

# Chapter 1

## HISTORY AND ITS SPECTER

### *Rethinking Thinking in the Post-Cold War Age*



On the basis of the Greeks' initial contributions towards an Interpretation of Being, a dogma has been developed which not only declares the question about the meaning of Being to be superfluous, but sanctions its complete neglect. It is said that "Being" is the most universal and the emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition. Nor does this most universal and hence indefinable concept require any definition, for everyone uses it constantly and already understands what he means by it. In this way, that which the ancient philosophers found continually disturbing as something obscure and hidden has taken on a clarity and self-evidence such that if anyone continues to ask about it he is charged with an error of method.

—Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

In 1927, in the midst of the disintegration of modern Europe precipitated by the fulfillment of its fundamentally "imperial" logic, Martin Heidegger, following Nietzsche, called for the retrieval of *die Seinsfrage*, the question of being that Occidental philosophy had forgotten since it was first asked by the pre-Socratic Greeks. In so doing, he instigated an alienation effect that amounted to a Copernican revolution in the advanced thinking of the twentieth century. To put it essentially, in retrieving the question of being from the oblivion to which it was relegated by the increasing technologization and institutionalization of thinking, Heidegger enabled or, perhaps more accurately, catalyzed four integrally related epochal disclosures that radically called the "objective" problematic of the Occidental philosophical tradition into question: (1) the disclosure that this tradition was "onto-theo-logical,"

which is to say, a three-phased history (the Greco-Roman, Medieval/Reformation, and Enlightenment eras) that, despite its historical variations, has continuously privileged metaphysics—a mode of inquiry informed by a *Logos* or principle of presence, outside of or prior to time and history, as the essential ground of thinking; (2) the disclosure that this tradition had reduced the (temporal) *be-ing* of being understood as an indissoluble, if uneven, historical continuum extending from the subject and the ecos through gender and race to culture, economics, and sociopolitics, to a reified entity, a *Summum Ens*; (3) the disclosure that the perception/representation of being in this tradition was enacted not in-the-midst (*interesse*), but from after or above or beyond (*meta*) the emergent things themselves (*physis*); and, most tellingly, (4) the disclosure that this metaphysical representation of being *as* Being was informed by the totalizing will to power over the relay of differences that being *as temporality* always already disseminates.

The years following Heidegger's announcement have borne witness to the emergence of a number of postmodern or post-ontotheological discourses—deconstruction, genealogy, neo-Marxism, feminism, gay criticism, new historicism, cultural criticism, postcolonialism, global criticism, New Americanist studies, and so on—that, despite crucial resistances, have assimilated Heidegger's fundamental transformative disclosures in some degree or other into their particular perspectives. These “new” discourses, in turn, have been (unevenly) assimilated into most of the traditional disciplines of knowledge production. But have the implications for both critique and emancipation of this potentially polyvalent revolution in thinking been fully realized? My answer is an emphatic negative. And the reason for this failure is that the project of thinking or rethinking the *Seinsfrage* has come to a premature closure. This is not simply because of the widespread and ideologically driven identification of Heidegger's thought with Nazism in the wake of Victor Farias's *Heidegger et le nazisme* (1987). It is also because of the growing sense on the part of the current Left, especially in the context of the reemergence of praxis to privileged status over “theory,” that ontology or rather ontological representation is so rarefied a category of thought that it is virtually empty of, if not hostile to, politics. In other words, the rethinking of thinking Heidegger's interrogation of the ontotheological tradition enabled has come to its end because the emancipatory “postmodern” discourses that his thought catalyzed have, in putting ontological inquiry (“theory”) in a disabling binary opposition with cultural and “worldly” political praxis, again forgotten the question of being. In so doing, they have forfeited the advance in thinking enabled by the *Seinsfrage* to those metaphysical traditionalists it was intended to disarm.

It will be one of the purposes of this introductory chapter, therefore, to retrieve the question of being as an especially urgent imperative of

thinking and emancipatory practice at the present—*post-Cold War*—historical conjuncture, which, after September 11, 2001, has entered its most dangerous phase. More specifically, I will attempt, in a prolegomenal way, to think more fully the unevenly thought “Heideggerian” ontological disclosures enumerated above in the context of the resurgence of metaphysical interpretations of the post-Cold War occasion: the “triumphalist” representations of the epochal implosion of the Soviet Union by the liberal democratic/capitalist “victors” as the “end of history” and the advent of “the New World Order”—and the annulment of any lingering vestige of the “Vietnam syndrome,” which is to say any remaining doubt as to the ontological rightness of America’s perennial exceptionalist errand in the global wilderness. (In later chapters, I will address the modifications of this triumphalist representation of the post-Cold War occasion compelled by the resurgence of Iraq after the first Gulf War and later by the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by Al Qaeda. Here, it will suffice to say, by way of anticipation, that these later modifications by the “intellectual deputies”—Gramsci’s phrase—of the dominant culture did not entail a radical rejection of the initial end-of-history thesis; rather, they *accommodated* the events that seemed to contradict it.)

On the basis of the recent (mis)identification of Heidegger’s thought with Nazi practice, both the liberal and radical left will surely question the legitimacy of such an appeal to a Heideggerian model in behalf of an emancipatory discourse adequate to the post-Cold War occasion. To justify such a project, it will therefore be necessary to undertake a brief “detour” into recent history. By “recent history” I mean, of course, the dominant culture’s massive “triumphalist” representation of the uprising in China (Tiananmen Square) and the “revolutions” in Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the end of history and coming of the New World Order and, of course, the ensuing advent of the free world market. But I also mean—and this should always be kept in mind—the historically specific history—the *specter*—that this global History would obliterate in order to legitimize its claim to universality: not least, the Vietnam War.

## I

This History, both what it affirms and what it has repressed, is, because of the euphoric excess of its representation, conveniently epitomized by Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).<sup>1</sup> This book by an intellectual deputy of the triumphant capitalist culture was immediately canonized on its publication not only by the emergent neo-conservative movement in the United States, but also by many liberals,

and it was given global visibility by the Western, especially American, media. But with the significant exception of Jacques Derrida, to whose commentary on this post-Cold War phenomenon I will refer later, it was not taken seriously by the dominant oppositional discourses.<sup>2</sup> It is true that Fukuyama's attempt to prove that the actual history that bore witness to the collapse of Soviet communism is symptomatic of a universal history (History) that has culminated in the end of history is, in fact, extraordinarily naive, as the indifference of his problematic to the disclosures of poststructuralist and postcolonial discourses and the blindness of his triumphalist enthusiasm to *historically specific history* everywhere testifies. Indeed, this euphoric representation of the "end" of the Cold War by the American Right was soon qualified under the corrosive pressure of world events since the first Gulf War, particularly with the resurgence of Islamic opposition to America's presence in the Middle East. In fact, overt reference to the end of history and the New World Order all but disappeared from political scientific theoretical and mediatic representations of the contemporary global occasion. But this qualification, as I have noted, should not be interpreted, as it was by intellectuals of the Left, as a tacit admission by the neoconservative Right of the illegitimacy of the American end-of-history discourse, but rather as an *accommodation* of these contradictory events to its universalist scenario, a scenario the essential structure of which, as I will show at length in this book, is synchronous with the founding of America. It is an accommodation, in fact, that renders this end-of-history discourse more, rather than less powerful insofar as the apparent acknowledgment of their historical specificity obscures its real metaphysical basis.

This accommodational strategy of representation in the aftermath of the Gulf War is epitomized by Richard Haass, a former official in the first Bush administration who, after serving as director of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institute, became a high-ranking advisor to the second Bush administration, in his *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States After the Cold War* (1997).<sup>3</sup> Circumventing Fukuyama's problematic Hegelian/Kojévian eschatological structure in favor of theorizing the post-Cold War practices of the United States in the international sphere—Somalia, Haiti, Russia, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, and elsewhere in the world—Haass frames the contemporary occasion in the totalizing Reaganite economic image of the "deregulated world" (in contrast to the world "regulated" by the logic of the Cold War scenario) and the role of the United States in the "frontier" trope of a sheriff leading posses (the appropriate members of the United Nations) to quell threats to global stability and peace posed by the "criminal" actions of "rogue nations" or "terrorist" groups precipitated by this international *deregulation*. Despite

Haass's acknowledgment that conflict is inevitable (which, in fact, as it will be seen, echoes Fukuyama), the triumphant exceptionalist *idea* of liberal capitalist democracy remains entirely intact in his discourse:

In the domestic market, the federal government constitutes the visible hand [that guarantees "peace, prosperity, and morality" in the deregulated economic world] and thus the authority of last resort. Obviously, there is no world government. Nor is any country or organization prepared to do more than help. There is only the United States. In the post-Cold War world, in the age of deregulation, the lion's share of the burden of promoting international order falls on the United States. It is a burden worth bearing. Both for what can be accomplished and what can be averted.

In many instances, the United States will best be able to do this by assuming the role of international sheriff, one who forges coalitions or posses of states and others for the specific tasks. This was the approach used to counter Iraq's aggression against Kuwait. More generally, it makes sense when no organization has the capacity to meet a challenge but when a unilateral or uncoordinated response would be inadequate. (*RS*, 6)

However veiled by the global geopolitical realities of the post-Gulf War occasion, Haass's commitment to this "laissez-faire" polity (deregulation)—to the fictional concept of the sovereign national subject—continues to be grounded in the metaphysics that informed America's "burdensome" "exceptionalist" global "errand" in the "wildernesses" of the world. Indeed, Haass endows this representational problematic with far more historical power than Fukuyama's political scientific disciplinary discourse is able to muster in its behalf. For, unlike the Fukuyamans, Haass informs his representation of the United States' historically determined and determining "exceptionalist" mission in the post-Cold War era with the teleological metaphors that have been, from the beginning—and, as we shall see, were tellingly overdetermined in the political, cultural, and literary discourses of the Vietnam War—fundamental to the constitution and power of the American globally oriented national identity. The metaphor of the sheriff/posse derives from the history of the American West and constitutes a late variation of the exploitative pacification process of westward expansionism. As such it surreptitiously brings with it the entire baggage of the teleological metanarrative of the American frontier, from the Puritans' "errand in the wilderness" through Alexis de Tocqueville's identification of "the gradual development of the principle of equality" in America as "a providential fact"<sup>4</sup> to the discourse of "Manifest Destiny" and beyond. This is the myth

that has saturated the cultural discourse of America, both high and low, since its origins. It informs, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the “American jeremiad,” which, from John Winthrop, Cotton Mather, and Jonathan Edwards, through Timothy Dwight and John Adams, Andrew Jackson, Daniel Webster, to Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and, most extremely, George W. Bush, has always functioned to secure—and rejuvenate—the American national consensus in behalf of its providentially ordained mission to domesticate (and dominate) what is beyond the frontier.<sup>5</sup> It informs the historiography of official national historians of the United States like Francis Parkman, George Bancroft, and Frederick Jackson Turner.<sup>6</sup> It informs the narratives of canonical American writers like John Filson, Joel Barlow, Robert Montgomery Bird, James Fenimore Cooper, and William Gilmore Simms.<sup>7</sup> And it informs the Hollywood westerns, which have functioned to naturalize what one New Americanist historian has called the American “victory culture.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as I will show at length in chapter 6, it is this deeply backgrounded myth in all its historical specificity that Samuel P. Huntington, one of the most influential historians or, more accurately, neoconservative policy experts, of the American future, has invoked in the wake of September 11, 2001, *now overtly*, in his aptly titled book *Who Are We?: Challenges to America’s National Identity* for the purpose of mobilizing America against the “internal threat” posed by the “deconstruction of America” and the rise of “subnational cultures” in behalf of “the clash of civilizations” heralded by the Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.<sup>9</sup>

Reconstellated into the context of Haass’s revisionism, Fukuyama’s overdetermination of History in his announcement of the end of history undergoes a suggestive estrangement. What in its naive exaggerations seems on the surface easily dismissable, comes to be seen as demanding rigorous analysis. That is, such a reconstellation reveals Fukuyama’s text to be a symptomatic fulfillment of a deeply inscribed American assumption about Being (in the form of its historical allotrope) whose origin is simultaneous with the founding of America. As the inflation of Fukuyama’s book into a media event itself suggested, it is an assumption that the actual history of (post)modernity has turned into a national, (meta)narrative need. I cannot undertake such an extended analysis here. It will suffice for my purposes to invoke briefly that dimension of Fukuyama’s argument that epitomizes the triumphant post-Cold War discourse’s representation of contemporary history in the context of the “Heideggerian” destruction of the ontotheological tradition or, more specifically, of its late, post-Enlightenment or “anthropological” phase. I am referring to Fukuyama’s overt appropriation of a Kojévian version of Hegel’s dialectical history to interpret the contemporary historical events

as the final and permanent “triumph” of liberal capitalist democracy over communism and the precipitation of (a modified version of) the idea of the “universal and homogeneous state” (*EH*, xxi and chapter 19).

What this “Heideggerian” context demands focusing on in Fukuyama’s representation is the radical incommensurability between the *actual* history of recent global politics and the universalist conclusion he draws from this history:

But the fact that there will be [after the decisive triumph of liberal/capitalist democracy in the Cold War] setbacks and disappointments in the process of democratization, or that not every market economy will prosper, should not distract us from the larger pattern that is emerging in world history. . . . What is emerging victorious, in other words, is not so much liberal practice, as the liberal *idea*. That is to say, for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy, and no universal principle of legitimacy other than the sovereignty of the people. (*EH*, 45)

This representation of the relationship between the historically specific history of the modern age and the History subsuming it constitutes the underlying structural principle of Fukuyama’s history—the problematic, in Althusser’s term, that determines actual history’s visibilities and invisibilities. Its specific multidimensional lineaments can, therefore, serve as a revelatory synecdoche of the fixed, undeviating, and deeply backgrounded whole of Fukuyama’s book.

To begin with, we could say in a general way that Fukuyama’s historiography—his representation of *this* particular history—takes the essential and foundational form of Western literary narrative, by which I mean a *mimesis* in the “Aristotelian”/“Horatian” mode: a story with a beginning, middle, and end, in which the end—understood as the goal, the truth, and thus the principle of legitimacy—is present from the beginning through the middle to the termination of the action. It partakes, that is, of a (timeless) movement that always already determines the “directionality”—an important word in Fukuyama’s Hegelian discourse—of the temporal process. To put this general movement in the more specific ideological rhetoric he employs, Fukuyama’s story is, as his representation of the “triumph” of liberal capitalist democracy in the mode of the annunciation of “good news” suggests (*EH*, xiii), informed by the “promise/fulfillment” structure of eschatological (and, as in the case of Virgil’s *Aeneid* or Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, imperial) narrative.

But this, though not inaccurate, is to put the teleology of Fukuyama's narrative too abstractly and simply. As its rhetoric of conflict/triumph suggest, the narrative informing Fukuyama's representation of modern history is complicated by a post-theological dialectical economy. It is a logical economy that, while appearing to allow temporality to do its corrosive work, in fact precipitates an always promised Absolute out of temporal ideological momentums. It is not adequate simply to say that this representation *subordinates* time/history to "a larger pattern." More significant, this maneuver, as the mythology of this "white writing" suggests, transforms time, which is intrinsically unrepresentable, unnamable, and incomprehensible, into a presentable, nameable, and graspable spatial or territorial image. That is, Fukuyama's projection of modern history as a conflictual (dialectical) narrative movement that in the end has precipitated "the liberal *idea*" as the truth of History is informed, in Derrida's terms, by a philosophy of Presence, which posits existential time as *merely* apparent and, as such, potentially "*distractive*" from the essential object of the historian's gaze. To foreground the presiding metaphors of this synecdochical passage, Fukuyama's representation of modern history is a re-presentation (German, *Vorstellung*): a *placing* of time—that which cannot in essence be *placed—before* the panoptic and commanding eye. Put alternatively, Fukuyama's "secular" narrative of the history of the Cold War is informed by a *metaphysical ontology*: the perception of being—the always emergent "things-as-they-are" (*physis*)—from *after* or *above*, as, in other words, a totalized structure.

In the above synecdochical passage Fukuyama's rhetoric strategically maneuvers the reader's attention toward the "larger pattern"—the promised structure—that the dialectics of History will bring forth in the "fullness of time." (I am pointing provisionally to the affiliative relationship between the metaphors of the centered circle, of the gaze/picture, and of the patriarchal/theological seed "planted" in the womb of time, all tropes intrinsic to the Occidental—and especially American—imperial project.) Understood in terms of the de-sedimented context precipitated by this interrogation of Fukuyama's spatial rhetoric, we are enabled to resist this enticement and to refocus our attention on "the setbacks and disappointments in the process of democratization" that Fukuyama foresees, but which he represents as seductive "distractions" from "the larger pattern" to which we should not succumb. That which distracts means an inessential or accidental or irrelevant or, more resonantly, marginal force—a differential Other—that draws our attention—our gaze—away from the "essential" direction and that "stirs up or confuses us [as subjects] with conflicting emotions or motives."<sup>10</sup> In Fukuyama's discourse, this distraction refers to the histori-



cally specific events of modernity that have collectively generated a pervasive pessimism, especially among advanced (poststructuralist?) intellectuals, a pessimism that, accordingly, has made it difficult to “recognize good news when it comes” (*EH*, xii). This is the history he abstractly and neutrally characterizes as “the truly terrible political events of the first half of the twentieth century—two destructive world wars, the rise of totalitarian ideologies, and the turning of science against man in the form of nuclear weapons and environmental damage” (*EH*, xiii). That is, what the “distraction” that “distracts” refers to is the actual—catastrophic—history, both past and future, that would disrupt the promissory dialectical economy of History. Derrida thematizes the eschatological provenance of Fukuyama’s announcement of the end of history as “good news” (I would add its “providential” origins to foreground the visual metaphors of this prophetic):

Why a gospel? Why would the formula here be neo-testamentary? This book claims to bring a “positive response” to a question whose formation and formulation are never interrogated in themselves. It is the question of whether a “coherent and directional History of mankind” will eventually lead “the greater part of humanity” . . . toward “liberal democracy” (p. xii). Of course, while answering “yes” to this question in this form, Fukuyama admits . . . to an awareness of everything that allows one to have one’s doubts: the two world wars, the horrors of totalitarianism—Nazi, fascist, Stalinist—the massacres of Pol Pot, and so forth. . . . But according to a schema that organizes the argumentation of this strange plea from one end to the other, all these cataclysms (terror, oppression, repression, extermination, genocide, and so on), these “events” or these “facts” would belong to *empiricity*. . . . Their accumulation would in no way refute the *ideal* orientation of the greater part of humanity toward liberal democracy. . . . Even if one admitted the simplicity of this summary distinction between empirical reality and ideal finality, one would still not know how this . . . anhistoric *telos* of history gives rise, very precisely *in our day* . . . to an event which Fukuyama speaks of as “good news” and that he dates very explicitly from “The most remarkable evolution of the last quarter of the twentieth century.” (p. xiii) . . . This “move toward political freedom around the globe” . . . would have been everywhere accompanied . . . by “a liberal revolution in economic thought.” The alliance of liberal democracy and of the “free market,” there’s the “good news” of this last quarter century. This evangelistic figure is remarkably insistent.<sup>11</sup>

Derrida's analysis constitutes a powerful and, however belated, much welcomed thematization not simply of the reductive ontological priority of the transhistorical *Logos* over actual history in Fukuyama's historiography, but of the theological provenance of its will to power over the *singular event*: of what I will provisionally call the imperialism of Fukuyama's meta-physical ontology. But the actual history to which Derrida refers does not adequately differentiate itself from the examples that Fukuyama calculatively enumerates in accounting for the "blinding" pessimism of advanced thinking in the late twentieth century. This is because Fukuyama can dissociate the limitations of liberal democracy from the violent events Derrida invokes as witness against the end of history. Indeed, it is the fundamental assumption of Fukuyama's post-Enlightenment discourse that the violence perpetrated by liberal democracy is radically distinguishable from the kind of violence perpetrated by the "political" ideologies that have fallen by the historical wayside in the wake of the dialectical "triumph" of liberal capitalist democracy. Unlike the latter, he would argue, the violence of the former is not—of course—inherent in its logic. As in the binarist rhetoric of the perennial Occidental colonialist project, it is, rather, the consequence of liberal capitalist democracy's unwanted but necessary historical responsibility to "defend" itself from evil aggressors:

The wars unleashed by these totalitarian ideologies were also of a new sort [sic], involving the mass destruction of civilian populations and economic resources—hence the term, "total war." To defend themselves from this threat, liberal democracies were led to adopt military strategies like the bombing of Dresden or Hiroshima that in the earliest ages would have been called genocidal. (*EH*, 6)

More usually, these apparent violences are rationalized as the consequence of the *betrayal* of liberal capitalist democracy's fundamental principles or of a partial or imperfect view of its logic's benign practical imperatives. As such they can be understood, as in the case of the culture industry's latest representation of America's defeat in Vietnam, as "mistakes" that are correctable or problems that are ultimately solvable.<sup>12</sup> (It is, as I will show later, by way of invoking Michel Foucault's analysis of the "repressive hypothesis," an assumption that has been fundamental to the truth discourse of liberal democratic societies since the Enlightenment.) As Fukuyama puts this perennially articulated American duplicity:

Assuming that liberal democracy is, for the moment, safe from external enemies, could we assume that successful democratic

societies could remain that way indefinitely? . . . There is no doubt that contemporary democracies face any number of serious problems, from drugs, homelessness, and crime to environmental damage and the frivolity of consumerism. But these problems are not obviously insoluble on the basis of liberal principles, nor so serious that they would necessarily lead to the collapse of society as a whole, as communism collapsed in the 1980s. (*EH*, xxi)

In saying that Derrida's examples can be accommodated to the logic of liberal capitalist democracy, I do not want to suggest that he is blind to the contradictory violence inhering in it. Returning to his thematization of Fukuyama's end-of-history discourse as "teleo-eschatological good news," Derrida in fact identifies the "legitimate" violence perpetrated by liberal democracies with the illegitimate violence to which Fukuyama refers. But characteristically his representation of these contradictions takes the indirect and distancing form of an ahistorical philosophical insight. The gap between the actualities of liberal democratic practice and the *idea* that Fukuyama declares "could not be improved on" (*EH*, xi) is, "by definition, a priori, characteristic of all democracies" (*SM*, 64).

What is surprising about Derrida's otherwise decisive indictment of Fukuyama's privileging of History over the jagged and dislocating singularities of actual history is his failure or refusal to invoke as witness against Fukuyama's representation a decisively *other* history than that which is amenable to accommodation by Fukuyama's imperial teleological dialectic. I mean the very actual violent histories enacted, not as a defense or a betrayal of or a blindness to the logical imperatives of the liberal democracy problematic, but by way of the *fulfillment* of its restricted logical economy. I mean the terrible events of modern history that, ironically, more than any philosophical textual momentum, instigated the postmodern or poststructuralist or posthumanist interrogation of the ontological principles informing the liberal democracies—and their humanist cultures—of Enlightenment modernity. I mean, in short, the very actual histories that have, in their facticity, brought history to a quite different kind of end from that euphorically announced by Fukuyama and celebrated by the American culture industry. This difference to which I am referring is the end—the *telos*—which, in historically fulfilling the theoretical and practical possibilities of the founding ontological principles of liberal capitalist democracy, also discloses its limits: "that" which it cannot finally accommodate and contain within its imperial orbit. Which is to say, the contradictory imperial violence against its Other inhering in its "benign" (teleo)logical economy.

## II

These violent modern histories that would destroy the “History” that both precipitated them and relegated their delegitimizing memory to oblivion are, in fact, everywhere ready at hand, if only symptomatically: the brutalization of the native populations of North Africa, India, and Southeast Asia by Western imperialist nations—Great Britain, The Netherlands, Portugal, France, and Germany—in the name of the *mission civilisatrice*; the histories of the enslavement of black Africans and the rapacious exploitation of their “dark” or “empty” lands in the name of the “white man’s burden”; and, more immediately, the histories of the removal and subsequent annihilation of the native Americans and their culture in the name of America’s exceptionalist “errand in the wilderness” and its inexorably directional Manifest Destiny.<sup>13</sup> But because these histories tend to subordinate the idea of liberal democracy to the more inclusive category of the “civilized” West, they could (illegitimately) be interpreted as histories perpetrated by and in the name of the generalized West or by an unfinished version of the idea of liberal democracy. For this reason, the history that I will invoke here, and in the chapters that follow, as decisive witness to the illegitimacy of the History that announces the end of history is the coruscating history of the Indochinese War. I mean the inordinately violent imperial history of Southeast Asia that culminated in the United States’ invasion of Vietnam or, to be more faithful to the hegemonic rhetoric that “justified” America’s intervention, in the American “errand in the wilderness” of Southeast Asia.

It will be the purpose of the second half of this book to fully show in what sense this twentieth-century “event” was an epochal event in modern, post-Enlightenment history, in what sense, that is, this history disclosed the radical contradiction—the unaccommodatable violence—that inheres in the benign discourse and practice of liberal capitalist democracy.<sup>14</sup> Here it will suffice to recall the provenance of postmodernist, or poststructuralist, or posthumanist theory against the reductive tendency of its current practitioners (and its postcolonial and humanist opponents<sup>15</sup>) to forget its historical origins—a tendency incumbent on its institutionalization and exacerbated by the end of the Cold War and the mediatization of one version or other of the “end-of-history” discourse. The advent of “theory,” it should be remembered, understood as the interrogation of the Western metaphysical tradition (logocentrism) and the pretensions of its imperial truth-claims to global authority, was precipitated by the implosion of the logical economy of imperialism in the aftermath of World War II. But its immediate origins lay in the thirty-year period of the Indochinese War (1945–1975), especially in its exorbitantly violent late planetary

phase, after the United States assumed its “exceptionalist” burden to “save” Vietnam for “democracy” from the decadent Old World colonialism of France and the communism of the Soviet Union. More specifically, the effort of postmodern “theory” to think from and within the margins the polyvalent critical/projective imperatives of a decentered Occidental *Logos* was, however indirectly and unevenly, instigated by the spectacle of the *self*-destruction of the *idea*—the *Logos/Eidos*—of the modern Occident in its post-Enlightenment (anthropological), which is to say, its liberal democratic/capitalist historical allotrope.

The war in Vietnam, it should not be forgotten, was inaugurated and escalated to its most intense and destructive violence by both liberal Democratic and conservative Republican presidential administrations (Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon) and was debated globally, not in terms of the fate of democracy in America, but of the very idea of liberal capitalist democracy. This spectacle of the self-destruction of the “benign” logic of liberal democracy—this inadvertent rendering visible of the genocidal violence latent in its otherwise invisible because banalized imperial “center elsewhere”—was the essential witness of the Vietnam War at large. It was, if the grotesquely comic banality (to which the highly serious American speaker is utterly blind) is understood as a carnivalesque trope of the inexpressible horror of the event he, like the Pentagon planners of the war, routinizes,<sup>16</sup> perfectly imaged in synecdochical form by the major who, in the aftermath of a large-scale search and destroy operation, told a reporter, “in a successful attempt at attaining history, ‘We had to destroy Ben Tre in order to save it.’”<sup>17</sup> Ben Tre, it should be remarked, was not simply a geographical/political space nor one occupied by the “enemy”; it is an earth, as we shall see later in this book, inhabited by a community of people whose culture sacralized this earth’s very (spatial and temporal) being.

We must, that is, not be seduced by the emergent “larger pattern” of History into forgetting that America’s intervention in Southeast Asia was undertaken in the name of “winning the hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese people to the fundamental and historically realized ontological principles of “the free world” and that it eventually took the visibly contradictory form of an all-out—undiscriminating—linguistic, ecological, cultural, economic, and military violence. We must also not forget that this polyvalent violence was read by a significant portion of the people of the United States, of Europe, and of the Third World, including responsible representative Western intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertram Russell, Noam Chomsky, and Martin Luther King, as genocidal in its intent and in its proportions. Nor must we forget that, however symptomatically enacted, the protestation of the war in the United

States—its “refusal of spontaneous consent” to the truth discourse of liberal capitalist democracy, to invoke Antonio Gramsci<sup>18</sup>—brought the American government to a crisis that only the disruption of the Civil War has surpassed in critical intensity. The examples (among many others) of President Lyndon Johnson’s decision not to run for reelection and the ensuing violence unleashed by Mayor Richard Daley at the Democratic national convention in Chicago and a little later by Governor James Rhodes at Kent State University attest to this crisis of hegemony.

What, in other words, happened in that time, which must not be forgotten—but which, since then, an entire culture industry has made it its priority to erase from the American national memory—was, to appropriate Michel Foucault’s language, something akin to an epistemic break. The unspeakable violence perpetrated in the name of the principles of freedom by the United States during the Vietnam War symptomatically disclosed at multiple sites on the continuum of being the contradictions inhering in the truth discourse of liberal capitalist democracy. To put it concretely and positively, America’s inordinately violent conduct of the war made visible the polyvalent global imperial will to power that, under normal conditions, strategically remains invisible in the (onto)logic of the “free world.”

It is this decisive shaking of the epistemic foundation of liberal capitalist democracy that explains the continuing unappeasable anxiety of the American people about a war that officially “ended” in 1975: its spectral refusal to be deposited in the main—monumental—stream of American history. It is also this rupturing of the sutured American discourse of hegemony that explains the continuing paranoid and massively mobilized representational effort of the culture industry—the news media, television, the film industry, mainstream publishing houses, and even educational institutions—to “heal the wound” opened up in the collective American psyche by the United States’ brutal and contradictory conduct of the war, the wound, it should be marked, that, since the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War, has tellingly been rerepresented negatively as “the Vietnam syndrome”: that is, a national neurosis.<sup>19</sup> In short, the decentering of the liberal democratic *episteme* also explains the obsessive, but unrealizable, will to forget the haunting specter of Vietnam by remembering it re-collectively: by reifying and accommodating its disruptive differential force to the American (democratic/capitalist) cultural memory.

What is remarkable, to emphasize the disclosive paradox, about Fukuyama’s representative announcement of the end of history (and the variations on this theme by later deputies of the dominant culture such as Richard Haass, Samuel P. Huntington, Niall Ferguson, Michael Mandelbaum,<sup>20</sup> and many other neoconservatives) is its virtual silence about or

blindness to the cacophonously visible history of the Vietnam War. His book purports to be a true history of the world, focusing on its last stage of “development”: the dialectical struggle of political systems during the Cold War that terminates (eschatologically) in the demise of a self-contradictory communism and the absolutization of liberal capitalist democracy. But in the process, it literally effaces or, to use a metaphor invariably applied (and restricted) by the Cold War discourse to Stalinist narratives of modernity, it “airbrushes” this singular history. I am referring to the violent history that includes not only the thirty years of actual conflict, but also the twenty years following the defeat of the American military command (1975, the year that bore witness to the humiliating spectacle of the fall of Saigon) to the present post-Cold War, indeed, post-9/11, conjuncture. What should be immediately visible and legible to anyone who, against the grain of the amnesiac American discourse of hegemony, remains attuned to the global scope and epochal significance—the “postmodernity”—of the radically differential history of the Vietnam War is not simply Fukuyama’s (and his revisionary neo-conservative colleagues’) studied indifference to this singular history. It is also, and more important, his arrogant indifference to the difference this history might make in his “report” on the global operations of History, more specifically, in Derrida’s apt terms, in his eschatological tidings of “good news.”

As his reassuring representation of the likely future “setbacks and disappointments in the process of democratization” as mere *distractions* “from the larger pattern that is emerging in world history” inexorably ordains, Fukuyama’s “Hegelian” metaphysical problematic *compels* the trivialization of the history of the Vietnam War, if not the complete obliteration of its epochal significance. In his only more or less direct reference to that globally disruptive occasion, he violently reduces the resonant double difference that was/is the Vietnam War to the reified status of one in a series of vaguely affiliated historical “accidents” (a “fluke”) that deflects our attention from the planetary *eventness* of *this* war. From his Hegelian perspective—and reminiscent of the nineteenth-century American discourse of Manifest Destiny—Fukuyama transforms the Vietnam War into a minor, passing, and mere (i.e., fundamentally irrelevant) digression in the grand, inexorable, and necessary progress of the dialectical (meta)narrative of History toward its self-devouring end. In short, just as his mentor effaces the historical presence of Africa from his dialectical history of the world—“At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit”—so Fukuyama pacifies the disruptive force of the (non)event of Vietnam:

It is possible, after all, that the present trend toward democracy is a cyclical phenomenon. What reason, then, do we have to expect that the situation of the 1970s will not recur . . . ?

Can it not be argued, moreover, that the current crisis of authoritarianism is a fluke, a rare convergence of political planets that will not recur for the next hundred years? . . .

But it is precisely if we look not just at the past fifteen years, but at the *whole scope of history*, that liberal democracy begins to occupy a special kind of place. While there have been cycles in the worldwide fortunes of democracy, there has also been a pronounced secular trend in a democratic direction. . . . Indeed, the growth of liberal democracy, together with its companion, economic liberalism, has been the most remarkable macropolitical phenomenon of the last four hundred years. (*EH*, 47–48; Fukuyama’s emphasis)

In the counterlight of my retrieval of the global scope and significance of the Vietnam War, Fukuyama’s ocularcentric obliteration of its disclosive singularity in his euphoric representation of the end of the Cold War assumes a glaring visibility of epochal historical proportions. The totalizing and encompassing—panoptic—“look” he so casually advocates against the “merely” immediate event comes to be seen, not as the means of a disinterested reading of the itinerary of modern (Cold War) history as he claims, but as the powerful enabling agency of a polyvalent imperial interpretive project. *It takes on the lineaments of a lethal act of reduction and pacification that repeats at the site of thinking the indiscriminate violent practice that destroyed Vietnam in order to “save it.”* It is for this reason that this fissure in his totalized text—this visibility of his representational obliteration of the *thisness* of the war—needs to be carefully thought not only for its ideological implications but also for its implications for thinking as such.

### III

As the representation of such an all-encompassing imperial gaze, Fukuyama’s book, despite its prematurity, can be seen to constitute the culmination—the “end” (I want to stress the metaphors of vision and timelessness silently at work in this most crucial of “white” metaphors) of a massive polyvalent American historical project of cultural representation dedicated to the obliteration of the dislocating spectral memory of Vietnam in behalf of reclaiming the imperial authority of (American) lib-



eral capitalist democracy. Indeed, the book can be seen as the *theorization* of that retrospective and recollective ideological project of recuperation: as, that is, a global effort to *relegitimize* the dominant but historically crisis-riven liberal capitalist culture of America. It can be seen, in other words, as an ideological strategy intended to re-endow liberal American capitalist culture with the authority of law by invoking History *against* what is normally understood as practical history: by providing actually existing democracy with an ontological ground that always subordinates the “merely” historical and material specificities of economic and politic power to its privileged ideality.

This always visible hierarchical binary opposition between polities grounded in fundamental principles that “win hearts and minds” (e.g., the liberal democracy of the United States), and regimes that resort to overt force (e.g., the fascism of Nazi Germany and the communism of the Soviet Union), is obviously fundamental to Fukuyama’s duplicitous argument. “To understand the true weaknesses of the Soviet State,” Fukuyama reiterates, “the economic problem has to be put in the context of a much larger [and more fundamental] crisis, that of the legitimacy of the system as a whole. Economic failure was only one of a number of failures in the Soviet system, that had the effect of catalyzing rejection of the belief system and exposing the weakness of *the underlying structure*. *The most fundamental failure of totalitarianism was its failure to control thought*. Soviet citizens, as it turned out, had all along retained an ability to think for themselves” (*EH*, 29; my emphasis). This argument for a “legitimate” legitimacy that is grounded in an “underlying,” that is, ontological, truth and against an “illegitimate” legitimacy that is achieved by the overt use of power should recall what Foucault, by way of his analysis of the ocularcentrism of the discursive practices of modern humanist societies, exposed as the ruse of the “repressive hypothesis,” which assumes truth to be not internal but external to power and thus its essential adversary: the truth will set you free. This, according to Foucault, is the hypothesis invented by the liberal bourgeois reformers of the Enlightenment, most notably, the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, to obscure the complicity of (their) “knowledge” with power.<sup>21</sup>

Foucault limited the parameters of his analysis of this self-defining and enabling distinction of Enlightenment liberalism to the exposure of the latter as the disciplinary society (“the regime of truth”). But, as the concurrent emergence of the disciplinary society and European, especially British and French, colonialism suggests, it is not difficult to extend its applicability, as Edward Said had done, to the Enlightenment’s imperial project. For it is precisely this logic that everywhere informs the discourse and practice first of post-Enlightenment British colonialism—its virtually systematic invocation

of the brutality of the imperialism of the Turks, the Spanish, the Portuguese, or the Belgians (as in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and H. Ryder Haggard's *King Solomon's Mine*—and later, as I will show at length in chapter 6, of American colonialism—its systematic invocation of the French and especially the Spanish, as in James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, William Gilmore Simm's *The Yemassee*, Francis Parkman's *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, and George Bancroft's *History of the United States*) to define what their colonialism is not. As Conrad's spokesman, Marlowe, puts this perennial post-Enlightenment justificatory logic in *Heart of Darkness*:

Mind none of us [Marlowe and his British countrymen] would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps [the Romans in the past and the Belgians in the present] were not much account really. They were no colonists, their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you wanted brute force. . . . It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. *What redeems it is the idea only.* An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice."<sup>22</sup>

And it is precisely this duplicitous logic of the repressive hypothesis, pushed to its nuanced extreme, that, as in the case of Fukuyama's argument, contemporary liberal democratic societies, especially the United States, employ to justify their colonialist interventions in Third World countries. The fundamental representation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam bears witness to this. Even before the demise of French control in Indochina with the fall of Dien Bien Phu (May 7, 1954), America—the presidency, the Congress, the Pentagon, the culture industry—predictably justified its intervention by insistently distinguishing its motives as radically different from those informing the decadent colonialism of Old World France. As I will show at length in chapter 3, the fraudulence of this benign American exceptionalist justification was proleptically exposed—if not acknowledged by the American public—long ago by Graham Greene's portrayal of the young, idealist American Alden Pyle in his

novel *The Quiet American* (1955). Pyle, it will be recalled, comes to Vietnam inscribed by the writing of York Harding, an American “Asian expert”—an “Orientalist” as Edward Said would put it—whose discourse about the Orient is informed not only by the “domino theory” and the strategy of the “Third Force,” but also by the profound disdain for Old World colonialism that has characterized American culture since its origins in the Puritan’s genocidal exceptionalist “errand in the wilderness.” And, in the name of his culture’s assumed moral and racial superiority—and its certainty of “winning the hearts and minds” of these backward Asiatics—this Cold War American Adam, armed with Harding’s *The Advance of Red China*, the implacable Word or, as Said calls this dangerously quixotic vision, the “textual attitude,”<sup>23</sup> leaves a trail of innocent blood in his inexorably undeviating wake.

#### IV

What should be remarkable to anyone attuned to the dissonance of the actual history of this century is not only the failure of oppositional discourses—for example, deconstruction, Marxism, the new historicism, feminism, cultural critique, and even postcolonialist criticism—to perceive the rigorously logical counterrelationship between the Vietnam War and the triumphalist representation of the post-Cold War as the end of history and the advent of the New World Order or its later accommodational variants. These oppositional discourses, which include New Americanist studies, had their provenance in and continue to identify themselves with the post-Enlightenment countermemory. It should also be remarkable, therefore, that they have been blinded by their vestigially disciplinary problematics to the rigorously logical complicity of the American cultural memory’s massive and obsessively sustained effort in the thirty-year aftermath to obliterate the radically differential actual history of the Vietnam War (and to discredit the posthumanist discourses it precipitated)<sup>24</sup> with the triumphalist post-Cold War discourse’s more subtle obliteration of this radically disruptive event by *accommodating* it to the logical economy of the (Hegelian) dialectics of “the larger pattern” of History.

Given the glaring visibility of Fukuyama’s invisibilizing of the Vietnam War—a process further abetted by Richard Haass’s, and, as I will show later, Samuel P. Huntington’s and the numerous Straussian neo-conservatives’ “realistic” representation of the post-9/11 world—it is surprising, in other words, that these oppositional discourses should have been blind to his arrogant (or incredibly naive) re-visionary/recuperative

strategy, to the fact that this end-of-history discourse of what, since then, has come to be called “the American Century” relies on a now anachronistic ontological justification. I mean a rationale that reverts to the very *episteme*—the ground of legitimacy—that the singular event of the Vietnam War and the “theory” it precipitated had decisively delegitimized by revealing the truth discourse of liberal capitalist democracy to be a social construction—that of the “Anglo-Protestant core culture,” as Huntington will put it after 9/11—infused by a totalizing will to power that is characterized by its suppression or accommodation, the colonization, as it were, of the entire relay of Others composing the continuum of being to its polyvalent Identity.

To put that which these oppositional discourses overlook succinctly, Fukuyama’s representation of the end of the Cold War or, to emphasize that it is the hegemonization of this end-of-history discourse with which I am concerned, the mediatization of his representation, is informed by a metaphysical ontology that willfully subdues actual history, its differential dynamics, to its secularized transcendental *Logos*. In short, the calculative/instrumentalist thinking it privileges as the agency of truth is *essentially* imperial. It is not so much liberal capitalism’s practical colonization of the planet as such that this end-of-history discourse is celebrating. After all, Fukuyama, Haass, and the culture they and their neoconservative colleagues represent acknowledge the possibility of future setbacks and disappointments in this geopolitical “American” project. It is, rather, its planetary colonization of thinking in its technological/instrumentalist mode, though the two are not mutually exclusive, indeed, are indissolubly related. The fundamental ideological purpose of this discourse is to delegitimize *every other* form of thinking than that dialectical/instrumental reasoning that, according to the Kojévian/Hegelian perspective informing it, History’s *Aufhebung* has precipitated as the planetary absolute—the *Pax Metaphysica*, as it were.

This total “victory” of a historically “perfected” calculative metaphysics means, of course, the decisive preclusion as a viable option of the kind of ontological/political thinking precipitated as an imperative by the recognition of the Vietnam War as a radical contradiction in the discursive practices of liberal capitalist democracy, the kind of differential thinking, that is, that haunts the legitimacy of the latter’s “benign” global narrative. The massive post-Cold War representation of every manifestation of such thinking first as “politically correct,” a “new McCarthyism of the Left,” by the “victors” has contributed significantly to the demise of the little authority it originally achieved, indeed, as I will show, to their demonization after 9/11 as complicitous with, if not acts of, terrorism as such. It thus bears emphatic witness to the success of the dominant culture’s recupera-