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# Male Bonding, Hollywood Orientalism, and the Repression of the Feminine in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*

Nature was miraculously skilful in concocting excuses, he thought, with a heavy, theatrical contempt. It could deck a hideous creature in enticing apparel.

When he saw how she, as a woman beckons, had cozened him out of his home and hoodwinked him into holding a rifle, he went into a rage.

He turned in tupenny fury upon the high, tranquil sky. He would have like to have splashed it with a derisive paint.

And he was bitter that among all men, he should be the only one sufficiently wise to understand these things.

—STEPHEN CRANE, *The Red Badge of Courage*

**CHAPTER 11** *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) was marketed as a traditional war film, basking in the reflected glow of Kubrick's ambiguous reputation as an eccentric genius. Like most war movies, this film is, at least superficially, unconcerned with the representation of women. However, in the Warner Brothers press kit, the reviewer David Denby articulates a return of the issue of femininity repressed from the film's manifest content.[1]

> The first law of moviegoing happiness in the eighties is this: *Anticipate nothing*. Because if you dream about an important upcoming movie, if you expect it to save your life or even the movie season, the picture will turn out to be *Dune* or *The Mosquito Coast* or *The Mission*. Burned, you'll feel like the high school nerd who gets his hands on the class cheerleader only to discover she's wearing falsies. Which serves you right for caring so much about boobs, you boob.[2]

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There is here a curious coincidence between Denby's critical approach and the male fantasies both made available by and powerfully critiqued by this film text—as I hope to begin to make clear in what follows. And yet this passage from Denby's review also, despite itself, echoes a deep suspicion toward the film medium that is one of the most profound meditations carried out by this film: you cannot any longer use film as a simple facilitator of fantasy, especially fantasies about women. If you do, you will get burned. A detail from *Full Metal Jacket*: in one of the many "metacinematic" moments in the film, a Vietnamese whore is taken for sex into a gutted movie theater that is advertising a Vietnamese feature as well as a rerun of *The Lone Ranger* (1956).

Like *2001* (1968) and *Barry Lyndon* (1975), Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* divides into two distinct parts, punctuated (in the latter film) by a fade to black and a drastic change of location: from the Parris Island boot camp that is the setting of the first half of the film, to Da Nang and then Hue City during the 1968 Tet offensive. Both parts feature a timeworn combat-film formula—the adaptation of the individual to the demands of a ritualistic male group.[3] In both cases that adaptation fails spectacularly, though for radically different reasons. In the first instance this failure stems from what is termed, *pace 2001*'s Hal computer, a "major malfunction" in the brain of Private Leonard Lawrence (Vincent D'Onofrio), otherwise known as Private Pyle (as in "Gomer Pyle, U.S. Marine Corps"), who becomes a suicidal maniac at the end of his humiliating boot-camp experience. The second failure of adaptation concerns the film's protagonist, ironically named Private Joker (Matthew Modine) by the foulmouthed Sergeant Hartman (Lee Ermey) because of his imitation of John Wayne. This reference to John Wayne is hardly a casual one in a movie set during the days when *The Green Berets* (1968) was a gung ho promotion for the U.S. Army.[4] Clearly, Joker is easily influenced by the movies, despite his semblance of being a freethinker. At the end of the film Joker is marching into the reddened Vietnamese night, speaking in voice-over of his "homecoming fuck fantasies" and joining in as the troops sing the "Mickey Mouse" theme song after a full day in the urban trenches.[5] Joker is

lost in the masses of men marching against a backdrop of burning ruins, whose towering shapes call to mind the McGuffin of Kubrick's *2001* (a film released in 1968)—the monolith from outer space was there the emblem or figure of a peculiarly human enigma that might be expressed by means of one haunting question: What is human violence? Are we, as Joker's helmet claims, "Born to Kill"?

In this final scene, as he sings along with the gang, Joker has accommodated himself to the group, all right. But Kubrick seems to be implying that the "major malfunction" is no longer—or perhaps never was—an individual one. The men, renamed, repackaged, and, as the sergeant puts it in boot camp, "born again hard," now move as one, as devoid of what we ordinarily call human response as are the bullets encased in the "full metal jackets" that give the film its title. Even Hal singing "Daisy" at the moment of his greatest verbal regression was more human. One could go even further and say that Kubrick in that film as in this one is breaking down any simple binary opposition between the technological and the human, showing rather how man has produced himself as inextricably technologized and violent.[6] And this production of man is, at least in *Full Metal Jacket*, as concerned with gender as it is with species. Having passed through the unholy waters of masculinization—the construction of a masculine identity—where anything infantile, female, or homoerotic is expelled with horror, Joker now finds himself deep in a "world of shit" (one of the catchphrases of the film) joining in a celebration of mass infantilism and reveling in Technicolor fantasies about "Mary Jane Rottencrotch's" breasts. Such are the contradictions of masculinity.[7]

The violent rejection of the female, of the racially "other," and of anything reminiscent of infantile susceptibility to maternal mastery is spelled out in the scapegoating scenes that structure this film. From his first encounters with Sergeant Hartman, the woefully inept Private Lawrence fails to measure up to the standards of male behavior as gauged by the bodily disposition required of a marine. Overweight and incompetent, he is verbally abused as a "disgusting fat body" and linked by the sergeant through his name to that Middle Eastern "faggot," Lawrence of Arabia.



HARTMAN: "What's your name, fat body?"
PRIVATE: "Sir, Leonard Lawrence, sir!"
HARTMAN: "Lawrence? Lawrence what? of Arabia?"
PRIVATE: "Sir, no sir!"
HARTMAN: "That name sounds like royalty. Are you royalty?"
PRIVATE: "Sir, no sir!"
HARTMAN: "Do you suck dicks?"
PRIVATE: "Sir, no sir!"
HARTMAN: "Bullshit. I'll bet you could suck a golf ball through a garden hose. I don't like the name Lawrence. Only faggots and sailors are called Lawrence. From now on you're Gomer Pyle."

Although the other men (specifically Cowboy—Arliss Howard) are also abused as "queers and steers," Pyle's limpid demand for love from Joker, his masochistic enjoyment of the first harsh words from the sergeant, reflect his unique inability, in this group, to shake the menace of the unmasculine.

The name Gomer Pyle is, of course, another timely detail in this film narrative: the television show of the same name was at the height of its popularity in 1968.[8] It featured the antics of the incompetent but lovable Private Gomer Pyle, played by the actor Jim Nabors (whose alleged homosexuality was a topic of pervasive rumor during that period), forever consigned to boot camp under the irascible eye of his drill instructor, Sergeant Carter. One of the subtly disturbing elements of *Full Metal Jacket* is its rewriting of canonical cultural texts such as this television program: here we are forced to acknowledge both the pathological nature of the private's ineptitude and the repressed homoerotic desire that serves to shape these men in the image of the lackeys of the "beloved Corps." (One might note, in this context, the scatological connotation of the name "Pyle.")[9] In the television show, Pyle's bumbling continually arouses the infuriated though distinctly maternal, even loving ministrations of Sergeant Carter, who, to be sure, keeps the proper male perspective through his relationship to his hyperfeminine girlfriend, Bunny. In both the

film and the television program, to be part of the Body (the Corps) one must shape oneself in its image. One's body must not be disgustingly or alluringly "other." The Corps is both mother and father, functioning according to group dynamics that fall distinctly within the Imaginary order as Lacan describes it, with the consequent aggression directed toward the body itself insofar as it is the threateningly powerful maternal body; this aggression is directed only secondarily against the enemy. The men are also, we have seen, *renamed* by the sergeant, who here and elsewhere obviously exercises the prerogative of bringing the men under the sway of the group superego that stands in for the Lacanian Symbolic function. At every juncture, however, the line between male bonding and the baldly homoerotic is a fine one. As the drill sergeant puts it in his Christmas speech, "God has a hard-on for Marines."

The film's Private Pyle is finally put under the charge of Private Joker, who is to instruct him in all the practices of soldiering, which Joker does both reluctantly and tenderly. At first this task is carried out with some success. In a series of standard boot-camp scenes (some of which, like the shoe-tying episode, are also to be found in Coppola's *Gardens of Stone* (1987)—the failure of the latter film can be gauged in part by its leaden use of this and other stock scenes), Pyle is shown making slow but steady progress. Then, in one of the many stylistically astounding barracks inspection scenes, Pyle commits an error that he will never live down—he is caught with a jelly doughnut concealed in his footlocker. Hartman declares that from now on the entire group will suffer for Pyle's mistakes and has the men do push-ups while Pyle eats the doughnut. Later, Pyle is made to suck his thumb (for the second time in the film) while the other men do "squat-thrusts and side-straddle hops"[10] as penance for their association with this now marginalized baby. The interdependency of group and individual—which, according to the World War II film formula outlined by Robert Ray, must always be shown to be a *resolvable* opposition—is brought into stark relief, then finally dissolved at the end of the film as Joker melts into the now irrevocably infantilized group. In this film Kubrick has it both ways: he fulfills combat-film formulas as he rewrites them.



Both major segments of *Full Metal Jacket* are marked by what we might term, following Girard, the "violent unanimity" of the group against the individual.[11] In the marine boot camp the event occurs as follows: on an eerily blue moonlit night, Pyle is held down and gagged while each man takes a blow at his body with a bar of soap wrapped in a towel. Joker at first holds back, does not want to hit this boy he has nurtured, but, in the first moment of his moral collapse, he finally joins in and delivers six particularly vicious blows. Pyle is himself transformed into a monster by this victimization. It is only when he is clearly insane that Pyle begins to "fit in" to the Corps (this is one of the film's more obvious messages): soon after this scene he develops into a crack rifleman. Having been inculcated with the ethos of the assassin by Hartman, who "jokingly" offers as models to the men the former marine riflemen Lee Harvey Oswald and Charles Whitman, Pyle later turns his rifle on himself and the sergeant in the barracks head. "I *am* in a world of shit," Pyle declares to Joker, who tries to talk him down with a warning. Although he has at this point graduated from boot camp, Pyle cannot leave behind the confusing miasma of his own infantilism, the blood and violence and desire for male love (the toilet on which he kills himself, like his name, might be seen as a sign of his fixation on the anal) that form the infrastructure of the Marine Corps but must be externalized onto women and the enemy. So Joker spends the rest of the film seeking to externalize this action—to take it out of the men's head, so to speak.[12] For example, the "properly" adapting apprentice marine uses the head in this way: In the very same restroom where Pyle dies on a toilet with his brains blown out, Joker and his buddy Cowboy had exchanged the first in a series of ritual insults of the women in their families—Joker to Cowboy: "I wanna slip my tubesteak in your sister. What'll you take in trade?" Cowboy: "What d'ya got?" The "head" is a place where male control of "tubesteaks" and the consequent devaluation of the women available for barter is paramount. In this woman-rejecting and expelling process, there are no more taboos: even though the sergeant at one point attempts to force Joker to acknowledge the sacredness of the Virgin Mary, this ritualistic invocation of the name

of the Mother of God only anticipates the discovery that there is no "elsewhere," no place where the good mother still prevails unassailable in her purity. One could scarcely imagine, in the diegetic world of *Full Metal Jacket*, the existence of a character like the grandmother (unproblematically) addressed by the protagonist of *Platoon* (1986) in his letters home.

Although Joker is a witness to Pyle's act of suicidal homoeroticism—Pyle has, in effect, offered his body to the drill sergeant—he goes off apparently unscathed to Da Nang as a reporter for *Stars and Stripes*, the newspaper of the armed forces. Ordered up-country for smarting off during an editorial meeting after the Tet offensive, Joker and his overly eager buddy Rafterman (Kevyn Major Howard) join up with Cowboy's combat unit in the days following the Tet offensive. The film's second scene of what I am calling "violent unanimity" against the "other" is foreshadowed by an earlier event, where a prostitute (Leanne Hong) poses and talks dirty for Joker and his buddy. Her swaying progress across the screen is the first action of the second half of the film and is accompanied by the theme song of country-western feminism, "These Boots Are Made for Walkin", a sassy woman's song about taking control of her life (by stomping on a man). Suddenly, in one of Joker's only direct encounters with a living male Vietnamese, a young man (Nguyen Hue Phong) grabs Rafterman's camera, going through some karate moves obviously derived (anachronistically) from Bruce Lee films in a kind of mimeticism of Asian masculinity—moves that are amiably imitated by Joker.[13] This admiration for the Vietnamese warrior is borne out in another scene in the film, when Joker encounters a dead North Vietnamese (Duc Hu Ta) who is the "mascot" of the unit he joins. The dead man's American buddy praises the North Vietnamese Army, the gooks who are a worthy enemy, like "slant-eyed drill instructors"—not like the ungrateful South Vietnamese who bring them whores and hide bombs in babies' diapers. If this were a world of men, of drill instructors, slant-eyed or otherwise, the warrior ideal could prevail.[14] It is the South Vietnamese, not the NVA, who are associated with a degraded femininity.

Later in the film, another prostitute is brought before the men of



the unit by a South Vietnamese Army pimp. The woman agrees to have sex with all the men for $5 each after some complicated negotiations, including an argument about the size of black men's penises, in which it is concluded, reassuringly, that black men's penises are *not* larger than white men's. Here the sexual threat posed by the racial "otherness" of Eightball (Dorian Harewood), the "nigger behind the trigger," as he puts it, is recuperated; so, too, is he recuperated in his "otherness" by belonging to the Corps, although the potential threat he offers is never far from the surface of the narrative. The scene of a group of men and a single woman ends "humorously," with "Animal Mother," the quintessence of man-as-fighting-machine, taking first honors with the whore, displacing the black soldier.

Animal Mother (Adam Baldwin) is an arresting character. With a helmet that reads "I AM BECOME DEATH," he seems to be the reincarnation of Pyle in the form of a fighting man, as though that repository of infantile or animal instincts could not be entirely repressed, but may in fact be necessary for the group's survival, even as walking dead.[15] A crack shot, as was Pyle, Animal Mother looks like a "hard" version of the dead recruit. And his name is an index of that never quite completely expelled "maternal" force that seems to haunt the film: Animal Mother is the fighting man (a particularly ruthless one) who must wear the banner of the fertile female principle if he is not to be subsumed by it. Pyle, who wanted to be mothered, is now a mother himself. We could, once again, invoke the notion of a return of repressed ideas, or, in a slightly more deconstructive mode, note how the dominant term in the binary pairs set up by the film (in this case "adult-infant" and "mother-son") depends upon the logic of the repressed term.

The climax of the film takes place when the men of the unit suffer horrifying casualties from the assault of an unseen sniper, located, like the former marine crack shots Oswald and Whitman, in a building somewhere above the victims. These not-quite-dead victims squirm in the dust, their screams tormenting their fellow marines. Here at last is the true test of war: enraged by the violent loss of Cowboy, Joker tries to become a real warrior. He makes his

way into the sniper's building—only to find that "he" is a young, austerely dressed Vietcong woman.[16] Joker is paralyzed when he sees her: when he recovers, his rifle jams, then he fumbles the pistol he had drawn for his defense. Leaping into the breach, Rafterman blazes away with his M16, felling but not killing her. There ensues a strange dialogue between the men, who stand over the woman's body as though this were a gang rape, as they had stood over Pyle when they hit him, as they had stood over their dead comrades, and as they had figuratively surrounded the $5 whore. They are clearly confused by this woman who embodies both the repulsive and castrating "otherness" of womanhood and the ephemeral virginal/warrior ideal (she is praying—or at least the men think she is—and they are curiously restrained in their treatment of her). Animal wants to leave her to rot, but in an act of "mercy" Joker puts her out of her misery. "Hard core, man," comment his fellow marines.

In point of fact, the symmetry with the earlier scenes indicates to us that Joker has inexorably succumbed to what Girard might term the machine-logic of victimization, if indeed Joker's status as outsider in conflict with the group, as he who raised the question of "man's duality," was ever genuine. He lifts his hand against the woman as he had against Pyle, as had the human ape against his fellow ape in *2001*. Caught in a double bind, Joker can perform an act of mercy only as a gesture of scapegoating, one for which he must now take personal responsibility. Social unanimity involves violence against the "other": in a capitalist-imperialist society that "other" is a third-world Communist; under patriarchy it is a woman. While the woman is obviously not the only "victim" Kubrick portrays (indeed the women in these films are often complicitous with the powers of oppression), his films almost always show that Western social structures are based on ejection of and contempt for female sexuality. This contempt is curiously coupled with a pervasive desire for regression to the womb, as the last scene of the film (where the men sing "Mickey Mouse"—Hollywood as matrix) seems to indicate. In *Full Metal Jacket* we see the production of man—the storm troopers of America at the apogee, perhaps the final moment, of its imperial power—as a killing machine, whose violence finds



its model in that inflicted on women. This is not a film that specifically represents the struggle of the Vietnamese people: it is a film about the construction of the racist woman-haters who walk, as Animal Mother puts it, "like Jolly Green Giants with guns" across the face of the earth. Woman is troped, in this and other films by Kubrick, as the "Virgin Mary," whose name is invoked in all seriousness by the drill sergeant, and simultaneously as the cloacal shit from which the fighting men are trying to emerge so that they can become "real" men. Clearly, the woman-sewer or woman-fosterer-of-regression must be destroyed, but we have seen that, to their confusion, the men find that in doing so they have also destroyed both the virgin-mother and the warrior ideal that silently pervade the film's ideological structure.

In *Male Fantasies,* his book on the formation of the protofascist "soldier male" in Germany after World War I, Klaus Theweleit describes the Freikorps soldier's fear of the terrifying Communist riflewoman. These riflewomen were perceived as being endowed with a fearful instrument of castration: "The men experience communism as a *direct* assault on their *genitals*," according to Theweleit.[17] Thor Goote, a fascist author whose works Theweleit closely examines, describes a battle in the Baltic, where rumors were rife of armed Red Army women on the warpath after men.

> [T]he worst thing is not to die from a head wound, as this boy has just done; it is far worse to be captured by this bestial enemy, to suffer the most drawn-out, bitter and tortured death imaginable at the hands of sadistically grinning rifle women.
>
> [T]he dead continued to scream, though they were already cold. They will scream into eternity, those twelve savaged men of the Iron Legion, each drenched in black blood between hips and thighs, each with that terrible wound with which the bestial foe has desecrated defenseless, wounded men.[18]

So, too, in *Full Metal Jacket,* does the sniper woman lure the men one by one to their bloody doom, set in opposition to the clean "head

wound." Of course, Kubrick is both alluding to and undermining this image of the sadistic riflewoman by surrounding us with conflicting images about her. Theweleit continues: "The sexuality of the proletarian woman/gun slinging whore/communist is out to castrate and shred men to pieces. It seems to be her imaginary penis [whose visible representation is the rifle] that grants her the hideous power to do so."[19] The female phallus is, in *Full Metal Jacket*, fully feminine: Hartman orders his men to name their rifles after women (Pyle's is "Charlene") and to sleep with them each night.

The castrating riflewoman is menacing not only because of her phallic attribute but in some cases because of "something else, too," as Theweleit puts it—that something being racial or ethnic "otherness."

> SALOMÉ, RUTH, ESTHER: she stands there, a half-flight above him. Tight, tucked in shirt; left hand planted on her hip; right hand brandishing a pistol. The woman who enticed them to come up, with her shouting and crying.[20]

The beautiful, castrating Jewess is like her silent Vietnamese counterpart; both stand above the men, armed and dangerous.

Kubrick's representation of the enemy woman is, as I have indicated, a complex one. The Vietcong sniper, allied with the North Vietnamese, presents a sharp contrast to the whores of capitalism, as though Kubrick wanted us to make no mistake about the conditions of women under the two social systems in operation in Vietnam. The liberal Kubrick (one could also argue for a "radical" and for a "libertarian" Kubrick) makes sure that we get the opposite message to that given by the Freikorps officers who confront the Communist whores. And yet Kubrick's sniper is a Communist riflewoman who mutilates the men squirming on the ground beneath her. Joker has reached both a moral impasse and the point where it is no longer possible to conquer the woman, even through gang rape or execution. And having this woman of iron beg for death is no relief, either. The idealized virginal woman and the destructive Communist whore cannot finally be separated.

*Full Metal Jacket* is not Kubrick's first antiwar film. In 1953



Kubrick directed *Fear and Desire*, an abstract meditation on certain existential issues of war.[21] *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) is, of course, a black comedy about nuclear annihilation. The (seemingly) more traditionally humanistic 1957 antiwar film, *Paths of Glory*, is structured, like *Full Metal Jacket*, on the scapegoating of individuals within a military context. And in the former film, as in each of Kubrick's films dealing with war, women play a significant, if liminal, role.

In *Paths of Glory*, Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas) defends his men against charges of cowardice in the face of the enemy, brought by the lunatic "bad" father figure General Mireau.[22] Mireau's paranoia and lack of conviction in his leadership lead him to irrational behavior, for which he himself is finally cynically weeded out of the French Army at the end of the film. As in *Full Metal Jacket*, the men are propelled in forward motion toward a deadly objective—in this case they must conquer "the Anthill," a name indicating the dehumanizing effect of the forced assault. They fail in their attempt and then are psychologically tortured by their commandant, who arbitrarily executes three of their comrades. At the end of the film we find the remaining soldiers seated in a tavern watching an enemy woman (in this case a German) perform on stage. Their lewd catcalls quickly turn to tears as the woman sings a touching ballad instead of the torch song they had expected. This victimized "enemy" woman is in fact doubly the object of a spectacle, since Dax is outside watching his men watch her, paternally or paternalistically concerned with the nature of their response to her. But unlike *Full Metal Jacket*'s men, *these* men are able to make the moment of scapegoating itself into one of community, sharing this sad song with the woman as they would a lullaby, accepting her mastery of a language they may not understand. The men in *Paths of Glory* remain "human" because they can accept their own infantilism without violently punishing the woman who makes them aware of their helplessness. (One of the lyrics in the German song is "Please, Mother, bring a light.")

Earlier in *Paths of Glory*, Mireau had struck a man, a victim of shell shock who was acting like a "baby." Mireau cannot bear to see

his own fear reflected in the outside world. Obviously we are not to take him for the hero he believes himself to be. Still, in this film Kubrick seems to posit, though ironically, that "real men"—neither babies nor afraid of babies—might exist, and he offers Dax as a stand-in for that possibility. Mireau had earlier declared the Anthill "pregnable." Dax replies—"It sounds odd, like something to do with giving birth." Real men can look without fear into the abyss of female sexuality and reproduction—and still respect the purity of women. Such is the doublethink of old-time gallantry. However, even in this early film, what it means to be a man, to be human, to be a spectator are never simple givens, but are, as I have indicated, continually problematized. While Dax's men seem to accept their own infantilism without violently punishing the woman who brings it to their attention, they can only express their "humanity" in response to a markedly maudlin spectacle. We in turn must question our spectatorial relationship to Kubrick's close-ups of the tears on Dax's men's faces: the meaning of the sympathetic response as evoked by cinema is cast into doubt in the earlier as in the later film, though the political situations represented by the films are radically unlike.

In the title of this chapter I allude to a phenomenon that I have termed "Hollywood Orientalism." By this qualification of the notion of Orientalism, I mean to indicate that I do not wish to invoke the entire history of Western dealings with that heterogeneous "other" that it has called "the Orient," but simply to contextualize the representation of women in *Full Metal Jacket* by pointing to a tendency in *film noir* and in films about Vietnam (to name only two genres) to conflate various Eastern cultures with corrupt sexuality, a degraded or treacherous femininity, and male homoeroticism.[23] I will now take advantage of a textual cue in *Full Metal Jacket* to turn briefly to a late-colonial Orientalist text where a masochistic and homoerotic "turning in on oneself" is presented in the guise of a glorious form of male bonding among Arab men.[24] Lawrence of Arabia, who, as we have seen, is specifically named in Kubrick's film, is one well-known colonialist man who acted out the fantasy of "going native" (in this case, in the Middle East) in explicitly masochistic and homosexual terms.[25] T. E. Lawrence's works bring to the surface the deepest fears (and desires) of white colonialist and postcolonialist men everywhere.[26] As Rana Kabani has written, "Lawrence's 'heroic' epic begins with a passage that seems at odds with the lofty title [*Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*]. It describes the homosexual relations that Lawrence claimed took place all around him in the desert."[27]



> Friends quivering together in the yielding sand with intimate hot limbs in supreme embrace, found there hidden in the darkness a sensual co-efficient of the mental passion which was welding our souls and spirits in one flaming effort. Several, thirsting to punish appetites they could not wholly prevent, took a savage pride in degrading the body, and offered themselves fiercely in any habit which promised physical pain.[28]

Kabbani suggests that this "unlikely description of quivering bedouins" may represent "Lawrence's subconscious portrayal of his own desires." In projecting such a lurid fantasy about Oriental male relationships, Lawrence seems to be attempting to do his Eastern brothers one better, exaggerating the homosociality/homoeroticism of Arab men to suit his fancy. One is reminded of Colonel Kurtz, in *Apocalypse Now*, whose reinterpretation of Asian customs is inscribed in violent rather than in explicitly erotic terms.

The view of the Middle and Far East discernible in *Full Metal Jacket* echoes the Hollywood Orientalist ideology at work in a number of films from the 1940s through the 1980s, where certain issues of gender, race, and war are covertly or overtly addressed. I will concentrate here on the films where the Far East, rather than the Middle East, is the geographical area indirectly or directly under scrutiny.[29] In many of the films in this rather inchoate category, there is a bizarre coincidence of *gesture* that caught my attention. The gesture is one of annihilation, and seems to be strongly overdetermined, an intertextual allusion that expresses the Western man's externalization and vicarious destruction of his own fears and desires.

*Film noir* has offered a rich field for the observation of sexual role playing to theorists of gender. And, as is well known, *film noir* has its own historical tie to World War II. Howard Hawks's *Big Sleep* was, for example, made at the end of World War II; indeed, it was previewed by men overseas on the front. Annette Kuhn has observed an intriguing pattern of movement in this hermeneutically dense film.[30] During its last few minutes, we return to a site that was obsessively investigated earlier in the film by the protagonist, Philip Marlowe. The place is Geiger's house, a den of corruption, where blackmail, pornography, drug dealing, and other unsavory activities were carried out by the now-deceased homosexual tenant, Arthur Gwynn Geiger. A young woman, Carmen Sternwood, had been blackmailed by Geiger with pictures taken by a camera concealed in an Asian statuette, one of the many generically Asian art objects decorating Geiger's sinister home. Indeed, Carmen is found at one point in the film in Geiger's house wearing Chinese clothes. (In Chandler's novel she is naked, obviously not a choice for Hawks—Chinese clothing is thus a permissible though still, we are apparently to gather, sleazy substitute for nudity.) Philip Marlowe loves Carmen's older sister, Vivian—but even at the end of the film Vivian is still too closely associated with Carmen's disturbing sexual and infantile behavior to be considered a reliable potential sexual partner.[31] In this last scene of the film Marlowe must solve, once and for all, the enigma that Kuhn terms *the* enigma of female sexuality, here, as is often the case, conflated with the mysteries of the Orient and the perversions of effeminate men.

Is Vivian a good woman? What is her secret allegiance to Eddie Mars? In the last scene of the film, Marlowe (with Vivian's help) sets up Geiger's house as a place where he will ambush and kill Mars. In this crucial scene, the Asian statuette, of indeterminate, possibly feminine appearance to the eyes of the Westerner, is first linked to Vivian by means of a dissolve over *her* head, then shot by Marlowe in an uncharacteristically hysterical burst of anger at Eddie Mars. Mars is then sprayed with machine-gun fire by his own men, an act that has foul incestuous or homoerotic overtones (penetration, orgasm, death). Vivian has earned her spurs through her passive



cooperation with Marlowe. This bit of quintessentially Hawksian teamwork, where the woman seems to be an equal partner but is in fact subordinated to the man, makes the symbolic point of resolving through violence the enigma of what we might call the Orientalized woman. Interestingly, as the scene was first scripted, Carmen (the naughty sister) herself was to have been shot. Instead, she will simply be put away somewhere. In 1945, when *The Big Sleep* was first shown, the United States was on the verge of winning World War II. The Japanese menace will surely be beaten back—the "disturbance in the sphere of sexuality,"[32] curiously conflated with the Asiatic, also appears more resolvable in 1945 than it does in 1968, as seen, in *Full Metal Jacket*, through the lenses of 1987. At the end of World War II, the Japanese were defeated and, on the home front, women left the factories to return en masse to the domestic sphere. The specters of the spread of Asian Communism and of the increasing autonomy of women in the American work force were not so readily vanquished or contained after the war in Vietnam.

The destruction of the "Orientalized" woman has, as I have implied, a *gestural* as well as thematic relationship to later cinematic purges of dubious characters. The gesture is simply a shot to the head, a common enough suicidal or homicidal modus operandi, but strangely insisted upon in this body of films I am examining. In a discussion of *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Robin Wood lays particular emphasis on the film's quasi-mystical treatment of what the protagonists call the "one shot," that pure, masculine single shot that kills the deer stateside, but in Vietnam is transformed into the suicidal, Asianized, and homoerotic Russian roulette subculture used by the Christopher Walken character (Nick) as a way of "going native."[33] The "one shot" is thus transformed during the course of the film from an "emblem of control"[34] to "a monstrously perverted enactment of the union he [Nick] has always desired [with Mike]."[35] It is, I think, important to emphasize that this (probably mythical) game is presented as an *Asian* one, forced upon the men when they are held prisoner by the Vietcong.[36] Nick takes possession of the game as a masochistic expression of his desire for the sexually reticent Mike: the turning inward of sexual aggression is thus once again troped as

a process of "Asianization." According to Wood, Mike's attempt to save Nick from the addiction to this perverse game (which he likens to Chance's rescue of Dude from alcoholism in *Rio Bravo* [1959]) can only spell to Nick a return to repression, a return to the externalized, aggressive, and "masculine" meaning of the "one shot."[37] Obviously, Wood sees *The Deer Hunter* very much as a "male love story,"[38] though he seems to see the subversive treatment of male sexuality in this film as less a deliberate act on the part of Cimino than as a product of larger cultural determinants.

A film that, by contrast, works in what is clearly a self-conscious and deliberately citational mode is Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), which to some extent deconstructs the *film noir* conflation of the enigma of feminine sexuality with the cultural "otherness" of the Chinese. *Chinatown*'s female protagonist, a victim of paternal incest, cannot be salvaged—she is doomed to remain a victim of her hopelessly contorted past. Like Carmen in the original screenplay for *The Big Sleep,* Mrs. Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) is finally shot in the head (her eye is shot out, as is the camera eye at the end of *The Big Sleep*), only in this case the "one shot" is not fired in the shady home of a homosexual man, but, more directly, in Chinatown itself. The ending of Polanski's film shows that Gittis (Jack Nicholson) is precisely *unable* to purge himself of the evils associated with the "Asianized" woman by means of this act of violence. Rather, the scene reveals that Gittis is caught in a repetition compulsion that (by nature) is both out of his control and a deliberate choice he has made: he had lost a woman in Chinatown in the past, and now it is he who has asked Evelyn Mulwray to meet him in Chinatown, where she is killed by the police. A group of Chinese passersby watches the tragic spectacle, obviously not directly implicated in the events unfolding before them (though our discussion of spectatorship in *Paths of Glory* might indicate a need to examine further the meaning of "looking on" in this scene, as well). In this way Polanski wryly comments on *film noir*'s use of Chinatown as a figure of *Western* corruption.[39]

Although Cimino's recent film *Year of the Dragon* (1986) treats many of the same issues that come up in *Chinatown,* its presentation



of the sexual and ethnic material it unearths is, as one might suspect, muddled.[40] *Year of the Dragon* is a strangely anachronistic film about a cop's extended flashback of Chinatown-as-Vietnam, as a place that can only be purged of its corruption by all-out warfare. (The references to Vietnam are explicit, as when Stanley White [Mickey Rourke] declares that "this is a fucking war and I'm not going to lose it—not this one.")[41] Not surprisingly, the detective's mission includes saving a woman from the evil influence of the Chinese, of Chinatown. Oddly, the woman, Tracy Tzu (Ariane), a television reporter, is herself Chinese, as White vehemently reminds her throughout the film. At the end of the film the white man does manage to save the Asian woman from the threat of her native culture, after having vigorously dragged her back to Chinatown from the assimilated place in white society she had earlier achieved. While Chinatown-as-Vietnam remains allegorical in Polanski's film, *Year of the Dragon* depicts Chinatown as the literal locus for working through the post-traumatic stress experienced by the Vietnam vet, who rescues/exorcises the woman held captive by her own ethnicity. Like Vivian Rutledge, Tracy will be domesticated—but, true to the reigning ideology of the 1980s, domesticity has been portrayed as even more threatening than Chinatown. The film's plot is predicated on an initial conflict between the detective and his wife, Connie (Caroline Kava), an aggressive woman (she constantly tells her husband not to "break her balls") who wants badly to have a child. This desire sends her husband into paroxysms of doubt and evasive behavior. Before she manages to become pregnant, Connie is killed by Chinese gangsters. The final rescue of Tracy is thus both a displaced rescue of the wife and a more sinister replacement of the phallic mother (a woman with balls who wants to get pregnant) by the more salvageable (because finally less demanding) assimilated Asian yuppie. The "one shot" is also in evidence in this film: in a final, climactic scene White permits a Chinese gangster to commit suicide with his gun. Asian sexuality—both masculine and feminine—as well as Chinese upward mobility are thus punished and brought back under white control at the end of the film.

In his analysis of *Dr. Strangelove*, Peter Baxter describes the

"ineradicable tendency towards self-abasement, even self-destruction, that is almost universally repressed in the construction of masculinity."[42] The joyous self-annihilation of male-dominated Western culture is made hilariously explicit in that film (viz., its subtitle, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb"). Baxter's reading of *Dr. Strangelove* concentrates on "the one woman" in the film, Miss Scott (the bikinied secretary), who, like the "single women" in *Paths of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket*, functions to reflect and transmit various masculine concerns. Baxter notes that "the comic conceit" of *Dr. Strangelove* derives from the fact that "between men and the reality of politics and war intervenes the realm of sexual phantasy,"[43] a phantasy focused on "the nostalgic desire for a past that cannot be reached except in death. Doomsday echoes with the voice of the one woman we once upon a time all knew."[44] As I have already indicated, Baxter, like Kaja Silverman and a number of other critics, emphasizes the primacy of masochism in this (male) phantasy,[45] in which a desire for pain, humiliation, and death is attributed to other beings, generally those of lower social (i.e., ethnic or sexual) status. *Full Metal Jacket* incorporates both the "turning inward" of male masochistic homoeroticism and its aggressive turning outward in the form of projection and denial that we have observed in the films discussed above. In *The Deer Hunter*, male love of other men is a disruptive force, capable of tearing apart the social fabric of the homophobic, working-class American community. It is also shown to be strongly linked to a self-destructive fantasy that is attributed to the Vietnamese. In *Full Metal Jacket*, male homosocial bonding forcibly expels its homoerotic content—and yet Pyle's self-annihilation under the eyes of his buddy/mother remains the erotic focus of the film. *Full Metal Jacket* progresses from that image of violence and eroticism turned *inward*, to its outward infliction on a woman, as part of a chain of violent group actions against marginal figures. From fantasies (and phantasies) about male homosexual love entrenched in violent projections of masochistic desire, from heterosexual interactions irremediably founded on denigration and fear, to homo- and heterosexualities less marked by patriarchal victimization patterns: these are social and political gains that will not have been achieved by the time the next Kubrick film is released (even if it is as long in the making as was *Full Metal Jacket*). In the meantime, we can expect to continue to see works in which the Western male's desire to abase himself to the great white father is put off on Arabs, Asians, and women, the "natural" masochists of the world.



## Notes

1. It is, I think, significant that the press kit has no pictures of any of the three women who appear in the film.

2. David Denby, "Waiting for Stanley," *Premiere*, July–August 1987. Included as an insert in the Warner Brothers promotional packet for *Full Metal Jacket*.

3. For a succinct and informative discussion of the functioning of this formula, see Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1980* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985) 112–25.

4. This connection with *The Green Berets* is made much more explicit in Gustav Hasford's novel *The Short-Timers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), from which the film was adapted. In "Full Metal Genre: Kubrick's Vietnam Combat Movie," *Film Quarterly* 42.2 (1988–89): 24–30, Thomas Doherty notes that the grunts in Hasford's novel laugh at the naïveté of Wayne's film. Kubrick's Joker comes off as more credulous, regarding the media, than is his novelistic equivalent. And like the journalist in *The Green Berets*, Joker is also a reporter who begins by being "cynical" about the war but becomes a believer by the end of the film.

5. Mickey Mouse makes his appearance at least two other times in the film—once when the sergeant asks the soon-to-be homicidal Pyle, "What is this Mickey Mouse shit?" and once as a figure in the background of the *Stars and Stripes* "office," next to the lieutenant.

6. The "technologized" man is neither machine nor human, but something called a "killer" (another of Joker's nicknames). Joker describes the sergeant as proud when the men grow beyond his control: "The Marine Corps does not want robots. The Marine Corps wants killers. The Marine Corps wants to build indestructible men. Men without fear."

7. The ending of Kubrick's film is only very loosely adapted (by Kubrick, Michael Herr, and Gustav Hasford) from Hasford's novel. Elements of dialogue in this sequence and the group march itself are garnered from other sections of the novel. The final product, in *Full Metal Jacket*, is an ending that very much resembles that of Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of*

*Courage*, as Ed Dryden indicated to me and as I have hinted by using an epigraph taken from that novel. (The "derisive paint" to be splashed against the sky by Crane's protagonist anticipates the haunting lyrics of the Rolling Stones's "Paint It Black," which is played over the film's final credits.) Kubrick's is an ironic version of the already ironic Crane text—both film and novel achieve a peculiar impersonality of tone despite their close recounting of a young man's experience of a war whose political implications are (directly) dealt with almost not at all. See James A. Stevenson, "Beyond Stephen Crane: *Full Metal Jacket*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 16 (1988): 238–43, for a more extensive discussion of Kubrick's reworking of Crane. The most striking differences between Hasford's novel and Kubrick's film are structural ones: by expanding the boot-camp episode Kubrick gives as much weight to the construction of the soldier mentality as to the "Vietnam experience," and by emphasizing certain pivotal scenes of violence he achieves a more economical effect than does Hasford, who, it seems to me, adds a note of ideological confusion when he has Joker "mercy kill" Cowboy, as well as the Vietcong sniper.

8. In *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), David Marc notes that although the show paralleled precisely the worst years of American combat deaths in Vietnam, the word was never mentioned in the series (129).

9. The motif of anality reappears when the men laugh at Private Snowball for calling the structure from which Oswald shot Kennedy a "book suppository building."

10. Hasford, *The Short-Timers* 16.

11. See, especially, René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), for Girard's most far-reaching discussion of the social origins of scapegoating.

12. Moments before he is shot, Sergeant Hartman asks Pyle, "Just what are you doing in my head?" The significance of the image of the "head" in *Full Metal Jacket* has been more fully explored by Elaine Marshall in a paper entitled "Looking into *Full Metal Jacket* and the Problem of Cinematic Representation" presented at the Florida State University thirteenth annual Conference on Literature and Film, January 1988. In "*Full Metal Jacket* and the Beast Within," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 16 (1988), Claude J. Smith, Jr., notes that in *Strangelove* the "probably homosexual General Jack D. Ripper similarly committed suicide inside his latrine, apparently via a head wound" (228).

13. That Kubrick is willing to use such an anachronism in his film is



characteristic of the suspicion pervading *Full Metal Jacket* about the ability of media (including television and newspapers) to "mimetically transfer truth" (Gerri Reaves, "From Hasford's *The Short-Timers* to Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 16 [1988]: 236). In the television interview scene and elsewhere, "we get Kubrick's comments on the creation of a gigantic media event and on the obvious discrepancies between the reality of the war and the soldiers' perceptions of the war" (234). The Bruce Lee citation serves to remind us that we are looking at a depiction of the Vietnam War filtered through twelve years of postwar media representations.

14. "The more socially 'efficient' scapegoating is, the more capable it is of generating a positive transfiguration of the scapegoat, as well as the negative transfiguration of fear and hostility. The positive transfiguration is still present in the feudal and even the national traditions of military warfare. The enemy is respected as well as intensely disliked" (René Girard, "Generative Scapegoating" in *Violent Origins: Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987] 94).

15. I owe this insight about the "identity" of Pyle's and Animal Mother's character, as well as aspects of my analysis of the role of spectatorship in *Paths of Glory* (below), to a discussion with Mark Crispin Miller. I thank him here for his many useful comments both after screening the film and when this chapter was in manuscript form.

16. In Hasford's novel the sniper is described as Eurasian; see Hasford, *The Short-Timers* 116. In Chapter 6 of this book, "Narrative Patterns and Mythic Trajectories in Mid-1980s Vietnam Movies," Tony Williams comments that the woman's Eurasian ethnicity makes it possible to read her as Joker's feminine double. Although Williams's is a powerful reading of this scene in the novel, I see little evidence in *Full Metal Jacket* that the woman is meant to be partly European.

17. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1: *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, tr. Stephen Conway, in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 74. As this essay was first going to press, I discovered that Tania Modleski had also written on *Full Metal Jacket*, using Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* as one of her tutor texts. See Tania Modleski, "A Father Is Being Beaten: Male Feminism and the War Film," *Discourse* 10.2 (Spring–Summer 1988): 62–77. Modleski's placement of *Full Metal Jacket* within the context of other recent war films' depictions of the relation between sexual and military

conquest is extremely useful. She comments on Kubrick's refusal (in contrast to Stone in *Platoon*) to validate the "father": "the authoritarian nature of military training is [shown to be] positively disenabling" (72), as is indicated by Cowboy's strategically disastrous misreading of the map. "Thus," she continues, "Kubrick extensively undermines male authority; the father is not resurrected after he is killed off" (74). Still, the "paternal" power undermined by Kubrick is to a certain extent "recuperated in the signature of the filmmaker himself, the man who has the power to undertake the critique of authority in the first place" (74). Ironically, the overall effect of *Full Metal Jacket* may have been to glamorize the Marine Corps, through the intervention of this authorial signature.

18. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* 74 is citing Goote (Johannes M. Berg), *Kamerad Berthold der "unvergleichliche Franke": Bild eines deutschen Soldaten* (Hamburg, n.d. [copyright: Braunschweig, 1937]) 286, 297.

19. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* 76.

20. Ibid. 78.

21. Like *Full Metal Jacket*, this early film also focuses on the interaction between a group of men and a female hostage. See Thomas Allen Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) for details.

22. Oliver Stone's *Platoon* might be seen as a (simplistic) rewriting of the good-father, bad-father dichotomy in *Paths of Glory*.

23. For an encyclopedic overview of the Orient as "an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture," see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Said's discussion of the Occident's sexual obsession with the Orient has strongly influenced my own treatment of the subject. See also Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

24. In my discussions of male bonding I am referring implicitly to the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, especially to *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), where she explores the importance of male homosocial bonds in British culture and literature and the related repression of male homosexuality in Western culture.

25. The reference to Lawrence of Arabia by Sergeant Hartman seems to be a deliberate choice in Kubrick's film, although I do not know which of the collaborators on the script (Kubrick, Herr, Hasford) came up with the idea. In Hasford's novel Leonard's last name is "Pratt."

26. It would take me too far afield to examine the complex situation of the female colonialist. Obviously, the position of the white middle- or upper-class woman differs entirely from that of the (dominated) colonial subject, male or female, although a conflation of these positions seems to take place in some of the texts I am describing. In a more complete discussion of the relationship between colonialism, Orientalism, and gender politics, it would also be important to consider the function of lesbianism and of colonial female sexual adventurism in the Orient (cf. *Emanuelle* [1974], which takes place in Thailand).



27. Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* 110–11. In *Between Men*, Sedgwick discusses T. E. Lawrence as "charting the alien but to him compelling geography of male homosociality in the Arab culture" and remarks that "he had moved from intensely charged but apparently unfulfilling bonds with Englishmen, to bonds with Arab men that had, for political reasons, far more space for fantasy and mystification and hence for the illusionistic charisma of will" (195). Those "political reasons" for the Englishman's sense of a greater freedom to act out his sexual fantasies in the Orient include the dominance of the British Empire over the Arab world. For Sedgwick, Lawrence's experiences among the Arabs represent a "kind of postgraduate or remedial Public School," where the homosexual component of homosociality is explored without risk to class or gender privilege. See also Kaja Silverman's detailed discussion of the nature of Lawrence's homosexual masochistic fantasies and their complex relation to British imperialism in "White Skin, Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis; or, With Lawrence in Arabia," *Differences* 1.3 (1989): 3–54.

28. T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London, 1935; repr. 1965) 29.

29. I will not attempt rigorously to delineate the often composite profile of the ethnically "other" that is found in the films under discussion. A recent Hollywood film offers a good example of the difficulties involved in sorting out Hollywood's representations of ethnic and racial groups. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) is largely a remake of *Chinatown*, except that the oppressed social group in the film consists of "Toons," indestructible, marginally human cartoon figures housed in a ghetto called Toontown. As the film industry's most exploited entertainers, the Toons are modeled on black musicians and actors. At the same time, Toontown is the structural equivalent of *Chinatown*'s Chinese enclave, living according to its own alien laws (cf. the Chinese bordello in Wenders's *Hammett*). Finally, the film harks back (with twenty-twenty hindsight) to the question of World War II era anti-Semitism, invoking images of the Holocaust by depicting its

villain as plotting the genocide of the Toons. Although it is obviously useful and important to distinguish between the depiction of, say, Chinese sexuality in *Broken Blossoms* and Arabic sexuality in *The Sheik*, my purpose in this chapter is to point out the very slippage, concerning the various "orients," that occurs in Hollywood and Hollywood-style cinema. For a discussion of race and gender in *Broken Blossoms*, see Julia Lesage, "Artful Racism, Artful Rape: Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*" in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987).

30. Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) 74–95.

31. Like Pyle in *Full Metal Jacket*, Carmen sucks her thumb.

32. Kuhn, *The Power of the Image* 89.

33. I am drawing these arguments, rather loosely, from the chapter on Cimino in Robin Wood's *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1986). On the question of "going native" and of Orientalization as making feminine, see Eve Sedgwick's chapter "Up the Postern Stair: *Edwin Drood* and the Homophobia of Empire" in *Between Men*. Discussing *Edwin Drood*, Sedgwick remarks that, contrary to the American black-and-white dichotomy of racism, "Colonials . . . can 'go' native: there is a taint of climate, morale, or ethos that, while most readily described in racial terms, is actually seen as contagious" (183). Sedgwick notes that, in *Edwin Drood*, John Jasper wakes up "in a London opium den on a bed with a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman." The woman has even "'opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of a Chinaman.'" Jasper will later become "orientalized by his contact with the Princess Puffer—and, by the same toke [*sic*], insidiously feminized" (184). I would submit that the black-white dichotomy of race in American film and literature is not as clear-cut as Sedgwick contends—see, for example, John Stahl's and Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* for similar enunciations of the problem of racial "contamination."

34. Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* 294.

35. Ibid. 296.

36. Judy Lee Kinney has observed that Michael "presides over the ritualizing of one of the most famous visual icons of the War, General Nguyen Ngoc Loan's execution of a Viet Cong suspect during the 1968 Tet offensive by a shot to the head" ("The Mythical Method: Fictionalizing the Vietnam War," *Wide Angle* 7.4 [1985]: 40).



37. Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* 296. He also mentions (278) the more widely remarked intertexts for *The Deer Hunter*: Ford's *The Searchers* and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer*. Both of these narratives are of interest in that they involve what Richard Slotkin (see below) has termed the "feminization" of the white captive held by Indians. Many critics, including Tony Williams (in "Narrative Patterns and Mythic Trajectories") and Thomas Doherty (in "Full Metal Genre"), have noted the explicit "cowboy and Indian" themes in *Full Metal Jacket* and in other recent Vietnam War films. Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) explicitly addresses the role of the "hunter and captive myths" in the selling of the war in Vietnam to the American public. In 1965 President Johnson himself "invoked the characteristic imagery of the captivity myth, in which the family—symbolic embodiment of social order, centering on the figure of the mother and the child and associated with the cultivation of the soil—is assaulted by dark and savage forces from beyond the borders" (562–63). South Vietnam was the mother to be saved from outside invasion. In films like *The Deer Hunter* and *Full Metal Jacket* it is evident that the fear of engulfment by this mother is at least as strong as the fear of the "dark opponent." I will also note my disagreement with Susan Jeffords's assertion that women "disappear" from Vietnam in the recent films under discussion. I realize, on rereading her thought-provoking article "Friendly Civilians: Images of Women and the Feminization of the Audience in Vietnam Films" (*Wide Angle* 7.4 [1985]: 13–22), that my notion of the "repression of the feminine" is a direct citation from Jeffords (17), but in her description of how in these films the Vietnam soldier "denies the feminine" Jeffords does not seem to recognize that this repression is unsuccessful: a threatening (not simply a *passive*) femininity resurges to the forefront of the text. Since my essay first appeared Susan Jeffords has vastly expanded her reading of femininity in relation to Vietnam in *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). In her section of *Full Metal Jacket*, she unfavorably contrasts Kubrick's film with Hasford's novel, claiming that the changes introduced move the screenplay "into a more definitive depiction of the feminine as enemy and rewrites the novel as a story of a gendered opposition between masculine and feminine" (174). I disagree with this reading insofar as I see this move as one analytical of American attitudes about race and gender, rather than one that "allows for the repression of the violence that underlies the gender

system" (176). Whether Jeffords's interpretation or mine is more convincing must be determined by our readers. See also Michael Pursell, "*Full Metal Jacket*: The Unraveling of Patriarchy," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 16 (1988): 218–25, for a discussion of the "gynophobia" shown by the characters in the film.

38. Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* 294.

39. For further discussion of the depiction of Asians in Polanski's film, see William Galperin, "Bad for the Glass: Representation and Filmic Deconstruction in *Chinatown* and *Chan Is Missing*," *MLN* 102 (1987): 1151–70.

40. In fact, *Year of the Dragon* was picketed by Chinese Americans in many cities when it was released. Complaints focused, for the most part, on the representation of the Chinese-American community as corrupt and controlled by gangs. Most prints now begin with a disclaimer regarding the representation of Chinese Americans in the film.

41. In discussing the use of Chinatown as a metaphor for Vietnam in *Year of the Dragon*, I should note that Oliver Stone (writer and director of *Platoon*) cowrote the film with Cimino, basing it on Robert Daley's novel of the same name.

42. Peter Baxter, "The One Woman," *Wide Angle* 6.1 (1984): 35–41.

43. As is the practice among some psychoanalytic critics, Baxter is using the term "phantasy" to indicate that this is a preconscious or unconscious mental process, rather than a conscious "fantasy."

44. Baxter, "The One Woman": 41.

45. For a discussion of the theoretical grounds for claiming a primary, projected masochism, see especially Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Subjectivity," *Framework* 12 (1975): 2–9; "*Histoire d'O*: The Story of a Disciplined and Punished Body," *enclitic* 7.2 (1983): 63–81; "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," *Camera Obscura* 17 (1988): 31–67; and "White Skin, Brown Masks."



# Vietnam, Chaos, and the Dark Art of Improvisation

**CHAPTER 12** The Vietnam War has proved to have remarkable staying power as an unsettling experience. By the time of the South Vietnamese government's collapse in 1975, a great many Americans had been compelled to relinquish their illusions about managing the war to an ordered, reasonable resolution. Consequently, a panoply of assumptions about power and control was virtually swept aside, and a kind of existentialism at last became more real than theoretical. Old truths no longer offered assurance, and the Vietnam War has shrouded every turn of events in U.S. foreign policy to the present day. The specter of Vietnam was evident throughout the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990–91, even at the conclusion of the 100-hour ground war, even at the moment when the United States and its allies claimed victory over Iraq. Even in victory, President Bush was compelled to deliver a funeral oration for the doubts sown by the earlier war.

The legacy of the Vietnam War will extend, however, far beyond the end of Operation Desert Storm, challenging American life for decades with cautionary stories about the fragility of certainties