See Chapter 5.

[12] Auster is also indebted to European modernism and avant-gardism, particularly those of Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and Knut Hamsun, etc. Stephen Bernstein points out, "[b]y deftly mixing the American Renaissance's literature of darkness with the postmodern instability and fragmentation of Samuel Beckett's trilogy Molloy (1955), Malone Dies (1951), and The Unnameable (1953) – a trio Auster has called

The use of chance as a narrative strategy helps Auster denaturalize cultural myths and ideals of America by undermining ideological underpinnings of them. Reminding us of Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodern fiction as "historiographic metafiction," which simultaneously reinscribes and subverts the dominant ideologies,[14] Auster recycles American cultural legacies to critically subvert them. By revealing fissures of the American myths and ideals that are related to the geo-cultural expansion and economic development, his fiction provides critical commentaries on American history and culture.

Auster's imaginary "Poe-land" or "Neverland" presents critical reevaluations of American history, often by portraying white male characters haunted by unhappy racial memories. Fogg in Moon Palace, for example, "suddenly beg[i]n[s] to dream of Indians" (70) while he is sleeping in Central Park, a "man-made natural world" (62). He follows in his

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'masterpieces' (Hunger 50) – he raises his detective fiction to the metaphysical level" ("'The Question Is the Story Itself': Postmodernism and Intertextuality in Auster's New York Trilogy," in Merivale & Sweeney 134-135). More interestingly, Aliki Varvogli divides his The World that is the Book: Paul Auster's Fiction into three chapters: "Legacies," a comparative discussion between Auster and his "American forefathers"; "Austerities," a chapter on the "ascetic narratives in Auster's oeuvre" (69), that is, on the influences on Auster by the European modernist writers such as Beckett and Kafka; and "Realities," a chapter on the postmodern condition of contemporary American culture. Obsession with his Jewish identity is also a major concern for Auster's narrative, as we can hear a shadowy Rabbi in In the Country of Last Things saying: "Every Jew ... believes that he belongs to the last generation of Jews. We are always at the end, always standing on the brink of the last moment ... " (Country 112).

[13] Indeed, as Niall Lucy maintains in Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction, postmodernism is closely related to romanticism. Focusing on theoretical postmodernism that emphasizes the free play of difference against the oppressive regime of the Enlightenment reason, Lucy argues that postmodernism is derived from the romantic tradition of the late eighteenth-century, which "implies ... the production of something entirely new." "So: on the one hand romanticism is defined as 'the production of something entirely new' [Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, The Literary Absolute], while on the other postmodernism is defined in terms of 'working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done' [Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition]. On this basis it is difficult to see how postmodernism and romanticism differ. ... Paradoxically, after all, the whole point is to present the unpresentablility of the unpresentable" [Lyotard] (Lucy 64).

[14] Borrowing the concept of "double coding" from Charles Jencks, who defines the "Post-Modern" as "the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence" (Jencks 30), Hutcheon in The Politics of Postmodernism defines "historiographic metafiction" as "paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity, that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world" (11). She particularly emphasizes the strategy of "irony" that postmodern fiction frequently utilizes for "paradoxical installing as well as subverting of conventions" or the "complicitous inscribing" which is none other than the "subverting challenge" (14).

dream "a group of half-naked men through the forests of Manhattan" and gets "closer to the spirit of the forest" (70). When his Chinese girlfriend, Kitty, wakes him up, he calls her Pocahontas because she is wearing a Navaho headband (70). Also the narrator of "The Locked Room" remembers his temporary job as a census-taker in Harlem in 1970, where he was randomly inventing names for the unresponsive, or rather, non-existent African Americans (Trilogy 292-5).

Auster's fiction also raises a critique of the "perils of consumerism" (Timbuktu 64). This critique is often expressed through his characters' "ascetic quest" or "militant refusal to take any action at all" (Moon Palace 20-1). Fogg, for example, attempts to "turn[] [his] life into a work of art" and elevate nihilism "to the level of an aesthetic proposition" (Moon Palace 20-1) by voluntarily starving like Kafka's "hunger artist."[15] This aesthetic/ascetic quest/critique develops in Leviathan into an active eco-cultural terrorism. Benjamin Sachs, the prototypical Austerian writer-protagonist of Leviathan, abandons his promising career as a novelist and disappears into the world of real politics, as Bill Gray does in DeLillo's Mao II.[16] Unlike that of Bill Gray, however, Sachs's sudden plunge into real politics is triggered

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[15] Franz Kafka, "A Hunger Artist," The Complete Stories, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) 267-77.

[16] Leviathan is "for Don DeLillo," as Auster writes in his dedication. DeLillo in turn dedicates Cosmopolis, his thirteenth novel, "to Apul Auster." We can find autobiographical as well as literary connections between these two writers. They act often together for the human rights activists such as Wei Jingsheng or the threatened writers like Salman Rushdie. They also focus in their works on missing writers and vanishing fathers, on the fate of the artist in postmodern society, on the meaning of violence and terrorism in contemporary world, on the function of chance and coincidence in our lives, and on postmodern revival of the conspiracy theories. Most interestingly, both Mao II and Leviathan directly portray the fate of the writer in the postmodern world. Like DeLillo's Bill Gray in Mao II or Auster's own Fanshawe, the missing writer in "The Locked Room," or like other reclusive writers such as Thomas Pynchon and J.D. Salinger, Benjamin Sachs gives up writing for a more serious activity that can have an impact on human consciousness. Bill Gray disappears while confronting the realities of international politics, whereas Benjamin Sachs turns himself by chance into an American terrorist. In some sense, Benjamin Sachs is responding to Bill Gray's understanding of the writer replaced by the terrorist: "There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence. ... Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness" (Mao II 41); and, "What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass

by pure chance, exemplifying the unique function chance plays in Auster's narrative. Random involvement in a double murder case turns Sachs into a latter-day prophet who is "ready to march out into the wilderness and spread the word [of freedom]" (Leviathan 256), just as Samuel Danforth, the early Puritan minister, preached in his sermon, "Errand into the Wilderness." In order to wake up the American people to their forgotten "errand" of the Thoreauvian quest for non-materialist freedom, Sachs, alias the "Phantom of Liberty," plants bombs in replicas of the Statue of Liberty, in a manner similar to the eco-terrorism directed against "industrial society" by Theodore Kaczynski, who is better known in America as the "Unabomber."[17]

I will argue in this chapter, however, that Auster's postmodern critical desire is undermined by his excessive use of "the music of chance." His use of pure chance has two

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consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger of they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous" (Mao II 151). Thus a comparative study of these two writers, particularly of Mao II and Leviathan, seems to be required, though it is not an imminent concern of this dissertation.

[17] According to his brother David Kaczynski, Ted Kaczynski was not only a "crazy environmentalist" or "mad genius," but he was also a "man who went off [into the Montana wilderness] and divorced himself from the world in a very Thoreauvian way" (Mad Genius 58, 78; emphases added). He was also allegedly linked to an extremist eco-publication, Earth First! In his "manifesto," " Industrial Society and Its Future," published in The Washington Post on September 19, 1995, he argues that, in order to regain genuine freedom from the industrial corruption of humanity, we need to regain the "positive ideal" of nature:

> The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is, WILD nature: those aspects of the functioning of the Earth and its living things that are independent of human management and free of human interference and control. And with wild nature we include human nature, by which we mean those aspects of the functioning of the human individual that are not subject to regulation by organized society but are products of chance, or free will, or God (depending on your religious or philosophical opinions).
>
> Nature makes a perfect counter-ideal to technology for several reasons. Nature (that which is outside the power of the system) is the opposite of technology (which seeks to expand indefinitely the power of the system). Most people will agree that nature is beautiful; certainly it has tremendous popular appeal. (Mad Genius 245)

Compare this passage with Thoreau's "Walden:" In Unabomber: A Desire to Kill, Robert Graysmith explains Kaczynski's philosophy by quoting Thoreau's sentences such as "In wilderness is the preservation of the world" (15); "I lived alone in the woods" (19); and "Simplicity, simplicity, Simplicity!" (29). Graysmith even juxtaposes the photos of Thoreau's cabin and that of the Unabomber's (21). For the significance of Thoreau in Auster's fiction, see my discussion of his recycling of Thoreau's ideas and images later in this chapter.

impulses canceling each other out: a subversive edge that undermines the American cultural traditions, and another edge that blunts his critical desire. Auster's postmodern "music of chance" indeed works to undermine the collective myths and ideals of America. His narrative of chance, however, domesticates his critical edge in such a way that the celebrated American freedom is tamed by what Herbert Marcuse might call "enforced tolerance," the cultural, ideological mechanism operating in "one-dimensional" America (One-Dimensional Man 226). By relegating every event to the domain of mystery and chance, Auster's "music of chance" thus prevents us from critically interpreting American culture and history except from an angle of absolute agnosticism. In Auster's reimagined America, Lady Chance appears with the familiar face of Lady Liberty.

Auster's narrative is shot through with random events loosely connected by the logic of pure chance. Unexpected encounters, windfall inheritances, and sudden twists of events mysteriously determine the flow of narrative as well as characters' lives. "City of Glass," for example, begins with strange phone calls for Daniel Quinn, who writes mystery stories under the pseudonym of William Wilson. He receives repeated calls from a mysterious male who is in a desperate tone looking for "Paul Auster. Of the Auster Detective Agency" (Trilogy 8). "It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not" (3). The caller, whose voice is "at once mechanical and filled with feelings, hardly more than a whisper and yet perfectly audible" (7), ushers Quinn into a strange new world of chance meetings and happenings. Persuaded by the caller's desperate request for help, he accepts a tail-job, adopting the fake identity of "Paul Auster," and starts a "real" life as a detective. The job assigned is to watch

Peter Stillman, Sr., who has just been released from Poughkeepsie, New York, after having been incarcerated there for abusing his son. His son, Peter Stillman, Jr., had been a subject of his father's idiosyncratic experiment based on a neo-Puritan interpretation of American history as a typological fulfillment of biblical history. Believing that the fall of language described in the story of the Tower of Babel could be corrected and we could regain the original language, Stillman, Sr. had confined his son to a dark room for nine years, so that he would directly communicate with God.[18] This Stillman, Sr. is now coming back to New York City, posing a new threat to his son's already distorted life, and Quinn has to protect the son from his father. He launches research on this ex-Columbia professor's academic past and learns that he was dreaming of realizing a New Canaan in contemporary America through recovery of the perfect language of God. His spying on Stillman, Sr. continues until he reaches the suspicion that the seemingly meaningless trajectory of this latter-day Puritan's wandering in Manhattan composes what looks like "The Tower of Babel," a hieroglyphic writing similar to the strange message Poe's adventurous protagonist of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym finds in a mysterious cave in the South Pole. Then he confronts this idiosyncratic scholar, who lectures him on an anti-Saussurean philosophy of language, and is sucked deeper into the maelstrom of metaphysical puzzles.

Moon Palace covers a more secular history of America. Interwoven into the story are episodes ranging from the Puritan ideals to the invention of electricity, from the landscape painting to the anti-war movements in the late nineteen-sixties, and from the lost colony in

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[18] Auster the author or Quinn the protagonist does not mention any precedent of this Puritan theme of direct communication with God in American literary history. But we can see a similar case of paranoid Puritan faith in Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland, in which the protagonist, Wieland, kills his family members while hallucinating that God has ordered him to kill them to prove his faith. But the voice of God Wieland hears is in fact a ventriloquist's concoction. The desire for a perfect language and typological understanding of American history, in which God's providential history presumably reaches a Hegelian moment of self-realization in the New World, is not uncommon in the tradition of American literature.

Roanoake, to the historic moon landing in 1969. Like Auster's memoir, The Invention of Solitude, which records his genealogical stories and artistic experiences, Moon Palace tells stories of vanishing artists and missing fathers. Marco Stanley Fogg, an orphaned Columbia student, is hired by an old, eccentric blind man, Julian Barber, to prepare an obituary for him, so that his son, who does not know his father is still alive, would read it after his death. Since his disastrous journey for landscape painting to the deserts of Utah, Barber has been living as Thomas Effing, a strange name he concocted from Thomas Moran and the word "f[uck]-ing," to signify his life was messed up since the journey to the West. His presumably fatherless son, Solomon Barber, is living a shameful life as a highly obese historian since he was caught having an affair with his student. The student is none other than Fogg's mother, who was run over by a bus. And Fogg accidentally pushes Solomon, his own father, into a newly dug grave near his mother's tomb.

In Leviathan, chance plays a more radical role. Benjamin Sachs, a long time literary friend of Peter Aaron, is found dead in an explosion on a roadside, and Aaron is pressed to write a biography of him before the FBI comes to investigate. Based on his memories, on Sachs's confessions to him while he was alive, and on female characters' descriptions of Sachs's secret life while he was hiding, Aaron writes a biography of his literary friend. According to this uncanny biography, which is none other than Leviathan, Auster's own fiction titled after an unfinished novel by Sachs, Sachs takes a walk in the middle of writing, but has to stay in the wilderness for one night after being lost. Meeting a truck driver next morning, he is ready to come back to his normal life as a promising writer, just when they meet a stranger. The stranger kills the young driver without reason, and Sachs kills the murderer. Sachs then goes to his victim's house to live as a substitute husband and father.

Here he learns that his victim, Reed Dimmagio, was an eco-terrorist scholar studying Alexander Berkman, the legendary anarchist who shot Henry Clay Frick in 1892 "to eliminate this symbol of capitalist oppression" (251). Sachs takes over the mission left unfinished by his victim. Thus starts the secret journey of this writer-turned-to-murderer-to-terrorist: he bombs replicas of the Statue of Liberty all around America, hoping to wake up America to the genuine meaning of freedom.

The Music of Chance is a critical fable about the fate of the individual controlled by the logic of gambling. Jim Nashe, an ex-firefighter, receives an unexpected inheritance from his missing father only after he is divorced and jobless, and starts to live a life "on the road" by driving across America, much as Jack Kerouac and his friends do in On the Road. Contrary to Kerouac's quest for spiritual meaning, however, Nashe's life on the road has nothing to do with quest for meaning. It is an aimless, disoriented (non-)quest. And, as Austerian narrative always happens to be, Nashe meets, "by chance," Jack Pozzi, a naïve gambler, and enters with him a secret world of one-night gambling showdown against two old, idiosyncratic millionaires. It ultimately leads them to indentured labor because they cannot pay the gambling debt. Nashe's accidental meeting with Pozzi and their subsequent enslavement to the dark "music of chance" reveal how much Auster cherishes the idea of pure chance as the absolute determinant of human life.

Through these stories of chances and coincidences, Auster presents critical commentaries on American culture, particularly by subversively recycling various pseudo-historical episodes. Conspicuous examples can be found in his use of strange episodes related to Whitman and Thoreau. Hired by White to spy on Black, private eye Blue in "Ghosts" goes

through excruciating metaphysical cul-de-sacs until he finds himself to be spied on by Black, who, to his double surprise, turns out to be White, his own client. Blue disguises himself as a typical New York bum and confronts Black/White in person. Recognizing that Blue looks like Whitman, who frequented the same street in Brooklyn, Black tells him an odd story concerning Whitman's brain. Believing in phrenology, Whitman agreed to let people do an autopsy on his brain after his death. The jar containing the brain, however, shatters due to a research assistant's careless mistake before it can be measured properly.[19] "It splattered all over the place, and that was that. The brain of America's greatest poet got swept up and thrown out with the garbage" (Trilogy 206). Black then tells another story related to Whitman: Thoreau and Bronson Alcott visit Whitman in Brooklyn and find a "full chamber pot right in the middle of the floor" in the attic he is sharing with his mentally retarded brother, Eddy (208).

These episodes are used for Auster's own autopsy of America. What Black tells of Whitman, "It's sad to think of poor Walt lying in the grave.... All alone and without any brains" (Trilogy 206), alludes to the cultural condition of contemporary America, which is somehow cut off from its foundational ideals. Or, by debunking the sacred image of this national bard, Auster seems to be criticizing American myths brewed around the democratic national figures. Juxtaposing Whitman's shattered brain and the chamber pot of his brother, Auster provides through Black's voice a new understanding of the undercurrents of American cultural history: "there is a certain similarity of form. ... There's a definite connection. Brain and guts, the insides of a man. We always talk about trying to get inside a

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[19] According to Aliki Varvogli, "Stephen Jay Gould informs us that Whitman's brain was indeed measured, and weighed 1.282 kg" (51). Varvogli quotes this from Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, "Plagiarism in Praise: Paul Auster and Melville," Revista Portuguesa Literatura Comparada, 1 (Dec. 1991): 105-14, and Santos in turn quotes it from Gould, The Panda's Thumb (New York: Norton, 1982) 150. See note 28 in Varvogli, The World that is the Book: Paul Auster's Fiction (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2001) 51.

writer to understand his work better. But when you get right down to it, there's not much to find in there" (208). Certainly here is "much to find" and much more than a "similarity of form" because these episodes point to the material basis of American ideals. Like Michael Joo's sculpture of "Buddha," a headless body whose dark, purplish guts and insides can be seen through transparent skin of Plexiglas, Auster's de-spiritualized Whitman has what the Russian Formalists might call a "defamiliarization effect" upon our "automatized" understanding of the American ideals. By demythologizing the consecrated image of the democratic American spirit, Auster seems to be claiming that the American "empire of freedom" is in fact based on a material process not much different from that of other presumably non-exceptional countries.

These episodes have another intertextual resonance in Moon Palace. Fogg suffers a shattering of two eggs during his self-imposed hunger strike to "challenge ... the American way" (61). Just before this orphaned Columbia student starts an ascetic ritual of cooking the last eggs left for him, they unfortunately slip through his fingers: "The sunny, translucent innards sank into the cracks, and suddenly there was muck everywhere, a bobbing slush of slime and shell. One yolk had miraculously survived the fall, but when I bent to scoop it up, it slid out from under the spoon and broke apart. I felt as though a star were exploding, as though a great sun had just died. The yellow spread over the white and then began to swirl, turning into a vast nebula, a debris of interstellar gases" (42-3). Exemplifying Auster's creative use of minimalist episodes for their grand metaphysical significances, Fogg jumps into an escalating loop of chain-reaction and chain-thinking. He desperately goes to the Moon Palace, a Chinese restaurant across the street, and splurges on egg drop soup, as if it were a "last meal, the soup they serve up to a condemned man before they drag him off to the

gallows" (43). Then, Fogg "remembered a phrase from [Sir Walter] Raleigh's last letter to his wife, written on the eve of his execution: My brains are broken. ... I thought of Raleigh's chopped-off head .... Then I imagined my head cracking open, splattering like the eggs that had fallen to the floor of my room. I felt my brains dribbling out of me. I saw myself in pieces" (43). Like Whitman's shattered brain, Fogg's broken eggs and his "brains dribbling out of" him in his paranoid imagination point to the deadlock American civilization has reached.

This episode leads us to another, more serious episode in "City of Glass." Quinn is constantly defeated in his attempt to crack the secret of Stillman, Sr. because this insane latter-day Puritan does nothing but wander endlessly in Manhattan, picking up shattered fragments of things from the streets. Quinn in disguise finally meets him and asks about Henry Dark, an American assistant to Milton who, according to Stillman, Sr.'s doctoral dissertation, believed in the coming of a millennial utopia in America in 1960, the year when Stillman, Sr. locked up his son for the experiment to regain the perfect language of God.

> In the year 1960, [Henry Dark] stated confidently, the new Babel would begin to go up, its very shape aspiring toward the heavens, a symbol of the resurrection of the human spirit. History would be written in reverse. ...the tower would be large enough to hold every inhabitant of the New World. There would be a room for each person, and once he entered that room, he would forget everything he knew. After forty days and forty nights, he would emerge a new man, speaking God's language, prepared to inhabit the second, everlasting paradise. (Trilogy 59)

Surprisingly, however, Stillman, Sr. confesses that he invented Henry Dark for his own theological experiment.

When asked why he named this fictitious scholar Henry Dark, Stillman, Sr. comes up with two theories. First, the initials, "H.D.," refer to Humpty Dumpty, who is the "purest embodiment of the human condition" because he is simultaneously an egg "which is not yet

been born" and a creature who is "already born" (97). This paradoxical existence of Humpty Dumpty raises for Stillman, Sr. a philosophical question: how "can he be alive if he has not been born?" He sums up his own answer to the question:

> Humpty Dumpty sketches the future of human hopes and gives the clue to our salvation: to become masters of the words we speak, to make language answer our needs. Humpty Dumpty was a prophet, a man who spoke truths the world was not ready for.
> ...
> For all men are eggs, in a manner of speaking. We exist, but we have not yet achieved the form that is our destiny. We are pure potential, an example of the not-yet-arrived. For man is a fallen creature – we know that from Genesis. Humpty Dumpty is also a fallen creature. He falls from his wall, and no one can put him back together again.... But that is what we must all now strive to do. It is our duty as human beings: to put the egg back together again. For each of us, sir, is Humpty Dumpty. And to help him is to help ourselves. (Trilogy 98)

Humpty Dumpty as "a fallen creature" signifies the cultural fall of contemporary America. Thus the American people need "to put the egg back together again." To do this, we need to learn from Humpty Dumpty himself because he is, most of all, a philosopher of language, or rather, an inventor of perfect language, as he declares to Alice: "When I use a word, ... it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less" (98). Stillman, Sr. poses himself as an American Humpty Dumpty in order to invent a perfect language identical to the order of things. His ultimate goal as an inventor of such a language is to build a New Canaan in contemporary America. Thus he came back to New York City to launch a second experiment for his cosmic project. New York indeed seems to be desperately waiting for his second coming: "it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. ... The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap. It suits my purpose admirably. I find the streets an endless source of material, an inexhaustible storehouse of shattered things. Each day I go out with my bag and collect objects that seem worthy of investigation" (94). And "I give them names." "I

invent new words that will correspond to the things" that are "broken apart, shattered, collapsed into chaos" and alienated from the original wholes that are the same as the words that they are referred to (93-4).[20]

A second reason is related to "Columbus's egg," "the most celebrated egg of all" (99). Hinting at the symbolic connection of Columbus to American civilization, Stillman, Sr. explains: Columbus "sought paradise and discovered the New World," and "It is not too late for [America] to become paradise" (99). "Americans have never lost their desire to discover new worlds" (99). And, completing his weirdly random logic, he concludes: "Men walked on the moon" (99) and "the moon does look very much like an egg" (100).

For all his efforts, Stillman, Sr. fails in his second experiment to regain the perfect language, and jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge. Auster thus suggests through this story the futility of the Puritan yearning for an Adamic language. Through Stillman, Sr.'s failure to reach the original language, Auster is presenting here a poststructuralist understanding of the relationship between language (signs) and things (referents) or the signifier and the signified, which is always contaminated by gaps and slippages. As Walter Benjamin suggests in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," human language became "a mere sign" after the Fall because "man abandoned immediacy in the communication of the concrete,

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[20] This representation of New York City as the "most forlorn" city is similar to that of Auster's post-apocalyptic novel, In the Country of Last Things, where Anna Blume scavenges broken things from the streets of a dead city, which could be New York, controlled by the power of death and randomness. Blume records:

> It is an odd thing, I believe, to be searching for broken and discarded things. After a while, it must be surely affect the brain. For nothing is really itself anymore. There are pieces of this and pieces of that, but none of it fits together. And yet, very strangely, at the limit of all this chaos, everything begins to fuse again. A pulverized apple and a pulverized orange are finally the same thing, aren't they? You can't tell the difference between a good and a bad dress if they're both torn to shreds, can you? At a certain point, things disintegrate into muck, or dust, or scraps, and what you have is something new, some particle or agglomeration of matter that cannot be identified. It is a clump, a mote, a fragment of the world that has no place: a cipher of it-ness. As an object hunter, you must rescue things before they reach this state of absolute. You can never expect to find something whole – for that is an accident, a mistake on the part of the person who lost it – but neither can you spend your time looking for what is totally used up...." (35-6)

name, and fell into the abyss of the mediateness of all communication, of the word as means, of the empty word, into the abyss of prattle" (120). Now "multiplicity" and confusion are predominant. This post-Babelic heteroglossia is the condition of human language. By representing Stillman, Sr. as a paranoid latter-day Puritan who tries in vain to literally regain the original language of God, Auster critically reflects on the Puritan theology based on the belief that the individuals can directly communicate with God without the "abyss of the mediateness." Like Stillman, Sr.'s yearning, the Puritan dream for a perfect communication with God was just chanced by the Pilgrims' desires. Besides, the whole mythology of "City of Glass" is a concoction of the paranoid Stillman, Sr., whose death (and even his existence) is not certain because Quinn hears of his drowning indirectly from "Paul Auster," another mysterious character who is doing a postmodern research on the disputed authorship of Don Quixote. Stillman, Jr. and his wife, Virginia, who is Quinn's employer-mistress, also disappear without a trace, and Quinn disappears, too, at the end of the story. Auster's critique seems to be clear: Though started with a religious faith to build a "city on the hill," America seems to have failed to realize it, or rather, America has in fact had no foundationalist grounds from the beginning. Auster thus undermines the myth of the religious foundation of American civilization chosen by God's Providence. Everything was and is just a work of chance.

A similar example of Auster's subversive recycling of pseudo-historical episodes can be found in Leviathan, his systematic critique of American cultural ideals and myths, particularly because it includes various episodes directly related to the Statue of Liberty and to the ideals of the primordial American wilderness. According to Aaron the narrator, Sachs,

the protagonist of Leviathan, has published only one novel, The New Colossus,[21] before his disappearance. In this "historical" novel (in the novel), there are numerous pseudo-historical episodes related to America.[22] One of them is about Thoreau's pocket compass. When Emma Lazarus goes to Concord, Massachusetts, to visit Emerson, she is introduced to the old Ellery Channing and goes with him to Walden Pond, where Thoreau developed his philosophy of nature. At this moment of Austerian juxtaposition of the aged white New Englander and the young Jewish poet from New York, Channing gives Thoreau's pocket compass to Ms. Lazarus as a parting gift.

Auster then speaks through Aaron's voice: "Although it isn't said in so many words [in The New Colossus], the message couldn't be clearer. America lost its way. Thoreau was the one man who could read the compass for us, and now that he is gone, we have no hope of

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[21] Given that "The New Colossus" is carved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, we can easily see the parodic intention of this title. By undermining the myth of American freedom, Auster poses an Austerian critical gesture.

[22] This novel within the novel has a dizzying list of pseudo-historical episodes Auster recycles ad infinitum. The following quotation is a good summary of Auster's own oeuvre that is infinitely regressing, or rather, infinitely expanding:

> Among the characters who appear in the novel [The New Colossus] are Emma Lazarus, Sitting Bull, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Pulitzer, Buffalo Bill Cody, Auguste Bartholdi [the French sculptor of the Statute of Liberty], Catherine Weldon, Rose Hawthorne [Nathaniel's daughter], Ellery Channing, Walt Whitman, and William Tecumseh Sherman. But Raskalnikov is also there (straight from the epilogue of Crime and Punishment – released from prison and newly arrived as an immigrant in the United States, where his name is anglicized to Ruskin), as is Huckleberry Finn (a middle-aged drifter who befriends Ruskin), and Ishmael from Moby Dick (who has a brief walk-on role as a bartender in New York). The New Colossus begins in the year of America's centennial and works its way through the major events of the next decade and a half: Custer's defeat at the Little big Horn, the Building of the Statue of Liberty, the general strike of 1877, the exodus of Russian Jews to America in 1881, the invention of telephone, the Haymarket riots in Chicago, the spread of the Ghost Dance religion among the Sioux, the massacre at Wounded Knee. But small events are also recorded, and these are finally what give the book its texture, what turn it into something more than a jigsaw puzzle of historical facts. The opening chapter is a good case in point. Emma Lazarus goes to concord, Massachusetts, to stay as a guest in Emerson's house. (Leviathan 42-3).

If Melville presents a comprehensive cetology, or the study of whales, in Extracts (xxxvii-li) and Chapter 32 (145-157) of Moby Dick and DeLillo incorporates a comprehensive condomology, or the study of different kinds of condoms, in Underworld, Auster's fiction not only lists numerous (pseudo-)historical facts exemplified in this quotation, but he also weaves them into his narrative.

finding ourselves again" (Leviathan 43). Emma Lazarus is the author of "The New Colossus" carved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, the prototypical American symbol of freedom that welcomes "the huddled masses yearning to breathe free." To her is given the compass used by Thoreau, which is now useless because Thoreau himself has already been dead for fourteen years. Auster's point is clear: Like Whitman's brainless body, the chopped-off head of Raleigh, whose first colony in Roanoke was mysteriously wiped out, and Fogg's broken eggs and his paranoid imagination, Thoreau's pocket compass left without anybody who can read it signifies the lost ideals of America.

Auster's more direct allusion to Thoreau can be found in "Ghosts." Finding out that his suspect, Black, is reading Walden, Blue buys himself a copy, which interestingly was published by Walter J. Black in 1942 (Trilogy 181), and starts reading it. The problem, however, is that he cannot understand it at all:

> As Blue begins to read, he feels as though he is entering an alien world. Trudging through swamps and brambles, hoisting himself up gloomy screes and treacherous cliffs, he feels like a prisoner on a forced march, and his only thought is to escape. He is bored by Thoreau's words and finds it difficult to concentrate. Whole chapters go by, and when he comes to the end of them he realizes that he has not retained a thing. Why would anyone want to go off and live alone in the woods? What's all this about planting beans and not drinking coffee or eating meat? Why all these interminable descriptions of birds? Blue thought that he was going to get a story, or at least something like a story, but this is no more than blather, an endless harangue about nothing at all. (Trilogy 193-4)

Again, Thoreau is dead for too many years and his "endless harangue" is "about nothing at all" to the ears of complacent contemporary Americans.

Leviathan also critically recycles the American ideals of nature. This novel could be read as a postmodern parody of "Walking," Thoreau's essay on wilderness and civilization, and of "Nature," Emerson's essay on the "Oversoul" in the wild American nature. Nature for both Emerson and Thoreau is the source of life, reason, and God's grace. In "Nature," for

example, Emerson tells how we can experience God's presence in nature by crystallizing ourselves into a "transparent eyeball," or a transcendental subject:

> In the woods is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. ... I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. ("Nature" 10-11)

Thoreau presents a similar understanding of wilderness as a source of wisdom and faith. In "Walking," which starts with "the art of walking" and soon develops into a cosmic thesis on wilderness and its connection to the spread of Euroamerican civilization, he writes of nature, or rather, of swamp: "When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable .... I enter a swamp as a sacred place, a sanctum sanctorium. There is the strength, the marrow, of Nature. The wildwood covers the virgin mould, and the same soil is good for men..." ("Walking" 613). If nature is "the vehicle of thought" or "the symbol of [divine] spirit" for Emerson ("Nature" 19), for Thoreau it is "a sacred place, a sanctum sanctorium," and "a personality so vast and universal" ("Walking" 625). For both of them, nature is full of meaning. Or, it is the sublime temple where God presences himself.

For Auster, however, nature is a spiritless place in which we can be easily disoriented. It is devoid of "the perpetual presence of the sublime" ("Nature" 9). In Leviathan, Auster again alludes to Thoreau when Aaron says of Sachs: "Thoreau was [Sachs's] model"; "when Walden came up in the conversation, Sachs confessed to me that he wore a beard 'because Henry David [Thoreau] had worn one'"; and "they both lived the same number of years" (Leviathan 29). Most of all, Sachs is, like Thoreau, "living like a hermit in the woods" (157).

When he goes for a walk one autumn day, however, the wilderness waiting for him is totally different from that of Thoreau. "Once he enter[s] the woods ... he bec[o]me[s] distracted. Instead of looking at the leaves and migrating birds, he start[s] thinking about his book" (165). Then, "at a certain point he noticed that he was having trouble seeing. ... He looked around him, hoping to get his bearings, but nothing was familiar, and he realized that he had never been in this place before. ... He had no flashlight, no matches, no food in his pockets" (166). Sachs is completely lost in the wilderness: "He couldn't tell if he was traveling east or west or north or south" (167). He experiences neither spiritual transcendence nor mythopoetic rebirth. He is just sucked into the wilderness by the power of pure chance, and is left in it all by himself without Thoreau's compass or Emerson's dial.

The barren wilderness waiting for Barber/Effing on his painting journey to the West is also devoid of meaning: "There we were out in that enormous country, with nothing around us, nothing but empty space for miles around, and for all that it was like being locked in prison" (Moon Palace 156). "Nothing but whiteness.... It's a dead world, and the only thing you ever get closer to is more of the same nothing. ... A giant cemetery was what it was, a blank page of death" (154). The American West for Barber/Effing might still be sublime in a sense, but it is primarily "nothingness," a place of non-plenitude. In Auster's depiction of nature we thus find neither Thoreauvian wisdom nor Emersonian faith. Rather, it is an exact antithesis to the nature/wilderness idealized by these two "American scholars."

The history of American civilization could be interpreted as a gradual process of domesticating nature/wilderness. As we can see in the sermons by Puritan ministers, for the early colonists nature was wilderness itself that can be contrasted to civilization. Various natural phenomena were understood simply as dark forces, or at best, as warning signs from

the almighty God. In the age of the emerging American nationalism, the wilderness started to be celebrated as grand, beautiful, and fertile, as we can see in the naturalist writings of the early national period. Since the Romantic writers' glorification of the wilderness and the Transcendentalists' religious understanding of it, nature became both sublime and sacred. And the first frontiersmen like Daniel Boone opened up the West to civilized Eastern eyes, ultimately transforming the American conception of nature/wilderness into one of an (agrarian) garden. Thus if Emerson and Thoreau were writing in a period when the American "virgin land" was being tamed by the forces of civilization, Auster's portrayal of nature as a dark, unknowable place is somewhat closer to that of the early Puritans, which understood wilderness as a dark place whose evil forces threaten the "city on the hill" on the eastern seaboard. Auster thus ironically reintroduces into the derealized postmodern world the Puritan conception of nature. This atavistic connection might sound oxymoronic, but if we understand that both the pre-modern consciousness and the postmodern worldview share a common antithesis, modernism/modernity, it is not difficult for us to see a connection between the Puritan notion of nature and that of postmodernism. But there is one critical difference: if the Puritan wilderness was dominated by personified evil forces or supernatural signals sent by God, Auster's wilderness is dark and mysterious yet natural. The contents of two worldviews are thus different, but as I will discuss later, there is still a homology between Auster's cosmos and that of the Puritans. Thus like Jean Baudrillard's depiction of contemporary America, which he calls "the only remaining primitive society" (America 7), or of Morpheus's understanding of contemporary civilization in The Matrix, the Wachowski brothers' post-apocalyptic film, in which he "welcome[s] [Neo] to the desert of the real," Auster's portrayal of nature/wilderness can be called one of postmodern Puritanism.

Auster's critique of America does not stop with things related to the past. He also criticizes the perils of contemporary American capitalist system. While living a bum's life in Central Park, Fogg gives a political interpretation to his own self-imposed asceticism: "I ... look at myself from a political perspective, hoping to justify my condition by treating it as a challenge to the American way. I was an instrument of sabotage, ... a loose part in the national machine, a misfit whose job was to gum up the works. No one could look at me without feeling shame or anger or pity. I was living proof that the system had failed, that the smug, overfed land of plenty was finally cracking apart" (Moon Palace 61). This political "sabotage" seems to be a direct answer to Marcuse's call for "the Great Refusal," for "refusing to play the game" "repressively" tolerated by the system of "total administration" (49). In One-Dimensional Man, Marcuse somewhat paranoiacally describes American society as "truly totalitarian" (18) because no critical alternative is possible in this "one-dimensional" society controlled by "technological rationality" (49). Anticipating Jameson's critique of postmodernism, he writes:

> Today's novel feature is the flattening of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted another dimension of reality. This liquidation of two-dimensional culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of the "cultural values," but their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale. (One-Dimensional Man 57)

Marcuse, however, finds seeds of hope in "the [residual] pre-technological culture [which] is the rhythm of those who wander or ride in carriages, who have the time and the pleasure to think, contemplate, feel and narrate" (59). Though Americans became "cogs in a culture-machine" (65), Marcuse argues, we can still find an "unconquered dimension of man and

nature, on the narrow limits placed on organization and manipulation, on the 'insoluble core' which resisted integration" (66). Particularly, the "aesthetic dimension still retains a freedom of expression which enables the writer and artist to ... name the otherwise unnamable" (247):

> It is an outdated and surpassed culture, and only dreams and childlike regressions can recapture it. But this culture is, in some of its decisive elements, also a post-technological one. Its most advanced images and positions seem to survive their absorption into administered comforts and stimuli; they continue to haunt the consciousness with the possibility of their rebirth in the consummation of technical progress. They are the expression of that free and conscious alienation from the established forms of life with which literature and the arts opposed these forms even where they adorned them. (One-Dimensional Man 59-60)

This "artistic alienation is the conscious transcendence of the alienated existence – a 'higher level' or mediated alienation" (60). Thus "art contains the rationality of negation. ... [I]t is the Great Refusal – the protest against that which is" (63).

Fogg's "militant refusal to take any action at all" (Moon Palace 21) echoes Marcuse's "conscious transcendence of the alienated existence." During his ascetic life, he "turn[s] [his] life into a work of art" and elevates nihilism "to the level of an aesthetic proposition" through voluntary starving (21). Seen from Fogg's and Marcuse's political perspective, Auster's wandering protagonists are not just wandering, either. As Marcuse claims in the passage quoted above, their wandering is an enactment of their residual "dreams and childlike regressions."[23]

This "political perspective" shared by Fogg and Marcuse provides us with a vantage point for understanding another Austerian episode in Moon Palace: Barber/Effing's giving money away to total strangers. Knowing that his death is imminent, he hands out twenty thousand dollars to strangers in mid-Manhattan: one fifty-dollar bill to each of forty passers-by every night for ten consecutive days (201-14). Though he tells Fogg he is just repaying

[23] Michel de Certeau also argues in The Practice of Everyday Life that wandering is a unique "pedestrian speech act" that reinscribes everyday singularities into the "totalizing [urban] space" (102).

the money he had found in a cave in the desert of Utah, his eccentric charity performance is also political.

Fogg's sabotage of the American "national machine" and Barber/Effing's absurd performance of postmodern potlatch can be understood more clearly if we compare these episodes with anecdotes in Auster's own life. In Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure, Auster records that his relationship to money, which has always been "flawed, enigmatic, full of contradictory impulses" (3), originated from his parents' obsession with it. They "had lived through the Depression, and neither one had fully recovered from those hard times," and thus developed distorted attitudes toward money: "My father was tight; my mother was extravagant. She spent; he didn't. The memory of poverty had not loosened its hold on his spirit.... She enjoyed the rituals of consumerism..." (7). Young Auster "was caught in the middle of this ideological war" between "two moral philosophies" (7), but manages to get away from it by living as "an internal émigré, an exile in [his] own house" (10). Like Fogg, he interprets his life as a "case against materialism, an indictment of the orthodox view that money was a good to be valued above all others" (11): "As if to prove the essential inhumanity of the marketplace, nearly all of the metaphors had been taken from the animal kingdom: dog eat dog, bulls and bears, the rat race, survival of the fittest. Money divided the world into winners and losers, haves and have-nots. That was an excellent arrangement for the winners, but what about the people who lost?" (12)

Then Auster records an episode directly connected to Barber/Effing's eccentricity. His friend at Columbia, Christopher Smart, gives away fifty-dollar bills: "for obscure reasons that had something to do with the American economic system and the future of mankind, he was handing out money to strangers" (39). Soon we learn that this is a political gesture: "He had

come to New York on a mission" "to use money to bring down the American government" (40):

> With those three hundred portraits of Ulysses S. Grant as his calling cards, he was going to introduce himself to his conspirators and unleash the greatest economic revolution in history. Money is a fiction, after all, worthless paper that acquires value only because large numbers of people choose to give it value. The system runs on faith. Not truth or reality, but collective belief. And what would happen if that faith were undermined, if large numbers of people suddenly began to doubt the system? Theoretically, the system would collapse. That, in a nutshell, was the objective of [Smart's] experiment. The fifty-dollar bills he handed out to strangers weren't just gifts; they were weapons in the fight to make a better world. He wanted to set an example with his profligacy, to prove that one could disenchant oneself and break the spell that money held over our minds. (Hand to Mouth 41)

Thus Smart, Fogg, and Barber/Effing all share Auster's own discomfort with money and capitalism. The fifty-dollar bills Barber/Effing and Smart hand out are not "just gifts." They are Effing's and Smart's, or rather, Auster's own harshly "effing" gesture against money and capitalism. Besides, "the prospect of being poor d[oes]n't frighten" (Hand to Mouth 4) the three Columbia students, Fogg, Smart, and Auster himself.

Auster presents a more comprehensive critique of the capitalist system in The Music of Chance, a Kafkaesque parable of money, gambling, and bureaucracy.[24] As the title implies, Music provides a critique of American capitalism through the logic of chance. From the start of the story, money is portrayed, like the power of chance, as something sinister. Jim Nashe receives a windfall inheritance from his long-forgotten father, only after he is already divorced and jobless. The only thing he wants to do now with this windfall is to drive aimlessly across America, living a life "on the road," in the tradition of what James M. Jasper calls the "restless nation"[25]: "For one whole year he did nothing but drive, traveling back and

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[24] Kafka's first novel, Amerika, includes episodes of doubles and dark, mysterious forces controlling the fate of the individuals, a theme more fully developed in The Trial.

[25] James M. Jasper, Restless Nation: Starting Over in America (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000). As the

forth across America as he waited for the money to run out" (Music 1). And, money for Nashe means both freedom and loss:

> [H]e kept going, relentlessly moving around the continent, feeling more and more at peace with himself as time rolled on. ... At first, the money had seemed inexhaustible to him, but after he had been traveling for five or six months, more than half of it had been spent. Slowly but surely, the adventure was turning into a paradox. The money was responsible for his freedom, but each time he used it to buy another portion of that freedom, he was denying himself an equal portion of it as well. The money kept him going, but it was also an engine of loss, inexorably leading him back to the place where he had begun. (Music 17)

When the money is almost used up without spiritual pay-offs, Nashe, out of the blue, meets Jack Pozzi, a self-fashioned professional poker player: "Three days into the thirteenth month, he met up with the kid who called himself Jackpot. It was one of those random, accidental encounters that seem to materialize out of thin air.... [B]ecause he figured there was nothing to lose anymore, he saw the stranger as ... a last chance to do something for himself before it was too late" (1). Like other Austerian characters and Auster himself, Pozzi has been uncomfortable with money since his missing father suddenly appeared to him when he was eleven and gave him a hundred-dollar bill (43). Nashe plunges with this "Jackpot" into a one-night gambling showdown in a "self-consciously masculine room" (69) against two old men, Stone and Flower, who became millionaires after a lucky jackpot seven years before. The game, however, ends in total disaster, and to pay back the gambling debt, the two losers are forced to build a straight wall, using the stones Flower and Stone had collected from a 15th-century Irish castle. This indentured labor sucks Nashe and Pozzi into an uncanny nightmare of capitalism and bureaucracy.

Once enslaved to these eccentric millionaires, or the symbolic "stones" and "flowers" of capitalism, Nashe and Pozzi literally become the most pathetic members of the proletariat

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subtitle implies, however, Jasper describes this "restlessness" of American people as something positive, whereas the restlessness of Auster's characters is charged with dark implications.

in a mysterious mansion in Pennsylvania. While Stone and Flower never appear again to them, Calvin Murks oversees them. As his name implies, this old handyman of the two capitalists behaves like inscrutable bureaucrats in Kafka's The Castle, who endlessly deny K.'s access to the castle, or like the obscure but strict Puritan minister speaking for the hidden God:

> There was something so deeply imperturbable about the man, so fundamentally oblique and humorless, that Nashe could never decide if he was inwardly laughing at them or just plain dumb. He simply went about his job, plodding along at the same slow and thorough pace, never offering a word about himself, never asking any questions of Nashe or Pozzi, never showing the slightest hint of anger or curiosity or pleasure. He came punctually every morning at seven, delivering whatever groceries and provisions had been ordered the day before, and then he was all business for the next eleven hours. It was difficult to know what he thought about the wall, but he supervised the work with meticulous attention to detail, leading Nashe and Pozzi through each step of the construction as though he knew what he was talking about. He kept his distance from them, however, and never lent a hand or involved himself in any of the physical aspects of the work. His job was to oversee the building of the wall, and he adhered to the role with strict and absolute superiority over the men he is in charge. Murks had the smugness of someone content with his place in the hierarchy, and as with most of the sergeants and crew chiefs of this world, his loyalties were firmly on the side of the people who told him what to do. (Music 128-9)

This spiritless Calvin is an embodiment of what Max Weber calls "the spirit of capitalism." More specifically, he could be an epitome of the "specialist without spirit" (182). According to Weber in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, the ethos of modern capitalism, derived from Puritan asceticism, is defined by "the rational utilization of capital ... and the rational organization of labour" (58). Started as an ascetic quest for spiritual salvation, however, the spirit of capitalism makes an Austerian twist by turning us into prisoners in an "iron cage":

> The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic

> conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the "saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment." But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage. (Protestant Ethic 181)

Weber concludes his analysis of capitalism with a quotation from Goethe: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (182). Indeed, Calvin Murks is a "specialist without spirit" working mechanically for the two enigmatic millionaires.

Nashe and Pozzi keep waiting for a chance to complain about the horrible injustice of their indentured labor, "but the millionaires never show[] up. Their absence [i]s inexplicable" (132). The green meadow where they are working now turns into an iron cage: "Freedom, therefore, had never been an issue. Contracts, handshakes, goodwill – none of that had meant a thing. All along, Nashe and Pozzi had been working under the threat of violence, and it was only because they had chosen to cooperate with Murks that he had left them alone. Bitching and grumbling were apparently allowed, but once their discontent moved beyond the realm of words, he was more than ready to take drastic, intimidating measures against them" (144). Thus once Pozzi shows signs of rebellion, Calvin starts carrying a gun but still acts "murkily" as if nothing had happened. Pozzi mysteriously disappears while trying to escape this iron cage, but Calvin keeps telling Nashe that he is safely hospitalized. Now more paranoid than ever, Nashe distrusts whatever Calvin says. Nashe finally manages to finish the wall and becomes a free man. But he drives himself into a suicidal car crash on the way back from Atlantic City, where he had a farewell party with Calvin.

Gambling is first suggested in Music as an end, but it turns out to be a "calling" from the spirit of capitalism, or a dance to the "music of chance" played by Stone and Flower. Like Effing/Barber's and Smart's giving away of fifty dollar bills to total strangers, Nashe's and Pozzi's fatal dance is thus presented as Auster's parable of capitalism. Through their voluntary dance to the music of money, Music presents Auster's exploration of the dark side of what Fogg calls the "smug, overfed land of plenty" (Moon Palace 61). Nashe and Pozzi are the wretched of capitalism, particularly of its latest form of finance capital working through the logic of gambling. Strange calls this latest phase of capitalism "casino capitalism," with the "wheel of chance" turning in the gambling hall as well as in the "global financial casino" (1-3).

Auster fashions himself as a poet of chance particularly by deconstructing the detective/ mystery story, an order-obsessed and closure-bound literary genre invented by Edgar Allan Poe. Auster's postmodern anti-detective stories[26] present a world totally different from that of the traditional detective/mystery stories. Undermining the idea that we can solve literary as well as socio-cultural problems through the application of scientific knowledge, Auster's stories dismantles conventions of the detective/mystery story. In his fiction, no room is locked, no body is to be found, and no problem is to be solved. Or, not even a problem is presented from the beginning. Only metaphysical red herrings ceaselessly swim through the narrative space, undermining the reader's narrative desire for closure/solution.

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[26] Different names have been used for this unique postmodern genre that combines the detective story and the "deconstructive turn." William Spanos and Stefano Tani call it "anti-detective" fiction/novel/story, whereas Michael Holquist and Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney call it a "metaphysical detective story." Many other unpopular names have also been used: "deconstructive mysteries" (Patrick Brantlinger); "post-nouveau roman detective novel" (Michel Sirvent); "analytical detective fiction" (John T. Irwin); and "ontological detective story" (Elana Gomel). (Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney 2-4). Such names as "black humor," "new Gothicism," "new fiction," and "metafiction" have also been used to describe novels by Pynchon and Paul Auster as well as fiction by Borges and Robbe-Grillet (Tani 40).

Auster's subversive revival of the detective/mystery story is most evident in Trilogy, a collection of three anti-detective stories first published in 1985-6.[27] By turning the traditional conventions of the detective/mystery story inside out and upside down, Auster debunks the traditional conventions of the detective/mystery story. His stories have no detective, no detecting process, and no solution of the crime in the traditional sense. We find only idiosyncratic characters and accidental events. Nor does the narrative follow a linear process, since it is mainly propelled by chances and coincidences. As Blue in "Ghosts" says to himself, in Auster's narrative there is "no story, no plot, no action" (Trilogy 202).

In "City of Glass," Quinn writes detective/mystery stories under the name of William Wilson.[28] But he also lives in the world of the detective/mystery stories by identifying himself with Max Work, a private eye Quinn himself has created, and by avidly reading detective/ mystery stories. He "had ... stopped thinking of himself as real. If he lived now in the world at all, it was only at one remove, through the imaginary person of Max Work" (Trilogy 10). And:

> What he liked about these [mystery] books was their sense of plenitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has potential to be so – which accounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the

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[27] Trilogy, written between 1981-4, is the first major work that established Auster as a fiction writer. In Hand to Mouth, he summarizes that he used to live "hand to mouth" writing non-fictional pieces while trying to establish himself as a novelist, particularly trying to publish Trilogy. He particularly records his earlier experience of repeated failure to find a publisher for his detective stories. In the late nineteen-seventies, Auster "was turned down. There wasn't enough money in this kind of thing, she [a book agent] said, and it wasn't worth her trouble. No one read private-eye novels anymore. They were passé, old hat, a losing proposition all around" (126). His Squeeze Play was first published in 1982 under a pseudonym, Paul Benjamin, that anticipates "Benjamin Sachs" of Leviathan.

[28] "William Wilson" is, of course, from Poe's eponymous "William Wilson," a short story about the darkly interconnected fate of the mysterious doubles. In this story, William Wilson is haunted by another William Wilson until both perish in a final showdown. Poe presents the questions of split identity, love-hate, and the dark side of the human psyche. Auster ardently recycles names, themes, and episodes borrowed from the stories of the American romantics, most conspicuous of them being "Roger Malvin's Burial," "Wakefield," and Fanshawe, by Hawthorne; "William Wilson," "The Man of the Crowd," and The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, by Poe; and "Jimmy Rose" and Confidence Man by Melville. Giving a typical postmodern twist to these stories, Auster inserts the characters' names of these works into his works. See my discussion below.

> slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.
>
> The detective is one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable. The reader sees the world through the detective's eyes, experiencing the proliferation of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him, as if, because of the attentiveness he now brings to them, they might begin to carry a meaning other than the simple fact of their existence. Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter "i," standing for "investigator," it was "I" in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him. (Trilogy 9-10)

Quinn believes in the "plenitude" and "economy" of the detective/mystery stories. He thinks that, if we read "objects" and "events" carefully, we can "pull all these things together and make sense of them." Also "the writer and the detective are interchangeable" for Quinn because the "eye" of the private eye simultaneously means three things: the "i" of the "investigator," the "I" of the cogito, and the eye of the writer who observes the world.[29] Quinn's imaginary world thus conforms to the strict rules and principles of the detective/mystery story.[30] As Stefano Tani summarizes in The Doomed Detective: the Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American & Italian Fiction:

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[29] This quotation thus shows a good summary list of what Auster aims to deconstruct in his fiction: the conventions of the "classic" detective/mystery story; the idea of subject/identity as a unified entity; and writing and reading as a cognitive, hermeneutic process. For Auster, deconstructing the detective/mystery story also means deconstructing the traditional ideas of literature.

[30] The "classic detective fiction[,] which reached its peak between the two world wars and is often called the whodunit" (Todorov 44), has been considered to have strict rules for both writing and reading. For example, the famous "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories," by S. S. Van Dine, and "Detective Story Decalogue," by Ronald A. Knox, list certain pre-given rules. Just two examples of them: "3. There must be no love interest. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar" (Dine 189-90); "The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow" (Knox 194).

> A conventional detective story is a fiction in which an amateur or professional detective tries to discover by rational means the solution of a mysterious occurrence – generally a crime, usually a murder. This definition implies the presence of at least three invariable elements: the detective, the process of detection, and the solution. Besides these basic elements other characteristics typical to detective fiction and useful for definition of the anti-detective novel are: a mystery or a crime to unravel; suspense (the interaction between detection and solution as it plays with the expectations of the reader); delay of the solution (normally caused by a first false solution planted by the criminal or caused by a mistake on the part of the detective). ...however, the crucial elements of the genre are the detective, detecting process, and solution.... The solution is the most important element since it is the final and fulfilling link in the detective novel's sequence, the one that gives sense to the genre and justifies its existence. (41)

The problem with these conventions is, however, that they are fictional. These rules of the detective/mystery story are denied in Auster's "real" postmodern anti-detective stories. In the "real" world Quinn enters by adopting the identity of "Paul Auster," he finds no clue to his case. Even after his meeting with Stillman, Sr. three times in disguise, "Quinn was nowhere.... He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning" (Trilogy 124). He then disguises himself as a bum and stays put in front of Stillman, Sr.'s hotel to spy on him around the clock. Still, the "days ... came and went. Stillman did not appear" (141).

Totally frustrated, Quinn finally visits the "real" "Paul Auster," who, against his expectation, turns out to be a postmodern critic studying the complex authorship of Don Quixote. This "Auster" tells Quinn that Stillman, Sr. jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge months ago. Quinn immediately goes to Stillman, Jr.'s apartment, but finds it empty (151). Then he starts a second phase of his bum's life in the empty apartment, writing "in his red notebook" (154). But this "period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook. Little by little, Quinn was coming to the end" (156). This apparently imminent ending, however, does not result in a closure of the narrative. Now Quinn himself mysteriously

disappears, and the narrator of the story, who is a friend of "Paul Auster," tells the reader: "As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now" (158).

Blue in "Ghosts" is faced with a similar fate. As a good student of his Poesque master, Brown, he believes in the importance of scientific reasoning for detectives. He finds, however, that he is watching himself through his suspect, Black: "To speculate, from Latin speculatus, meaning to spy out, to observe, and linked to the word speculum, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself" (Trilogy 171-2). This scientifically oriented professional gumshoe is thus puzzled through and through. Because "he knows nothing" (203), he "just wanders around the streets" for a while (202), and forgrounding the reader's disoriented reader-responses to Auster's postmodern anti-detective story, he speculates:

> They [Black and White] have trapped Blue into doing nothing, into being so inactive as to reduce his life to almost no life at all. Yes, says Blue to himself, that's what it feels like: like nothing at all. He feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life. This is strange enough – to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through lives of others. ... But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action – nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. That's all there is, Blue realizes, and he no longer wants any part of it. But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room? (Trilogy 201-2)

Blue finally confronts Black, and Black, wearing a mask, is now waiting for him. In the manner of Poe's "William Wilson," Black tells Blue: "I've needed you from the beginning. If it hadn't been for you, I couldn't have done it" (230). He continues: "To remind me of what I was supposed to be doing. Every time I looked up, you were there, watching me, following me, always in sight, bringing into me with your eyes. You were the whole world to me, Blue, and I turned you into my death" (230). Blue, again as in "William Wilson," kills Black, his

metaphysical double.

This seeming closure of the story is, however, yet another red herring for the reader because the ending is left completely open by the narrator, or rather, by Auster himself: "Where he [Blue] goes after that is not important. ... Anything is possible.... I myself prefer to think that he went far away, boarding a train that morning and going out West to start a new life. It is even possible that America was not the end of it. In my secret dreams, I like to think of Blue booking passage on some ship and sailing to China. Let it be China, then, and we'll leave it at that. ... And from this moment on, we know nothing" (232).

Like Quinn ("City of Glass"), Blue ("Ghosts"), Sachs (Leviathan), and Barber (Moon Palace), the unnamed narrator of "The Locked Room" adopts an identity. This time, it is that of his old friend and double, Fanshawe, a genius writer who mysteriously vanishes. Fanshawe disappears in the same manner as the protagonist of Hawthorne's short story, "Wakefield," who vanishes one day without reason but comes back to his wife after years of absence as if nothing had happened.[31] Fanshawe "preferred to stay in hiding" (Trilogy 242) even before his disappearance, but now he is completely vanished, leaving his beautiful wife and unpublished manuscripts to the narrator.

Living as Fanshawe's replacement, that is, as his wife's substitute husband, his literary agent, and his biographer, the narrator tries to forget about Fanshawe, but his friend's absence endlessly haunts his own presence. He thus decides to find and kill his double. But, like that of Nicholas Branch in DeLillo's Libra, his search for Fanshawe becomes deadlocked. "It went on for months, and each day the material expanded, grew in geometric surges, accumulating more and more associations, a chain of contacts that eventually took on a life of its own. It was an

[31] "Fanshawe" is of course an intertextual Austerian lease from Hawthorne's first novel that was hated by his own creator, who asked it to be destroyed after his death.

infinitely hungry organism, and in the end I saw that there was nothing to prevent it from becoming as large as the world itself. A life touches one life, which in turn touches another life, and very quickly the links are innumerable, beyond calculation" (332). In Paris he even meets a certain "Peter Stillman," who could or could not be Fanshawe, or who even could or could not be Peter Stillman from "City of Glass."

After encountering numerous red herrings, he finally has to confront Fanshawe in person per Fanshawe's own request for a final showdown. When he arrives in Columbus Square in Boston, Fanshawe is hiding in a "locked room" and asks his replacement not to call him "Fanshawe." From behind the closed door, he says, again like Poe's William Wilson: "I watched you. I watched you and Sophie and the baby. ... I followed you everywhere you went" (365). Already dying after having taken poison hours ago, he gives the narrator a red notebook, without showing his face: "Take the notebook and go back to New York. That's all I ask of you" (365).

The traditional reader here might expect some clues for his reading as well as to the fate of Fanshawe and the narrator. But once again, the narrator, who, according to his narration, is also the same narrator of the previous two stories of the trilogy, leaves the ending totally open and unsolved. While waiting for a next train for New York, he reads the red notebook, and tells the reader:

> If I say nothing about what I found there, it is because I understood very little. All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. I can think of no other way to express it. Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible. It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives this notebook is one of great lucidity. It is as if Fanshawe knew his final work had to subvert every expectation I had for it. These were not the words of a man who regretted anything. He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again. I lost my way after the first word, and

> from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me. And yet, underneath this confusion, I felt there was something too willed, something too perfect, as though in the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail – even to the point of failing himself. (Trilogy 370)

Then, in a very Austerian gesture, he tears up the red notebook given by Fanshawe, leaving the reader with the "odor of nothingness" (352): "One by one, I tore the pages from the notebook, crumpled them in my hand, and dropped them into a trash bin on the platform. I came to the last page just as the train was pulling out" (391).[32] These sentences of Trilogy and its penultimate paragraph I quoted above seem to be a rewriting of the theory of postmodernism, particularly that of the anti-detective story: Story deconstructs itself from within, "canceling" out or "erasing" any transcendental signifier; Look for "no story, no plot, no action" (202).

Auster's subversion of the traditional detective/mystery story through the logic of chance indeed reflects some theoretical trends in contemporary American humanities, which frequently focus on the significance of randomness. As Paul de Man claims in Allegories of Reading, for example, deconstruction, a major theoretical cousin of postmodernism, underlines randomness as an important critical concept: "nothing, whether deed, word, thought or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power … is due to the randomness of its occurrence" (69). More particularly, William Spanos claims in "The Detective and the Boundary" that the anti-detective story is "the paradigmatic literary archetype" of the postmodern literary imagination:

> Ultimately, these programmed expectations also demand the kind of social and political organization that finds its fulfillment in the imposed and habituating certainties of the well-made world of the corporate and totalitarian states, where investigation or inquisition on behalf of the negation of mystery, of uncanniness, of

[32] A similar anecdote can be found in Auster's more recent novel, The Book of Illusions, a book about a legendary movie director's quest for pure art.

> difference, or to put it positively, on behalf of the achievement of a total, that is, preordained or teleologically determined and de-differentiated hegemonic structure – a "final solution" – is the defining activity. It is, therefore, no accident that the postmodern literary imagination at large insists on the disorienting mystery, the ominous and threatening uncanniness of being that resists naming, and that the paradigmatic literary archetype it has discovered is the anti-detective story (and its antipsychoanalytical analogue), the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to "detect" or to psychoanalyze – to track down the secret cause – in order to violently frustrate this impulse by refusing to solve the crime (or find the cause of the neurosis). (Repetitions 24-5)

Spanos suggests that the postmodern anti-detective story epitomizes a wide-ranging cultural transformation that has happened since the collapse of what he calls the "Western structure of consciousness," which "perceives the world as a well-made melodrama" (39).

This understanding of the anti-detective story as a prototypical postmodern genre is based on an awareness shared by the anti-detective story and the postmodern worldview. As Tani writes:

> The main difference that separates postmodernism from modernism, then, is postmodernism's lack of a center, its refusal to posit a unifying system. Postmodernism's new awareness is the absence of a finality, a solution. This is exactly what the anti-detective novel is about. ... The detective novel, a reassuring "low" genre that is supposed to please the expectations of the reader ... becomes the ideal medium of postmodernism in its inverted form, the anti-detective novel, which frustrates the expectations of the reader, transforms a mass-media genre into a sophisticated expression of avant-garde sensibility, and substitutes for the detective as central and ordering character the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, or nonsolution. (39-40)

Or, as Michael Holquist argues in "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction," "Post-Modernism exploits detective stories by expanding and changing certain possibilities in them" (1491). The postmodern anti-detective story or what Holquist himself calls the "new metaphysical detective story finally obliterates the traces of the old which underlie it" (153). Most of all, it is "purged of [the] linear teleology," or "its

telos is the lack of telos, its plot consists in the calculated absence of plot. It is not a story – it is a process..." (153).

Auster's postmodern rewriting of the detective/mystery story universalizes this tendency by consecrating the logic of pure chance as the transcendental, trans-historical agent.[33] Directing our attention to that logic, Auster makes the anti-detective story a prototypical postmodern literary genre. No wonder, then, that Auster criticism has focused on his undermining of traditional ideas of literature, particularly that of the detective/mystery story. Alison Russell, for example, defines Auster's Trilogy as a Derridean deconstructive project. In "Deconstructing The New York Trilogy: Paul Auster's Anti-Detective Fiction," Russell writes:

> All three [stories of Trilogy] employ and deconstruct the conventional elements of the detective story, resulting in a recursive linguistic investigation of the nature, function and meaning of language. The trilogy also parodies and subverts the Romance, "realistic" fiction, and autobiography, thereby exploding the narrative traditions associated with these genres. By denying conventional expectations of fiction – linear movement, realistic representation, and closure – Auster's novels also deconstruct logocentrism, a primary subject of Derrida's subversions. Logocentrism, the term applied to uses and theories of language grounded in the metaphysics of presence, is the "crime" that Auster investigates in The New York Trilogy. In each volume, the detective searches for "presence": an ultimate referent or foundation outside the play of language itself. This quest for correspondence between signifier and signified is inextricably related to each protagonist's quest for origin and identity, for the self only exists insofar as language grants existence to it. (71-2).

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[33] Theoretical tendencies that emphasize chance and randomness are in fact not limited to the humanities. As N. Katherine Hayles points out in Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science, "an archipelago of chaos" (3) has been forming since the 1960s, which includes chaos theory, poststructural-ism/deconstruction, and contemporary (postmodern) fiction. According to Hayles, these different disciplines commonly defy traditional belief in binary opposition, foundationalism, order, and predictability. Or, as Nicholas Rescher argues in Luck: The Brilliant Randomness of Everyday Life, "modern science has been moving away from determinism and toward a doctrine of chance limited by law. And, of course, the operation of chance is not confined to physics [which "emphasizes the role of chance and stochastic randomness in the world of eventuations" and quantum processes and the entropy law] alone. In biology we see randomness at work in genetic mutations; in economics there is the random-walk theory of stock-market price fluctuation; and so on, Chance is a pervasive factor in modern science" (45).

Because "the detective story is end-dominated" (73) and "its popularity attests to Western culture's obsession with closure" (73), by "denying closure, and by sprinkling his trilogy with references to other end-dominated texts, Auster continually disseminates the meaning of this detective story" (73). Or, as William Lavender summarizes pithily in "The Novel of Critical Engagement: Paul Auster's City of Glass," "City of Glass deconstructs the form of the novel, the canons of criticism, theory, and tradition, and it deconstructs itself" (220).

Auster indeed subverts the "classic" detective/mystery story. I would argue, however, that he ironically reanimates the detective/mystery story by foregrounding one of its essential conventions, its emphasis on the mysteriousness of the world, while undermining another conventional element of the genre: the final solution of the mystery case and the closure of the narrative. As Tani points out: though "it seems most reasonable to view the anti-detective novel not as a continuation of the genre but as a transgression of it" (40), a "new use of old techniques can lead to a phenomenon that still maintains visible connections with the detective novel" (41). Or, according to Russell, "Auster continually disseminates the meaning of this detective story" (73). His recycling of the traditional detective/mystery thus makes Auster reconnected to, or recontained by, the Euroamerican literary, cultural tradition.[34]

Auster's critical recycling of the (pseudo-)historical episodes and of the traditional literary conventions provides a good case study for Hutcheon's theory of "postmodern irony." According to Hutcheon, postmodern fiction, or what she calls "historiographic metafiction," "de-naturalizes" "the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces"

[34] In some sense, Auster's postmodern anti-detective stories are rewriting of, or rather, appendices to Hawthorne's "Wakefield." In the conclusion of "Wakefield," Hawthorne takes the omnipotent narrator's voice and writes: "amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one and to a whole, that, by steeping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe" (Hawthorne 75).

through "complicitous critique," which "at once inscribes and subverts" them (Politics 11). As I have been discussing in this chapter, Auster's "paradoxical postmodernism" (11) indeed reveals the ideological cruxes of America by critically recycling its myths and ideals. The shattered brain of Whitman, the chamber pot in his attic, the fallen egg-linguist Humpty Dumpty, Columbus's egg, Thoreau's pocket compass left to Lazarus, and the American wilderness devoid of meaning: all these are random elements mobilized by Auster's aesthetic to undermine the myths and ideals of America.

There is, however, an ultimate excess in Auster's oeuvre that Hutcheon's theory cannot explain. To the degree that these episodes are repeatedly introduced in his intertextual stories, Auster's narrative infinitely regresses, or rather, infinitely expands. The more complicated his narrative becomes due to these episodes, the wider his narrative expands its imaginary space. As that space expands, Auster's creative voice becomes clearer than his critical reevaluations of the traditional myths and ideals. It is true that he recycles the dominant history and culture of America in order to defamiliarize them. But at the same time, Auster ventriloquizes this ultimate message of art through none other than his own subversive voices. In the end, art is not a critical sociology; it is a creative activity to open up the realm of our imagination. The logic of pure chance is for Auster an artistic device to achieve this function of art. Everything is under the rule of Lady Chance; therefore, nothing is certain and everything is mysterious. This mysteriousness is what Auster aims to explore through his art. His somewhat excessive use of the logic of pure chance thus undermines one of the most celebrated postmodern literary assumptions, its insistence on the impossibility of a unified authorial voice. Rather than defining literature as a dogmatic sociological tract, he makes Lady Chance a postmodern Muse. By attributing an almost superhuman power to the logic of chance and mysteriousness,

Auster thus opens up a new dimension for the novel writing in the age of what John Barth calls "exhaustion."

By negating necessity and causality, Auster's narrative of chance invites the reader into an abysmal realm of sublime mysteriousness. We can even say that his Lady Chance takes an almost divine role, and thus a certain "perpetual presence of the sublime" (Emerson 9) resides in Auster's postmodern narrative space. Because everything is mysterious in his ever-expanding narrative imperium, we are not to doubt the existence of the transcendentally mysterious. Rather, we need to confront and explore its power. As the words in Ecclesiastics, "Meaningless! ... Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless" (1:2), are in fact telling us about the omnipresence of God, Auster's "music of chance" tells us about the omnipotence of Lady Chance, a demigoddess in our postmodern age. Auster thus might be called a postmodern Jonathan Edwards, whose "Spider" sermon preaches the omnipotence of the Puritan God through a vivid representation of human frailty comparable to the fate of a spider held up over fire. To parody Edwards, we might say that Auster is preaching: "The [Lady Chance] ... holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds up a spider ... over the fire" (97). "That world of misery [and mystery], that lake of burning brimstone is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of [Lady Chance] ...: there is nothing between you and hell but the air; 'tis only the power and mere pleasure of [the mysterious power of Lady Chance] that holds you up" (95). Auster's Marcusean "Great Refusal" thus turns into a Great Affirmation of Lady Chance. As Proverbs tells us that "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (16:33), so does Auster tell us that "every decision" is made by Lady Chance.

American cultural history is rife with numerous chance events, one of them being the originary stranding of the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock in 1620. Though often interpreted as a providential epiphany promising a bright future for American history, this stranding epitomizes a chance origin of the American nation. By attributing a work of pure luck to God's Providence, the Pilgrims justified their settlement in America. America's rise to a global empire has also been often legitimized by similar essentializing interpretations of random historical events. Reading Auster's fictional reconstruction of America, we are rightly led away from these interpretations because there is no historically legitimizing logic for the American ideals of civilization. On the other hand, we are simultaneously led away from the critique of the American imperial legacies because, according to Auster's narrative of chance, everything has been made possible by the mysterious power of pure chance. Auster's literary postmodernism seems to be declaring: American freedom is based on pure luck; ergo, Lady Chance prevails in the free land of the Lady Liberty; nothing more, nothing less. Auster thus tacitly endorses American phenomena with the logic of pure chance, while ostensibly undermining the mythic interpretations of them with the same logic. Simply, we should "know nothing" (Trilogy 232), though we need to endlessly try to know.

Marcuse predicted that even the desperate dream to rekindle the Great Refusal could be absorbed by the flexible American cultural system: "The efforts to recapture the Great Refusal in the language of literature suffer the fate of being absorbed by what they refute. ... This absorption is justified by technical progress; the refusal is refuted by the alleviation of misery in the advanced industrial society" (One-Dimensional Man 70). I would argue that Auster's postmodern fiction is also freely absorbed by the resilient power/knowledge of American tradition, which refutes any alternative to it by the "alleviation of misery." By creating an ever-

flexible and ever-expansive narrative space that undermines essentialist/foundationalist interpretations of American culture and history, Auster presents a significant critique of America. By closing off alternative understandings of America to absolute agnosticism, however, Auster's narrative tacitly endorses an all-absorbing, flexible American history and culture, presenting a unique example of the convergence between postmodern uncertainty and the logic of the American expansionist imagination.

Auster's narrative expansion also exemplifies American culture's transformation into a postmodern one since the constricting experiences of the late sixties and early seventies. If postmodernism is a response to what John Barth calls "exhaustion," Auster's endless narrative movements through an all-inclusive postmodern chronotope could be an attempt to reimagine new narrative space in which the contemporary American cultural self can move freely. The American cultural imagination has developed an idea of freedom in terms of space, privileging spatial expansion over historical consciousness. It is characterized by unusual thrusts for expansion that would presumably guarantee the individual/national self a limitless freedom. Concerning this linguistico-cultural expansion of America, Richard Poirier argues that a cultural mission of the canonical American writers has been to create a "world elsewhere" (6-7), "an imaginary environment," in which the "ideal national self" can enjoy "limitless possibilities" or "unconditioned existence, so that s/he can become like Emerson's 'transparent eyeball'" (Poirier 3-4; Whalen-Bridge 171). This expansionist tendency dreamed by the "limitless individual" (Whalen-Bridge 171) goes hand in hand with the capitalist expansion that has helped America become an imperial power. If the cultural imagination of America has realized a triumphant geo-cultural expansion, its capitalist ideal has acquired a status of global

finance capital. These two expansionist thrusts seem to have merged into an all-inclusive whole in contemporary postmodern Pax Americana.

I believe the confluence of these two thrusts finds a literary homologue in Auster's narrative, proving that postmodernism is a cultural strategy contributing to the extension/ expansion of the traditional American ideals. While liberating the literary imagination from conventional restrictions, his narrative brings these two expansionist thrusts into a "limitless" postmodern aesthetic space. Simultaneously undermining and simulating the boundary-breaking logic of American expansionism, Auster's "music of chance" is the atonal music of the Americano-centric postmodern world. Thus his presumably subversive aesthetic ironically replicates the same expansionist logic cherished by the American collective cultural imagination. This makes his aesthetic strategy a doubly ironic "postmodern irony." Working as a subversive aesthetic of the "postmodern irony" excessively celebrated by Hutcheon's theory, Auster's critique is nonetheless caught up within the American cultural expansionism, making his narrative expansionism not only homologous to but also complicitous with the collective American imagination. While accomplishing what Hutcheon calls a "complicitous critique," Auster's crtitical narrative desire thus ironically subsumes itself to the very boundary-breaking logic. Auster rescues American history and culture, naturalizing it in his very critical practice of denaturalization.

More specifically, Auster's narrative of chance anticipates the demand of contemporary finance capital, which, freed from the traditional Protestant ethic/ethnic, threatens to break down every imaginable boundary. Today's globalized finance capital symbolically recombines the traditional American cultural ideal with a recent thrust of global capitalism, blurring social, cultural, political, and geographical boundaries. By materializing this tendency, Auster's

postmodern aesthetic of chance becomes a cultural homologue to multinational finance capital, doing justice to the analyses of postmodernism by Jameson, David Harvey, or Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who consider postmodernism to be "the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism" (Postmodernism 46), a cultural symptom of the post-Fordist "flexible modes of capital accumulation" (Postmodernity vii), or the "anti-foundational and anti-essentialist" "ideology of ... the world market" (Empire 50). As Jameson claims in his conclusion of "Culture and Finance Capital," finance capital has acquired the status of "total flow" to which corresponds the "cultural renarrativization of the broken pieces of the image world" (160):

> Modernist abstraction, I believe, is less a function of capital accumulation as such, than rather of money itself in a situation of capital accumulation. Money is here both abstract (making everything equivalent) and empty and uninteresting, since its interest lies outside itself: it is thus incomplete like the modernist images I have been evoking, it directs attention elsewhere, beyond itself, towards what is supposed to complete (and also abolish) it, namely production and value. It knows a semi-autonomy, certainly, but not a full autonomy in which it would constitute a language or a dimension in its own right. But that is what finance capital brings into being: a play of monetary entities which needs neither production (as capital does) nor consumption (as money does): which supremely, like cyberspace, can live on its own internal metabolism and circulate without any reference to an older type of content. But so do the narrativized image-fragments of a stereotypical postmodern language: suggesting a new cultural realm of dimension which is independent of the former real world, not because, as in the modern (or even the romantic) period, culture withdrew from that real world into an autonomous space of art, but rather because the real world has already been suffused with it and colonized by it, so that it has no outside in terms of which it could be found lacking. Stereotypes are never lacking in that sense, and neither is the total flow of the circuits of financial speculation. (The Cultural Turns 160-61)

Jameson focuses his discussion on the movie previews that epitomize the "narrativized image-fragments of a stereotypical postmodern language." I believe Auster's postmodern narrative also reflects this "total flow" of the multinational finance capital. In his ever-expanding narrative imperium, anything is possible and any episodic fragments can be incorporated; all traditional barriers are broken down, though those of America become ever-expansive; no

outside exists that will guarantee an aesthetically critical distance; and, as Karl Marx has prophetically written when America was rising as an industrial country, "all that is solid melts into air" in Auster's postmodern American fiction.[35] His narrative of chance thus helps create a postmodern "elsewhere" where a new unlimited American freedom is realized. It provides elbow room for the postmodern American subjects. Auster's expansionist narrative imperium is thus analogous to the logic of the American-led global finance capital, which is a culmination of American cultural and material ideals, regardless of whether we need to accept it or fight it.

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[35] Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto, ed. Frederic L. Bender (New York: Norton, 1988):

> The bourgeoisie cannot exit without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the condition of the existence of all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with is kind.
>
> The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.
>
> The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are being destroyed. ... In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (58-9)

This analysis of the destructive dynamics of the capitalist mode of production prefigures recent discourses on globalization, world-market, and their subsequent cultural implications such as multiculturalism, post-nationalism, and postmodernism. Also interestingly, the logic of capitalism has, according to Marx, started accomplishing its formal realization as a global form with the "discovery of America": "Modern industry has established the world-market, for which the discovery of America paved the way" (56).

Chapter 4

Tim O'Brien: An Unending Narrative "March" of Postimperial America

Westward the star of empire takes its way,
in the whiteness of innocence.

-- John Quincy Adams[1]

It is disputable whether the Vietnam War was the first postmodern war or not. Fredric Jameson first remarked in 1984 on the relationship between the Vietnam War and postmodernism/postmodernity. Discussing the emptying out of historical and psychological depths and the "breakdown of all previous narrative paradigms" in postmodern cultures, Jameson takes Michael Herr's Dispatches as an example of the depthless postmodern structure of feeling. According to Jameson, Dispatches is an attempt to represent the Vietnam War as the "first terrible postmodernist war," whose story "cannot be told in any of the traditional paradigms of the war novel or movie" (Postmodernism 44-5).

Since Jameson's formulation, there have been debates on the question of the Vietnam War in relation to postmodernism/postmodernity. One position argues that the Vietnam War was a major cause of postmodern cultures because the notorious guerilla warfare helped deconstruct the technology-oriented Euroamerican Enlightenment. According to this view, the influences of the war were evident in the "rhizomatic" theoretical practices of poststructuralism and the fragmented writing strategies of postmodern fiction. Exemplifying this view, Donald Ringnalda calls Tim O'Brien's Going After Cacciato "a guerilla novel" that "explores the dark, mysterious archetypal foundations of Paul Berlin's conscious and

[1] Quoted in Richard Drinnon, Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building (Norman: U of Oklahoma P) vii. This statement was made just after the Louisiana Purchase by Thomas Jefferson in 1803.

subconscious minds" without any "reassuring clocks or maps" (36).[2] A second position claims that highly advanced Euroamerican societies were already undergoing their own transformation around the years of the war. According to this view, the Vietnam War was not a major cause of Euroamerican postmodernism/postmodernity but just one collateral example of it. This position locates postmodernism/postmodernity in the wider socio-cultural contexts of Euroamerica. While the first position emphasizes the subversive energies of postmodernism/postmodernity foregrounded in literary/aesthetic/cultural realms, the second view emphasizes the importance of wider socio-historical developments in Euroamerican societies.

A third and more recent (post)marxist position argues that the Vietnam War and literary reflections on it have not been postmodern enough, but rather, more traditionally modern: the Vietnamese national liberation movement was a prototypically modernist attempt to establish a new national sovereignty on the basis of the people's self-determination; American ways of warfare based on its "mechanistic worldview" and "managerial skills" were also modernist, not postmodernist; and the "fragmentary collage form" often used in literary reflections on the war is controlled by a single modernist artistic vision or narrative voice. Contrary to Jameson, Douglas Kellner thus argues, for example, that Dispatches is a well-intended, well-plotted, and well-symbolized modernist epic that has a unified signifying structure to show the "horrors" of the "imperialist war."[3] According to Kellner, the first Gulf War in 1991 was the genuine beginning of postmodern war, which is characterized by "a progressive displacement of humans by technology" (227). The fact that

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[2] As my discussion in this chapter will show, however, Paul Berlin's fantasy journey in fact has a clearly pre-charted destination: it is heading "west" toward civilized Paris.

[3] Douglas Kellner, "From Vietnam to the Gulf: Postmodern Wars?" The Vietnam War and Postmodernity, ed. Michael Bibby (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1999) 199-236.

American warheads blurred the boundaries between telecasting cameras and destructive bombs has led some critics to claim that the first Gulf War was a "virtual" war. French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard has claimed that the first Gulf War "would not happen" (before the war) and that it "did not" happen (after the war) in modernist senses of warfare.[4] Even in the first Gulf War, however, the alleged "democratic" goals of the war and the "modern" targets destroyed on the Iraqi side were still pre-postmodern.

Whether it was the first postmodern war or not, we cannot deny that American involvement in Vietnam was one of the major historical events to have been discussed in close connection to the postmodernization of American culture.[5] The Vietnam War has been discussed in the light of postmodernism because of its notorious uncertainty, formidable unknowability, and unprecedented unrepresentability. Uncertainty was the common experience among the American soldiers in Vietnam: there were no front lines, no goals or purposes, no recognizable difference between friends and enemies, and no linear progression of battle plans; instead, there were snipers, ambushes, haunting wilderness, and disoriented marches. These experiences, however, were not limited to the soldiers: The "we" in the last sentence of Herr's Dispatches, "Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there," also includes American civilians (280). As James William Gibson points out in The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam, America started the war with a "deeply mechanistic world view," but came to find soon after the first official involvement in 1965 that it "was as if an imaginary Western had turned into a horror show" (3, 14). American society in general was indeed becoming a different kind of nation during and after the war, and new cultural responses

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[4] Jean Baudrillard, The Gulf War Did Not Take Place, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995).

[5] Other historical moments, of course, could be claimed to be an originary event/moment of postmodernism /postmodernity. Don DeLillo, for example, thinks the assassination of John F. Kennedy was the genuine originary moment of American postmodernity.

were forming stateside, often under the rubric of postmodernism.

Focusing on American postmodern fiction and its relation to the Vietnam War experience, Wendy Steiner maintains that the Vietnam War "normalized" the postmodern literary experiment, especially by making the "merging of reality and fiction," a crucial element of postmodern experimentalism, into an everyday experience (481). According to Steiner, the Vietnam War "was actualizing the claims of postmodern fiction: the inappropriateness of conventional notions of plot and character, the peculiarly tense relation between text and audience (war and public), and the intrusion of metaconcerns into any form of action" (483). Jerome Klinkowitz also writes in Structuring the Void: The Struggle for Subject in Contemporary American Fiction that

> By late 1966 the Vietnam experience could be described as one of uncertainty in the face of disrupted forms and as yet unanswered questions: why was this war neither fightable nor supportable in conventional terms? In fiction similar traditional certainties of order, coherence, and authority were being unsettled by writers who declined to accept the realistic novel's great tradition of linear time, physical space, and God-like moral stature. (137)

The Vietnam War indeed gave an opportunity for American fiction to (re)structure itself. American literature of Vietnam, having started mainly with journalistic and realistic documentation of the war experiences, also allegedly mutated into a genre of postmodern fiction by the early nineteen eighties.[6]

The various discourses on the relationship between postmodernism/postmodernity and the Vietnam War seem to be predicated on a hidden narrative desire to locate an originary moment of postmodernism/postmodernity. This desire reveals that even discourses on/of

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[6] According to Tony Williams in "The Rites of Incorporation," until the nineteen-seventies American fiction of the Vietnam War not only represented but also accepted the historical "pain" or the "agony of historical trauma" caused by the war, as we can see in Ron Kovic's Born on the Fourth of July (1976), Charles Durden's No Bugles, No Drums (1976), Philip Caputo's A Rumor of War (1977), Larry Heinemann's Close Quarters (1977), and Gustav Hasford's The Short Timers (1979). This realist mode of the Vietnam War fiction was replaced in the late nineteen-seventies and early eighties by various postmodern texts "disavowing Vietnam's historical significance" (Bibby 109-10).

postmodernism/postmodernity, which often entreat us to forget about origins and foundations, cannot escape from imagining their own origin(s). We might ask, then: What narrative desire underlies American postmodern fiction? Does the postmodern aesthetic of uncertainty have a hidden desire for its origin(s)? If so, are those origin(s) also related to the foundational origin(s) of the imagined American national community?

In this chapter, focusing on two fictional works based on his personal experiences of the war in Vietnam, Going After Cacciato and The Things They Carried, I will discuss Tim O'Brien's postmodern fiction in relation to a wider tradition of American culture and show how it is reinscribed into what in Chapter 1 I have called the "American expansionist imagination." Though apparently subverting traditional literary/cultural conventions, O'Brien's "stories" not only recycle but also reaffirm the American culture of "empire for liberty," which has always dreamed "a world elsewhere" in Richard Poirier's phrase, in which the cultural self of America could find "elbow room" for freedom.[7] I will discuss this recontainment of O'Brien's fiction by the American cultural imagination mainly focusing on his tacit endorsement of hegemonic American communalism. Unconsciously supporting traditional ideas of "American exceptionalism," "American innocence," and the American "civilizing mission," O'Brien also repeats traditional American attitudes toward "other" cultures and peoples. I will also argue that O'Brien's frequent portrayal of the disoriented march of the American soldiers can be read as a synecdoche for an apparently disoriented but still expanding American culture in the postmodern age. Contrary to current critical

[7] According to Poirier, "even at the moment of worldly defeat the [American] hero has managed to create, like the exiled Coriolanus, at least the illusion of 'a world elsewhere'." The American "expansive characters" in literature has had "the American obsession with inventing environments that permit unhampered freedom of consciousness" (3-8).

celebration of O'Brien's critique of the Vietnam War, I will conclude that his postmodern narrative strategies are used for a postmodern narrative expansion of the traditional American cultural imagination.

From If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home, a philosophical war memoir often discussed as a fictional work, to his latest novel, July, July, a collective fictional biography of a college class from the 1960s, O'Brien's novels have represented the Vietnam War experiences in a typically postmodernist mode.[8] Blurring the traditional

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[8] There have been three main tendencies in O'Brien criticism. A first, more traditional one focuses on whether O'Brien's fictional representation of the Vietnam War fits into traditional American cultural mythologies or not. Philip Beidler in American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam (1982) and in Re-Writing America: Vietnam Authors in Their Generation (1991), for example, argues that O'Brien's writing tries to "re-vision" or "rewrite" traditional American popular mythologies. Rather than focusing on the way O'Brien breaks with traditional American representation, Beidler points out how O'Brien reconciles his new experiences with the traditional representation through "re-visioning" or "re-writing."

Against this earlier one, a dominant trend to date has focused more on O'Brien's narrative techniques, which are neither organic nor realistic. According to this trend, O'Brien is a subversive narrative artist who uses various artistic novelties, such as blending of different spatiotemporal dimensions, blurring of the real and the unreal, and mixing up of the personal and the national. This trend emphasizes the "power of the imagination" to remold fragmented memories of the war. According to this trend, O'Brien is a champion of the postmodern aesthetic of uncertainty. Concluding passages of "CliffsNotes" on Things show the quick canonization of O'Brien as a postmodernist writer but also suggest reasons why he is canonized as such:

> The standout works that followed the [Vietnam] war share an acute sense of reflexivity, a sharp bent towards the subjective voice, and a vested interest in telling stories. While the predecessors of such works as Al Santoli's Everything We Had, Michael Herr's Dispatches, and Neil Sheehan's A Bright Shining Lie surely are Owen, Crane, Hemingway, and specifically Orwell, the Vietnam War works are postmodern. In this sense, the Vietnam War genre is postmodern because of a hyper-self-awareness of form within literary form. O'Brien, Herr, and Santoli are obsessed by storytelling, and their writing is frequently about writing and the generation of stories themselves.
>
> A sense of postmodernism is created through the interaction of three main similarities present in the Vietnam War literary genre. First, clearly delineated definitions of fiction and non-fiction are abandoned. In The Things They Carried, O'Brien fuses these modes of discourse. Second, verisimilitude becomes secondary to the interplay of form and style. Third, a highly self-aware, subjective (anti-)hero is the protagonist. The Things They Carried is, then, by definition a postmodern Vietnam War narrative. Because of its postmodern [sic] the Vietnam War genrequalities, [sic] it is at once a collection of stories and a novel, a piece of fiction and an autobiography (non-fiction), and war narrative and a Vietnam War narrative. (Colella 102)

For a comprehensive critique of the formalistic/postmodernist aestheticization of the Vietnam War literature, see Jim Neilson, Warring Fictions: Cultural Politics and the Vietnam War Narrative (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1998). Neilson criticizes American literary criticism on the Vietnam War fictions for being entrapped by a "new aestheticism" called "postmodernism," which exclusively emphasizes the "uncertainty" of the war and "sanitizes" or "eliminates" U.S. roles in the war through a revisionist rewriting of the war and its literature:

boundaries between fiction and fact, fantasy and history, imagination and memory, and past and present, his novels such as Cacciato, Things, and In the Lake of the Woods carve out a unique postmodern narrative space. Narrative strategies mobilized by O'Brien to create this postmodern space of uncertainty are not different from those of other allegedly subversive postmodern writers: repetition of the same stories from different points of views, blending of contradictory spatiotemporal elements, rejection of realist/modernist conception of the monolinear narrative progression, and destabilizing of the ideas of self, nation, fiction, and history. O'Brien's postmodern fiction is committed neither to reality nor to pure fiction, but aesthetically merges these two dimensions into a surreal narrative space where memory and imagination cohabitate. From within this fictional space, O'Brien criticizes the American war mentality with its modernist worldview of technological progress and problematizes American cultural mythologies particularly well incarnated in the icons of the two heroic Johns: John F. Kennedy of the triumphalist "New Frontier" and John Wayne of the movie

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> Besides ignoring the ideological complicity hidden in the postmodern refusal to distinguish between fact and fiction, between true and false histories, contemporary literary critics, in their repeated endorsement of a postmodern rendering of the war, have failed to recognize that postmodernism itself arose during and has taken part in the reactionary rewriting of the war and repudiation of left radicalism. (208)

A third and more recent trend emphasizes the traumatic aspect of O'Brien's writing. Often with comparisons to the Holocaust or rape survivor narratives, this trend focuses on how O'Brien's narrative tries to overcome the post-traumatic disorder syndromes through the healing power of narrative. O'Brien's famous phrase "story can save us" becomes a motto for this view. A recent book-length study on O'Brien is Mark A. Heberle, A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2001). Heberle defines O'Brien's Vietnam as a "metaphorical" "psychic condition characterized by traumatization." Based on O'Brien's own statement of Vietnam as "an essential metaphor or a life-giving metaphor that ... is inescapable," he narrows down O'Brien's fiction into a psychological text/subject (xviii). No wonder, then, that, in his understanding of the "Vietnam fiction," "Vietnam" disappears into an imaginary dimension, the war is just a "misadventure," and the major victims of the war, that is, the Vietnamese people, are suppressed by his critical placebo: "Ultimately, Vietnam has metamorphosed into an imaginative site in O'Brien, a place of sometimes agonized, sometimes ironic meditation not limited to the terrible misadventure in Viet Nam, a postwar world of 'uncertainties never articulated in war stories ... no front, no near, no trenches laid out in neat parallels'" (xxvii).

If the second and third trends tend to empty out cultural, historical, and ideological dimensions of O'Brien's fiction by aestheticizing or psychologizing it, the first tendency overlooks the relation between O'Brien's narrative techniques and his appropriation of ideological, cultural legacies.

images of the innocent American citizen soldier.

Contradicting his own literary practices, however, O'Brien subjects the "power of the imagination" to the logic of the American ideology of communalism, as we can see in the final pages of Cacciato where Paul Berlin the protagonist comes back even in his imagination to his "obligation" to the small-town American community. Drawing on personal/national experiences of the "uncertain" war in Vietnam but also subsuming the power of the imagination to the communalist "obligation," O'Brien's pseudo-autobiographical novels exemplify what narrative strategies the American cultural imagination could adopt in order to reconcile itself with a new national crisis, the Vietnam War. O'Brien's postmodern narrative strategies are recontained by communalism; or, we might say that American liberal communalism finds new avenues of expression in O'Brien's postmodern narrative strategies. O'Brien's major narrative "fulcrums," that is, recurring themes, settings, characters, and episodes are mobilized for reconfirming this American communalism.

"Tim O'Brien,"[9] the 43-year old veteran narrator/protagonist of "On the Rainy River," one of the "fulcrum" stories of Things, tells the reader "for the first time" what

[9] Throughout this chapter, I follow an accepted convention of O'Brien criticism that uses "O'Brien" in quotation marks to refer to the narrator or the protagonist of "stories" created by O'Brien the author. Like Paul Auster, whose case we discussed in Chapter 3, O'Brien frequently uses his own name both for the narrator and for the protagonist of his fictional works. Making a case for the postmodernist blurring of the boundaries between the fictional and the factual, the imaginary and the historical, and the personal and the public, O'Brien also uses his personal experiences for his fictional "stories." More puzzlingly than Auster, who at least draws a clear line between his personal life and his fictional creation when asked to appear to the public, O'Brien often tells/reads his fictional "stories" when he is supposed to lecture or tell his personal experiences. As Tobey Herzog points out in Tim O'Brien, for example, O'Brien once in the midst of his book tour for In the Lake of the Woods told the audiences "a personal story" that happened to him in the summer of 1968 when he went to the war despite his own liberalism. At the end of the session, however, O'Brien confessed that his "personal" story was in fact "made up." He was indeed just retelling the story of "On the Rainy River." What was more confusing to the audiences was that the "story-truth" of "O'Brien" in "On the Rainy River" was not much different from the "happening-truth" of O'Brien the author's real life. This kind of double- or triple-twisting of the author/narrator/protagonist is very useful for O'Brien to aesthetically blur the line between the real war and the imaginary war. As Herzog points out, "Such blurring of the line between fiction and reality, or story-truth and happening-truth (O'Brien's terms), is common for O'Brien" (1-2).

happened to him during the summer of 1968.[10] A midwestern boy raised as a "Lone Ranger," "O'Brien" receives his draft notice. After feeling "terror," "schizophrenia," "moral split," and "shame" and finally experiencing a traumatic breakdown while working as a "declotter" on "a quarter-mile assembly line ... removing blood clots from the necks of dead pigs" (Things 46) in a meat-packing plant in his hometown, Worthington, Minnesota, "O'Brien" drives northward with a vague intention of becoming a draft-dodger. At the Tip Top Lodge, "which separates Minnesota from Canada, and which for [him] separate[s] one life from another" (50), he finds himself in a primordial American wilderness: "All around us ... there was a vastness to the world, an unpeopled rawness, just the trees and the sky and the water reaching out toward nowhere" (58).[11] Like Robert Bly's innocent young prince in Iron John: A Book About Men who acquires masculinity through "initiatory" meetings with a mythical sage called Iron John at the margin of a mythopoetic wilderness,[12] or like the persona of Whitman's "By Blue Ontario's Shore" who meets at Lake Ontario a proto-nationalist muse of the mythic America called "A Phantom gigantic superb" and is asked by her to chant "the great Idea" of "A Nation announcing itself" (468-83), "O'Brien" in this northern wilderness meets an old sage named Elroy Berdahl, who later protects him from the lure of the moral

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[10] In his interview with Scott Sawyer, O'Brien tells that he in fact "never went to the Rainy River to decide whether or not to go to Vietnam." It is a "lie" to represent a "higher truth." ("In the Name of Love" 6) A problem with O'Brien's postmodern stories, however, is that many of his stories are still based on his autobiographical details with slight changes. Many details of "On the Rainy River," for example, are still the same as those of his autobiographical data: age, hometown, college, etc. Besides, he tells in an interview with Herzog that: "My thoughts [in 1968] were centered on one of three possibilities: go to the war, go to Canada, or go to jail" (84).

[11] The idea of wilderness, like the idea of "swamp," is an important element of the American cultural tradition. As Roderick Nash points out in Wilderness and the American Mind, "wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization. From the raw materials of the physical wilderness Americans built a civilization; with the idea or symbol of wilderness they sought to give that civilization identity and meaning" (xi). In short, "wilderness" as a "state of mind" is a creation of American civilization.

[12] Borrowing a Grimm fairy tale titled "The Story of Iron John," Bly maintains that the lost inter-generational harmony since the Vietnam War might be recovered through traditional "initiatory" rites in which young boys can regain their genuine masculine gender roles from male elders.

and natural wilderness and who, through a Socratic inactive mediation, sends him to a new frontier in Asia, recontaining him within the spiraling ideological boundaries of America.

Wisely recognizing what problem this young man has, the silent old sage takes "O'Brien" to the "marginal" waters where the land of Canada is just a stone's throw away and secretly offers him an opportunity to decide his fate with his own free will. When he is "off on the margins of exile" (Things 53), however, "O'Brien" suddenly experiences a Jeffersonian moment of nationalist enlightenment and decides to go to the war. As Thomas Jefferson found his nationalist "eye compos[ing] itself" in the sublime American nature on the Blue Ridge in 1785,[13] "O'Brien" at the Tip Top Lodge here regains his nationalist self and overcomes his desire to dodge the draft after a cathartic "moral freeze," in which his "whole life seemed to spill out into the river" (59-60). Though not so optimistic as Jefferson's earlier nationalist awakening, "O'Brien's" being recontained by the boundaries of the Pax Americana here seems to be as sublime as that of Jefferson's and justifies what Myra Jehlen calls the "American incarnation"[14] or what Rob Wilson calls the "American sublime."[15] Through a ritualistic reenactment of his free (but also subjected) will in the

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[13] In Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson records a sublime moment of his communion with the American land by declaring that the "eye composes itself." This is an epitome of what Myra Jehlen calls the "American incarnation," a harmonious communion between the liberal individualist American self and the extensive American continent based on what Washington Irving calls the "law of discovery." In a passage of Notes that could also be read as a sexual metaphor, Jefferson fuses his Enlightenment self with the sublime American nature and feels proud: "For the mountain being asunder, she [nature] presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small catch of smooth blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate of the calm below. Here the eye ultimately composes itself; and that way too the road happens to lead" (Jefferson 19).

[14] Myra Jehlen, American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986). "When the liberal ideal fused with the material landscape, it produced an 'America' that was not allegory, for its meaning was not detachable, but symbol, its meaning inherent in its matter. The very notion of an American 'discovery' had already forecast this incarnation. By translating infinite time into universal space, the conception of a New World permitted principles that in the old world were rendered relative by their connection to process and growth to become absolute, timeless natural laws in the new. Reconceived as a spatial concept, process did not mean transformation but expansion" (9).

[15] Rob Wilson, American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991). "The

American wilderness, "O'Brien" here incarnates, though passively, his nationalist self into his own frozen psyche, which is a mirror image of the primordial American wilderness: "Everywhere ... in the trees and water and sky, a great worldwide sadness" comes "pressing down on" him, but "[r]ight then, with the [Canadian] shore so close," "O'Brien" overcomes "a drowning sensation" and finally "underst[an]d[s]" (59) that he has to go to the war; "And right then I submitted. I would go to the war – I would kill and maybe die ..." (62). After the nationalist reawakening while the wise natural/national sage is witnessing in absolute silence "like God" (62), "O'Brien" dispatches himself, as O'Brien the author did in real life, to where late twentieth-century America requires of him, that is, to its new frontier deep down in the Asian wilderness.

The manifest reason for this (re)awakening is apparently innocent: "I would not swim away from my hometown and my country and my life" (60). And then "O'Brien" the narrator/protagonist jumps to a conclusion and hurriedly closes off the gaps of the story, the moral dilemma in his psyche, and the abysmal fissures of American communalism/nationalism that have been momentarily unconcealed to him by the draft notice: "I passed through towns with familiar names, through the pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam, where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war" (63). "O'Brien" as a liberal individual here is, as Louis Althusser might have said, "interpellated" into the communalist/nationalist ideology.

This recognition of the boundaries of U.S. nationalism explains how the narrative mechanism of the traditional "end of the frontier thesis" works in O'Brien's postmodern

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genre of the sublime helped to consolidate an American identity founded in representing a landscape of immensity and wilderness ('power') open to multiple identifications ('use')" (5).

America/Vietnam. It summarizes the way new American geopolitical adventures spiral out of an apparent impasse into an even wider expansion. "O'Brien's" nationalist reawakening can be read as a postmodern end-of-the-frontier thesis echoing the thesis presented by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 as an interpretation of the history of democratic American civilization. As Turner's thesis functioned as a rationale for further expansion of American civilization at the end of the nineteenth century, the momentary recognition of the impasse in the wilderness here works for "O'Brien's" reorienting himself toward a new frontier. Berdhal makes "O'Brien" understand that the American frontier has once again been closed off and that now the only frontier left for American "empire for liberty" is across the Pacific in Asia where "O'Brien"/O'Brien lands after reconciling with the national boundaries. This is thus a moment when American expansionist nationalism encounters another end of its frontier and modifies itself into a postmodern version. This nationalist reawakening of "On the Rainy River" also repeats the circular logic of traditional American culture that, as Richard Slotkin claims in Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860, has regenerated and restabilized itself through violent rituals.[16] "O'Brien" here adds one postmodern element to the regenerative logic of traditional American culture, that of his feeling of guilt, as we can see in those last three sentences: "I survived, but it's not a happy

[16] According to Slotkin, "The first colonists in America saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience" (5). Starting with the early "captivity narrative," this national ritual of "regeneration through violence" develops into the hunter symbol iconized by Daniel Boone and James Fenimore Cooper's "deer hunters." "Believing in the myth of the regeneration through violence of the hunt, the American hunters eventually destroyed the natural conditions that had made possible their economic and social freedom, their democracy and social nobility. Yet, the mythology and the value system it supported remained even after the objective conditions that had justified it had vanished" (557). This national ritual as the "seeds of many American tragedies" develops in turn into the idea of "gunfighter nation, which inevitably leads to the intervention in Vietnam." We can see a direct relation between this ritual of "regeneration through violence" and the Vietnam War in cultural works based on Vietnam: literary works such as Philip Caputo's Indian Country and Bobby Ann Mason's In Country, and films such as The Deer Hunter, Taxi Driver, Apocalypse Now, and Rambo trilogy. In these cultural representations, the hunter/soldier who suffers from spiritual agonies because of the Vietnam War "regenerates" himself through cathartic but violent rituals.

ending. I was a coward. I went to the war."

This momentary opening up and hurried sealing off of the narrative gaps both in the individual psyche of the narrator/protagonist and in the cultural matrix of American nationalism repeatedly reappears in O'Brien's other stories, particularly in If I Die and in Cacciato. In If I Die, "O'Brien" the author/narrator repeats exactly the same logical itinerary of Things: he goes to the war because he is a "coward" who cannot resist the "obligation" to his community. Though he is a "confirmed liberal" who "would have cast [his] ballot to end the Vietnam War," "O'Brien" ultimately "submits" himself to the communalist/nationalist ideology (If I Die 30): "I simply couldn't bring myself to flee. Family, the hometown, friends, history, tradition, fear, confusion, exile: I could not run. ... I was a coward" (73). Like "O'Brien" the narrator/protagonist of "On the Rainy River," "O'Brien"/O'Brien the narrator/author of If I Die excuses himself by redefining "courage" as a passive "endurance": "Proper courage is wise courage. It's acting wisely ... when fear would have a man act otherwise. It is the endurance of the soul in spite of fear -- wisely" (137). And he concludes his justification of communalism with a Socratic phrase from Plato's Laches: "only the wise endurance is courage" (138).

In Cacciato too, Paul Berlin[17] the protagonist reaches a similar conclusion after an imaginary journey to civilized Paris: he also has to go back to the battlefield and give up daydreaming about Paris because even the power of the imagination should be contained by

[17] The name of the narrator/protagonist, "Paul Berlin," also implies another symbolic origin of O'Brien's Vietnam War stories. The divided city, Berlin, could allegorically mean the divided mind of Paul Berlin oscillating between the horrors of the war and the fantasy journey. To me, however, the divided city, Berlin, does signify more than the split mind of Paul Berlin. It could imply the Cold War status quo, or the Cold War "system," in which both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. were depending on each other in controlling the bipolarized world, repressing any "third way" desire of the newly independent "Third World" countries. If Paris is a symbol of the City of Light, Berlin is a symbol of the systemic stability of the Cold War that developed from a left-hand agreement between the two superpowers. This is why the end of the Cold War doesn't mean at all a total American control of the world to some conservative intellectuals such as Richard N. Haass.

the "obligation" to the community. Triggered by a "real" event in which a squad of soldiers chase after a soldier named Cacciato who went AWOL after having been against "fragging" the squad leader, Paul Berlin fantasizes an intercontinental journey from Asia to Europe. His fantasy journey on foot is a nostalgic journey "west" via Eurasian continents to Paris, the "City of Light": the city of past American glory where a world peace was realized by the rising American military-industrial power at the end of World War II; the city of a future present in which another American-led peace would be reached on the Paris Peace Talks table between North Vietnam and the U.S. Paul Berlin's imagined journey, though intermittently interrupted by horrific realities of the "real" war "in country," could be read as a yearning of the American soldiers for a Hemingwayesque "private peace." In the final pages of Cacciato, however, O'Brien makes Paul Berlin submit to the "obligation to the community." Berlin also rationalizes his collaboration with American involvement in Vietnam in a Socratic witticism, giving a definitive touch to O'Brien's tacit support of American communalism/nationalism:

> "Obligation is more than a claim imposed on us; it is a personal sense of indebtedness. It is a feeling, an acknowledgement, that through many prior acts of consent we have agreed to perform certain future acts. ... But beyond them were many tacit promises: to my family, my friends, my town, my country, my fellow soldiers. ...I am being asked to perform a final service that is entirely compatible with what I had promised earlier. A debt, a legitimate debt, is being called in. ...True, the moral climate was imperfect; there were pressures, constraints, but nonetheless I made binding choices. Again, this has nothing whatsoever to do with politics or principle or matters of justice. My obligation is to people, not to principle or politics or justice.
>
> "More than any positive sense of obligation, I confess that what dominates is the dread of abandoning all that I hold dear. I am afraid of running away. I am afraid of exile. I fear what might be thought of me by those I love. I fear the loss of their respect. I fear the loss of my own reputation. Reputation, as read in the eyes of my father and mother, the people in my hometown, my friends. I fear being an outcast. I fear being thought of as a coward. I fear that even more than cowardice itself." (285-6)

This submission of Paul Berlin to the "obligation to the community" affirms O'Brien's narrative support for hegemonic American nationalism that requires American citizens to participate in its expansionist adventures in the name of the community.

As Tony Williams points out in his discussion of the "rites of incorporation" operating in Bobbie Ann Mason's In Country and Philip Caputo's Indian Country, two Vietnam War novels exhibiting "definite postmodernist tendencies" (110), postmodern Vietnam War fiction often reveals a "process of dehistoricization" by essentializing the idea of transcendental community. According to Williams, both novels "attempt denial of traumatic historical pain and memory, repressing ... conflicts and contradictions central to the historical experience of U.S. involvement in Vietnam" (110). Particularly using the motif of "mythic 'rite of incorporation'," both Indian Country and In Country function as narrative, cultural "rituals incorporating the individual within the community" (113, 123). In Indian Country, this is realized through a reconciliation between the mainstream American culture represented by the protagonist, Christian Starkmann, and the native American spiritualism represented by the literally "friendly-fired" Bonny George, whereas in In Country it is reached through an inter-generational understanding among Sam Hughes, her veteran uncle Emmit, her KIA'd father, and her grandmother, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

I would argue that a similar "process of dehistoricization" through the "rite of incorporation" is happening in O'Brien's stories, in which the American draftees repeatedly fail to dodge the draft because of the "gravity" of the communalist ideology.[18] Moreover, the

[18] The only novel by O'Brien that does allow the protagonist to dodge the draft is The Nuclear Age. Even in The Nuclear Age, however, the "incorporation into the community" still works as a narrative device to conclude the novel. After representing the draft-dodgers' "revolutionary" adventures in Central America in which childish whims are doomed to fail not because of political circumstances but because of the essential naivety of

moral and ideological fissures in O'Brien's narrative are ironically shut sealed by the same postmodern logic of uncertainty that he aesthetically promotes. The war was fundamentally uncertain; the only thing certain was traditional American community; O'Brien's characters can thus go to the war morally and ideologically prepared.

O'Brien's fictional support of American nationalism also makes him uncritically accept the idea of "American innocence" that has often functioned as an excuse for expansionism. Contrary to a postmodern understanding of history that allegedly recalls the historical past only to critically undermine or denaturalize it, the traditional idea of American innocence is still part of American nationalism in the postmodern age because, as Michael Billig argues in Banal Nationalism, American nationalism today works more through common people's innocent daily lives than in the realm of official dogmas or declarations. Discussing contemporary American nationalism, Billig contrasts "banal nationalism" to "hot nationalism." According to him, contrary to what is widely accepted in academia as well as in popular understanding, nationalism often works in the "flagging" of the Stars and Stripes. We find this usually unnoticed flagging even in everyday weather forecasts, sports, and sociological theories. The danger of banal nationalism is that it is not literally banal, but more deeply connected to hot nationalism. Particularly since the September 11 terrorist attacks on America, an apparently banal flagging became no more banal, because it is highly charged with an almost jingoistic sentiment among the American people. Thus I believe Billig's idea of banal nationalism does not necessarily deny its possibility of sudden eruption into aggressive nationalism; rather, it emphasizes the routine readiness of nationalist ideology for moments of action. Like a dormant volcano, this banal flagging is always ready to evolve

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the draft-dodgers, O'Brien re-incorporates William Cowling the protagonist into the mainstream American society (246-63).

into a hot jingoism, particularly when it is given a fresh channel by political leaders' propaganda or by changing conditions of international politics. Thus the boundary between banal and hot nationalism is never clear. I would say that there is a certain dialectic that is working between these two realms, particularly in America. To parody Clausewitz, flagging in a peaceful time is the preparation of war by other means, and war is the continuation of flagging by other means.

O'Brien's conception of innocence is a good example of this "banal nationalism" in the sense that O'Brien's tacit contribution to American cultural tradition and his soldiers' unnoticed submission to American expansionism in the name of community works as an indirect endorsement of the hot American nationalism. An irony is that, though O'Brien is strongly against the hot American nationalism, he habitually endorses the very hot nationalism by taking a position of banal nationalism both through his fiction and his personal life. Consider, for example, his wearing of a baseball cap on everyday occasions, for example, in his readings or interview meetings. This shows his "American" casualness basking in the comfort of the baseball cap, one of the most famous American cultural symbols. O'Brien's postmodern critique of the Vietnam War transforms itself into an endorsement of this banal nationalism, which works invisibly but routinely and is always ready to develop into hot nationalism.

Exactly as O'Brien the author was pulled into the war in Vietnam by the "gravity" of nationalism as "a sort of sleepwalking default" (If I Die 31), "O'Brien," his fictional alter ego, is attracted to the war by the magnetism of the communalist "obligation." Young "O'Brien" in "On the Rainy River" first confronts a moral dilemma concerning the question of "courage" after receiving the draft notice and oscillates between a feeling of "smug

removal" and the "obligation" to the "small-town America." His ultimate submission to the "obligation" and participation in the imperial adventures, however, reveal that he is recontained by American communalism/nationalism.

"O'Brien's" initial understanding of "courage" shows that he is also saturated by the traditional American spirit of "free enterprise": "Courage, I seemed to think, comes to us in finite quantities, like an inheritance, and by being frugal and stashing it away and letting it earn interest, we steadily increase our moral capital in preparation for that day when the account must be drawn down" (Things 43-44). This understanding of "courage" reveals the fact that "O'Brien" grew up as an All-American Boy, uncritically supporting the capitalist logic of post-World War II America. A serious problem with this "moral capital," however, is that it doesn't earn interest "when the account [is really] drawn down"; instead, it earns more moral confusion. "O'Brien" therefore needs to adapt himself to a new cultural logic of late twentieth-century America, redefining "courage" as a "wise" Socratic "endurance."

"O'Brien"/O'Brien as a moderate "liberal" believes that "[c]ertain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons" (Things 44), but he also thinks he is simply "beyond" the dirty war when the war becomes a question of personal experience.[19] Because he is a privileged college boy with "Phi Beta Kappa and summa cum laude and [was the] president of the student body and [now has] a full-ride scholarship for grad studies at Harvard," and is most of all "no soldier" at all (45), "O'Brien"/O'Brien of "On the Rainy River" feels "rage"

[19] O'Brien the author remains a moderate liberal even after successfully returning from the thirteen-month "tour of duty" with medals of honor, and later, becoming one of the best canonized Vietnam War novelists, a title he has recently tried to shed off. In an interview with Dave Edelman, O'Brien claims that he is not a Vietnam writer: "It's like calling Toni Morrison a black writer or Joseph Conrad an ocean writer or Shakespeare a royalty writer."; "I don't write about bombs and bullets, I write about the human heart. It [Vietnam] was just the subject matter that was given to me" (1). Or, he claims that he is just a "writer-writer," not a "Vietnam writer" (Interview with bookreporter.com 1).

burning down in his stomach when called upon to fight in the "wrong" war,[20] but ultimately fails to free himself from the ideological grip of U.S. communalism/nationalism exactly because of his own innocence.

Apart from the issue whether it was a postmodern war or not, the Vietnam War has brought up another closely related issue: Was it a "different war" as it has often been dubbed by the American mass media? Has it produced more national traumas than, say, the "forgotten war" in Korea, the first American involvement in Asia since World War II, had done before? Was it indeed the "longest" and the only "lost" war in the historical march of American civilization? Or did the Vietnam War indeed make America break away from the traditional matrices of history and culture? And most important to our interest in this chapter, what are O'Brien's literary responses to this issue of whether the Vietnam War was an "exceptional" American experience?[21]

One widely accepted liberal interpretation of the Vietnam War has defined the war as

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[20] "I think the war is wrong" (If I Die 63). Not only in If I Die but also in other fictional works, O'Brien and his soldiers repeat this statement whenever there is a need for the author to show his authorial voice.

[21] In "Vietnam War Themes in Korean War Literature," Philip K. Jason compares the Vietnam War with the Korean War around a dozen motifs or themes found in Vietnam War literature and rejects the idea of "uniqueness" of the Vietnam, showing that those "unique" motifs are also found often in Korean War literature: the cliche that "the enemy rules the night"; the United States' "misdirected pride" in its technological and racial superiority; adverse climates such as "jungles," "heat," "cold," and the enemy's "tunnel networks"; the "lack of preparedness and lack of will" on the part of the allies and consequent "racist attitudes [of Americans] toward both [North Korean] enemies and [South Korean] friends"; the "commitment and clarity" characterizing the North Korean and the North Vietnamese soldiers; commanders' obsession with "enemy body counts"; "drug problems" among the American soldiers; "constant and intrusive presence of the media"; "official misrepresentations of the war's progress"; "the frustrations of limited warfare and the horror of napalm" (contrary to popular and academic myths, napalm was invented in 1943, much earlier than the Vietnam War, and used in World War II and more commonly in the Korean War); the psychological effect on the soldiers' of the "'limited' war policy"; and the POW experience. As Jason points out, "many of the issues that critics have made hallmark features of Vietnam War fiction are found in the earliest Korean War representations." Following Andrew Martin's idea on the function of the "ideological gatekeeping and cultural selection," Jason concludes: "It took Vietnam and its long shadow to get us there [better attention to the Korean War in connection with the Vietnam War], but it took Korea -- or our unwillingness to learn from it -- to bring us to Vietnam" (Jason, Acts and Shadows: The Vietnam War in American Literary Culture 121-129).

an aberration from the smooth historical march of American ideals. According to this interpretation, the Vietnam War was just an un-American exception to "American exceptionalism": The "innocent" American nation went to another "great war" or "good war" with a "benign" intention of "winning the hearts and minds" of the native people, but unfortunately failed to do so because of mutual misunderstanding and unfavorable circumstances. As Gibson points out, "[i]n American society the idea that Vietnam was a mistake of some kind or another was the prevalent conception at least through the early 1970s. This view prevailed not only among serious scholars, but also in public opinion polls." Such nouns as "quagmire," "swamp," "mistake," "nightmare," "uncertainty," and "errors of judgment" were recruited to support this view (433-6). David Halberstam's "quagmire thesis" is one of the most conspicuous examples of this view: America created its own "quagmire" in Vietnam because of its egocentric innocence and ignorance about the cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts of Vietnam. In The Making of a Quagmire, first published in 1964, Halberstam writes:

> Whatever military gains were brought by U.S. troops might soon be countered by the political loss; the war would begin to parallel the French experience. It would be a war without fronts, fought against an elusive enemy, and extremely difficult for the American people to understand. The misconceptions, misinformation and lack of candor displayed by American officialdom in the past in Indochina does not give anyone confidence that our government would explain the conflict honestly to its own citizens.
>
> So for the moment we are caught in the quagmire. (178)

Or, according to him, the Vietnam War was just simply a "mistake" (178).

Though O'Brien is consciously against the idea of exceptional uniqueness of the Vietnam War,[22] his fiction unwittingly endorses the liberal understanding of the war that

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[22] O'Brien maintains that the Vietnam War was not a "different war." According to his interviews, every war has similar aspects and his critique is not limited to the Vietnam War. In If I Die, his first book-length narrative on the war, O'Brien writes in the voice of a battalion commander: "You know, the Korean war and the Vietnam

emphasizes the war's exceptional aspects. Like Halberstam, for example, O'Brien fictionalizes the Vietnam War as an "uncertain" war. In Halberstam's 1965 novel One Very Hot Day, Captain Beaupre, an aged and disillusioned American officer, answers Captain Anderson when this young Westpointer says to him, "God, I bet you haven't walked this much since World War II,":

> "Not as much then. We didn't know how simple it was, and how good we had it. Sure we walked, but in a straight line. Boom. Normandy beaches, and then you set off for Paris and Berlin. Just like that. No retracing, no goddamn circles, just straight ahead. All you needed was a compass and good sense. But here you walk in a goddamn circle, and then you go home, and then you go out the next day and wade through a circle, and then you go home and the next day you go out and reverse the circle you did the day before, erasing it. Every day the circles get bigger and emptier. Walk them one day, erase them the next. In France you always knew where you were, how far you had walked, and how far you had to go. ..."
>
> Then he paused, walked on, and said ..., "And France, France smelled so good." (114)

Halberstam's sophisticated American officer just "kept walking" "automatic[ally]" "through a circle" in Vietnam "in an almost insane rote march" (81). The "senselessness of the war" implied by this "endless walking" (126) in "one very hot day" defines the allegedly "exceptional" quality of the Vietnam War in contrast to previous wars, particularly to the "straight," modernist World War II.[23] Halberstam summarizes this view in an axiomatic postmodernist sentence: "Yes was no longer exactly yes, no was no longer exactly no, maybe was more certainly maybe" (127).

In O'Brien's "Indian Country," too, the soldiers find themselves caught in a postmodern disorientation not quite different from that of Halberstam's disillusioned

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war aren't much different. One country divided by an artificial line. People of the same race killing each other. Communist aid, American aid..." (67).

[23] This image of the "endless walking" in the Vietnam jungle is more frequently used by O'Brien. I will discuss below the "endless walking" or disoriented march in the Asian wilderness, particularly focusing on the relationship between O'Brien's soldiers' ceaseless march and the unending postimperial march of American national narrative in the age of postmodernism.

Beaupre. There is no order, no front, no cause, and most of all, no knowability or visibility in the war: "No sense of order or momentum. No front, no rear, no trenches laid out in neat parallels. No Patton rushing for 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. ... They did not know the terms of the war, its architecture, the rules of fair play" (Cacciato 240). Besides, "France, France smell[s] so good" to O'Brien's soldiers, too, as we can see in Paul Berlin's determined fantasy journey to Paris. We encounter in Things a similar postmodern aesthetic/politics of uncertainty expressed by "O'Brien"/O'Brien, a promising young American intellectual who majored in political science in college and was supposed to write a doctoral dissertation on American interventions later at Harvard:[24]

> Certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons. I saw no unity of purpose, no consensus on matters of philosophy or history or law. The very facts were shrouded in uncertainty: Was it a civil war? A war of national liberation or simple aggression? Who started it, and when, and why? ...[S]mart men in pinstrips could not agree on even the most fundamental matters of public policy. The only certainty that summer was moral confusion. (44)

The last sentence of this passage, "The only certainty that summer was moral confusion," exactly replicates the gist of Halberstam's sentence, "Yes was no longer exactly yes, no was no longer exactly no, maybe was more certainly maybe." By declaring through "O'Brien's" voice that the "very facts were shrouded in uncertainty," O'Brien here inadvertently submits himself to a narrative force field that has defined America as an exceptional country and the

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[24] In 1968, the year of "On the Rainy River," O'Brien graduated as summa cum laude from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, with a bachelor's degree in political science. In Vietnam he was in the 198th Infantry (Alpha Company) in the Quang Ngai region near the South China Sea, where he earned a Purple Heart for the wounds he suffered at My Lai a year after the infamous massacre. After his tour of duty, he entered Harvard University as a graduate student in government studies but quit as ABD in 1976. His readings during his education included political theory and literature. He did not finish his doctoral dissertation, tentatively titled "Case Studies in American Military Interventions." See his interview with Herzog, "Tim O'Brien Interview," The South Carolina Review 31.1 (1998): 90.

Vietnam War as an exceptional war. Halberstam and other journalists were contributing to the revival of this narrative tradition when they had to face the music of Vietnam. And, as the unusual similarities between O'Brien's literary/ cultural tropes and those of Halberstam's reveal, what Pierre Bourdieu might have called "habitus" or the "ideological mood" of the times seem to have a strong hold on O'Brien's postmodern literary imagination.[25]

O'Brien's more literal/literary support for Halberstam's "quagmire thesis" can be found in his four stories collected in Things, which repeat the same story of a soldier's uncanny death in a Vietnamese "swampy field": "Speaking of Courage"; "Notes"; "In the Field"; and "Field Trip." In this "fulcrum" episode retold from various O'Brienian "angles" or perspectives, including those of the soldier characters ("Speaking of Courage" and "In the Field"), of "O'Brien" the narrator/protagonist ("In the Field" and "Field Trip"), and of "O'Brien" the narrator/author himself ("Notes" and "Field Trip"), "O'Brien"/O'Brien tells a weird story of a Vietnamese "village toilet" in the field where an American squad bivouacked in a rainy, thunderous night. When a rookie soldier, who is none other than "O'Brien"/O'Brien himself as hinted in "Field Trip" (207), lights his lighter to show a picture of his girlfriend to a christianized Native American soldier, Kiowa, the squad is surprise-attacked by the Viet Cong. The "shitfield" then becomes a literal quagmire: "The field was boiling. The shells made deep slushy craters, opening up all those years of waste, centuries worth, and the smell came bubbling out of the earth. ...[H]e heard somebody screaming. It was Kiowa.... A strange gargling noise. ... [A]nother round hit nearby,

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[25] Pierre Bourdieu, The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988) 8. Bourdieu locates the origin of Heidegger's "pure philosophy" in the context of the Zeitgeist, and claims that Heidegger's "pure" but conservative philosophy was in fact orchestrated by the journalistic and academic discourses composing an intellectual "field" of his own age. I here argue that O'Brien's "pure" imagination is also deeply influenced by certain journalistic and academic interpretations of the Vietnam War, which in turn are heavily indebted to the traditional understanding of American exceptionalism.

spraying up shit and water, and for a few moments he ducked down beneath the mud" (167). Norman Bowker, another soldier and the protagonist of "Speaking of Courage," tries to pull Kiowa up from the "swampy shitfield," but he also fails and Kiowa goes MIA into the "shitty" "swamp": Kiowa is just "wasted in the waste," making a "world-class irony" (187). This tragicomic episode of an American squad losing a Native American soldier in the Vietnamese "shitfield" fictionally epitomizes the American "quagmire" thesis.

This literary representation of the "quagmire thesis" interestingly repeats a Puritan cultural conception that often contrasted the east coast "city on a hill" under the Christian God's Providence against the dark wilderness occupied by evil, uncertain forces. Against himself, O'Brien is caught up in this traditional cultural trope and retrieves it in his fictional portrayal of the Vietnam War. In "The Ghost Soldiers," another segment of Things, for example, narrator/protagonist "O'Brien" summarizes unusual experiences of the war in a similar mode as the "quagmire thesis," but he also betrays that those experiences of the soldiers are typically American:

> We called the enemy ghosts .... The countryside itself seemed spooky.... 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, boogiemen 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. (228-9)

As this quotation suggests, Vietnam for O'Brien is a "ghost country" by which America is haunted. In a war against the "forces that did not obey the laws of twentieth-century [American] science," the land itself is the "enemy," as it often was in the so-called Indian

Wars. As the Puritan soldiers in the "swamp wars" were haunted by the "Indians" who took advantage of the land, "appearing, disappearing" and "changing form, becoming trees and grass," the American soldiers in O'Brien's "Indian Country" are haunted by the "Charlie Congs" who can also "blend with the land, changing form, becoming trees and grass." As Philip H. Melling points out in Vietnam in American Literature, "the American experience in Vietnam resurrects the Puritan experience in New England. Vietnam harks back to the original errand; it predates the return of a 'lost frontier'," or more simply, "Vietnam was an affirmation of an American way of life and an 'American way of war'" (15).

The Vietnam War was indeed an extension of a longer tradition of American expansionism, which has used the idea of exceptionalism as a narrative/cultural device for its own logic. As John Hellman properly argues in American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam, during the Vietnam War "Americans generally saw themselves entering yet another frontier, once again 'western pilgrims' on a mission of protection and progress." This self-assigned civilizing mission is rooted in the idea of American "innocence, a desire to 'do good,' a conception of the world as a battleground between forces of Light and Darkness, a hastily acquired knowledge of a savage landscape and enemy, a belief in the special virtue of Americans in contrast to the colonial past of Europeans, and an absolute faith in American righteousness and 'mission'" (14-5). The Vietnam War was a typical extension of American continental expansion in the past.

As is well known, continuous denial of certain facts by the American authorities during and after the war has developed since the early nineteen-eighties into an active revisionism that has tried to forget the traumatic war experiences by redefining the lost war as a "noble cause." This revisionist rewriting has taken place in a wider cultural, ideological

context in which various remembering or regenerative gestures were made: the filmic reproduction of the Vietnam War experience in a "cathartic" as well as reflexive mode in movies such as Apocalypse Now, The Deer Hunter, and Rambo: First Blood around the time when the so-called "Reagan Revolution" was institutionalized; the establishment of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. in 1982, which was first suggested by Jan Scruggs, a veteran who was convinced after watching The Deer Hunter in 1979 that "it was time for the nation to publicly remember the war" (Hass 9-10); and later, the final "kicking off of the Vietnam Syndromes" in the first Persian Gulf War by President George Bush, Sr. in 1991. An irony here is that, as the representation of the Vietnam War cultures in literature and in the film becomes more successful and thus the memories of the war become more recollected by the American collective imagination, the amnesiac strategy of denial becomes more prevalent.[26]

Confirming this politics of denial, Paul Berlin in O'Brien's Cacciato, published in 1978, claims that the original American "intentions were benign," the American soldiers were innocent, and the war was "all a sad accident" or just an Austerian "chance":

> ... [D]id the girl like him? Lord knows, he had no villainy in his heart, no motive but kindness. ... Did she sense his compassion? Could this little girl ... somehow separate him from the war? ... Could she see him as just a scared-silly boy from Iowa? Could she feel sympathy? ... Wondering, he put mercy in his eyes like lighted candles; he gazed at the girl, full-hearted, draining out suspicion, opening himself to whatever she might answer with. Did the girl see the love? Could she understand it, return it? ... He wanted to be liked. He wanted them to understand, all of them, that he felt no hate. It was all a sad accident[,] ... chance, high-level politics, confusion. He had no stake in the war beyond simple survival; he was there, in Quang Ngai, for the same reasons they were: the luck of the draw, bad fortune, forces beyond reckoning.

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[26] According to Susan Jeffords, a sudden blossoming of films and narratives on the Vietnam experience in the nineteen eighties is related to what she calls the "'remasculinization' of American culture, the large-scale renegotiation and regeneration of the interests, values, and projects of patriarchy ... taking place in U.S. social relations" in those years (xi). Jim Neilson claims that this "conservative rewriting" of the Vietnam War became established by the nineteen nineties (2-3).

> His intentions were benign. He was no tyrant, no pig, no Yankee killer. He was innocent. Yes, he was. ... He would have told them he wanted to harm no one. ... He had wronged no one. If he'd known the language, he would have told them how he hated to see the villagers burned. ... Wrong! ... But not me, he would have told them. The others maybe, but not me. Guilty perhaps of hanging on, of letting myself be dragged along, of falling victim to gravity and obligation and events, but not ... guilty of wrong intentions. (233-34)

We find here O'Brien's representation of a prototype of American innocence/ignorance. Because Paul Berlin himself is innocent or just simply ignorant, the fault goes to the Austerian "chance" and "bad luck": "He was innocent"; the war was a result of "the luck of the draw, bad fortune, forces beyond reckoning." O'Brien here, of course, distances himself from Paul Berlin's almost paranoid assertion of his innocence and ignorance, probably criticizing the "high-level politics" and "confusion." A danger of this representation of the innocence/ignorance of the American soldiers is, however, that, though expressed in an ironic tone, it reproduces a certain biased conception of the war and its cultural, historical circumstances. It overshadows O'Brien's authorial irony because it suppresses or excludes various "other" narrative angles on the terrible war, particularly the yearnings and memories of the Vietnamese people, whereas the narrative itself remains focused on the wishful desires and memories of the innocent American soldiers. By making Paul Berlin blame the "forces beyond reckoning," O'Brien's critical voice thus falls short of revealing the tragic outcomes of the American imperialist adventure. Caught within the horizon of the exceptionalist understanding of the war, O'Brien's critique of the war makes the traditional American idealism resurface in his text.

This American innocence often develops into a brazen self-justification in O'Brien's postmodern representation of the war. We encounter in Cacciato, for example, a convenient self-justifying logic proposed by Paul Berlin as follows:

> Fast through the German heartland.... There were streetlights ... and steeples ... and neon-lighted ads for Coke and Bromo-Seltzer. The end was coming. He could feel it. Already he anticipated the textures of things familiar: decency, cleanliness, high literacy and low mortality, the pursuit of learning in heated schools, science, art, industry bearing fruit through smokestacks. Wasn't this the purpose? The goal? Some vision of virtue? Weren't these the valued things? Wasn't freedom worth pursuing? If civilization has meaning, weren't these the reason? Hadn't wars been fought for these very promises? Even in Vietnam – wasn't the intent to restrain forces of incivility? The intent. Wasn't the intent to impede tyranny, aggression, repression? To promote some vision of goodness? Oh, something had gone terribly wrong. ... Facts, circumstances, understanding. But had the error been wrong intention, wrong purpose?
>
> Now, rushing through the German dark, Paul Berlin felt full of this same desire for order and harmony and justice and quiet. A craving. Good intention made good by good deeds. Civility on street corners and courtesy at the borders between nations. (246-7)

Paul Berlin here makes sure that "the American "intent" was transcendentally just because it was to "restrain forces of incivility" or to "impede tyranny, aggression, repression." Besides, the "textures of things familiar," or the ideals of civilization, are presumed to be found only in Europe: sanitation, high literacy, low mortality, science, art, and industry; order, harmony, justice, and quiet. If there is anything "gone wrong," that must be an exceptional aberration from the progress of modern Euroamerican civilization and the blame should exclusively go to the unfavorable "facts, circumstances, understanding." Even the slightly ironic tone created in this passage by O'Brien's critical distance and liberal consciousness is ultimately submerged, as M.M. Bakhtin might have said, by the "monologic" wish controlling the whole passage, that is, by the predominant desire that wants to declare the good "intention" of America to remain transcendentally intact.

Presupposing the idea of transcendental American innocence, Paul Berlin also seems to desire the Vietnamese people to accept it. The following speculation reveals his innocent desire to be acknowledged:

> After the war, perhaps, he might return to Quang Ngai. ... And then, with the war ended, history decided, he would explain to her why he had let himself go to war. Not because of strong convictions, but because he didn't know. He didn't know who was right, or what was right; he didn't know if it was a war of self-determination or self-destruction, outright aggression or national liberation; ... ; he didn't know who really started the war, or why, or when, or with what motives; he didn't know if it mattered; he saw sense in both sides of the debate, but he did not know where truth lay; he didn't know if communist tyranny would prove worse in the long run than the tyrannies of Ky or Thieu or Khanh -- he simply didn't know. ... He just didn't know if the war was right or wrong or somewhere in the murky middle. ... So he went to the war for reasons beyond knowledge. Because he believed in law, and law told him to go. Because it was a democracy, after all, and because LBJ and the others had rightful claim to their offices. He went to the war because it was expected. Because not to go was to risk censure, and to bring embarrassment on his father and his town. ... Because he loved his country and, more than that, because he trusted it. ... Oh, he would rather have fought with his father in France, knowing certain things certainly, but he wouldn't choose this war, nobody could. Was this so banal? Was this so unprofound and stupid? ... He would tell her these things. He would ask her to see the matter his way. ... And then he would ask the girl questions. What did she want? How did she see the war? What were her aims -- peace, any peace, peace with dignity? Did she refuse to run for the same reasons he refused -- obligation, family, the land, friends, home? And now? Now, war ended, what did she want? Peace and quiet? Peace and pride? ... Justice? What sort? Reparations? What kind? Answers? What were the questions: What did Quang Ngai want to know? (234-5)

"After the war, perhaps," Paul Berlin would visit Vietnam again, as O'Brien himself did in 1994, and "explain to her why he had let himself go to war"[27]: not because he was for the war but because he "didn't know who was right." Paul Berlin here not only lightens his own historical burden, but also tacitly requests the Vietnamese people to accept the transcendental American innocence: "he would ask" the Vietnamese girl "to see the matter his [American] way."[28] Like Whitman's omnipresent persona of "Song of Myself," Paul Berlin as O'Brien's

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[27] The grammatical structure of "he had let himself go to war" also reveals Paul Berlin/O'Brien's desire to de-subjectivize himself and to foreground the fact that he didn't even "go" to the war: he just "let" himself go to the war.

[28] Indeed, O'Brien tells Anthony Tambakis about his self-exculpatory visit to Vietnam: "It's phenomenal how much the Vietnamese have forgiven us, or seem to have forgiven us" (105). This is also an epitome of life imitating art, because his fictional revisit to Vietnam is portrayed in "Field Trip," in which "O'Brien" revisits

persona thus seems to be singing here, "I celebrate myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume" (27).[29] This desire to be understood and to be exculpated from his war activities, however, suppresses the very historical desires of the Vietnamese people, particularly the desire to be independent as a nation. Besides, one thing here remains again transcendentally certain: America is a "democracy," a good community that should be "loved," "trusted," and "protected." Again this emphasis on the innocence of the American intention by Paul Berlin reveals the fact that O'Brien's own critique of the politics of denial becomes recontained within the same politics because his critique, like Auster's logic of chance and mystery, ultimately mystifies the imperialist aspects of the Vietnam War as highly unknowable, which means he is not ready to see the river of the imperialist war from the opposite bank. He is thus back to a Hemingwayesque dream of "private peace," but no more than that, even in this "wrong war," which is neither a great war like World War I nor a good war like World War II.

As Loren Baritz points out in his classic cultural history of the Vietnam War, Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did, the Vietnamese were often "incomprehensible," "inexplicable," and "inscrutable" to the

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the field where Kiowa had been sucked up by a "shitty swamp." After his real "field trip" to Vietnam, O'Brien wrote an article titled "The Vietnam in Me" for The New York Times. In this article, O'Brien repeats main themes and moods of his "stories" of Vietnam: his innocent guilt, his wishful self-exculpation, his condescending attitude toward the native people.

[29] We find a similar self-exculpating narrative desire of the American self in Benjamin Rush's "Paradise of Negro Slaves. – A Dream." In this dream narrative about a "paradise of Negro slaves," Rush visits an exclusively christianized African American community and, when the ex-slaves are surprised to see a white stranger, rushes to claim that, "But in me – you behold a friend. I have been your advocate." The imaginary ex-slaves then generously welcome him in and even explain to him how slavery was good for the redemption of their souls: "Here we have learned to thank God, for all the afflictions our task-masters heaped on us; inasmuch, as they were the means of our present happiness. Pain and distress are the unavoidable portions of all mankind. They are the only possible avenues that can conduct them to peace and felicity (188)." We see in this short story Rush's white guilt and his whiter desire to be exculpated from the sin of slavery.

innocent/ignorant American eyes: "America ... never understood the Vietnamese. We were frustrated by the incomprehensible behavior of our Vietnamese enemies and bewildered by the inexplicable behavior of our Vietnamese friends. For us, this corner of Asia was inscrutable. These Asians successfully masked their intentions in smiles, formal courtesies, and exotic rituals" (19). O'Brien's literary imagination is not free of this innocent/ignorant attitude, though he tries to overcome it by romantically mystifying the Vietnamese victims.

O'Brien's most violent representation of the Vietnamese people can be found in "The Things They Didn't Know," the 39th chapter of Cacciato. Here O'Brien introduces an uncanny episode in which an American soldier named Stink Harris uses his English-Vietnamese dictionary to tell a group of Vietnamese civilians to "lie down" but fails to do so because of his lack of proper pronunciation of this other language. Learning that his "sputtering" does not work, he fitfully screams and ceaselessly fires his automatic rifle over the heads of the villagers. The scared villagers clearly "understand" this sublime material signifier and quickly lie down to the ground. Stink then smiles and says, "See there? They understand me fine. Nam xuong dat, it means to lie down. You just got to punctuate your sentences" (232). O'Brien's portrayal of this episode certainly reveals his keen eye to capture a tragic moment of the war, but the terrible violence of it is highly aestheticized, leaving his critical irony politically neutralized as the title of the story implies: like other soldiers and "O'Brien" himself, the soldier of this episode does not know what he is doing, or he desires not to know.

O'Brien portrays the Vietnamese male enemy soldiers either as friendly rivals helping the American soldiers in various mysterious ways or as innocent and as well as tolerant victims who can generously understand their American enemies who came to kill

themselves. Li Van Hgoc, a Viet Cong officer punished by his own government to be confined in a labyrinthine "rabbit hole" in Cacciato, kindly explains to the American soldiers why America cannot win the war: The Americans cannot win the war because even the Vietnamese land, which is the enemy itself, cannot be defeated.[30]

A more concrete representation of the male enemy soldier can be found in "The Man I Killed," a story that is, like other "fulcrum" stories of Things, repeated with difference in two other stories, "Ambush" and "Good Form." Here "O'Brien" confesses that he killed a Viet Cong sniper and feels guilt. "O'Brien's" guilt, however, makes himself identify with his victim and sublimate his own white guilt into a romantic fantasy in which the dead Viet Cong soldier is, like "O'Brien"/O'Brien himself, against the war. This "slim," "delicate," "dainty," and "frail-looking" young Vietnamese male with "bony legs, a narrow waist, long shapely fingers," "the arched eyebrows," "a woman's walk," and "smooth skin" must have been

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[30] While journeying away from the Asian wilderness towards the civilized Paris in "Falling Through a Hole in the Road to Paris," Chapter 13 of Cacciato, the squad and Paul Berlin meet an idiosyncratic VC Officer named Li Van Hgoc, who is held prisoner by his own government in a labyrinthine "tunnel complex." Li Van Hgoc says, "The [Vietnamese] soldier is but the representative of the land. The land is your true enemy." "There is an ancient [Chinese] ideograph -- the word Xa." Sarkin Aung Wan, a Chinese-Vietnamese girl guiding the American soldiers through the jungles, explains: "It means community, and soil, and home." Li Van Hgoc then adds: "Yes, but it also has other meanings: earth and sky and even sacredness. Xa, it has many implications. But at heart it means that a man's spirit is in the land, where his ancestors rest and where the rice grows. The land is your enemy." "The land defending itself." "The underground, the smiling man said, was the literal summary of the land, and of mysteries contained in it; a statement of greater truth could not be made. Xa Hoi, the party, had its vision in Xa, the land" (77-8). Also compare this with the idea of land as a communal basis in native American cultures. Lenny Christopher, after discussing the misrepresentation of Sarkin Aung Wan (see below), writes about this mysteriously friendly character: "Perhaps a better gauge of the novel's failure to imagine the other side is embodied in Li Van Hgoc (another naming error – he asks to be called 'Van,' his middle name, which is not a possible form of address for a Vietnamese; 'Hgoc' is likewise not a possible Vietnamese name, and 'Li' is a Chinese spelling). Li Van Hgoc is a deserter (another error; Van is introduced as a Viet Cong major, but later he turns out to have been born in Hanoi, and drafted, meaning he would have been drafted into the PAVN, not the Viet Cong)." Besides, "While U.S. soldiers might often have felt that the land itself was the enemy, to put those words into the mouth of a Vietnamese soldier is to be guilty of an erroneous political analysis. ... By presenting Li Van Hgoc as a deserter like Cacciato and Berlin's squad, the novel is trying to show a commonality between soldiers, but through the conversation about the land, it simultaneously denies the Vietnamese their role as soldiers. ... Further, placing Li Van Hgoc as a prisoner in the tunnels held there by his own government obscures the real role of the tunnels. 'The land, Paul Berlin kept thinking. A prisoner of war, caught by the land' (121). Vietnamese soldiers who worked in the tunnels were held prisoner there not by their land, but by U.S. bombing. The tunnels were constructed as a way to survive U.S. munitions. Thus, in a clever step, O'Brien obscures U.S. responsibility in the war" (Christopher 233).

presumably an innocent boy who was just "hoping and hoping, always, even when he was asleep" that "the Americans would go away" on their own (139-40).

> The skin on the right cheek was smooth and fine-grained and hairless. Frail-looking, delicately boned, the young man would not have wanted to be a soldier and in his heart would have feared performing badly in battle. Even as a boy growing up in the village of My Khe, he had often worried about this. He imagined covering his head and lying in a deep hole and closing his eyes and not moving until the war was over. He had no stomach for violence. He loved mathematics. His eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's and at school the boys sometimes teased him about how pretty he was, the arched eyebrows and long shapely fingers, and on the playground they mimicked a woman's walk and made fun of his smooth skin and his love for mathematics. The young man could not make himself fight them. He often wanted to, but he was afraid, and this increased his shame. If he could not fight little boys, he thought, how could he ever become a soldier and fight the Americans with their airplanes and helicopters and bombs? It did not seem possible. In the presence of his father and uncles, he pretended to look forward to doing his patriotic duty, which was also a privilege, but at night he prayed with his mother that the war might end soon. Beyond anything else, he was afraid of disgracing himself, and therefore his family and village. But all he could do, he thought, was wait and pray and try not to grow up too fast. (141-2)

Justifying himself by saying that he had to "automatically" kill the Viet Cong soldier because of the "morning fog," and that he himself "did not hate" or "see him as the enemy" (148), "O'Brien" the narrator/protagonist here presumes that the enemy soldier must have been another innocent pacifist scholar who, like the narrator/protagonist/author himself, came to the war against his individualist free will.[31] "O'Brien" thus lightens his guilt by attributing the cause of the soldier's death to the "fog," and then wishfully glorifies his victim as a pacifist like himself, blurring the crucial boundaries between the victimizer and the victim, the invader and the invadee, and most of all, the world of life and that of death.

Just as Native American cultures were often romanticized by the wishful white

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[31] This romantic identification with the victim, however, goes a bit too far by making the enemy soldier a pseudo-feminine other. Reminding us of the legendary episode about American soldiers' (mis)understanding of the "handholding" South Vietnamese soldiers as homosexuals who cannot be relied on as partners because of their presumed lack of masculinity (Baritz 23), "O'Brien's" condescending love for the "man" he killed culminates in his excessive romanticization of the other as peaceful but also mysteriously less masculine.

narratives of mainstream American culture only after they had allegedly "vanished," this young Viet Cong soldier is glorified by O'Brien after the pseudo-autobiographical protagonist "O'Brien" killed him, making him another "vanishing" American other in the Americano-centric global frontier. As Brian W. Dippie explains in The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy, the self-fulfilling white attitude toward the native Americans often used a "rhetoric of doom" to express its own wishful desire for the Native Americans to "vanish." And then, based on the same self-fulfilling desire, it praised the "Indians" as "noble savages": "Romantic poets, novelists, orators, and artists found the theme of a dying native race congenial, and added those sentimental touches to the concept [of the "vanishing American"] that gave it wide appeal" (11). Compare this traditional white attitude toward the "vanishing" American "Indians" with "O'Brien"/O'Brien's attitude toward the "vanished" Vietnamese soldier in this "Indian Country." This young Viet Cong soldier, who probably fought for an independent Vietnamese nation, is romanticized not as a patriot but as a noble pacifist, only after his quick death is caused presumably not by the American power but by the unfavorable foggy "circumstances," just as the romanticized "noble savages" had "vanished" from the American continent due to their own inferiority and/or bad luck.

On the other hand, O'Brien represents the Vietnamese women either as mysteriously friendly or unusually cruel. Sarkin Aung Wan in Cacciato, for example, is described as a victim of the Viet Cong, not of U.S. expansionism, and pleasantly travels to Paris with the American soldiers. She also kindly guides the innocent American soldiers through the Vietnam jungles, [32] as the legendary Native American woman Sacagawea did for the Lewis

[32] Her name, "Sarkin Aung Wan," which is a pure O'Brienian concoction, does also sound eerily unsound for a name of this Vietnamese girl of Chinese origin. According to Christopher, like "Li Van Hgoc," "this is not a

and Clark expedition in the early nineteenth century when America was expanding into a substantially modern state.[33] Or, we see the Vietnamese women portrayed as inhuman killing machines in If I Die: "The rest of the men talked about ... the girls [who] performed the best tricks. I was a believer during those talks. The vets told it in a real, firsthand way that made you hunger for Thailand and Manila. When they said to watch for the ones with razor blades in their vaginas – communist agents – I believed, imagining the skill and commitment of those women" (105-6). If Sarkin Aung Wan is a model Asian geisha with the perfect image of a beautiful and intellectual woman for the American soldiers who are nostalgic for the good old days of World War II in Japan or France, these Vietnamese women "with razor blades in their vaginas" are the flip side of O'Brien's representation of Sarkin Aung Wan. This representation of the Vietnamese women either as good geishas or as cruel killing machines also fits well into what the feminist critique of traditional Western culture's binary conception of women in general has taught us: women either as angels or as whores.

O'Brien's representation of the American women is not much different from his portrayal of the Asian women, as we can see in his depiction of a nameless American college drop-out in Cacciato or in his portrayal of an American girl who becomes an insane beast in "Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong," the ninth story of Things. In "Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong," Mary Anne Bell visits her boyfriend soldiering in Vietnam but is mysteriously

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phonetically possible Vietnamese name" either (231). More than that, it resounds with O'Brien's orientalist, "misogynistic" attitude towards Asian "others." Apart from the unusual number of the syllables, which is not 3 as in common Vietnamese names, the phonetics and semantics of this name also betray O'Brien's innocent/ignorant attitude towards this culture. I would suggest that "Sarkin" and "Wan" seem to reveal O'Brien's whiter male authorial identity: "Sarkin" could remind the reader of the word "sucking," and "Wan" could literally mean "unnaturally pale, weary, and melancholy." Besides, "Aung" sounds more like Burmese, not Vietnamese.

[33] The Lewis and Clark expedition was planned by President Jefferson after the Louisiana Purchase for an exploration of the newly acquired territory. This expedition was one of the defining adventures of the rising American state.

fascinated by the "ghostly" Vietnamese land. She sneaks out with "greenies," or marines, into the dark jungle every night. "The war intrigued her. The land, too, and the mystery" (107). As the mysterious Asian "wilderness" draws her in deeper and deeper, she gradually becomes a female Kurtz. Wearing a "necklace of [the Vietnamese] human tongues" and dancing to the "weird tribal music" in the dark jungle, she one night gives a warning to the American "grunts," or foot soldiers: "You are in a place ... where you don't belong"; "You just don't know ...You hide in this little fortress, behind wire and sandbags, and you don't know what it's all about" (120-1). What she says up to this point doesn't seem to be beastly enough; we are just kindly reminded of the American anti-war feminists such as Mary McCarthy or "Hanoi" Jane who were against the "things [American] men do" in Vietnam.

She goes further, however, like Kurtz in Conrad's Heart of Darkness or in its Americanized film version, Apocalypse Now:

> Sometimes I want to eat this place. Vietnam. I want to swallow the whole country – the dirt, the death – I just want to eat it and have it there inside me. That's how I feel. It's like ... this appetite. I get scared sometimes – lots of times – but it's not bad. You know? I feel close to myself. When I'm out there at night, I feel close to my own body, I can feel my blood moving, my skin and my fingernails, everything, it's like I am full of electricity and I am glowing in the dark – I'm on fire almost – I'm burning away into nothing – but it doesn't matter because I know exactly who I am. You can't feel like that anywhere else. (121)

In this portrayal of an American girl who mysteriously eats up and becomes one with the ghostly Vietnamese land, we find an innocent American girl who falls prey to the enemy land. If the early Puritans were scared of being "Indianized" by the dark forces of the wilderness, Mary Anne here symbolically swallows up the "Indian Country" itself and becomes a crucial narrative element for "O'Brien"/O'Brien's male fantasy, which needs to aesthetically mystify both the female body and the body of the "other" land while treating

them as culturally inferior. This image of an American femme facile falling prey to the exotic land thus unconceals a secret anxiety of the American males about their own women who are somehow easy for the "other" elements. But more importantly, it blames the exotic elements themselves for that anxiety. I also want to suggest here that the symbolically limitless appetite of this white American girl could represent a dark side of American expansionism. If the American male soldiers try to conquer the Vietnamese land with a military-industrial logic, this American girl symbolically tries to eat it up with the logic of incorporation, which is the soft side of the logic of American military-industrial desire.

In Chapter 40 of Cacciato titled "By a Stretch of the Imagination," Paul Berlin and his squad finally arrive in Europe and somewhere before Zagreb encounter one "revolutionary" American girl from California wearing a "red bandanna around her hair" (245). The nameless girl presumes that Paul Berlin's squad members went AWOL because they "saw evil" and had "guilt" for their roles in the war, and suggests helping them meet with the underground anti-war networks in Europe. This anti-war activist girl praises these "resisters" or "deserters" for their "guts to walk away" from the war, but one of the squad members suddenly threatens her with a rifle, the same material signifier Stink Harris uses to communicate with the native people. This pathetically naïve college drop-out, however, misunderstands them through and through to the end:[34]

> ...the girl glanced into the mirror. Oscar had the rifle against her ear. She pulled off onto the shoulder, stopped the van, and sat still while Oscar moved to the front seat.

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[34] She does not seem to understand a different kind of dialectic between the soldiers' patriotism and sexual desires than what she conceives. For the soldiers in Vietnam, the rifle (M-16) was often a symbol of sexual potency that "kills." According to Baritz, "The power of technology to convert boys into men, to bestow potency on the weak, caused many young American males to think of machinery and sex as the same thing.... It was not unusual for GIs in Vietnam to be explicit about the sexual excitement their weapons induced." Thus, according to one soldier, "carrying a gun constantly was like having a permanent hard on" (52-3). Here in Zagreb, the soldiers' own brand of patriotism prevails over their sexual desire. Or, are they marking an autoerotic case if indeed machinery and sex are the same thing for them?

> She smiled at him. "Look, rape isn't necessary. I mean, hey, I really dig sex. Really. We can rig up a curtain or something."
> "Out," Oscar said.
> The girl kept smiling. She wore blue jeans and a sweater and a khaki jacket. "Outside?" she said.
> "You got it."
> "It'd be a lot more comfortable in back."
> "Out."
> "Shrugging, glancing again into the mirror, the girl opened the door and stepped out. She watched while Oscar dumped out her suitcase and sleeping bag. She never stopped smiling.
> Eddie drove, Oscar rode shotgun.
> "You know," Doc said wistfully, "sometimes I do feel a little guilt." (246)

This American girl whose car, not body, is confiscated by the American soldiers, presents a good example of the O'Brien's postmodern aesthetic of irony. His aesthetic, however, makes a tragicomic turn within itself because it is overshadowed, ironically due to its glaring brightness, by the multi-chrome historical realities he benignly suppresses from this episode: the anti-war movements around the world during the Vietnam War period. Or, simply put, we could say O'Brien's postmodern aesthetic here gives a negative shade to the historical picture of the anti-war movements around the globe.

Unlike the Japanese Imperial Army during the World War II, which recruited more than two hundred thousand Korean girls with force and arms to use them as sex slaves, institutionalizing them as "comfort women" or "public toilets" as the strategically efficient official and unofficial jargons explained, these innocent American soldiers of O'Brien might be indeed innocent enough not to take this voluntary American "comfort woman." Or, were they patriotic enough in their own way not to take this assertive but also facile white American woman into a corporeal "friendly fire"? The answer is not certain.

It is certain, however, that O'Brien shows in his fiction a frequent reliance on certain prejudiced conceptions and narrative tropes of women. Take this definition of women by a

soldier in If I Die, for example: "There is no thing named love in the world. Women are dinks. Women are villains. They are creatures akin to Communists and yellow-skinned people and hippies" (52). Or, a Korean stripper "in a black evening gown" in Vietnam "had big breasts, big for a gook" and "was the prettiest woman in the Orient. Her beastly, unnaturally large breasts quivered like Jello," as she danced to Paul Simon and Arthur Garfunkel's music (110). Or more seriously, a Viet Cong woman shot to death is sympathized with not because she is a human but because she is a pretty "gook." In Chapter 12 of If I Die, titled "Mori," an enemy woman soldier "had been shot once. The bullet tore through her green uniform and into her buttock and out through her groin." While she flickers in and out of consciousness, one American soldier says, "She's a pretty woman, pretty for a gook. [Because y]ou don't see many pretty gooks" (115). Then another soldier says, "Damn, she's pretty. It's a crime. We could have shot an ugly old man instead" (117). A crime, indeed.

But more than that, O'Brien's female characters are represented as simply not understanding the "things men do," as Jimmy Cross confesses to "author" "O'Brien"[35] in "Love," a three-page love story with an unhappy ending in Things. Jimmy Cross here tells "author" "O'Brien" his story about how his girlfriend left him after giving him a photo of hers: "She didn't understand how men could do those things. What things? he asked, and Martha said, The things men do. Then he nodded. It began to form. Oh, he said, those things. At breakfast the next morning she told him she was sorry" (31).[36] By letting a veteran friend,

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[35] I want to call the reader's attention here to the quotation marks around "author" and "O'Brien." Here again, O'Brien uses a typical postmodern aesthetic of uncertainty by complicating the boundaries among the author, the narrator, the protagonist, and the reader/audience. "Author" "O'Brien" in this story listens to the narrator/protagonist and even describes in detail the processes of writing, publishing, censoring, and editing, of this episode.

[36] O'Brien's 1998 novel Tomcat in Love is a story about a "misogynistic" Vietnam veteran linguistics

Jimmy Cross, tell this story on women's lack of understanding "the things men do," "O'Brien" the "author," who is also the narrator/character of this and other stories, reveals a misogynistic attitude toward women often shared by the Vietnam soldiers and veterans.

O'Brien heavily embeds his own authorial voice in the fictional space of his text. But does O'Brien the author also subscribe to this generalized conception of women's lack of understanding of the soldiers, a common ingredient of Vietnam stories, particularly of those stories written by veterans themselves? Responding to the feminist and postcolonialist criticisms of his "misogyny" and "ethnocentrism,"[37] O'Brien argues that he just aesthetically represents the Vietnamese people from an observational post, limiting his imagination to hard "facts" that only he knows or has experienced. His answer to the criticism is thus, simply, "Don't blame the messenger for the news."[38] By simply taking the position of a messenger, O'Brien tends to be emptying out his own white guilt from what he calls the "story-truth," that is, an imaginative truth, which he claims to be "truer" than the "happening-

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professor, Tom Chippering, who turns into a sadomasochistic womanizer revenging on his mistreatment by women. Though O'Brien himself tries to dub it a "feminist novel," claiming that "I'm mocking this guy," I believe he reveals a serious lack in his understanding of feminism ("Novelist Tim O'Brien Pursues 'Emotional Truth'," interview with Bruce Weber, The New York Times, Sept. 2, 1998). See, for example, his statement on Tomcat in Love in an interview with bookreporter.com: "But I must confess that I am super-duper proud of imperious, sexist, oblivious, pompous, charming, disgusting, politically incorrect voice that drives Tomcat." Here he is aesthetically proud of creating a very disgusting character; but the problem his pride is that this novel replicates all kinds of misogynous tropes and discourses, including the pride of being male.

[37] For more on O'Brien's "misogyny," see Lorrie Smith, "'The Things Men Do': the Gendered Subtext in Tim O'Brien's Esquire Stories," Critique 36.1 (1994): 16-40. Calling O'Brien's Esquire stories collected in Things "a failure of the imagination," Smith writes: "Read sequentially, these stories make up an increasingly misogynist narrative of masculine homosocial behavior under fire" (20, 39). For O'Brien's "ethnocentricity," see Christopher 229-35. According to Christopher, Cacciato is a typically "apolitical," "ethnocentric" novel (230).

[38] See his interview with Brian C. McNerney, "Responsibility Inventing History: An Interview with Tim O'Brien," War, Literature, and the Arts 6.2 (1994): 1-26. In this interview, O'Brien responds to the criticism of his "misogynistic," "racist" representation of the Vietnamese women exemplified in "She's sort of pretty for a gook": "I haven't to present a Vietnamese viewpoint. Why haven't I? Because I don't know it"; "You don't' blame the messenger for the news" (17-8). As I argue, however, he seems to hide himself behind his own "ignorance," presupposing an objective observational post of the (omniscient) writer.

truth."[39] This emptying out of the authorial position, however, ironically strengthens O'Brien's own white attitude toward both presumably transcendental American innocence and its suppressed dark outside. Besides, his claim that he limits his imagination to hard "facts" goes against his own postmodern literary aesthetic, which cherishes the mysterious power of the imagination. In other words, O'Brien as a creative postmodernist writer is ironically claiming here to be a (neutral) news messenger who simply relates "facts" without much imagination.

After Paul Berlin's long fantasy journey to Paris in Cacciato, O'Brien gives the reader an author-itarian definition of the literary imagination through Paul Berlin's voice. Explaining why he should go back to the battlefield, that is, why, as O'Brien himself did and other soldiers in his stories almost always do, he should submit to the communalist ideology of America, Paul Berlin tells Sarkin Aung Wan at a mock Paris Peace Talks table: "Even in imagination we must be true to our obligations, for, even in imagination, obligation cannot be outrun. Imagination, like reality, has its limits" (286). This definition of the imagination whose limits must be prescribed by communalism also puts limits to O'Brien's own literary imagination. O'Brien may acquire a thematization of the postmodern uncertainty through his soldier characters' fantasies.[40] Or, his stories may "save" O'Brien himself from the traumatic

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[39] According to "O'Brien" the author/narrator of Things, "story-truth is truer than happening-truth" (203). According to this half-Aristotelian poetics particularly well expressed in "How to Tell a True War Story," the seventh story of Things, the form is more important in storytelling than its moralizing content: "A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done" (76).

[40] In an interview with Herzog, O'Brien says: "life, unfortunately, is governed by the uncertainty principle" (97). O'Brien's more direct representation of this logic of uncertainty as a universal principle of life is well developed in In the Lake of the Woods, a postmodern mystery or thriller.

memories of the allegedly uncertain war.[41] Because of this injunction that the imagination should not trespass the communalist boundaries, however, his "story-truth" ultimately suppresses both imagination and history while nonetheless serving the myth of transcendental American community, which is in fact not a "story-truth" but a "happening-truth" historically naturalized/nationalized. O'Brien's postmodern aesthetic is thus recontained within the same communalist limits after those repeated fantasy "flights" to/from Vietnam.

Despite these limits to the imagination, or probably because of them, storytelling has a certain curative power in O'Brien's fiction on Vietnam. "Timmy" in "The Lives of the Dead," the last story of Things, tells the reader how stories can save us: "[s]tories can save us" because "in story, which is a kind of dreaming, the dead sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world" (255). This redeeming power of storytelling reminds us of the psychoanalytic criticism's claim that story can heal us by allowing us to narrativize our repressed traumas and desires. I would argue, however, that, story's healing power, if any, lies elsewhere, particularly in the case of O'Brien as a Vietnam veteran writer. Story heals not because of its own imaginative power or its therapeutic release of the repressed desires/traumas, but because of its unique status as a narrative embodiment in/for the collective cultural imagination. Story's underlying organizing principle is inevitably connected to the cultural myths of the community from/for/to which it is told and retold. Community needs certain narrative displacements of its wounds for its own healing; and the cultural myths of the community give its narrative a unique regenerative power. This is particularly true of American narratives on Vietnam because they are literary responses by

[41] At the beginning of "The Lives of the Dead," the last story of The Things, "O'Brien"/O'Brien writes: "But this too is true: stories can save us" (255).

the American collective imagination to its traumatic imperial adventures in Vietnam.

If indeed, as Edward Said in Culture and Imperialism argues, "nations themselves are narrations" (xiii), narrative culture cannot be free of its national culture. The novel in this regard has been a major mode of narrative in the life of modern nations. Timothy Brennan theorizes in "The National Longing for Form" on this relationship between nation and the novelistic narrative:

> It was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the 'one, yet many' of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles. Socially, the novel joined the newspaper as a major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardize language, encourage literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility. But it did much more than that. Its manner of representation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation. (Bhabha 49)

Furthermore, the novel is complicit with nation not just in the period of the rise of imagined communities; it continues to keep its crucial function in the process of the expansion of the communities/nations. Thus as Said maintains, the novel has a close connection to Western imperial adventures: "cultural forms like the novel" are "immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences" (xii); and:

> since narrative plays such a remarkable part in the imperial quest, it is therefore not surprising that France and (especially) England have an unbroken tradition of novel-writing, unparalleled elsewhere. America began as an empire during the nineteenth century, but it was in the second half of the twentieth, after the decolonization of the British and French empires, that it directly followed its two great predecessors. (xxii-iii)

America has in fact brewed its imperial desires since its mythic foundation of the "city on a hill," and its narratives have shown an obsessive concern with its colonial/imperial expansion.

To describe the close connection between American imperial desire and American

narrative, I would like to use the phrase "empire as a way of writing," giving a literary variation to William Appleman Williams's Empire as a Way of Life, a classic critical study of the cultural, historical background and trajectories of the American imperial adventures. I mean by the "empire as a way of writing" the inter-indebtedness between American writing and American imperial culture. The American collective imagination has needed narrative avenues to express its imperial desires, and this tendency is still alive in our celebrated postmodern/postnational age. American foundational myths and legends such as the "city on a hill," Manifest Destiny, and the "civilizing mission" are often presumed to be subverted or denaturalized these postmodern days, but their underlying structural principle, that is, the expansionist mode of the "empire as a way of life," continues to be a major formal force to drive American narratives forward. Thus American "empire as a way of writing" still serves its "empire as a way of life." Besides, when American "empire as a way of life" is wounded or debunked as it was in the years of the Vietnam War, its "empire as a way of writing" comes forward for the cure of the wounded collective cultural imagination. And, the mythic and legendary elements supporting the American "empire as a way of life" continue to provide curative placebos to its "empire as a way of writing."

O'Brien's stories are closely connected to this imperial tradition. His fictional narrative of Vietnam not only gives a formal embodiment to the postmodern imperial desire of America, but is also recontained by the web of the mythic, historical memories of America, which have required the American narratives to follow pre-charted imperial paths. Norman Bowker in "Speaking of Courage" drives endlessly around a lake in his hometown with a futile desire to tell his war stories to his ex-girlfriend and his father. This repeated circular driving works as a symbolic displacement of Norman Bowker's and his creator's

narrative desires. It may not save/heal Norman Bowker or O'Brien himself for the moment, as Bowker's suicide and O'Brien's repeated revisit to the traumas of the Vietnam War prove, but it ultimately heals the American people's wounded memories because of its logic of persistent recurrence that symbolically restabilizes the connection among the current communal life of America, its imperial adventures in Asia, its earlier expansionist tradition, and the foundational myths and ideals. O'Brien's American stories on Vietnam can indeed "save"/heal US because its cultural connection to the American communal life continues to support and regenerate the American values and ideals. What Williams calls "the rite of incorporating the individual within community" has a deep structural logic in American narrative, modern or postmodern.

One narrative constant of O'Brien's postmodern aesthetic is the endless march of the American soldiers in the Asian monsoon wilderness. This endless march of the disoriented soldiers, however, is different from the civilizing marches of the traditional American cultural self. Those marches were optimistic either because of the presumed Christian God's Providence or because of the victorious progress of the "English speaking" civilization, as Theodore Roosevelt once justified in his historical studies.[42] Well epitomized in Mary Rowlandson's twenty "removes" by the dark forces into the "Indian" country during King Philip's War, the earlier cultural march of the American self has often justified its redemption in the name of God.[43] More secular cultural marches of America can be found in

[42] Roosevelt in "The Spread of the English-Speaking Peoples" emphasizes the importance of the English language as an essential heritage in the westward expansion of American civilization. "The fact that no change of language has accompanied the second wandering of our people, from Britain to America, as it accompanied their first, from Germany to Britain, is due to the further fact that when the second wandering took place the race possessed a fixed literary language, and, thanks to the ease of communication, was kept in touch with the parent stock." According to him, however, due to "the change of blood" "the Americans began their work of Western conquest as a separate and individual people, at the moment when they sprang into national life. It has been their great work ever since" (50-1).

the "Corps of Discovery" led by Lewis and Clark to find the "Northwest Passage" that would connect the Atlantic Sea to the Pacific Ocean[44]; in Henry David Thoreau's "Walking" with a "civilizing mission" into the American wilderness and other uncivilized spaces[45]; in Whitman's march of the democratic American pioneers into other continents; in Kennedy's liberal democratic march of the "New Frontier"; and more recently, the Persian Gulf Wars by the Bush administrations, particularly the second one which is presumably, at least according to the ruling neo-conservatives, a "war" to "democratize" Iraq and make the world more peaceful and civilized. These cultural marches of America seem to have been rewarded in one way or another. Rowlandson's "removes" finally "removed" her back to the comfort of God's Providence. The Lewis and Clark expedition accomplished a first government-funded geographical, anthropological exploration into the North American continent. The liberal, individualistic, and republican ideals of American democracy imagined by Thoreau, Whitman, and Kennedy have apparently realized their ultimate triumph after the collapse of the so-called "evil empires," as Francis Fukuyama, a latter-day socio-cultural puritan, has claimed in 1989.[46] Even the "virtual" wars on Iraq seem to have achieved part of their post-

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[43] A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682) opened up a unique American literary genre called the "captivity narrative" which is characterized by a strong conviction in God's providence for American civilization and by a prototypical representation of the "Indians" as dark forces. Rowlandson describes how she was kidnapped by the Indians during King Philip's War but then redeemed by God's providence.

[44] I want to draw the reader's attention here to a recurring sentence in the journals of Lewis and Clark: "We set out and proceeded." The journals start daily entries frequently with this sentence. I suggest that we can interpret this repeated "setting out and proceeding" of the "corps of discovery" as a discursive element that allows us to read the expedition as a national cultural march (3, 8, and passim).

[45] Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," The Portable Thoreau, ed. & intro. Carl Bode (New York: Viking, 1947) 592-630. In this short essay, Thoreau starts his narrative "walking" into the forest in a meditative, transcendentalist mood, but soon jumps to a Whitmanesque justification of the American civilizing mission into the corners of other continents.

[46] I will discuss Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis in connection with postmodernism and traditional American endism/apocalypticism in Chapter 5.

Napoleonic goals, including the removal of an unfit leader and his giant statues.

This triumphant cultural march of the American Manifest Destiny, however, seems to have lost track of its original "errand into the wilderness" at least for several decades since the beginning of American intervention in Vietnam. Or, we might even say that it met a symbolic end in those years. In Vietnam, therefore, we only find the disoriented but endless marches of the American soldiers. Though the military-industrial complex believed it had a manifest destiny or a noble cause in Vietnam, both civilians in the "World" and the soldiers in "Indian Country" had no manifest cultural telos left for them except for their own individual survival. As listed in "The Things They Carried," the introductory story of Things, one of the "things" O'Brien's soldiers carried on their backs is the "weight of memory" or the burdensome imperial memories. Carrying things and memories on their back, the American soldiers just endlessly march without any goal or destination, "as if repetition itself were an act of poise" (20):

> The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules. By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared, but it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost. They marched for the sake of the march. They plodded along slowly, dumbly, leaning forward against the heat, unthinking, all blood and bone, simple grunts, soldiering with their legs, toiling up the hills and down into the paddies and across the rivers and up again and down, just humping, one step and then the next and then another, but no volition, no will, because it was automatic, it was autonomy, and the war was entirely a matter of posture and carriage, the hump was everything, a kind of inertia, a kind of emptiness, a dullness of desire and intellect and conscience and hope and human sensibility. Their principles were in their feet. Their calculations were biological. They had no sense of strategy or mission. They searched the villages without knowing what to look for,... then other villages, where it would always be the same. They carried their own lives. (15)

The figure of this "automatic," "biological" march of the American soldiers without "volition" or "will" is a crucial "fulcrum" element of O'Brien's narrative aesthetic. It urges

us to believe that the traditional American Manifest Destiny has apparently lost its "original" content in this "first terrible postmodernist war," but it also implies that the persistent mode of the march still "endlessly" went on. I believe this unending mode of the march gives us an insight into O'Brien's narrative indebtedness to the deep-seated structural forces of the American cultural imagination. Dispatched to and lost in the Asian wilderness by the power of American imperial myths and legends, the American soldiers were still closely connected to the thrusts of the American expansionist imagination. And when the experiences are (re)written by the veteran writers like O'Brien, the fictional soldiers continue to march through the Asian wilderness guided by the same structural principle.

I would argue that this disoriented but endless march of the American soldiers in Vietnam can thus be read as a synecdoche for the apparently disoriented but still endlessly expanding American culture in our American-led global postmodern age. I want to use the term "postimperial," as an alternative to "postmodern," to describe this cultural condition of contemporary America. What I mean to describe by the "postimperial" is the paradoxical aspect of contemporary American culture that retains its imperial heritage despite its attempt at undermining it. For example, current postcolonial/postnational discourses proudly allege that they are subverting American imperial desire, but they are haunted, or more correctly, recontained by the same imperial tradition, resulting only in its own narrative expansion over/into other cultures. As Amy Kaplan points out in Cultures of United States Imperialism, "[t]he absence of the United States in the postcolonial study of culture and imperialism curiously reproduces American exceptionalism from without" (17).[47] The postimperial

[47] I will discuss in Chapter 5 more about the usefulness of the term "postimperial" in interpreting the literary/ cultural condition of contemporary America, particularly in the context of "endism" or cultural apocalypticism, which is still strongly called upon as we can see in discourses such as Fukuyma's "end of history thesis" or French Americanist Baudrillard's "posthistory." Kaplan also raises the issue of the term "postimperial" but in a

American narrative march continues despite its lack of "volition," as American culture expands its power to the corners of the earth in spite of its lack of "will."

The disoriented but endless march of the American soldiers in Vietnam is a postimperial American embodiment of what Peter Brooks in Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative calls "narrative desire." According to Brooks, "the nature of narration as a form of human desire" is "the need to tell as a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire that never can quite speak its name ... but that insists on speaking over and over again its movement toward that name" (61). O'Brien's narrative desire to acquire a full understanding either from his own community or from its "others" can never be accomplished, but it still urges him to write "over and over again" about the war, though it "never can quite speak its name," that is, U.S. imperialism. As Brooks writes, "[n]arrative always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered" (97). O'Brien's postimperial narrative desire also needs to go "over and over again" to "a ground already covered," which is none other than Vietnam. If repetition is indeed an attempt for the narrative "mastery" similar to the Freudian fort/da game, O'Brien's narrative repetition might also be read as his desire to master his and his postimperial nation's experiences of the war. Like the dilatory narrative movement between the beginning and the end, O'Brien's postimperial narrative shuttles between the recurrent representation of the originary American community and its symbolic fall into the Asian quagmire. It has a white memory of the American foundational "errand into the wilderness," but it also has a whiter anxiety

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different sense from what I want to mean by it: "Is it possible yet to speak of 'postimperial' culture, and how might it differ from the postcolonial?" (17). Whereas Kaplan focuses on the possibility of "post-ing" of the "imperial" in the "postimperial," I want to focus more on "imperial," despite the fact that America is often claimed to have never been "imperial" or have "post-ed" traditional imperialisms.

about its possible "end" in Vietnam. As D.H. Lawrence writes in his discussion of Herman Melville's Moby Dick,[48] "Doom! Doom! Doom! Something seems to whisper it in the very dark trees of America [and of Vietnam]. ... And the doom is in America[/Vietnam]. The doom of our white day" (168-9). Indeed, William Cowling, the paranoid protagonist of O'Brien's The Nuclear Age declares: "In dreams, in imagination, I watched the world end" (9).

O'Brien's soldiers as representatives of the postimperial American culture thus continue marching in the alien wilderness endlessly oscillating between the mythic memories of the foundational "city on a hill" in the "World" and the anxieties of its postimperial doom in "Indian Country." In the meanwhile, however, they continue to dream what Poirier calls a "world elsewhere" in the deep Vietnam jungles. And this dream contributes to the narrative, cultural expansion of American postempire in our age of the end of history, whose preemptive interventions are globally unfolding before our eyes.[49]

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[48] As Said claims in Culture and Imperialism (New York: Vintage, 1994), Captain Ahab in Moby-Dick could indeed be read as "an allegorical representation of the American world quest; he is obsessed, compelling, unstoppable, completely wrapped up in his own rhetorical justification and his sense of cosmic symbolism" (288).

[49] One interesting cultural issue of nineteenth-century America was the cyclical course of empire, as is well expressed in Thomas Cole's "The Course of Empire." American cultural elites wanted to find a way to postpone an imperial demise, hopefully making America a genuine beginning of an eternal city on a hill free from the cyclical European histories.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Postmodern or Postimperial?

> In this tragic moment [of the September 11 terrorist attacks], when words seem so inadequate to express the shock people feel, the first thing that comes to mind is this: We are all Americans! We are all New Yorkers, just as surely as John F. Kennedy declared himself to be a Berliner in 1962.... How can we not be struck at the same time by this observation: The new century has come a long way.
>
> --Jean-Marie Colombani[1]

> There are two things that will always be very difficult for a democratic nation: to start a war and to end it.
>
> --Alexis de Tocqueville[2]

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, two best-selling theoretical works related to the event have appeared in American bookstores, each claiming its efficacy for interpreting the phenomenon of the "new world (dis)order": Samuel P. Huntington's notion of the "clash of civilizations" and Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis.[3] Huntington's model argues that the post-Cold War world has become a battleground for competing civilizations based on religious faiths. This view has become widely accepted after the September 11 terrorist attacks because those attacks and America's response to them with wars on terror seemed

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[1] Le Monde, Sept. 12, 2001. Editorial. Quoted from World Press Review Online. <http://www.worldpress.org/1101we_are_all_americans.htm>

[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. George Lawrence (New York: HarperCollins, 1969) 649.

[3] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Avon Books, 1992); Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

indeed to be a clash of two civilizations.[4] But Huntington's model does not seriously take into account the economic, political, and historical aspects of the post-Cold War world, while attributing complex international conflicts to categorical religious traditions. His model also seems to fail to explain various intra-regional conflicts in the same cultural, religious area.

Fukuyama's thesis announces that the final triumph of liberal democracy has been achieved, ushering in a new age of posthistory. He explains away the terrorist attacks as the death throes of the groups and nations that are still caught in history, but it seems to me that we are now observing a renewed war over history. We have new kinds of participants in the current war over history, America as a single superpower and the supranational terrorist networks armed with what Jean Baudrillard in The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers calls the "zero-death" strategy (21) because the terrorists turn "their own deaths into an absolute weapon against a [global] system" (16). Fukuyama's notion is nonetheless interesting to us because it is related to two interrelated Western cultural traditions, as I will discuss below: the European idea of the end of history, originally proposed by Hegel and Alexandre Kojève; and the American cultural apocalypticism I have discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Fukuyama's thesis is also related to another phenomenon we have been observing since the September 11 attacks: the proliferation of the discourses of empire, of the imperial, and of the imperialistic. These discourses for/against American empire are now openly and frequently published in major American dailies, weeklies, and monthlies, which is unusual,

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[4] Niall Ferguson, "The Empire Slinks Back," The New York Times Magazine (April 27, 2003) 52-57; Richard N. Haass, "Imperial America," Foreign Affairs (November 11, 2000) <http://www.book.edu/dybdocroot/views/articles/haass/a990909primacy_fa...>; Michael Ignatieff, "The Burden," The New York Times Magazine (January 5, 2003) 22-27, 50-54. Ignatieff's title on the cover of the magazine is "The American Empire (Get Used to It)"; Stanley Kurtz points out: "This is Samuel P. Huntington's moment. The world of cultural and religious strife anticipated by Huntington in his much-discussed (and widely excoriated) book, The Clash of Civilizations, has unquestionably arrived" (1).

particularly compared to the Vietnam War era when even the critical media tried to avoid using stigmatized words such as "imperialism." America is now often compared to the ancient Roman Empire and is also called the New Rome by critics and advocates alike.

Scholars such as Richard Haass, Michael Ignatieff, Niall Ferguson maintain that America as a single superpower must undertake a new mission similar to what Rudyard Kipling called the "white man's burden" more than a century ago.[5] Haass, for example, declares that it is now essential for Americans to "re-conceive their role from a traditional nation-state to an imperial power" (4) because, though "there is always the risk that a great power will exhaust itself by doing too much," "the greater risk facing the United States at this juncture ... is that it will squander the opportunity to bring about a world supportive of its core interests by doing too little. Imperial understreach, not overstretch, appears [to him] the greater danger of the two" (12). According to Haass, thus America should now adopt an "imperial foreign policy," which, he argues, is different from imperialism per se.

Ignatieff announces the coming of a totally new species of empire:

> America's empire is not like empires of times past, built on colonies, conquest and the white man's burden. ... The 21st century imperium is a new invention in the annals of political science, an empire lite, a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known. It is the imperialism of a people who remember that their country secured its independence by revolt against an empire, and who like to think of themselves as the friend of freedom everywhere. It is an empire without consciousness of itself as such, constantly shocked that its good intentions arouse resentment abroad. But that does not make it any less of an empire, with a conviction that it alone, in Herman Melville's words, bears "the ark of the liberties of the world." (24)

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[5] The idea of these scholars and commentators basically agrees with what George W. Bush declares in his "Introduction" to "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," which is better known as the Bush Doctrine. Bush announces: "The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise" (5); and America "welcomes [its] responsibility to lead in this great mission" to "further freedom's triumph over all these foes" (9).

Because "America has inherited a world scarred not just by the failures of empires past but also by the failure of nationalist movements to create ... free states – and now, suddenly, by the desire of Islamists to build theocratic tyrannies on the ruins of failed nationalist dreams," Ignatieff maintains, those Americans "who want America to remain a republic ... have not factored in what tyranny or chaos can do to vital American interests. The case for [American] empire is that it has become, in a place like Iraq, the last hope for democracy and stability alike" (54).

Ferguson seconds Ignatieff's idea of "empire lite," but he also points out the "fundamental weakness at the heart of the new American imperialism" (54). According to Ferguson, if "America has embarked on a new age of empire, it may turn out to be the most evanescent empire in all history" (54) because it cannot play a "proper role of an imperial America" due to the lack of desire to establish "strong institutional foundations of law and order" (54). Ferguson argues that, to operate an empire, we need a certain number of young people brave enough to give up their complacent lives to go to the imperial frontier as the British elites did in the age of traditional imperialism (57). But "the young [American] elites have no desire whatsoever to spend their lives running a screwed-up, sun-scorched sandpit like Iraq" (54).

On the other hand, people like David North, chair of the editorial board of World Socialist Website, and other leftist intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky strongly maintain that "America's drive for world domination" (North) should be stopped right away for the interests of America as well as for those of other parts of the world. According to North, "No other country in modern history, not even Nazi Germany at the height of Hitler's madness, has asserted such a sweeping claim to global hegemony ... as is now being made by the

United States" (66). But unlike advocates of America's imperial role, North argues that the current military activities of American empire are symptoms of its decline: "This insistence on the decisive role of military power arises not from the strength but rather the underlying weakness of American capitalism" (73); U.S. "militarism is symptomatic of [its] economic and social decline" (73). David Harvey and Immanuel Wallerstein also point out in a similar but more sober tone that the American wars on terror are the last gasps of the "declining" "new imperialism," rather than new beginnings of American empire. Wallerstein contends in The Decline of American Power that "the United States is a declining hegemonic power, and ... September 11 is a further evidence of this [decline]" (8).[6] Harvey also claims in The New Imperialism that the "surge towards militarism will ... appear as a last desperate move by the US to preserve its global dominance at all costs" (207), which will fail in the end because of its already losing economic power.

The discourses of empire are in fact nothing new to America, though the American cultural tradition has repeatedly denied its imperial desires. As Richard W. Van Alstyne argues in The Rising American Empire, from the beginning America "was conceived as an empire" (9). The imperial discourses have often been presented with positive connotations such as "civilizing mission"; and during the eras of the Spanish-American War and the Vietnam War, anti-imperialist critics added negative connotations to them, while the official and dominant cultures still strongly wanted to deny them. The recent proliferation of imperial discourses is thus a return of the repressed, or rather, a return of the denied.

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[6] Wallerstein presents an interesting idea on the theoretical collusion between the American hawks and the non-American anti-imperialists: "Ironically, the hawk reading [that America should act as an imperial power] has largely become the reading of the international left, which has been screaming about U.S. policies – mainly because they fear that the chances of U.S. success are high" (24).

Another important phenomenon triggered by the September 11 attacks is the recognition of what might be called the reality principle, which is aptly summarized by "Game Over," an article by Naomi Klein, author of No Logo, published in The Nation just after the collapse of the World Trade Center. Klein argues that the good days of Americans' "illusion of war without casualties" are over now. Their "single brutal fiction" of America as an "expert in the art of sanitizing and dehumanizing acts of war" was shattered by the harsh reality of the civilian casualties in America's own homeland. "September 11 will mark the end of the shameful era of the video game war." What Baudrillard calls the "absolute event, the 'mother' of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place" (Spirit 4) has thus come back with a vengeance to the collective American consciousness. Though I do not agree with Baudrillard's exaggerated interpretation of the attacks as the absolute event or the mother of all events, we can still understand what he means by these phrases, that is, the terrible impact of those attacks on the collective cultural consciousness of America. The various paranoid responses to the attacks, such interpretations of the events, for example, as a second Pearl Harbor or as the most tragic attack in American history, also signify the unusual extent of psychic destabilization the attacks have evoked in the collective mind of Americans, though the credibility of those interpretations can be easily doubted by anybody who understands American history.[7] Whatever is our cultural, historical interpretations of those attacks, the American age of "virtual" war allegedly opened up by the

[7] Expressions such as "the most horrible event" or the "most horrible attack on American continent" can be easily disproved by the War of 1812, several conflagrations in New York, the system of slavery, and what is called the "American Holocaust," the vanishing of the Native Americans.

first Gulf War, which Douglas Kellner calls the first genuine postmodern war, seems to be indeed over now.[8]

But what has happened to the liberatory thrusts of the "post-" discourses such as postmodernism, postcolonialism, and postnationalism? I believe Klein's analogy is also important in this respect. Before September 11, American intellectuals were promulgating various euphoric discourses of the "post-," particularly postmodernism as a boundary-breaking cultural practice and postnationalism as a phenomenon coming in the wake of the death of the nation-state. Many scholars also wanted to believe that history had entered an almost millennial phase where there would be no boundaries or obstacles to American-led new world order of liberal democracy. But now they have suddenly awakened to harsh realities by the terrorist attacks and particularly by the literal closing off of the American national(ist) boundaries. These various "post-" discourses have become replaced by debates on empire and patriotism. Will the September 11 terrorist attacks, then, also mark an end of postmodernism, postcolonialism, and postnationalism? It seems so.

Postmodernism particularly can be explained in terms of three issues: whether it is related to the modernist experiments; whether it is connected to the characteristics of the American cultural tradition; and whether it is related to the cultural, political, and economic practices that are often categorically dubbed globalization.[9] According to Charles Jencks,

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[8] See also Chapter 4 for the relationship between postmodernism/postmodernity and the Vietnam War, which is called the "first postmodern(ist) war" by Fredric Jameson.

[9] The first two issues are in fact the two main currents in the postmodernism/postmodernity debate: whether it should be understood as new artistic and cultural practices with populist, egalitarian, and heterogeneous desires; or it should be understood as a periodizing concept. If what Hutcheon means by the "two clearly opposed 'camps' in the postmodern wars" (17) is related to political, ideological positions, these two different ways of seeing postmodernism/postmodernity are important in the sense that they include artistic, philosophical as well as political, ideological concerns.

who maintains in What Is Post-Modernism? that the "idea of plurality is essential to Post-Modernism" and that "the necessity of crossing boundaries and mixing genres is also a norm" of it (6), postmodern ideas are not necessarily incompatible with traditional metanarratives: "the post-modern period has not seen the end of all metanarratives, but rather their proliferation" (7). Jencks thus emphasizes that "post-modernism is the continuation of modernity and its transcendence" (15). This dual gesture of postmodernism is what he calls "double coding" (29-30), an idea replicated by Linda Hutcheon's concept of "postmodern irony." Though Jencks's view is less radical than what other postmodern(ist) theorists claim, his foundational ideas reveal the crucial connection between modernism and postmodernism. In Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern, Marianne DeKoven similarly emphasizes the continuity between modernity and postmodernity: "postmodernity remains in continuity with the key elements of modernity.... Postmodernity, as both the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' ... and also as the engine of egalitarian populism and of the politics of subjectivity ..., is in many ways the culmination of the modernity so closely identified with American-dominated globalism" (xv).

Contrary to advocates' critical efforts to define postmodernism/postmodernity as a genuine breakthrough, it seems to me that the continuity between modernism/modernity and postmodernism/postmodernity has become much clearer after the September 11 attacks. But what is more important is the fact that the terrorist attacks and America's quick and paranoid response to them have put into question the very problematic itself that compares/contrasts postmodernism/postmodernity with/against modernism/modernity. September 11 has made many elements of contemporary discourses obsolete, while almost automatically reinviting the old imperial discourses and traditional American myths and ideals into the contemporary

American cultural scene as if they were a Freudian uncanny. This fact requires us to critically understand the cultural conditions of contemporary America from its deeper cultural, historical traditions. What is needed now is not a debate that is focused on the continuity/ discontinuity between those two cultural terms, but a more historical and global perspective to understand those artistic, cultural, and critical efforts in the context of the American expansionist imagination.

More important for the thesis of this dissertation, Andreas Huyssen claims in After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism that there must be a historically significant connection between postmodernism and the American cultural tradition. Huyssen emphasizes the "specifically American character of postmodernism": "After all, the term accrued its emphatic connotations in the United States, not in Europe. ... [Postmodernism] could not have been invented in Europe at the time" (190). According to him, in France or West Germany during the 1960s there was not a "major break with modernism as [there was] in the U.S." (191). Huyssen lists four characteristics that have helped "establish American postmodernism as a movement sui generis" (191-5): the "temporal imagination" ("rupture and discontinuity," "crisis and generational conflict"); the "iconoclastic attack" upon what Peter Burger calls the "institution [of] art"; "technological optimism"; and a "populist trend." These are certainly those of the early postmodernism. They are also uniquely American not only because they are related to the American cultural, historical experiences in the 1960s, but also because they reveal America's flexible cultural dialectic that has often developed through the "adversarial," "antinomian, suspicious, [and] even 'paranoid'" practices, which are also characteristics of the "American literary way" (Lentricchia, Introducing Don DeLillo 5-6). According to Huyssen, postmodernism is thus prototypically American.

Until around the moment of the September 11 terrorist attacks, postmodernism had apparent theoretical efficacy. I believe, however, that the critical thrusts of postmodernism were in many ways homologous to the expansive, boundary-breaking logic of multinational financial capital, as my discussion of Auster's postmodern expansive narrative strategy of chance exemplifies. A more recent and harsher critique of postmodernism and other "post-" theories has been presented in Empire by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Hardt and Negri declare that the discourses of postmodernism and postcolonialism have been preempted by the total logic of "postmodern capitalism":

> Many of the concepts dear to postmodernists and postcolonialists find a perfect correspondence in the current ideology of corporate capital and the world market. The ideology of the world market has always been the anti-foundational and anti-essentialist discourse par excellence. Circulation, mobility, diversity, and mixture are its very conditions of possibility. Trade brings differences together and the more the merrier! Differences (of commodities, populations, cultures, and so forth) seem to multiply infinitely in the world market, which attacks nothing more violently than fixed boundaries: it overwhelms any binary division with its infinite multiplicities. (150)

Harvey also argues in Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography that capitalism thrives on diversity, heterogeneity, and difference because it needs to accumulate capital through what he calls the "time-space compression," the "spatial fix," and the "niche market" (124-5). He contends: "I just c[an] not see why the sort of heterogeneity that postmodernism celebrates [i]s in any way inconsistent with ... [the] processes of capital accumulation, which not only thrive upon but actively produce social difference and heterogeneity" (122). And "it even seem[s that] postmodernism itself [i]s a product of the process of capital accumulation" (122). In short, according to Harvey, post-Fordist capitalism has "produced the conditions for the rise of postmodern ways of thinking," and "the worship of fragments" is exactly what the flexible logic of capital accumulation promotes (122).

Hence according to both Harvey and Hardt/Negri, either as descriptive models or as subversive cultural strategies, the visa of postmodernism and postcolonialism seems to have now expired in the new global market state of theories, particularly after the revisit of the traditional imperial desires after the September 11 attacks. Or worse than that, they are in many ways unwittingly colluding with the forces of capitalism, transforming themselves into creative but also compliant elements of "the ideology of the world market," despite their critical and liberatory thrusts. Thus the anti-capitalist manifesto of Hardt and Negri is worth listening to, though it sounds somewhat judgmental and moralizing:

> [P]ostmodernist and postcolonialist theories may end up in a dead end because they fail to recognize adequately the contemporary object of critique, that is, they mistake today's real enemy. What if the modern form of power these critics (and we ourselves) have taken such pains to describe and contest no longer holds sway in our society? ... In short, what if a new paradigm of power, a postmodern sovereignty, has come to replace the modern paradigm and rule through differential hierarchies of the hybrid and fragmentary subjectivities that these theorists celebrate? In this case, modern forms of sovereignty would no longer be at issue, and the postmodernist and postcolonialist strategies that appear to be liberatory would not challenge but in fact coincide with and even unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule! (Empire 137-138)

This self-betrayal of postmodernism and postcolonialism is similar to the status change of the bourgeoisie in modern Europe: While the bourgeoisie was fighting against the feudal system, it functioned as the vanguard of social changes; once it became established as the ruling class, however, it turned out to be more conservative. The theories of postmodernism and postcolonialism seem to be suffering a similar fate because these theories also revealed critical and liberatory thrusts during the last decades of the second millennium, but they are now not only attacking old straw men and deteriorated windmills, but more seriously, they are co-opted by the very flexible system they imagine they are critically undermining.

One undeniable aspect of the phenomenon called globalization is that American culture is rapidly expanding to the corners of the world: American consumerism and its secular lifestyles as well as its ideals of freedom and equality are often heartily accepted by the non-American youths of the world but also often by the critical anti-Americanists in spite of their pronounced political, ideological positions.[10] Thus the genuine power of imperial America lies in its expanding civilization, though it is frequently supported by its military operations. This aspect of the expansive/expanding American civilization has often been dubbed McDonaldization or Cocacolinization. More theoretically, it has been called neo-imperialism or cultural imperialism. But these tropes and paradigms have also lost critical potency in the face of the irresistibly attractive American culture and civilization. The idea of Empire brought up by Hardt and Negri might be a useful notion to explain this new phase of American-led globalization, though their critique is focused more on the global aspects than on their being dominated by America. According to Hardt/Negri, every corner of the world has become thoroughly saturated by the "biopolitical" mechanism of postmodern capitalism. The world we live in is a multilateral, multifaceted network, which cannot be understood through traditional critical paradigms based on essentialized concepts of the self, nation, and culture because Empire as a "non-place" is a smooth network without centers, boundaries, and outsides.

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[10] I don't agree with his somewhat conservative liberalism, but Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. provides an interesting observation on the acceptance of the Euroamerican democratic ideals by the peoples of the world:

> The Western commitment to human rights has unquestionably been intermittent and imperfect. Yet the ideal remains – and movement toward it has been real, if sporadic. Today it is the Western [which also could be read as Euroamerican] democratic tradition that attracts and empowers people of all continents, creeds, and colors. When the Chinese students cried and died for democracy in Tiananmen Square, they brought with them not representations of Confucius or Buddha but a model of the Statue of Liberty. (The Disuniting of America 129)

Like them or not or fight them or not, we cannot deny that there is a strong gravitational power in American culture and its ideals.

Contrary to what Hardt and Negri argue, however, it seems to me that there is still a center in our global cultural sphere, and that is America. This does not mean that America is an imperial metropolis similar to those of empires past. Contemporary America might be called an "empire without imperialism," or to use Thomas Jefferson's prophetic definition, America has now become a genuine "empire for liberty" that promotes the "imperialism of freedom." This apparently oxymoronic notion well explains the status of contemporary America. America is, first of all, an imperial state. At the same time, however, it is not an imperialist center in its traditional sense. It is an invisible imperial center like the prison warden's post in the model of the panopticon presented by Bentham and Foucalut, in which the warden in the omniscient power center is invisible to the inmates but the inmates in their cells are completely visible to the eyes of the warden in the center.[11] Or, to use my own trope, the globalized world of today can be defined as a flying (non-)zone for the American stealth bombers that can fly without being caught by enemy radars. Thus despite its expansionist character, there is still a center, though it posits itself as an invisible non-center. This condition of America as an apparently invisible imperial center makes postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers often imagine that there is no power center in our allegedly boundary-less global world. When peoples of other parts of the world desire to declare, "Now we are all Americans," these theoretically critical internationalists announce that there is no America, unwittingly providing an alibi for its expansionist center.

Thus to regain our critical potency I want to suggest the notion of the "postimperial." As is prophetically portrayed in Herman Melville's short story "Benito Cereno," American

[11] I am not claiming here that America literally has an all-seeing power. Its weakness is obvious in its failures in foreign intelligence, knowledge of other cultures, and evaluations of its own power. I am just emphasizing the fact that as a single superpower America assumes a hubristic role of a global sheriff armed with an unrivaled satellite vision. Remember the message sent from the sky to the Iraqi people just before the second invasion: "We're watching you!"

empire has replaced the old European empires. It has taken over those European empires' unfinished project of modernizing the whole world and has attempted to continue that project through apparently benign means. It has tried to wrap its economic and political desires in its cultural ideals of democracy and freedom. The new American empire now threatens to incorporate the whole earth into its own cultural, political, and economic sphere, while trying to avoid imitating the brutal logic of empires past. In other words, the new America, which I would now call "American postempire," does not allow an outside to exist; by expanding its culture and civilization to the corners of the world, it prefigures a utopian image of a future global village. Yet it is still connected to the imperial desires of the past, a fact that requires us to explore the postimperial phenomena not only synchronically but also diachronically. I am suggesting the "postimperial" to designate this new aspect of America globalizing the world with its own cultural images and ideals and also to specify the need for an exploration of its continuous historical trajectories. The new world order seen from our critical point of view is global, but it is also expansive, imperial, and most of all, Americano-centric.

To paraphrase the title of Alfredo G. A. Valladão's 1996 book, The Twenty-First Century Will Be American, a book on "the decline of the American Republic and the birth of World-America" as "the new universal democratic empire" (xiii) that promotes the "imperialism of freedom" (185), I would say: The future centuries are already for the new American postempire. Like the Roman Empire, I believe American postempire will end only with the realization of a global pax in which America itself as a dominant postempire will ultimately implode and its cultural ideals will finally expand over the whole globe. Only then, will we be able to say that there is no American center in this world. I am thus paradoxically on George W. Bush's side. Bush might be a postmodern or postimperial Napoleon, who

violently spreads the cultural ideals of America through politics by other means. Our age is a period when the traditional American ideals of civilization, particularly those of democracy and freedom, go in two directions at once: a deep self-reflection and, more importantly, a violent regeneration and expansion through every possible device, cultural, narrative, and even military.

On the other hand, America started with a millennial dream of realizing an eternal empire. In some sense America was a posthistorical and postimperial nation from its very beginning: posthistorical in the sense that it claimed to be free of all contaminated historical experiences of the old Europe and that it declared to be a new nation in a New World; and postimperial in the sense that it wanted to be free of the European histories of colonialism/ imperialism. These desires to escape from the old (European) histories have encouraged Americans to imagine their nation as a new invention. In the collective cultural imagination of America, America has been an invented empire in its own unique way even before the Spanish-American War. Thus in some sense, America was and is still (more) a postempire.

The discourses of/on globalization/postmodernity have a tendency to be posthistorical in the sense that they imagine the end of (the modernist) history. This posthistorical tendency is similar to the traditional American apocalypticism, which has been used as a regenerative cultural device, and to the postimperial desires that I have just discussed. Two conspicuous examples of the theoretical apocalypticism related to contemporary America are Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis and Baudrillard's concept that postmodern America has passed the "dead point" of history. These theories are from different traditions, but they share the single idea that contemporary America is an ultimate realization of posthistory. The end of history

has been in fact an attractive issue for European intellectuals, particularly for those in France such as Alexandre Kojève, Maurice Blanchot, and Georges Bataille (Mathy 269).[12] The idea commonly shared is that we humans have mastered all the imaginable categories of knowledge and practices, and that this mastery is best realized in the political and socio-cultural system of America. I believe this European imagining of America as a posthistorical society provides us with an interesting insight into what I call American postempire because America also has its own apocalyptic tradition, as I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's Phenomenology of the Spirit includes a typical "end of history" thesis. In Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Kojève argues that Hegel thought that "History itself must be essentially finite; collective man (humanity) must die just as the human individual dies; universal History must have a definitive end" (148), and that we thus must "conclude ... that History is completed" (98), particularly with the Napoleonic Wars as a historic(al) agent that disseminated the ideals of the French Revolution. According to Kojève's understanding of Hegel, this moment of the end of history is also marked by the "appearance of the Wise Man [Hegel himself] or of absolute Knowledge in the World. This absolute Knowledge, being the last moment of Time – that is, a moment without a Future – is no longer a temporal moment. If absolute Knowledge comes into being in Time or, better yet, as Time or History, Knowledge that has come into being is no longer temporal or historical: it is eternal, or, ... it is Eternity revealed to itself" (148-9). Hegel could not but conclude that history has inevitably reached an end, for his totalizing system of philosophy presupposed a beginning (the First Man's "struggle for recognition" that triggered the movement of history in the form of the Master-Slave dialectic) and an end (which is free of contradictions between

[12] This, however, does not mean that other cultures don't have similar apocalyptic sentiments or theories. For a German variant of the "dissolution of history," see Lutz Niethammer, Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Verso, 1992). See also note 15 in this chapter.

the Master and the Slave) for every concept, including history itself. Hegel's end of history is an entropic moment when all contradictions and conflicts, which are the driving forces of history, are completely resolved.

This idea is repeated by Kojève himself: "I understood that the Hegelian-Marxist end of History was ... already a present, here and now. ... Hegel was right to see in this battle [of Jena] the end of History properly so-called. In and by this battle the vanguard of humanity virtually attained the limit and the aim, that is, the end, of Man's historical evolution. What has happened since then was but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon" (160). Kojève maintains that later historical events such as the World Wars and the Russian and Chinese Revolutions "had only the effect of bringing the backward civilizations of the peripheral provinces into line with the most advanced (real or virtual) European historical positions" because they were "to speed up the elimination of the numerous more or less anachronistic sequels to its pre-revolutionary past" (160). Kojève then argues that contemporary America is the genuine "post-historical" society (161) or the achieved utopia. According to him,

> this process of elimination is more advanced in the North American extensions of Europe than in Europe itself. One even can say that, from a certain point of view, the United State has already attained the final stage of Marxist "communism," seeing that, practically, all the members of a "classless society" can from now on appropriate for themselves everything that seems good to them, without thereby working any more than their heart dictates.
>
> ... [I]f the Americans give the appearance of rich Sino-Soviets, it is because the Russians and the Chinese are only Americans who are still poor but are rapidly proceeding to get richer. I was led to conclude from this that the "American way of life" was the type of life specific to the post-historical period, the actual presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the "eternal present" future of all of humanity. Thus Man's return to animality appeared no longer as a possibility that was yet to come, but as a certainty that was already present. (160-1)

In his Hegelian view, all the contradictions between man and nature as well as the conflicts among humans themselves are overcome in America, the post-historical society.[13]

This Hegelian-Kojèvian tradition of endism has often been repeated by later thinkers with shifts of foci, particularly by Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Daniel Bell, and above all, Fukuyama and Baudrillard (Mathy 273). Besides, this end-of-history thesis has become "a virtual cliché of intellectual culture" in contemporary postmodern world (Elliott 415). The most popular version of this "right-Hegelian philosophy of history" (Elliott 418)[14] is presented in Fukuyama's The End of History and the Last Man, a book that has widely disseminated the idea of the end of history after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Following, or more correctly, almost literally replicating Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, Fukuyama declares that history has ended with the triumph of the "Western liberal democracy" because it has finally accomplished its ultimate goal: the realization of the "equality of human freedom" (60), or the establishment of the "universal and homogeneous

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[13] Two main issues can be raised about this Hegelian-Kojevian view of the end of history, though they are beyond the realm of this dissertation: its Eurocentrism; and the problem of the concrete moment of the beginning of the end of history, which could be revised repeatedly, as apocalyptic prophecies on the end of the world often have done. For Kojève's own revisions of the beginning of the end of history see Kojève 161-2. It is delayed from the Napoleonic Wars to contemporary America, and then again, after visiting Japan several times, he declares that Japan has been enjoying posthistory for more than three centuries!

[14] In the tradition of Hegelian philosophy, there was a schism between the right and the left. As Peter Singer summarizes in Hegel of Oxford "Past Masters" series:

> After Hegel's death, those who considered themselves his followers split into two camps. The orthodox or Right Hegelians followed in the style of Hegel's later years. They reconciled his religious views with Protestant Christianity, and accepted the generally positive view of the Prussian State expressed in the Philosophy of Right. This conservative school of Hegelianism produced no major thinkers, and after having for some years the status of a semi-official philosophy in Berlin, it went into so steep a decline that by the 1860s Hegel's philosophy was totally out of fashion in Germany.
>
> The other camp was very different. It consisted of a group of young men [including Karl Marx] with radical leanings. Their attitude toward Hegel was like Hegel's attitude toward Kant. Just as Hegel had seen Kant's doctrine of the thing-in-itself as a failure to carry through the radical implications of his philosophy, so these students of Hegel saw his acceptance of Christianity, the Prussian State, and the general conditions of their time as Hegel's failure to carry through the radical implications of his philosophy. This group became known as the Young Hegelians, or Left Hegelians. The future lay with them. (Peter Singer 203)

state" that guarantees the "universal and homogeneous recognition" (199-208). According to Fukuyama, current Euroamerican human beings, especially Americans basking in the post-industrial affluence, have become Hegelian-Nietzschean "animals again, as they were before the [first] bloody battle [driven by the Hegelian "desire for recognition"] began history" (311). Because now Americans " would no longer risk their lives in battle" for recognition, Fukuyama argues, contemporary Americans are like "dogs" who are "content to sleep in the sun all day provided [they are] fed" and "not dissatisfied with what [they] are" (311).

Fukuyama's thesis, like those of its predecessors, also declares the arrival of the "end of both art and philosophy" (311): The Euroamericans "could write endlessly poems on the beauties of springtime or the graceful swell of a young girl's breast, but they could not say anything fundamentally new about the human situation" (311) because all genuinely creative artistic experiments have been already made. This Hegelian idea of the end of art is also revived by postmodern writers and thinkers, as we can see in John Barth's earlier thesis of "exhaustion." Nor is philosophy possible any more because "absolute knowledge" has been realized either by Hegel/Kojève or Fukuyama himself. But the most interesting aspect of Fukuyama's thesis is that it announces the genuine end of history with the American victory over what Ronald Regan called the "evil empire," the Soviet Union. In other words, he declares that liberal democracy is the final form of human civilization, which is most perfectly realized in contemporary America. Thus the end-of-history thesis for Kojève-Fukuyama works as a political, ideological justification of American postempire.[15]

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[15] For a critical survey of this thesis, see: Perry Anderson, A Zone of Engagement (New York: Verso, 1992), particularly the last chapter, "The Ends of History" (279-375); Christopher Bertram & Andrew Chitty, Has History Ended?: Fukuyama, Marx, and Modernity (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1994); Timothy Burns, ed., After History?:Francis Fukuyama and His Critics (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994); Alex Callinicos, Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) 1-43; Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), particularly Chapters 1 & 2 (3-75); Shadia B. Drury, Alexandre Kojève: The

But "Hegel is [also] interesting [to Baudrillard] to the extent that he questions the disappearance of art, etc." (Baudrillard Live 25). If Hegelian "end of history is marked by the coming of Science in the form of a Book – that is, by the appearance of the Wise Man or absolute Knowledge" (Kojève 148), Baudrillard's end of history is marked by the coming of the Simulacrum that declares the end of all realities, the omnipotence and omnipresence of simulacrum, the death of the representational subjectivity, and the fatal impossibility of any kind of interpretation whatsoever. At the beginning of Simulacra and Simulacrum, Baudrillard introduces "the Borges fable in which the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly" (1), and presents his ideas on simulation/simulacrum:

> Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but our. The deserts of the real itself. (Simulacra 1)

According to Baudrillard's somewhat exaggerated logic, the world we live in is a "hyperreal" world where the "omnipotence of simulacra" threatens "the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (Simulacra 3-4).

Baudrillard presents Disneyland as the "perfect model" of simulation. He declares: "Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America that is

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Roots of Postmodern Politics (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Kenneth Jensen, ed., A Look at "The End of History?" (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1990); Michael Valdez Moses, The Novel and the Globalization of Culture (New York: Oxford UP, 1995); Alan Ryan, ed. & intro., After the End of History (London: Collins & Brown, 1992); B Howard Williams, David Sullivan, and Gwynn Matthews, Francis Fukuyama and the End of History (Cardif, UK: U of Wales P, 1997). For the French genealogies of the idea of the end of history, see: Vincent Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, trans. L. Scott-Fox & J. M. Harding (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1980); and Jean-Philippe Mathy (Extrême-Occident: French Intellectuals and America (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993).

Disneyland .... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real" (12-3). Thus for him, the alleged disappearance of the "nature/culture distinction" in contemporary America is not surprising ("Hyperreal America" 244; Live 132). In America as the "utopia that had been achieved," we are told that there is only "culture's self-negation" ("Hyperreal" 244), and thus that contemporary America is ultimately understood as a cultural "desert for ever" (America 121) "without anchor and without destination" (Live 134).

What is more interesting to us in Baudrillard's postmodern report on contemporary American culture is his idea on the relationship between time and space that is presumably operating in contemporary America. Reminding us of Wei-chee Dimock'd Lukácsian idea of the "spatialization of time" (Empire for Liberty 15), Baudrillard maintains that what he calls the "transfiguration of time into space" or the "transition from history to everyday life" is fully and finally realized in contemporary American life ("Hyperreal" 244). His concept of time is related to his own obsession with the American "speed" culture. According to his observation, speed keeps America immune to both history and culture: "Speed creates pure objects. It is a pure object, since it cancels out the ground and territorial reference-points, since it runs ahead of time to annul time itself, since it moves more quickly than its own cause and obliterates that cause by outstripping it. Speed is the triumph of effect over cause, the triumph of instantaneity over time as depth, the triumph of the surface and pure objectivity over the profundity of desire" (America 6). Hence, according to Baudrillard, "[b]eyond a certain point, it is movement itself that changes. Movement which moves

through space of its own volition changes into an absorption by space itself" (America 10).

Thus Baudrillard declares that America has passed the "zero point" (Live 133) or the "dead point" (Selected Writings 190), where time and history have stopped. Though we can neither remember nor return to this point, he agues, it is certain that we have already passed this dead point of history: Our "desire to locate this blind spot beyond which 'things have ceased to be real,' where history has ceased to exist, without us realizing it, and where, lacking such insight, we can only persevere in our current destruction [or "catastrophe" of culture"]," is an impossible dream because "this point is also the end of linear time, and all the marvelous inventions of science fiction for 'going back in time' are useless if time already no longer exists" (Selected Writings 191). With the disappearance of time and history, Americans are supposedly living in the "perpetual present"; America is thus a space of amnesia where only the escalation of catastrophe and the "never-ending circulation" are possible ("Hyperreal" 245). Left with this escalation of speed or the inertia of time, America has become a society that is "running straight ahead, because [it has] lost the formula for stopping" (America 39; "The Year 2000" 37). Hence, Baudrillard claims, only the "perpetual present" endlessly continues in America: "Having known no accumulation of time, it lives in a perpetual present. Having seen no slow, centuries-long accumulation of a principle of truth, it lives in perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs" (America 76). This is why Baudrillard can dare to declare as early as 1987 that "the year 2000 has already happened" ("The Year 2000" 35).

Thus both the triumphalist Fukuyama and the aphoristic Baudrillard agree that America has finally realized its foundational dream to escape from history. Their representations of American postempire return them back to what I have called the American expansionist

imagination, whose two main components are the spatial imagination and the cultural apocalypticism, which not only characterize but also repeatedly revitalize the American nation. In other words, these theoretical discourses on America revive traditional American cultural tropes related to its imagined identity: the spatialization of time; the escape from history; and the narrative expansion through representation of the end of narrative/culture. The image of American postempire, which they define as a posthistorical society, can thus be seen to us as a revived image of the foundational dream of the early settlers who dreamed of building a "city on the hill" free of the old European histories. America was and is again imagined as a posthistorical (and postimperial) nation, and these contemporary globalist/postmodernist Americanists revive, or rather, repeat the same cultural logic of the American expansionist imagination.

A comprehensive exploration of the characteristics of American postempire and its relation to these theoretical discourses that represent them is beyond the realm of this dissertation. But I believe my discussion of the three contemporary American writers, Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, and Tim O'Brien, can be an example of this kind of exploration with a focus on the literary field. Their narrative self-reflection as a synecdoche for the cultural movements of American postempire is what I have tried to explore. In short, they represent those aspects of the contemporary postimperial American culture at/from its very American center. They are more critical of American postempire than Fukuyama and Baudrillard, who are at best extreme cases of the traditional American expansionist imagination that has readjusted itself to contemporary American-led globalization. They are also less apocalyptic and much less triumphant than those theorists. Most of all, they reveal both critical and

affirmative attitudes toward the new American postempire and its historical trajectories. Nevertheless, I believe Auster, DeLillo, and O'Brien share basic tendencies with these theorists in the sense that, despite themselves, they are unwittingly reviving, or rather, reaffirming those traditional American cultural tropes of apocalypticism, of the spatialization of time, of America as a free space, and of American civilization as a beacon of freedom and democracy. I am not claiming their rhetoric of subversion that unwittingly turns into a postimperial practice of readjustment to the American expansionist imagination is flawed. I just want to emphasize the fact that there must be some connection between their subversive, democratic desires and their being American writers in the age of American postempire. If, as Lentricchia claims, "[t]he main literary line [of America] is political, but not in the trivial didactic sense of offering programs of renovation, or of encouraging us to go out and 'do something'" (Introducing Don DeLillo 6), then they are typical postimperial authors who are political without being didactic. Their narrative strategies to critically reflect the traditional cultural imagination of America are postmodern enough to the extent that they attempt at undermining the imperial legacies; but their subversive desires are also postimperial as I define it because those desires are still strongly hinged on the American expansionist imagination.

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