

CAPITAL OF HELL

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Madness has become man's possibility of abolishing both man and the world — and even those images that challenge the world and deform man. It is, far beyond dreams, beyond the nightmare of bestiality, the last recourse: the end and beginning of everything. Not because it is a promise ... but because it is the ambiguity of chaos and apocalypse.

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

"Master, what gnaws at them so hideously their lamentation stuns the very air?" "They have no hope of death," he answered me.

Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*

This essay is not constituted as a judgment on *Apocalypse Now* nor on its enigmatic subject-matter, that failed, radical experiment in colonialism: the attempted Capitalization of Vietnam. Judgment, the placing of the interrogatory texts of culture under the sign of History, cedes in this writing to the task of creation and appreciation. The project of this essay is to pass beyond the veil of History: to decipher the text of the film in such a way as to generate a new and more productive theoretical meaning; to transform the ambiguities and nuances of *Apocalypse Now* and, of its object of representation, Vietnam, into the poetry of disquieted intellectual expression.

Everything is suspect. The relation of the film to History; to the representation of social reality, is but the beginning. Our assumption is, at first, that the visual architecture of the film, the techné of the moving image of *Apocalypse Now*, parallels the displaced imagery, the "de-centered" universe, of the colonization of the natural and social landscape of Vietnam. And the Vietnam war itself, the actuality and the metaphor, is taken to be a tragic displacement of moral rage; an iridescent expression of the soured and chaotic energies of the culture of Enlightenment. *Apocalypse Now*, this seemingly

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grotesque and uncontrolled parody of the strutting ambitions of the Western soul, succeeds as a visual narrative of that often symbolic, always methodical, journey into the twilight of madness that was Vietnam. The movie revisits, in visual form, *The Birth of Tragedy*; and in the dialectic of eternal recurrence, in the Vietnam of Sade, in this surrender of the ego to the fluctuating demands of irrationality, in reason that is unmasked as normal psychosis, the film discovers a passageway into a depth exploration of the modalities, the primal, of the overworld of unreason that is the fundamental impulse of Western civilization. In this journey into the psychological terrain of human madness, the film has the special significance of unifying an imaginative tapestry of the central forms of affirmative culture with a poetic articulation of pre-Enlightenment origins of the universe of irrationality. Celebrity and degradation in the sphere of sexuality; the traumatized condition of the colonialist; the vacant morality of the command corporation; the routinization of the moment of the absurd — these, the harmony itself of affirmative culture, are synthesized with the immobility, the passivity, of the Asiatic decomposition of the social and phenomenological reality of the West.

I

Contemporary film interpretation operates often under the old assumption, the premise of a literate, positive culture, that the *oeuvre* of the film remains an alienated, displaced expression of the social totality that it wishes to interpret. The aesthetic taxonomy of the film is assumed, in this instance, to represent a distanced interrogation of a pre-existent social reality; a cultural reproduction of and response to the sphere of social facticity. This is, of course, the premise of positivistic critique; the vacated epistemology of affirmative culture. Our assumption is that a critique of film which assumes a necessary alienation between the interrogatory and its object, rather than a reflexive relationship between image and text, is unsympathetic to the *ratio*, the *aura*, of the film itself. This would be a style of criticism which does not remain appreciative of the internal complexities of the aesthetic object, or of the parallelisms which exist today between the medium of film and the "object" of the human social process.

Contemporary interpretations of Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* are not exempt in this regard. This film, in the tradition of the serious and eloquent epic, contains a crucible of meaning *and* a definitive style of expression which is not reducible for its interpretation to an analysis of the film as a visual continuation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, of Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, or more appropriately, of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The continuities and symbolism in mythic declaration among Conrad, Dante and Coppola are of special significance; but the *form* of the movie, its visual archeology of the

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madness of positive culture, is a unique representation of the chaos, the depth surrealism of the Vietnamization, the maddening night, of the Western soul. Equally, in opposition to *pro forma* declarations that the movie is an evocative statement on the phenomenon of American imperialism, we counter that this politicization of aesthetics is an unproductive intellectual terminus. Imperialism as a concept, as a category of political thought, is less an ending, than a tentative and highly paradoxical opening into a reconstitutive interrogation of the cultural text.

II

Consider the opening meditation of Willard — the assassin, the “errand boy sent by grocery clerks to collect the bill.” Willard is presented as the quintessence of alienation, and the opening to historical remembrance. The film originates in the devastation of estrangement; and it concludes with premonitions of redemption. In Willard there is the chaos of the great forgetting, of the person in history without History: “I hardly said a word to my wife until I said yes to a divorce.” Willard has abandoned the World, and in this abandonment is the despair of a dying man’s convulsions. He does not speak; he is without public utterance. His task, his mission, is that of the disembodied interlocutor; speech is divorced from biology, from the historical situation. The motif: Willard arches with the pain of an unbearable memory; he shatters the image of himself and in the dance of blood there surfaces the memory of the jungle, of Charlie, of the sounds of madness. Willard is immolated, evacuated of historical relations; he is, in bewilderment, prepared for his other, Kurtz. And Kurtz, the dialectical antinomy of Willard, the madness at the heart of enlightenment, the celebrant *and* negation of instrumental rationality — counter-points the overworld of reason, of Willard, of the Cartesian ego, of the life insurance company. Kurtz stands to Willard as his completion in negation — victim and assassin, memory and reality, nature and culture. Kurtz is emblematic of the confusion of the soul, of the ambiguity of the discipline of the *übermensch* become remorseful; he is the beginning and ending of madness. Willard will find his moment of redemption in the ceremonial sacrifice of the other, of Kurtz. And from the negation of the other, the taming of passion gone mad, there will emerge the beginning of redemption, of *Apocalypse Now*. “Almighty to Street-Gang”. “They will make me a major for this and I’m not even in their army anymore.” Kurtz’s first words to Willard, disembodied, filled with the confused echo of a lost land, of a lost soul: “I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor ... and survive. That was my dream, my nightmare.” Willard, the moment of meditation completed, is entrapped like Odysseus before the Sirens. The ‘I’ recognizes the return of the repressed; the assassin hears the tortured voice of one who has

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gone before. Kurtz, the celebrant of military vigour, has discovered the dark night, the de-censoring, of the soul; he stands now at the beginning of time, in the time of mythic utterance, far beyond the empty spatializations of modernity, of Capital. Kurtz's discovery of the abyss of moral terror, of the wasteland in "rat's valley" is more than the Corporation, Adorno's "barrack's" society will tolerate. The General remarks to Willard: "His methods are unsound; he has gone beyond the pale of any civilized action." And later, Willard in response to Kurtz will say: "I don't see any method at all." Willard is one with Conrad's Marlow in the judgment on the nihilism of the despairing soul. But Marlow sought solace in the official history of the inspiring lie; Willard is more courageous, he meets, in singularity, the *horror* of the moment of madness, of the terror of the uncensored spirit. Street-Gang disconnects from the "hovering horde" of Almighty.

Coppola is insightful. He understands that Vietnam, this act of machine bestiality, this chorus of "Death from Above", is also an allegory of the journey of the inhabitants of the modern into the suppressed region of moral indeterminacy. Vietnam, the faceless land, the *alter*, is the completion in negation of the radical impulses of western culture.

Vietnam was no aberration. The actuality of colonization, the subordination of the other, of the sacralization of Asia, is the axiomatic sign of the will to power: Vietnam, this spectral vision of Conrad's *nothingness* — the wild landscape which absorbs in anonymity and in silence, without the recognition of hostile response, the fire of patrolling warships; Vietnam, this radical experiment in the possibility of the domination of pure unreason; Vietnam, this promise and peril of the instrumentalism of technology, of the class of Nietzsche's *üntermensch*; Vietnam, the beginning in history of the journey of positive reason into the underworld of unreason, of the passion of no illumination, of the moral predicament which haunted the "best and the brightest" of the agents of instrumental rationality. *Apocalypse Now* begins with the actuality of the seamless horror of the universe of reason; and it moves through allegory and metaphor into the victimization of rationality, into the last flutterings of "dead souls" in immobility and passivity. We return to Plato's cave but this time in the guise of assassins become poets. Vietnam symbolizes the rupturing of the moral censor; the ambiguity and the chaos of modernity is reflected in savagery on the Asian shore.

Willard's journey, therefore, is one of self-interrogation, of autocritique. His mission, "to terminate with extreme prejudice," the command of Kurtz is a passageway in metaphor though the depth surrealism, the rational codifications, of his vacated identity. The Corporation, in embarrassment and in cabal with the colonized — the Vietnamese intelligence operative — considers that it has hired an assassin to 'sanction' Kurtz, that mimicry of itself. The irony remains that the assassin stands at the moment of the inception of his

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mission in the inferiority of mute admiration before the flight of his prey. Reason rests on a coming mutiny of corporate gunmen.

In the tradition of epic, of *The Divine Comedy*, of *Heart of Darkness*, the journey into the underworld of reason, into the beginning of time, is undertaken by river. The Nung River, the River of Styx, flows softly and inevitably to the City of Dis, the Capital of Hell. When Willard approaches the confrontation with Kurtz, he says in the voice of interrogation, in an echo of Conrad's Marlow: "It was as if the boat was being sucked up the river and the water back into the jungle." The journey by river, this confession by metaphor, is interrupted by stations on the way, by meditative 'circles,' each station a visual narrative, an etching, of the moment of the absurd; each a reflection on the alienation in solitude of the colonizer and colonized alike.

Willard's reading of Kurtz's dossier, this secret confession of the story of a soldier "who could have gone for general, but instead decided to go for himself" is matched rhythmically and ironically by stations on the Nung River: stations which build to an irreversible conclusion and which point without remorse to the memory, the future, of Kurtz. To the point of the Do Lung bridge, this vestibule of hell, filled with the cries of anguish of displaced souls, soldiers; there is a dialectical unity in the construction of the film. This dialectic, between event and recollection, between action and reflection, is mediated by Willard's reading of Kurtz's dossier. The film moves in a serial narrative between the exhibition of events external to the boat, the Erebus, and Willard's study of the traces of Kurtz's administrative history. The eclipse of the rational impulse of the method of civilization, is personified by Kurtz's movement beyond the control of the Corporation; and the historical incidents which symbolized the "moral stench" of civilized action are publicized by the layered sequence of stations upon stations. Before Willard meets Kurtz, he will abandon the official text to the river.

The stations of *Apocalypse Now* begin in the normal rationality of the alienation of the distanced spectator, and they terminate in a suffocating chaos. Even in the most oppressive and ironic of circumstances, there is the forced allusion to the rationality, the homeland, of the West. It is only gradually, and then with the decisiveness of death, that the inward journey of Willard abandons the illusion, the *masque*, of the homeland and confronts, on its own, the unpredictable terrain of the moment of unreason. Thus, the journey begins with the mediation of the absurd and the trivial, of the foreign and the familiar, and of leisure and domination. The implication is clear: the reason of instrumentalism is an empty celebration of the rites of formalism. It is not substantial in character. The rational impulse of civilization, this methodology of the domination of the happy consciousness, imposes upon the faceless landscape, upon the modern soul, a schematization of control which is open and unpredictable in its contents. The masters of instrumental reason, the

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colonizers of Capital, are themselves suborned by the grand riddle of domination. In the most grotesque of circumstances, they must protect themselves from the terror, the fear, of the faceless land by overwhelming its appearance with the illusions of the lost homeland. Thus, the curiosity of the cultural accoutrements of America, of the market-place of Capital, in the foreground of actual reports of war. And equally, however histrionic, the pathos of the representation by Kilgore and his subordinates in "Death from Above," of the myth of the frontier, of the mystique of the cavalry, now integrated with the pseudo-romanticism of the *Ride of the Valkyries*. In the early stages of the journey, in its moment of disaffected spectatorship, there is, as in the colonialism of affirmative culture, no meeting of master and bondsman, no explicit ontological union between the oppressor and the oppressed. Positive culture, revealed in its full bestiality by its 'second nature,' war, is a mediation of anonymous categories. The master moves in full consciousness of the theatricality of the gesture of war, of the significance of conceptual terrorism, the arrogance of publicity, in suppressing the moment of rebellion, of possibility, in his audience. In official hostility as spectacle, in the opening act of imposing a terroristic order upon the stranger, the anonymous landscape; the master moves seemingly oblivious to the threatening appearance of the opposition. The opposition, Kilgore's suppressed villagers, are negated in their identity — nullified by their forced appearance as victims on the stage of colonialism. Like extraterrestrial antagonists, Kilgore's ballet of helicopters descends at will upon the land, upon tradition. The helicopter, this symbol of the mediation of the categories of the absurd, of terrorism with leisure, is ordered in its motion by impulse, by opportunities for the inflation of the command ego. The village at the opening to the Nung River, the place of tradition, is but a passive instrument, a challenging means, for the struttings of the "nabobs" of the Corporation; for playing out at the childish level of taunts the oldest game of positive culture, the sado-masochism of the macho id. Willard notes: "Kilgore loved his men." And Kilgore says with sadness and incompleteness: "Some day this war is going to end...."

The political theme of domination as the "ever-identical of the repression," in consciousness of the presence of the other, is nowhere revealed more profoundly than in that spectacle of celebrity and degradation, the visitation of the trio of "Playmates" to the soldiers in the jungle station. There is, at first, the grotesque illusion of celebration: the unexpected arc of light with its ethereal figures which defies the natural rhythm of the Asian night. Hysteria is the theme of the spectacle; this is transportation beyond memory, beyond History. The dance sequence itself is emblematic in affirmative culture of the reduction of eroticism to a masturbatory sexuality. Celebrity performs in the titillating presence of the audience; the function of spectatorship is to give witness to the lure of sexual publicity: untouchable, taunting and perfect. Both

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parties, audience and celebrity, are imprisoned in a dialectic of degradation and incompleteness. The perfection of the act, of the spectacle, lies in the unattainability of the object of desire. Celebrity flees in the hysteria of unfulfilled desire; the promise of sexuality, of energy, once rekindled in memory, is left incomplete. And this intentionally. Surveying the devastation, the litter, of the stage in the bleak light of morning, Willard reminds himself: "Only the Americans could build a place like this in the middle of the jungle. Only the Americans would want to." Capital is de-historicized and de-territorialized.

In the concentration camp, in Vietnam, violence is the tongue of human discourse. The colonizer moves as a stranger, as the embodiment of the aggression of the alien, through the social and natural environment of the oppressed. And the colonizer, for all of his physical superiority, for all of his monopoly of access to technology, is swiftly terrorized; reduced to the silence of fear, to the inner trembling of present shock, by the totality of his solitude, by his isolation as an alien in the homeland of the other, of the dominated. Beyond the encampments of illusion, of the forced surroundings of the pseudo-gemeinschaft, there is the overwhelming threat of aggression in return by the uncontrolled landscape. The personnel of affirmative culture, in order to repress their terror of the possibility of dis-control, must overcome the ontology, the actuality, of the external environment of the dominated, or retreat to the pathetic security of the closed and familiar logic of the metaphor of the boat, of Erebus. In the world of positive culture, of Capital, this schism of oppressor and dispossessed, of aggressor and victim, is mediated only by the "hollowness" of violence, by the emptiness of negation *before* the encounter.

Thus, consider the terror of the Chef, the *saucier* from New Orleans, who repelled by artifice, by the denigration of craft knowledge in the mass productions of the Corporation, disembarks from the boat in an apparently innocuous quest for mangos, for nature. In a poignant scene which summarizes the unbearable strain which is the essence of the psychology of colonialism, the Chef is repulsed by the tiger, the symbol of the fury of the decultured, of the unknown. His vow, uttered in the incoherence of fear, never again "to get off the boat" is broken only twice thereafter: once, to make inevitable by the strain of his terror the massacre of the "boat people"; and, second, in a perfect act of retribution, to lose his head to Kurtz while guarding communications with Almighty.

The terror of the unknown, the emblematic sign of the colonizer reaches a crescendo at the Do Lung bridge. The station of the Do Lung is a visual reproduction of Dante's *Inferno*: dirge-like music, darkness illuminated only at random by explosions, the clamour of disembodied screams; this is an etching in code of the psychology of the wasteland of domination. In the night of the Do Lung, the colonizers huddle together in full knowledge of their unrealized dispensability. Without the comfort of illusion, they are a people, doomed

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survivors, without beginnings or endings; social instrumentalities in an act stripped even of the mystique of purpose, of the comforting lie of ideological justification. The Do Lung bridge, this division between space and time, between History and myth — this affirmation of the presence in futility of the colonizer serves only to be destroyed and rebuilt. Its Sisyphean symbolism is the perfect reproduction of the act of Capital, of the colonialism of Enlightenment. The fate of the soldiers is to be condemned to the limbo of the Do Lung; the aggressor is the victim of his own victory. The production of the bridge is the fatal drama which, given the inevitability of resistance and counter-resistance, ensnares both the master and oppressed in a nightmarish universe of conflict without end. In sum, the reification of the petty imperatives of the will to power — the ceaseless cycle of production and destruction of the bridge — is the abstraction which mediates the actuality of social relations. In the devastation of the *Inferno*, without hope of retreat from rule by abstraction and without possibility of action, the soldiers are reduced to sullenness, to the isolation of solipsistic music as their only connection to the world. Their aggression now is limited to the act of silencing the taunts of the dominated. In the end, the sign of rationality is the mystique of illusion. Willard asks, "Who is the CO?"; and the reply is: "I thought you were." And later, Roach, in awareness of rule by abstraction, answers only an enigmatic yes to Willard's question: "Do you know who is in command here?" In the night of the Do Lung, the command of the Corporation has dissolved; and what is left is the chaos, the confusion, and the bitterness of estrangement that could only issue from a rationalized culture of domination which is, in its moment of genesis, nihilistic. Coppola's vision of the *Inferno*, of the Do Lung bridge, is intended as an expression varying only in intensity but not in kind from the normal sense of life in the culture of modernity. Colonialism is the skin of instrumental reason; and the rationalization of reason is the basic impulse of social normality: the everyday *Inferno* of the West.

Before the station of the Do Lung, Willard had reflected on Kurtz's letter to his son: "The charges (against me) are unjustified. They are, in the circumstances, quite completely insane. Ruthlessness requires clarity; seeing what has to be done. I am beyond their timid, lying morality. I am beyond caring." And Willard had noted in the privacy of self-confession: "I didn't belong on this mission anymore. Kurtz was turning from a target into a goal. I had doubts." After the hellish spectacle of the Do Lung, Willard passes beyond the vacancy of demoralization, beyond the passivity of spectatorship; he assumes the active stance of the self-affirming individual, of command. Willard refuses the temptation of the Chief to halt the mission at that point: the Chief remains a representation of the logic of homeland; he is, through his command of the boat, entangled in the memory of the World. Willard senses the presence of Kurtz, of the time before homeland, of the possibility of discovering the

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foundations of the madness of reason. Willard, like Kurtz, could have remained in the false security of the Corporation; instead he decided to go for himself, for Kurtz.

Beyond the Do Lung, the journey of self-exploration that is the essence of *Apocalypse Now* moves with climactic certitude through the eloquent timing of a dream sequence. The logic of visual presentation, moves from didactic and explosive etchings into a prolonged reverie of myth, of the time of duration. Visibly, the architecture of the moving image is altered in its construction; the presence of haze, purple and yellow, signifies the shattering, the loss of old identities. And it is Lance, far removed from the necessities of memory, from the orthodoxy of History, who is the carrier of the haze. The journey into the beginning of time, into the irrationality at the heart of rationality, has begun in earnest. The historical traces of the culture of Enlightenment are abandoned in quick succession; the inhabitants of the boat are compelled to choose between History and possibility, between obeisance to the old logic of the master culture and the opportunity for the determination of self-knowledge, of self-recognition. The choice is fringed with the fatalism of inevitability. Clean, the sailor who Willard had already prophesized as having "one foot in the grave," dies in the retribution of an anonymous act of hostility; in the background is the equally anonymous and falsely intimate voice of his mother, in the circumstances, the sound of farce, of the unreality of the World.

Later, Phillips, the last link to the homeland, the final witness to the logic of the falsely real, will die, like the native steersman in Conrad, by the crudity of a spear. Phillips will have refused to enter into his future; to undertake the journey of self-interrogation. And thus, his hostility to, and fear of, the spectre of the unknown, of irrationality, will deny him entry into Kurtz's compound. Willard's premonition of the promise of Kurtz is confirmed: "Whatever was going to happen, it wasn't going to be the way they called it back in Na Trang." And, in a later soliloquy: "Part of me was afraid of what I would find. I knew the risks ... What I felt the most, more than fear, was the desire to confront him."

The transformation of the interrogative mood of Willard, from fear to anticipation, from bewilderment to self-determination, is matched by an abrupt transformation in the structure of the musical score of the movie. The harmonic structure of the background environment of sound is swiftly resolved into an almost wistful and severe ballad; in the *coda* of sound Coppola signals an inevitable and determinate resolution, a resolution *prior* to the encounter with Kurtz, in the thematic edifice of the journey into the heart of darkness. Homeland has been abandoned; the familiar terrain of the historicity of culture has been transcended in favour of interpellation with nature. In the symbolism of the dream-like navigation of the Erebus — navigation which passes silently, as in Conrad beyond the wreckage of technology — the journey into the inter-

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pretative centre of human madness only now begins. And in the unexpected serenity of the beginning, in Willard's meditation of peace, there is announced the conclusion, in redemption, in affirmation, of the film.

The reverie of the moment, of the arrival at Kurtz's compound, is broken by the raucous sounds of the harlequin: "It's alright. It's alright. It's all been approved." But what is approved is the inevitable denouement of Kurtz, the sacrifice in negation of the other, of Kurtz. The story is completed before the moment of its formal conclusion. Willard's goal, the synthesis of the rational and the irrational, the transvaluation of good and evil, has already been achieved before the moment of encounter. The desire for contemplative knowledge of the whole, for the mediation *and* transcendence of past and future was achieved by Willard in the act of anticipation, in the retrospective and prospective interrogation of the stations in the journey through the tempest of the modern. The suspense of the anticipation of Kurtz is magnificent illusion; an effective de-centering of the main protagonist of the movie, Willard. In Kurtz, Coppola presents, even records, the substantial and failed presence of that other polarity of the modern era, the moral impulse which in losing the arrogance of the right to historical judgment also abandons itself to the terror of all judgment. Kurtz is the man before the mast; the being who has passed beyond the false domain of ideology into existential knowledge of the moment of the *horror* — the impossibility of acting with the past certitude of reason and the necessity of judging stripped of the mask of History. The confrontation of Kurtz and Willard is purposely anti-climatic; this is the completion of an inevitable negation and synthesis, not the beginning of knowledge. In the act of anticipation, Willard has already become Kurtz's saviour as assassin; the image of Buddha is but a premonition of redemption.

The mediation of Kurtz and Willard, of radical doubt and the agony of the godhead, takes place in the mob society of the compound. Willard observes: "Everything that I saw told me that he had gone insane... It smelled like slow death in there ... malaria, nightmares." In their first, forced confrontation, Willard confesses to Kurtz: "They told me you had gone totally insane ... and that your methods are unsound ... [but] I don't see *any* method at all."

But Willard is mistaken. There is method; the method of purification, of purging the last traces of the historical memory of reason. In rapid and chaotic sequence, there occurs the decapitation of the Chef, the disconnection of Willard from communication with Almighty, his imprisonment and instruction by the harlequin, by the sonorous notes of Eliot's "The Hollow Men." Surfacing from the dream, the nightmare, of purification, Willard says of Kurtz: "He broke from them ... and then he broke from himself." And then, in the eloquence of sympathy, "I have never seen a man so broken up."

The solitude of Kurtz, his utter imprisonment in the non-being of savagery, symbolizes the abandonment of History, of homeland. His direct

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experience, beyond the protective artifice of the Corporation, of the ambiguity of good and evil, of the inevitable symmetry of reason and unreason, of the rationality of the moment of the mad, secures for him the fate of life with no illusions, of existence with no false certitudes. Kurtz, the wanderer in the depths of the *Inferno*, suffers the curious agony of acting without justification; of aspiring, in the absence of a serial narrative of good and evil, to the absolutism of the godhead. But his, unlike Enlightenment, is absolutism without the saving grace of faith. And in opposition to the Corporation, it is godhead without method. Kurtz has passed beyond the "ruminations" of history; he is the being in radical flight from memory. And his flight, his passage into the durational time of myth, of the "jungle", is the beginning and ending of the self-reflection of affirmative culture. His is the *ratio* in madness, the imminent negation, which constitutes the furthest positive limit, the horizon, of the world of instrumental reason, of the sphere of the abstractions of administrative rationality.

In melancholia, in the passion of resignation, Kurtz says to Willard: "You have a right to kill me. But you have no right to judge me... It is judgment that defeats us." Judgment, the substitution of cultural orthodoxy for self-knowledge, the moral repression of the relativity of the good, is the political faculty which subverts the critical self-consciousness of the colonizer. But then, at the "heart of darkness" of positive culture is the inescapable secret, the mystery of ontology, that the artifice, the method, of the West is but a manifestation of a more general flight from the life of moral indeterminacy, from the mediation of will and truth. Beyond artifice, beyond method, Kurtz has yielded to the primal, the autochthonous, of the modern era; he has subordinated the category of judgment, of reason, to the category of the pure act of will. And his movement beyond the Corporation, beyond self-identity, began with the "illumination" of the will of the dominated. His narration of the "genius, the will ... pure, complete, crystalline" of the colonized leads to the inevitable conclusion: "Horror has a face and you must make a friend of it and (of) terror ... they are friends ... or enemies to be feared." And this, the confession of Kurtz, then concludes with the fateful misunderstanding of the experience of the modern, of the possibility and impossibility of the mediation of colonialism: "We need men who are moral and who have a primordial instinct to kill, without failing, without passion, without judgment." But Kurtz, this most profound expression of the logic of the Corporation, knows that the union of truth and will, the primal, is accessible only to the dominated: "They were stronger than we were ... they fought with their hearts; they were filled with love."

And so, Kurtz's journey — a journey beyond method, beyond self, a journey into the mystery of the moralized will — terminates in the fatigue of incompleteness. Kurtz has taken the self-confession of Enlightenment, of positive

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culture, to its most elegant and pathetic moment of expression: a moment of expression which is as poignant in its melancholy simplicity as it is functional in its presentation. In the end, the vision of the *horror*, of moral terror, of that knowledge and will which is necessary for the recovery of affirmative culture is blocked from re-entry into History, into the sphere of judgment. Kurtz is condemned, by the Corporation *and* by the dominated, to the wasteland of knowledge without possibility of actualization, of self-confession without expiation. His is the fate of existing in the limbo, the void, between nature and culture, between reason and passion, between praxis and immobility. Kurtz, this alien in the Asian homeland, this symbol of the bittersweetness of moral self-knowledge, cannot go forward into nature, into the social landscape of the colonized; and he cannot return to the universe of method. His is the exile, the pathetic godhead, of the self-victimization of positive reason. In a last plea, Kurtz asks of History, of judgment, only remembrance by his son and the opportunity to die a soldier.

Willard responds to desperation: the assassin is, in the end, the agent, if not of redemption, then of understanding the terrible solitude, the non-being, of one who in achieving self-consciousness of the limits of reason is abandoned to the imperatives of History. The Corporation wills the extinction of Kurtz, this radical memory in advance of the denigration of its most moral impulse into the paralysis of despair. And the jungle, the "other" of the colonized, wills the death of Kurtz: the union of will and truth can, in the end, not transcend the anonymous categories of oppression. Willard speaks: "Everybody wanted me to do it; him most of all ... he was waiting for me to take the pain away. Even the jungle wanted him dead and that's who he took his orders from anyway." In a final gesture to the presence of *alter*, of nature, Willard immerses himself in the water of the Nung River; in baptism, he is prepared as the agent, not of murder, but of sacrifice.

III

Like its object of representation, the failed colonization of Asia, *Apocalypse Now* contains only the most enigmatic and indecisive of conclusions. Kurtz, symbolic of the dissipation of the will to the militarization of existence, is dead; but the social apparatus of the Corporation, of Almighty, remains in place. The institutions of History, the social organization of bestiality, endure beyond the will to life of its occupants, beyond the demoralization of failed ambitions to human domination. Hegemony is the property only of the mediations of the abstract, of the rules of motion of the *forms* of social oppression. And Willard, symbolic of critical self-consciousness, of self-determination, survives in such a way as to achieve moral preeminence; to rise to the actual command of Erebus. But his survival is without historical possibility; it is emblematic of reason

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negated before its moment of public utterance. In the end, Willard is the carrier of the manuscript — the ambiguous legacy of Kurtz; and he is the protective guide of Lance that figure who, in simplicity, oscillates without reflection between complete immersion in the cultures of America and Asia. Willard, the moment of sacrifice completed, drops the sword; and he refuses the godhead of the mob. But he is transported beyond the Inner Station, beyond the City of Dis, in the command of Erebus. In the end as in the beginning, Willard is trapped within the role of the narrator of memory; in an endless cycle of self-confession, of remorse in the remembrance of the encounter.

Thus, the end is in the beginning; and the beginning is one of torment without hope, of desire without satiation, of memory without forgiveness. Willard, this embodiment of the radical futility of self-confession, of reason in History, represents in the moment of the unveiling and termination of this journey in self-confession to the Inner Station, the despair of the story-teller who is condemned to repeat in speech, but never in activity, the memory of a better, yet unrealized, historical possibility. And thus, beyond the inevitable historical regress, beyond the public experience of a failed colonialism, there occurs on the part, not only of Willard, but of the citizens of the centre polis, as narrators, the bitter curiosity of redemption without hope, of critical self-reflection without exit into History. *Apocalypse Now* reflects, in its cinematic reproduction of social estrangement and self-confession, in the cycle of the ever-repeatable memory of Willard, the one, determinate instruction of the colonization of Vietnam: this was an imperialism, an arrogance of empire, that even for the most moral and savage of its perpetrators produced only the indwelling of reflection without any object of historical representation. In the image of *Apocalypse Now*, the self-confession of Vietnam, the loss of faith in the will to believe, continue in the quiet and desperate turbulence of the political memory of the colonizer. The people of the agent of colonialism are trapped in the ambiguity of that classical polarity of forgetfulness and shame: the *philosophical* falsehood represented by the erasure of the memory of failed aspirations on the part of the imperial apparatus; and the *historical* falsehood represented by the bitterness of self-interrogation without social response on the part of its survivors. Between amnesia and confession, between will and reason, beyond demoralized power and the futility of broken faith, that is the lesson of the twilight of Enlightenment, of Vietnam as the *fin de siècle* of Western ambitions, of the cinematic *oeuvre* of *Apocalypse Now*. Ultimately, in the moving image and in the historical event, the Capital of Hell is dislodged from its place in geography, in actual violence, and it is reconstructed in the darkness, in the almost nihilistic despair, of the broken faith of the colonizer. Vietnam today, as is intimated in *Apocalypse Now*, is the symbolic embodiment in the metaphysics of Western public life, of bad conscience, of an

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undeniable fracturing of the solipsisms of official history from private recognition of the almost inevitable decline of Western civilization, of Capital. Redemption without hope and without illusion is the only remaining *coda* of the City of Dis.

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