

GOING PARANOID FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE POST-COLD
WAR: CONSPIRACY FICTION OF DELILLO, DIDION, AND SILKO

A Dissertation

by

SEUNG GU LEW

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2009

Major Subject: English

GOING PARANOID FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE POST-COLD
WAR: CONSPIRACY FICTION OF DELILLO, DIDION, AND SILKO

A Dissertation

by

SEUNG GU LEW

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	David McWhirter
Committee Members,	Richard J. Golsan
	Larry J. Reynolds
	Sally Robinson
Head of Department,	M. Jimmie Killingsworth

May 2009

Major Subject: English

ABSTRACT

Going Paranoid from the Cold War to the Post-Cold War: Conspiracy Fiction of DeLillo,
Didion, and Silko. (May 2009)

Seung Gu Lew, B.A., Kangnung National University;

M.A., Sogang University;

M.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. David McWhirter

This dissertation proposes to examine the conspiracy narratives of Don DeLillo, Joan Didion, and Leslie Marmon Silko that retell American experience with the Cold War and its culture of paranoia for the last half of the twentieth century. Witnessing the resurgence of Cold War paranoia and its dramatic twilight during the period from late 70s to mid-80s and the sudden advent of the post-Cold War era that has provoked a volatile mixture of euphoria and melancholia, the work of DeLillo, Didion, and Silko explores the changing mode of Cold War paranoid epistemology and contemplates its conditions of narrative possibility in the post-Cold War era.

From his earlier novels such as *Players*, *The Names*, and *Mao II* to his latest novel about 9/11 *Falling Man*, DeLillo has interrogated how the American paradigm of paranoid national self-fashioning envisioned by Cold War liberals stands up to its equally paranoid post-Cold War nemesis, terrorism. In his epic dramatization of Cold War history in *Underworld*, DeLillo mythologizes the doomed sense of paranoid

connectivity and collective belonging experienced during the Cold War era. In doing so, DeLillo attempts to contain the uncertainty and instability of the post-Cold War or what Francis Fukuyama calls “post-historical” landscape of global cognitive mapping within the nostalgically secured memory of the American crowd who had lived the paranoid history of the Cold War. In her novels that investigate the history of American involvements in the Third World from Eisenhower through Kennedy to Reagan, Didion employs the minimalist narrative style to curb, extenuate, or condense the paranoid narratives of Cold War imperial romance most recently exemplified in the Iran-Contra conspiracy. In her latest Cold War romance novel *The Last Thing He Wanted*, Didion reassesses her earlier narrative tactic of “calculated ellipsis” employed in *A Book of Common Prayer* and *Democracy* and seeks to commemorate individual romances behind the spectacles of Cold War myth of frontier. Departing from the rhetoric of “hybrid patriotism” in *Ceremony*, a Native American story of spiritual healing and lyricism that works to appease white paranoia and guilt associated with the atomic bomb, Silko in *Almanac of the Dead* seeks to subvert the paranoid regime of Cold War imperialism inflicted upon Native Americans and Third World subjects by mobilizing alternative conspiracy narratives from the storytelling tradition of Native American spirituality. Silko’s postnational spiritual conspiracy gestures toward a global cognitive mapping beyond the American Cold War paradigm of “paranoid oneworldedness.”

DEDICATION

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. David McWhirter and my committee members, Dr. Larry J. Reynolds, Dr. Sally Robinson, and Dr. Richard J. Golsan, for their guidance and encouragement throughout the course of this research. Thanks also go to my friends and colleagues and the department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M University a great experience.

Finally, thanks to my parents for their unwavering support and prayer and to my academic companion, closest friend, and wife for her love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION: AFTER PYNCHON	1
II COLD WAR PARANOIA AND ITS BEYOND: DON DELILLO	28
1. Terrorism and the Dialects of Paranoia: The Paradox of “Agency Panic” in <i>Players</i> (1977) and <i>The Names</i> (1982)	33
2. <i>Mao II</i> (1991): Terrorism and the “Radical Nerve” of the American Novel	48
3. Beyond Cold War Paranoia: “Longing” for the American Crowd in <i>Underworld</i> (1997)	72
III COLD WAR IMPERIAL ROMANCES OF CONSPIRACY:	
JOAN DIDION	103
1. Cold War Imperial Romance and the Spectacle of “Calculated Ellipsis”: <i>A Book of Common Prayer</i> (1977) and <i>Democracy</i> (1984)	109
2. Toward the Post-Cold War Romance: <i>The Last Thing He Wanted</i> (1996)	133
IV WHITE PARANOIA AND NATIVE CONSPIRACIES:	
LESLIE MARMON SILKO	155
1. “Hybrid Patriotism”: The Cold War and the Native American Quest for Identity in <i>Ceremony</i> (1977)	159
2. From Cold War Psychological Hygiene to Native	

CHAPTER	Page
American Spirituality: A Quest for Revolutionary Conspiracy in <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1997)	179
3. Exploding White Cold War Paranoia: A War of Stories, Spirits, and Conspiracies	203
4. The Politics of Spiritual Conspiracy in the Third World	230
V CONCLUSION: PARANOID ONEWORLDEDNESS AND CONSPIRING TOTALITY	258
WORKS CITED	265
VITA	283

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: AFTER PYNCHON

Even though conspiracy thinking had existed from the earliest moments of American history, it was in the post-war era that conspiracy thinking and anxiety about its populist persuasion became a dominant cultural phenomenon. With the advent of the Cold War, conspiracy thinking grew omnipresent throughout American society, hovering over the popular imagination, the culture industry, national politics, and foreign policy. With the harrowing experiences with totalitarianism in Europe, the rise of international communism, and the surge of domestic populist sentiments on both the extreme right and the extreme left all remaining acutely raw in their memories, many Cold War liberals were highly concerned about the possible threats of populist conspiracy thinking. As Richard Hofstadter asserts in his germinal essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” (1964), for the “masses” of conspiracy mindset, “history” itself “*is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power*” (29). Many Cold War intellectuals, sociologists, and prominent public figures—like Hofstadter, Lionel Trilling, Daniel Bell, David Riesman, William Whyte, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and J. Edgar Hoover, to name a few—felt that traditional American liberal values, such as Weberian rugged individualism, autonomy, rationality, and national unity, were increasingly challenged by the ever-expanding commodification and corporatization of American life, the explosive growth of the middle class, and the expansionist policy of international communism.¹

This dissertation follows the *MLA Style Manual*.

Cold War liberals' alarmism and paranoia towards popular conspiracy thinking was not so much an intellectual response towards the post-war conspiracy culture as an ideological and psychological component of it. In fact, liberal alarmism coincided with the emergence of conspiracy culture in the popular expressions of Cold War anxiety. Enormously popular novels like Sloan Wilson's *The Man in Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) and Allen Drury's *Advise and Consent* (1959) gave expression to the post-war social and political anxieties partly resulting from the post-war destabilization of social and economic systems, partly from the emergence of global rivalry with international communism. Films such as Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954), Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), and Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) expressed Cold War paranoia about the atomic bomb, communist infiltration, mass hysteria, and crackpot extremism of populist demagoguery.

These mostly negative, patronizing, and paranoid undertakings of conspiracy culture during the earlier period of the Cold War both in intellectual circles and popular entertainments gave way to a less pejorative, more self-conscious, countercultural, high-brow mode of conspiracy thinking. By the end of the 1960s, with the Kennedy assassination as its most traumatic moment, conspiracy thinking and paranoid imagination became increasingly noticeable across a variety of new social movements including anti-war student activism, feminism, and black activism. As Peter Knight argues in his *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files*, while the earlier Cold

War conspiracy thinking “posited a threat to the American way of life and politics by subversive minorities” as alleged most notoriously by Senator Joseph McCarthy and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, the “new forms of oppositional conspiracy culture” emerging in the 1960s and after “have been based on the assumption that the American way of life is itself a threat to those marginalized by it” (34). The early novels of Thomas Pynchon, who has often been regarded as the “catalyst” of contemporary highbrow conspiracy fiction, reflect this gradual transformation of conspiracy thinking and paranoid imagination (Apter 367).² Pynchon’s fictions utilize conspiracy as a mode of narrative logic, integral to the 60s and 70s’ counterculture. Yet, they also indicate a historical tendency noted by some cultural critics that as conspiracy thinking and its narrative logic become more and more routinized and commercially exploited in the later period of the Cold War, conspiracy narrative appears to lose its potentially oppositional or countercultural edges, increasingly turning more content with making a highly cynical, relentlessly self-referential posture toward itself.

Written in the two years after Lee Harvey Oswald had shot John F. Kennedy to death from a window of the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas,³ Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* is a highly self-conscious literary representation of the dramatic explosion and dissemination of conspiracy thinking in the 60s, when paranoia came to be a dominant mode of understanding and representing social reality, becoming what Patrick O’Donnell broadly dubs “cultural paranoia” (181-82).⁴ Only a few months after part of the novel was published in *Esquire* under a different title, and in the very same year the novel itself came out, the magazine put out a special issue entitled “Spying,

Science, and Sex.” “During the first three-quarters of 1966,” one article reports, “Americans will be able to witness twenty-three movies and ten regular television programs based on themes of spying, international espionage or undercover operations” (81). Front-covered by a close-up face of a Bond-girl-type sleeping beauty with her long and darkly lashed eyes closed but having a third eye in her forehead wide open like a surveillance camera, the special issue includes: investigative articles about the CIA where “Secrecy is worshipped with an intensity that borders on the religious” (85); a book review done by a former intelligence officer of an autobiographical novel written by a former female CIA agent; an interview with Francis Gary Powers, a famous pilot of the U-2 that was shot down in May 1960 while flying over Russia; pieces about spying technology and mind control; Henry Miller’s talk about sex; William Burroughs’s one-page fictional piece described as “The last, fantastic word on the identity of undercover agents” (95); and finally, an article entitled “Wake Up America! It Can Happen Here!: A post-McCarthy guide to twenty-three conspiracies by assorted enemies within” ranging from “The Ubiquitous THEY,” “The Zip-Code Plot,” “Kennedy-Assassination Conspiracy,” “The Homosexual Conspiracy,” to “The Council on Foreign Relations Scheme” backed by the “Internationalist-Communist Conspiracy” (165). Tapping into the topic of Cold War paranoia that the magazine so readily exploits in its sensationalized narratives of the “American Daydream” (79)—voyeuristic male fantasies of espionage, infiltration into conspiracies, and fetishization of modern technology and the science of mind control—Pynchon’s novel investigates the possibilities and dangers

of paranoid imagination through its female protagonist's journey into the territory of conspiracy.

Oedipa Maas—perhaps the most famous paranoiac in American fiction—is in more ways than one a product of the Cold War.⁵ When visiting the Berkeley campus to meet a professor of English who edited a collection of plays in 1957 that includes an obscure Jacobean revenge play which she believes could provide a critical clue about the Tristero conspiracy, a secret postal system with a centuries-long history of underground existence, Oedipa finds “this Berkeley” to be “like no somnolent Siwash out of her own past at all” (103). For Oedipa, who “had undergone her own educating at a time of nerves, blandness and retreat among not only her fellow students but also most of the visible structure around and ahead of them,” the Berkeley campus in the mid-60s looks more like “those Far Eastern or Latin American universities you read about” where “the most beloved of folklores may be brought into doubt, cataclysmic of dissents voiced, suicidal of commitments chosen—the sort that bring governments down” (103-4). “Where [are] Secretaries James and Foster and Senator Joseph,” Pynchon inserts as a mock question, “those dear daft numina who’d mothered over Oedipa’s so temperate youth?” (104). The novel suggests that in the 60s there seemed to be two different—if not always mutually exclusive—historical patterns of paranoia to be embraced by those who, like Oedipa and Pynchon himself, had attended college sometime during the early Cold War period from Truman to Eisenhower: the one is, as Oedipa witnesses at Berkeley, going openly rebellious through radical political activism, cultural iconoclasm, or drug abuse; the other track, which Oedipa finds herself in, is silently accepting

paranoia as one of the perennial conditions of individual and social existence in post-war American life.

Pynchon goes further to suggest the possibility that either path of paranoia for his generation to choose in the 60s could be in fact a false choice secretly designed by the same “faceless pointsmen” who a decade before had sought to propagate a collective sense of anxious “blandness” and “retreat” among college students and to circumscribe their sensibility around the most “visible structure” of global and domestic imagination at the time, the Cold War. Now, following “another string of decisions taken,” those anonymous managers of power, the novel implies, deliberately leave some of Oedipa’s generation to be “transferred, deserted, in stir, fleeing the skip-tracers, out of their skull, on horse, alcoholic, fanatic, under aliases, dead, impossible to find ever again,” while turning others into harmless paranoids, as is the case of Oedipa Maas: “Among them they had managed to turn the young Oedipa into a rare creature indeed, unfit perhaps for marches and sit-ins, but just a whiz at pursuing strange words in Jacobean texts” (104).

Like “Puritans” who are “utterly devoted, like literary critics, to the Word” of God and zealously searching for His plans everywhere they look (156), Oedipa finds everywhere she goes hidden plots, ambiguous patterns, connections, hieroglyphics, and, of course, the famous muted post horn, all pointing towards the Tristero System, also referred to as WASTE. The mysterious director of the Jacobean drama warns Oedipa: “You could waste your life that way and never touch truth” (80)—a premonition that does not leave her entirely even at the end when she enters the auction of Lot 49. In the middle of her nightly pilgrimage to San Francisco’s marginalized backstreets, she even

wonders “if the gemlike ‘clues’” she has frequently witnessed all along “were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night” (118). Oedipa’s paranoia goes to the extent that she believes that the WASTE symbol she finds everywhere might be itself part of a plot designed to entice her to “waste [her] life” and “never touch truth,” pursuing perhaps a delusion of conspiracy (80).

Pynchon never tells us whether Oedipa is “in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero” (182); nor does it seem his main concern in the novel. Rather, the novel might be better characterized as Pynchon’s broader meditation about the function of paranoid imagination in the post-war era, a time that has, on the one hand, been defined by the dominant official discourse of Cold War bipolarism and its logic of containment, and, on the other hand, radically disoriented by the postmodern conditions of signification in which any ideological or epistemic frame of total reality becomes suspect. In this mixed historical juncture where the repressive certainty of Cold War discourse and its reductionist vision of totality converge with postmodern skepticism towards any meta-narrative explanation of totality, Pynchon implies, going paranoid—which is close to playing “God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself” (128-29)—could be “a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know” (170). Paranoia could also be an alternative narrative strategy to negotiate, “without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids,” “a secret richness and concealed density of dream” or a certain dissenting vision of historical

totality and communal connectedness that could resist “the official government delivery system” of Cold War discourse (170).

By nature, however, going paranoid has its obvious limitations and pitfalls, a fact that Pynchon is evidently aware of. Metzger, Oedipa’s co-executor of Pierce Inverarity’s will, comments upon Stanley Koteks’s conspiracy theory about his own workplace, an aerospace industry giant named Yoyodyne: “You’re so right-wing you’re left-wing” (88-89). A similar comment could be made about Mike Fallopian, an amateur scholar of the history of private mail delivery in the US and a member of the Peter Pinguid Society, who believes that Peter Pinguid, a Confederate commanding officer of a man-of-war during the Civil War, was the “first casualty” of an abolitionist conspiracy, not “the fanatic [their] more left-leaning friends over in the Birch Society chose to martyrize” (50). The Society claims that a proto-Cold War conspiracy between Abraham Lincoln and Nicholas II, abolitionist Czar of Russia, had precluded Peter Pinguid from attacking San Francisco by way of Cape Horn. What these comedic paranoid characters point to is that a law of entropy operates in paranoid imagination: paranoia’s narrative fecundity ultimately collapses to a zero degree of meaning at its extreme peak, and blossoming everywhere, it tends to be blind to any specific political persuasion.⁶ At its consummate moment of near-total connection, conspiracy theory collapses to contingency theory. However pervasive and ubiquitous the paranoid mentality is in post-war American culture, it almost always locates itself in the discursive fringes of the dominant ideology, and thus often invites the logic of self-victimization and self-delegitimization, delimiting its potentially dissenting narrative power of persuasion that could help maintain what

Fredric Jameson calls in his article “Cognitive Mapping” “a conception of the social totality” (355).

These limitations inherent in paranoid imagination lead Christopher Lasch to argue that Pynchon’s fiction exemplifies the general tendency of contemporary novelists to “[hide] the obvious behind a veil of obscurity,” satisfying themselves with repeatedly foregrounding “the impossibility of an objective understanding of events” and “the impossibility of moral discriminations in an age of atrocities” (159). “The best writing today,” like Pynchon’s, Lasch continues, “has the effect of removing history from the realm of moral judgment” and of glorifying “the contemporary experience of helplessness, victimization, and paralyzing self-consciousness but without connecting it to any larger social life outside the self” (159, 162). It is, however, hard to accept Lasch’s rather lordly generalization of Pynchon’s highly complex esthetic of paranoia. As his fiction clearly manifests, Pynchon is not blind to the possibility that paranoia can be easily co-opted by the “hoariest” ideology of Cold War skepticism which, Frederic Jameson argues, serves to obfuscate the critical distinction between “totalizing thought” and “totalitarian thought” and to stigmatize any attempt to conceptualize social totality and historical representation (“Cognitive Mapping” 354).⁷ Pynchon’s paranoia is more than a symptom of historical amnesia or psychic escape to oddly comfy indulgence in self-victimization or self-paralysis: his characters are certainly paranoid, but their paranoia helps them preserve a certain critical or “cognitive” consciousness about their own symptom. Oedipa, a self-proclaimed “Young Republican,” wonders whether her paranoia itself is “all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction, *plot*” designed by the same

anonymous “They” who “are stripping away” people around her like her husband, Wendell Maas, and her psychiatrist, Dr. Hilarius, “one by one,” by intentionally leading them into a trap of madness and narcotic intoxication (76, 31, 153). Unlike clinical paranoiacs, Oedipa consciously and almost ritually reminds herself that she is paranoid, so much so that her sanity itself seems dependent on her ability to remain paranoid. Dr. Hilarius, Oedipa’s “shrink,” tells her that he “chose to remain in relative paranoia,” where he can envision “who [he is] and who the others are” (136), although he later goes completely deranged when he comes to believe an Israeli conspiracy is after him. As such, for Pynchon, “cultural paranoia” not only entails an element of schizophrenic self-doubt, but also conserves, in however convoluted and delimiting a fashion, a certain level of belief in individual agency and social connectivity.

Post-war conspiracy narratives have quite often been discussed in terms of the postmodern crisis of meta-narrative, totality, and identity. As Frederic Jameson implies when he says that conspiracy theory is a “degraded attempt ... to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system” (*Postmodernism* 38), conspiracy as a mode of “cognitive mapping” has functioned as a pseudo-meta-narrative or historical vision as well as an individual or collective psychological defense mechanism in post-war and postmodern America. Discussing popular conspiracy films and narratives, Jameson argues in “Totality as Conspiracy” that totality in the postmodern era can be found, if anywhere, in the allegorizing narrative function of conspiracy. Jameson parallels the waning and disappearance of the historical/realist/modernist mode of literature with the emergence of conspiratorial narratives, in which historical “truth” or totality is circulated,

represented, and contained in the realm of simulacra and the imaginary. Due to the impact of the media and communicational and information technologies, totality in late capitalism irrecoverably becomes an impossible representation of totality, and the “imperfect mediatory and allegorical structure” of conspiracy (9) is almost the only possible narrative strategy to re-cognize the un-representable totality, a strategy which gives some—however fitful and provisional—moments of appearance of totality.

Jameson is neither enthusiastic nor sentimentally pessimistic about conspiracy as a “degraded” form of envisioning totality. Although conspiracy is “the poor person’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age” and certainly “a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital,” it is, nevertheless, “a desperate attempt to represent” its system (“Cognitive Mapping” 356). For Jameson, “the theme of paranoia” expressed in “a seemingly inexhaustible production of conspiracy plots of the most elaborate kinds” reflects a postmodern “turn toward a thematics of mechanical reproduction,” a tendency in which “the autoreferentiality of much of postmodernist art takes the form of a play with reproductive technology” which is “a degraded figure of the great multinational space that remains to be cognitively mapped” (356). If conspiracy posits a “degraded” vision of totality, so does the “thematics of mechanical reproduction” that finds its expression in postmodern art that tends to create an autoreferential illusion of connectedness and representation.⁸ Putting it more bluntly at the risk of undue simplification, the “degraded” form of cognitive mapping is called upon to cope with the “degraded” prospect of imagining any global social totality and the “dissatisfaction with the concept of totality” in the postmodern age (356).

What most troubles Jameson in his discussion of cognitive mapping is a widespread tendency in certain strands of postmodern thinking to repudiate and stigmatize the concepts of representation and totality, equating “a philosophical conception of totality” with “a political practice of totalitarianism”—a danger of “reproducing or reinstating the hoarist American ideological slogans of the Cold War: totalizing thought is totalitarian thought” (354). Though Jameson is talking about cognitive mapping in its proper form of higher aspiration and solemnity, Oedipa’s embrace of paranoid imagination encounters a similar voice of skepticism. At the end of the novel, Oedipa believes she now recognizes a complete picture of connection about the Tristero conspiracy and the Inverarity estate. Yet, she immediately knows that “they’ll call it paranoia,” degrading her cognitive mapping to a total hallucination (170). At the very moment when her paranoid pursuit finally leads to a narrative totality, Oedipa hears the loudest voice of repudiation from the anonymous “They,” who she sometimes believes have deliberately set her up with endless “clues” and “hints,” an exitless trap of paranoia which exhausts her desire for transcendental meaning.

Even if she might fail to completely penetrate the anonymity of the conspiracy, Oedipa maintains an intense sense of agency to the end in a way reminiscent of Dr. Hilarius’s “relative paranoia” that helps him become sensitized about “who [he] is and who the others are” (136). In *Empire of Conspiracy*, Timothy Melley develops Jameson’s take on conspiracy and discusses postmodern conspiracy thinking in terms of what he calls “agency panic.” By “agency panic,” he means “intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control—the conviction that one’s actions are being

controlled by someone else, that one has been “constructed” by powerful external agents” (12). Facing the postmodern crisis of meta-narrative, totality, and identity, individuals or groups of people try to defend their individuality and autonomy by taking a paranoid stance against such external entities as social institutions, economic systems, political collectivities, and foreign powers. This paranoid self-defense leads to the conviction that those external entities are real agents with autonomy and omnipresent power, a process Melley calls “postmodern transference.” In other words, the “hyperindividualism” (25) of a paranoid subject paradoxically results in a belief that the external entities, not the paranoid individuals, have total autonomy and agency. Thus, conspiracy thinking in the postmodern era is simultaneously a “nervous acknowledgement” and “rejection of “postmodern subjectivity” (15).

The work of Jameson and Melley allows us to entertain conspiracy thinking as a way of preserving the liberal humanist idea of subjectivity in a form most conspicuously dramatized in the rhetoric of paranoia and agency panic. For both, conspiracy is eventually a “negative” (“degraded” or “panic”) modality of self-defense, identification, and subject-formation. Since the subject produced by conspiracy thinking is a doubly “decentered” one, resulting from its unavoidable hyperindividualism and oversocialization, there is not much possibility or capability for the subject to achieve political legitimacy or authority. Consequently, for Jameson and Melley, agents of conspiracy thinking seem like inevitable casualties of the postmodern condition.

Even though essentially agreeing with Jameson and Melley in terms of the “degraded” status of conspiracy thinking, Peter Knight is more concerned with what

functions conspiracy thinking has been performing, what kinds of social groups have used it for their advantages, and how the nature of conspiracy thinking has changed, particularly, from the earlier conspiracy of “un-American” forces to the post-1960s pervasive and omnipresent culture of conspiracy. Suggesting “a strong connection between notions of manifest national identity and patterns of conspiratorial thought” in America, Knight argues that “in the postnationalist new world order of the global economy” the conspiratorial imagination now seems unsure of what is American and what not (“Introduction” 5). In other words, as the Cold War liberal consensus has been replaced with the post-1960s dissensus leading to a “postnationalist” world view, the conspiratorial imagination comes to face an ever more challenging task of constructing national identity. In this context, agency panic is now “(post)national” as well.

In “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions Into the Canon,” Donald E. Pease attempts to formulate a theory of what he calls the “New Americanist Counter-Hegemony,” one which, replacing the Cold War liberal consensus school of American Studies, will recover the connection between the political and the cultural, the literary and the social, and the public and the private, and possibly incorporate the dissenting voices of class, gender, race, and nation. The Cold War meta-narrative of universal national identity, Pease argues in another article, should be replaced with what he calls “postnational narratives,” in which hitherto “disenfranchised groups” could construct their own multiple identities (“National Identities” 2, 3). Although Pease is not in any way concerned with conspiracy thinking, his concept of “*postnational, provisional strategies*” (6) sheds light on the question of what we might call, following Knight, the

“postnational” agency panic of conspiracy thinking. According to Pease, the “liberal imagination” of the Cold War consensus Americanists constructs a “national meta-narrative” (4) that “interpellated a subject within a self-referential social symbolic order” (8). And this national symbolic order will be exposed as only an artifact by “postnational narratives.” Reviewing Patrick O’Donnell’s “Engendering Paranoia in Contemporary Narrative,” Pease writes that functioning as a “meta-category,” paranoia “refers to the desire to be totally inscribed within the social imaginary of the national narrative, even when all of the positions within that narrative have been dispersed” (13). Like Jameson, Melley, and Knight, therefore, Pease acknowledges that conspiracy thinking is able to construct a “hyperinterpellation—the capacity to produce narrative connections between completely disconnected cultural materials” (13). Unlike other commentators who regard conspiracy thinking as a form of identity “panic,” however, Pease seems to be aware of the possibility that conspiracy thinking might provide a “postnational” strategy that could help build some alternative, counter-hegemonic national imaginaries and identities in the post-Cold War era.

The “postnational” Donald Pease theorizes is to a great extent akin to the “postcolonial” of Homi K. Bhabha. Just like Pease, Bhabha takes advantage of the insights of poststructuralism in general, and Lacanian/Althusserian insights on identity formation in particular. By giving “poststructuralism a specifically postcolonial provenance”(64), Homi Bhabha attempts to challenge the kind of elegiac, subdued attitude toward the postmodern dilemma of identity formation that Melley, for instance, reveals in his envisioning of conspiracy thinking as a phenomenon of “agency panic.”

Similar to Pease, who proposes to construct “postnational” identities and multiple interpellations within the national symbolic order, Bhabha foregrounds “the *repetitious* desire to recognize ourselves doubly, as, at once, decentred in the solidary processes of the political group, and yet, ourself as a consciously committed, even individuated, agent of change—the bearer of belief”(65). Thus, Melley’s subject—who can construct his identity only through the process of decentering “postmodern transference” (that is, by hyperinterpellation and oversocialization)—becomes for Bhabha the very site of postcolonial identity formation and political agency construction. In this respect, the post-Cold War conspiracy imagination, which creates excesses and slippages in the repetitious or perpetual process of identity construction, might be a welcome phenomenon that dramatically exemplifies the strategies of “postnational” and “postcolonial” identity politics.

After a famously long silence, Pynchon put out another paranoid narrative, *Vineland*, at a time when American history is on the verge of moving into the post-Cold War era. Obviously, the novel is a sequel of *The Crying of Lot 49*, tracing the lives of Cold War paranoid subjects—60s’ political radicals, doped hippies, and masochistic government agents—from the Nixon era to the end of Reagan’s first term. Oedipa’s disk jockey husband, Mucho Maas, briefly appears in a scene when he “had decided around 1967, after a divorce ... to go into record producing” and became an industry biggie (309). Centered on the story of Frenesi, a 60s radical-turned government informant, *Vineland* ponders the bitter political betrayal and commercial co-optation of once oppositional paranoia during what he describes as “the Nixon Reaction,” and witnesses

the resurgence of Cold War paranoia during the Reagan years when everyone is becoming “even more paranoid than usual” (175). *Vineland* also attests to a far more globalized, postnational scenery of paranoia than its predecessor, playing with, for instance, a conspiracy theory that “There had always been channels between the yakuza and the American military” (128). Yet, Pynchon’s incorporation of commercialized, New Age-style Eastern cultural images is, at best, absurdly humorous, falling short of tempering the novel’s sarcastically pessimistic indictment of the return of Cold War paranoia in the 80s and the diminishing prospect of imagining a tenable vision of global social totality through paranoid cognitive mapping. In *Vineland*, Pynchon’s profoundly illuminating insights on cultural paranoia so brilliantly interrogated in *The Crying of Lot 49* appear significantly exhausted when confronting another wave of Cold War discourse in the 80s.

Interestingly, just as in 1960 Daniel Bell declared the “end of ideology” at the beginning of the Cold War era, so Francis Fukuyama declares in his controversial 1989 essay “The End of History?” that with the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, we are advancing towards the age of “post-history,” not entirely sure about what is next, and nostalgically relishing the sense of national destination and purpose, fullness of emotion and drama, and collective identity experienced during the bygone era of the Cold War. Here Fukuyama is repeating much of what many Cold War liberals had expressed about the post-war era: an anxiety-laden euphoria after the global war; a sense of the exhaustion of political ideologies, the end of history, and a nostalgic or elegiac reflection upon past history; a yearning for, or a realization of a need for, certain liberal humanist

cultural grounds for agency and national purpose; and a pervasive anxiety about the future.

This dissertation proposes to examine the conspiracy narratives of Don DeLillo, Joan Didion, and Leslie Marmon Silko that have been written mostly during the last two decades of the twentieth-century, more specifically from the beginning of the so-called Second Cold War in Reagan's presidency to the post-Cold War era. Retelling American experience with the Cold War from its twilight moment, contemplating the historical transition toward the post-Cold War era, DeLillo, Didion, and Silko take paranoia as an important narrative topos and grapple with many of the same questions that Pynchon had navigated through Oedipa Maas's quest for meaning and connectedness. For these writers, paranoia is a governing narrative principle of post-war American history from the Atomic Bomb and McCarthyism, through the Kennedy Assassination, Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall, to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Crisscrossing two temporalities—the Cold War and the post-Cold War—the work of these writers looks into the changing mode of paranoid epistemology and contemplates its conditions of narrative possibility in the post-Cold War era.

Are we witnessing the end of Cold War conspiracy thinking with the “end of history”? Has all the psychological and political energy behind Cold War paranoia and its historical vision been exhausted? What are the functions of conspiracy in post-Cold War American fiction? While traditional Cold War conspiracy narratives—from popular cultural texts like John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) to highbrow literature like Pynchon's fiction—reflect anxiety and hysteria about alien Others within

and without, DeLillo's conspiracy fiction tends to mythologize the historical sense of paranoid connectivity and collective belonging and tries to contain the instability and uncertainty of the present "post-historical" epoch within the secure memory of the paranoid past. In her effort to configure the geography of US Cold War imperial romance, Didion mobilizes the power of conspiracy thinking that had been a dominant mode of American national self-fashioning during the Cold War. Unlike Pynchon's *Vineland*, which represents an increasing tendency pervasive in the 80s to accept a sense of exhaustion of countercultural paranoid vision, Silko's post-Cold War paranoid imagination revives a counter-hegemonic form of conspiracy thinking as a mode of global cognitive mapping from the perspective of Native American spirituality. What the work of DeLillo, Didion, and Silko points to in different ways is that paranoia—both as a mode of imagining historical totality and as a paradoxical way of sensitizing individual and collective agency—is not dead or exhausted with the end of the Cold War, but self-consciously recalled with higher intensity and urgency partly because of the very sensational fanfare of the "End of History."

The conspiracy narratives of these authors also attempt to reconfigure America's relation to the Others of the Cold War: that is, those background "theatres" of the international Cold War ranging from South Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, the Mediterranean, to the Caribbean, as well as the Others-within that include not only ethnic or economic minorities but also victims of America's Cold War ambitions and those ordinary Americans so often derogatively termed the "masses" during the Cold War. DeLillo's paranoid subjects migrate from New York's Bronx to

Greece's Athens, from New Jersey to Lebanon, from the desert of Kazakhstan to the desert of the American South West, where Silko's Native American characters are busy plotting a grand conspiracy to rewrite white people's teleological vision of history and horizontalize its vertical narrative structure, imposed upon the sacred land of their ancestors most recently during the Cold War. Silko's global vision of spiritual conspiracy mobilizes an unusual mixture of forgotten stories of Cold War others from Africa, East Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the same location Didion's American characters wander around as tourists, imperial sojourners, or secret federal agents, pondering their roles in the US Cold War imperial romance. Testing the American narrative vision of Cold War paranoia on the peripheries of the global Cold War, or on the historically marginalized and forgotten territories of the Others-within, the fiction of DeLillo, Didion, and Silko tempts us to revisit Fredric Jameson's conception of conspiracy as "the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age" in a different light ("Cognitive Mapping" 356). To continue Jameson's spatial figure of mapping, these writers are open to the possibility that the historical totality of the Cold War can be better defined from its widely scattered peripheries and margins than from its hegemonic center whose strategic amnesia and myopia towards Cold War others and their localities makes it difficult to scan the global totality of Cold War history.

"Chapter II: Cold War Paranoia and Its Beyond: Don DeLillo" looks into the ways in which DeLillo takes on the theme of paranoia from his earlier novels about terrorism to his recent post-Cold War epic, *Underworld* (1997). Drawing upon Timothy

Melley's concept of "agency panic," I will argue that in his confrontation with the primary post-Cold War challenge, terrorism, in *Players* (1977), *The Names* (1982), and *Mao II* (1991), DeLillo interrogates how paranoia has worked for American national self-fashioning and whether this Cold War paradigm of paranoid self-fashioning will succeed in containing the post-Cold War threat to the American Self. In *Mao II*, DeLillo makes the novelist, who represents the "hyper-individualist" American Self envisioned by the "vital center"-Cold War liberalism, confront the terrorist, his paranoid nemesis who touts a totalitarian vision of human collectivity. If *Mao II* awakens Cold War liberal anxiety about the masses to reinvigorate the paranoid dynamic of national self-fashioning at the end of the Cold War, *Underworld* tries to reinstitute the American crowd as the legitimate, if paranoid, protagonist of Cold War history. In his apparently nostalgic meditation upon Cold War history and its culture of paranoia, DeLillo longs to mourn the end of the Cold War by commemorating the American crowd and its countless micro-narratives and felt histories.

"Chapter III: Cold War Imperial Romances of Conspiracy: Joan Didion" traces Didion's transition as a Cold War romance writer, whose fiction, as well as much of her non-fiction, mostly focuses on US involvement in the Third World during the Cold War. Didion's minimalist prose in *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) and *Democracy* (1984), I will argue, serves as a spectacle calculated to condense Third World realities into imagery and to camouflage America's imperial enterprise justified in the Cold War rhetoric of frontier romance invoked by John F. Kennedy. But in her latest novel *The Last Thing He Wanted* (1996), which looks back on the hectic days of Iran-Contra,

Didion critically interrogates the rhetoric of Cold War imperial romance re-invoked by Ronald Reagan two decades after Kennedy's misfired adventure in the Bay of Pigs. Didion continues to use the minimalist technique of reticence that has imbued her previous novels with a strong feel of imagist poetry; this time, however, instead of evading history and escaping to the "neutral territory" of romance, it works to confront and reassess the hard realities behind the rhetoric of Cold War romance. *The Last Thing He Wanted* is Didion's attempt to find a new form of romance after the Cold War.

Finally, in "Chapter IV: White Paranoia and Native Conspiracies: Leslie Marmon Silko," I will argue that Silko plots to subvert the paranoid regime of Cold War imperialism inflicted upon Native American lives by mobilizing alternative narratives of conspiracy from the storytelling tradition of Native American spirituality. In a trajectory similar to Didion's, Silko moves from the rhetoric of "hybrid patriotism" in *Ceremony* (1977) to one of spiritual conspiracy in *Almanac of the Dead* (1997). Characterizing *Ceremony* as a "grail romance" searching for Native American identity within the mainstream frame of Cold War national imperative, I will argue that through Laguna Indian protagonist Tayo's journey of spiritual healing, Silko tries to placate white paranoia and guilt associated with the nuclear bomb that had often been resourced and tested in Native American territory. However, in *Almanac of the Dead*, which witnesses the second coming of the Cold War and the Iran-Contra conspiracy, Silko rejects the Cold War discourse of psychological hygiene Tayo has accepted and looks for a revolutionary vision of conspiracy through the journey of another Laguna Indian character, Sterling. Silko finds in the Native American spiritual tradition oppositional

conspiracy narratives that disturb and counter the paranoid regime of white Cold War imperialism. By doing so, Silko points to the possibility that for Third World subjects, paranoid imagination and conspiracy thinking can be alternative modes of resistance and self-fashioning against the hegemonic centers of Cold War imperialism.

In a sense, the conspiracy narratives of DeLillo, Didion, and Silko—particularly those written after the Cold War ended, such as *Underworld*, *The Last Thing He Wanted*, and *Almanac of the Dead*—are all, to borrow from Michael Wood, “post-paranoid” narratives. These authors appear to have gained enough psychological distance and altitude from Cold War history to contemplate the paranoid mode of cognitive mapping during that time. While DeLillo and Didion mourn the end of the Cold War by nostalgically longing for the historical real or felt lives of American paranoid subjects, or by containing the narrative virility of Cold War imperial paranoia within the minimalist form of romance, Silko re-enchants the territories of Cold War others by drumming a carnival dance of conspiring ghosts long silenced by the white witchery of the Cold War.

Notes

¹ Daniel Pipes's *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* provides a wide-ranging overview of conspiracy theories in the West from the time of the Crusades to the present anti-Semitism in America. Following Richard Hofstadter's footsteps, Pipes regards conspiracy theory as a dangerous fantasy most often brewed by the "politically disaffected" (such as blacks and the extreme right) and the "suspicious" (even "among society's favored") (2, 9). Differentiating "conspiratorial" (referring to "a real conspiracy") from "conspiracist" (referring to "the fear of imaginary conspiracies") (26), Pipes claims: "With the important exception of the Soviet Union and other totalitarian states, conspiracism lost its central role in European and American life after 1945, and the Soviet collapse between 1989 and 1991 reduced the impact of conspiracism even more" (106). Pipes's rigid distinction between "real" and "imaginary" conspiracies—or, between "conspiracy" and "conspiracy theory" or "conspiracism"—is untenable, particularly when it comes to understanding literary texts that utilize the thematics of paranoia and conspiracy thinking. Pipes's claim about the diminishing power of "conspiracism" during and after the Cold War overlooks the profusion of conspiracy thinking in the post-war era and misrepresents Hofstadter's more nuanced argument. Mark Fenster, who speaks from a political persuasion to Pipes's, is, in this sense, a more faithful follower of Hofstadter. Besides "its shortcomings as a universal theory of power and an approach to historical and political research," Fenster argues in his study of contemporary political and cultural conspiracy

narratives, “conspiracy theory ultimately fails as a political and cultural practice,” “unable to locate a material position at which we can begin to organize people in a world divided by complex divisions based on class, race, gender, sexuality, and other social antagonisms” (225-26). Yet, both Pipes and Fenster, however distant their political sympathies stand from each other, tilt towards Hofstadter’s disparaging view of popular conspiracy thinking. For the populist embrace of various forms of “counter-knowledge” including conspiracy theory, see John Fiske and Clare Birchall.

² In addition to Thomas Pynchon who “takes paranoia beyond Cold War spy fiction and into the realm of a new literarity” through his “invention of a literature of conspiracy steeped in the ethos of CIA operatives, McCarthyism, cybernetics, and hallucinogenic drugs,” Emily Apter includes in what she describes as “the canon of American paranoid fiction” an extensive list of writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, William S. Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, Joseph Heller, Ralph Ellison, John Kennedy O’Toole, William T. Vollmann, Philip Roth, Don DeLillo, and Joan Didion (367, 387). Interestingly, however, Apter omits Leslie Marmon Silko’s recent paranoid epic of American Cold War history, *Almanac of the Dead*. I will discuss Silko in light of Apter’s concept of “paranoid oneworldedness” later at the end of this dissertation as well as in Chapter 4 devoted to Silko’s novels.

³ In his most recent book *The Kennedy Assassination*, Peter Knight argues that in Pynchon’s novel, the assassination, though never mentioned, is “an unspoken presence in its surreal reworking of mid 1960s America” (106). Most notable narratives that have

directly tackled the Kennedy assassination include, among many others, Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988), Norman Mailer's *Oswald's Tale* (1995), and James Ellroy's *American Tabloid* (1995) and *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001).

⁴ In "Engendering Paranoia in Contemporary Narrative," O'Donnell defines "cultural paranoia," borrowing from a broad and loose assortment of concepts proposed by Michael Foucault, Thomas Kuhn, Pierre Bourdieu, and Raymond Williams, as "an intersection of contiguous lines of force—political, economic, epistemological, ethical—that make up a *dominant reality* (or *episteme*, or *paradigm*, or *habitus*, or *structure of feeling*) empowered by virtue of the connections to be made between materiality, as such, and the fictional representations or transformations of that materiality which come to affect its constitution" (182). O'Donnell's "cultural paranoia" is "a way of seeing the multiple stratifications of reality, virtual and material, as interconnected or networked," widely dramatized in contemporary American fiction most emphatically since 1960 (182).

⁵ O'Donnell characterizes Oedipa Maas as "the paranoid Cold War subject" and calls her "a daughter of Joe McCarthy" (191, 192).

⁶ I borrow from Emily Apter's statement that "[p]aranoid oneworldedness obeys a basic law of entropy that posits that increased disorder diminishes available energy within the confines of a closed system" (370).

⁷ In his polemical study *Cold War Criticism and the Politics of Skepticism*, Tobin Siebers, including the New Criticism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and

deconstruction in the broad category of “modern criticism” or “cold war criticism,” makes a comparable remark: “Modern criticism has made a virtue of cold war paranoia. It redraws the character of the critical consciousness by focusing it inward toward the violent side of its better hopes. That cold war criticism has introduced a model of the self-conscious critic whose greatest desire is to deny his or her own agency in the world shows that modern criticism is tied to our vision of what the World Wars and the postwar era have taught us about the darker nature of human beings” (34). According to Siebers’s definition, *Oedipa Maas*, a student of an obscure Jacobean revenge play, is certainly a practitioner of “cold war criticism” that valorizes “cold war paranoia.”

⁸ Discussing Jameson’s ambivalent and dialectically fluctuating conception of conspiracy as a “degraded” form of cognitive mapping, Skip Willman concludes that Jameson’s work “serves as a necessary corrective to those cultural critics and political commentators who denigrate conspiracy theory and ostracize their proponents” (36). In a similar vein, Fran Mason argues that “Conspiratorial subjectivity is a paradigm of a scattered postmodern and global subjectivity and, as such, conspiracy theory is less a “poor person’s cognitive mapping” than a paradigm of “everyone’s cognitive mapping” in its attempt to make sense of the confusions of subjectivity in a multinational global society” (54).

CHAPTER II

COLD WAR PARANOIA AND ITS BEYOND: DON DELILLO

Toward the end of 1989, Americans had enough reason to believe that they were witnessing seismic world-historical changes that seemed to suggest strongly that the promises and beliefs of the American Century had finally come to dramatic fulfillment. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 signaled the irrevocable end of the Cold War, with its relatively peaceful aftermath in the European theater amplifying the euphoria Americans had felt with the final triumph over global communism. The fall of the Berlin Wall could not be a more appropriate geopolitical symbol for the second half of 20th century American history: With the Cold War victory, the United States had successfully completed its longer historical fight against totalitarianism, burying communism in the same burial ground as fascism and thereby confirming once again the American values of liberalism and individualism. Other historical events of global significance in the same year—the Tiananmen Square massacre, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Taif Agreement, which officially ended the Lebanese Civil War—also suggested to many Americans that the decades-long American practice of paranoid thinking had exhausted its enemies or mirrors of self-projection.

This post-Cold War euphoria finds its most confident and exceedingly optimistic voice in Francis Fukuyama's controversial 1989 essay, where he went so far as to boldly proclaim nothing other than the "end of history" itself: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution

and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (4). Due to the “growing “Common Marketization” of international relations,” Fukuyama claimed, the likelihood of Cold War-style “large-scale conflict between states” has drastically diminished to the point that only localized “terrorism and wars of national liberation” in the “historical” part of the globe will remain as “an important item on the international agenda” still requiring a certain level of cautionary attention from the “post-historical” part of the world now single-handedly represented by the only global superpower, the United States (18).¹

This historical transition—from the Cold War conflict between global superpowers to the more insulated and multifarious forms of global antagonism often associated with religious fundamentalism and Third-World nationalism—does not, however, herald the end of conspiracy thinking and paranoid imagination, which, having its root deep in the American psyche from her earliest history, had thrived to extremes in the Cold War culture of secrecy and anxiety. From the last couple of decades of the Cold War to the present, “terrorism and wars of national liberation” (Fukuyama, “The End of History?” 18), incubated or erupted predominantly in the Middle East and Latin America, have supplanted the Cold War antagonism with increasing speed and scope as a new central metaphor in America’s geopolitical cognitive cartography. The September 11 terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 have revived the specters of Cold War-style apocalypse, paranoia, and conspiracy, forcing us to revisit and reassess some of the recent ominous historical events—the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the ensuing Iran Hostage Crisis in the early 1980s, the 1983 suicide attack at

the U.S. Embassy in the West Bank in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War, and the 1993 terrorist bombing at the World Trade Center, to count some—that, with hindsight, did not receive due attention and precaution in the middle of the “post-historical” euphoria.

The “theme of conspiracy,” as Steffen Hantke accurately observes, continues to function in contemporary American fiction as a “conceptual framework for this historical shift” in the configuration of global antagonism (238). Once famously hailed as the “chief shaman of the paranoid school” of American fiction (Towers 6), particularly for his dramatization of the John F. Kennedy assassination through the troubled mind of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra* (1988), Don DeLillo has always been an unusually keen and poignantly prescient observer of contemporary American culture and history. Throughout DeLillo’s entire oeuvre that includes 14 novels, conspiracy remains a key motif intertwined with other frequent and prevalent themes: in *End Zone* (1972) and *Libra* (1988), the theme of conspiracy is tied to an under-history of Cold War anxiety around the atomic bomb and political secrecy; in *Great Jones Street* (1973), *Running Dog* (1978), and *White Noise* (1985), it is associated with sinister currents in mass consciousness, corporate control, and postmodern consumerism; in *Players* (1977) and *The Names* (1982), it is employed along with crackpot terrorist scheming, religious fundamentalism, and U.S. imperial paranoia projected, particularly, toward the Middle East.

This chapter is devoted to the ways in which DeLillo takes on the themes of Cold War paranoia and conspiracy in his most recent historical novels. In *Mao II* (1991),

which reflects the emergence of the Middle East in the 1980s as a new source of global paranoia and conspiracy thinking more pointedly than his previous novel *The Names*, DeLillo invokes some of the old fears and prescriptions of Cold War liberals in his effort to tackle this new dread of religious fundamentalism and terrorism in the post-Cold War environment. Steering precariously through the thematic binaries that structure the post-Cold War antagonism as DeLillo sees it—the submissive masses and the self, Third World cult of personality and Western individualism, popular culture and high modernism, terrorism and aesthetic modernism, cosmopolitan anonymity and ghetto idiosyncrasy, and alien menace and suburban ennui—the novel attempts to locate this new challenge of terrorism within an uncharted territory of the American global imagination that has long been mapped out in accordance with the discursive grids of Cold War liberalism. Ultimately, *Mao II* is an anxious meditation upon the time after “history” and the difficulty of envisioning the “post-historical” or post-Cold War present without conjuring up the “historical” time of the Cold War. In this respect, the novel is also an expression of the discursive limbo DeLillo finds himself in: Although in *Mao II*, DeLillo critically addresses this new paradigm of global hostility by mobilizing, rather diffidently or even ruefully, some familiar Cold War narrative frameworks and sensibilities, he is at the same time deeply troubled by the fundamental inadequacy of those venerable languages of the past.

DeLillo is faced with a similar dilemma in *Underworld*, where he simultaneously invokes and exorcizes the specters of Cold War history. The novel’s obvious nostalgia for the unmediated raw memories of America’s Cold War history is always tinged with a

profound sense of melancholia, impeding the cathartic process of mourning the bygone era, a process in which the Cold War could be pronounced dead, and at the same time, reconstructed through selective remembering and forgetting. The nostalgic desire for the redeemable, if not innocent, past, a longing found in the novel's countless personal histories, memorabilia, and paranoid narratives, is countered by the necessity of recycling these micro-narratives and their idiosyncrasies and individualities in a totalizing teleology of history, which would allow us to declare the end of a period or even "history" itself. Nothing better showcases *Underworld's* agonizing conflict and uneasy conflation between nostalgia and melancholia, selective remembering and incomplete forgetting, idiosyncratic paranoid narratives and the totalizing teleology of history, than DeLillo's treatment of "crowds" in the novel. In his effort to salvage a redeemable collective memory from Cold War history, DeLillo attempts to re-imagine the American "masses," a form of collectivity that had long been associated with totalitarian control and manipulation. Often suspected of lacking American individualism's rugged moral stamina and integrity, and being a ready victim of communist ideological infiltration, government bureaucracy, and more recently, postmodern consumerism, the "masses" have been a perennial source of anxiety and paranoia. In *Mao II* the masses are almost always associated with "foreign" communists or terrorists or religious cults; but in *Underworld*, instead of framing the question of the masses in terms of America's xenophobic paranoia, DeLillo infuses the Cold War masses and their collective experiences with a strong sense of nostalgia and sentimental homesickness. In so doing, DeLillo recycles and transmutes the Cold War masses into a

metaphor for the collective memory of national cohesion. DeLillo's nostalgic conjuration of Cold War history does not purport to completely wash away its darker and more sinister side of collective paranoia and anxiety. Instead, the paranoid memory itself becomes a historical anchorage for yet another uncertain phase of history or "post-history."

1. Terrorism and the Dialects of Paranoia: The Paradox of "Agency Panic" in *Players* (1977) and *The Names* (1982)

Terrorism has been one of the most frequent themes in DeLillo's fiction, well before *Falling Man* (2007). The theme of terrorism, however, poses quite a tricky challenge for DeLillo, who has found in paranoia a versatile and complicated metaphor for America's warped response to a variety of foreign and domestic threats in the second half of the last century. There is no question that the paranoid subject, however frenzied and pathological, maintains an ability to register a totalizing danger, even to the point of bankrupting his own self-control. The paranoid subject's existential panic, or "agency panic" as Timothy Melley calls it (12), does not necessarily mean a total loss of agency; rather, the very "panic" that he suffers paradoxically betokens his agency, if not self-control. Commenting upon the post-war nation-wide anxiety about individual autonomy and agency, Timothy Melley perceptively argues that "[o]ne of its most important cultural functions ... is to sustain a form of individualism that seems increasingly challenged by postwar economic and social structures. Conspiracy theory, paranoia, and anxiety about human agency, in other words, are all part of the paradox in which a

supposedly individualist culture conserves its individualism by continually imagining it to be in imminent peril” (6). Melley further suggests that paranoia, a form of “hyperindividualism,” is not only a “defense” but also an essential “component” of American “liberal individualism” (25). We encounter a similar “hyperindividualist” vigor in DeLillo’s prevailing use of paranoia as a twisted mirror reflecting the post-war American dread of totalitarian entities, be it the communist Soviet Union, the CIA, or corporate organizations. In fact, this acute sense of the perennial endangerment of the American Self has been highly consistent throughout DeLillo’s oeuvre, explored in different contexts ranging from Lee Harvey Oswald’s stubbornly isolated and wayward paranoia in *Libra* to the everyday collective paranoia about the poisoned and media-produced consumerist cultural environment in *White Noise*. As such, for DeLillo, paranoia, whether expressed individually or collectively, is the quintessentially American hyperindividualist angst: the paranoid subject is none other than the hyper-American Self.

The paranoid mind often harbors an apocalyptic fantasy of terror, a fantasy that one could reclaim one’s jeopardized agency, once and for all, through a totalizing violence commensurate with one’s wildest imagination of global conspiracy. Being a foster child of the nightmarish marriage between the paranoid mind and totalizing, or often totalitarian, violence, the figure of the terrorist lurks around the darker corners of the American Self. The terrorist could be easily attuned to paranoid hyperindividualism; yet, he goes beyond merely being a confused alarmist, who plays the usual paranoid game of “imagining” individualism “in imminent peril” as a way to “conserve” it

(Melley 6). Terrorism's paranoid individualism paradoxically operates for the total destruction of individualism, binding innocent and separate individuals into an anonymous collectivity of victimhood.

As early as 1977, DeLillo had already explored this dangerously murky blend of paranoia and terrorism in his fifth novel, *Players*, where a bored stock broker named Lyle becomes fascinated by a vague terrorist group and voluntarily involved in their secret plot to blow up his own workplace, the New York Stock Exchange. The group's motivation—and Lyle's understanding of its nature—remains unrelentingly vague and deliberately unspecified. But it is not because they do not have any specific justification for their terrorist plot; rather, there are too many possible justifications, and they are all too comprehensive and entangled to single one out. A. J. Kinnear, a mysterious figure involved in the terrorist network, provides his new recruit Lyle with a partial sketch of what might be called the dialectics of paranoia in the post-war America, from the paranoid anti-communism in the early years of the Cold War through the dissenting popular paranoia during the sixties to the post-Vietnam era's pervasive disillusionment with the federal government and the radical skepticism about liberalism in general:

“It's this uncertainty over sources and ultimate goals,” Kinnear said. “It's everywhere, isn't it? Mazes, you're correct. Intricate techniques. Our big problem in the past, as a nation, was that we didn't give our government credit for being the totally entangling force that it was. They were even more evil than we'd imagined. More evil and much more interesting. Assassination, blackmail, torture, enormous improbable intrigues. All these convolutions and relationships.

Assorted sexual episodes. Terribly, terribly interesting, all of it. Cameras, microphones, so forth. We thought we bombed villages, killed children, for the sake of technology, so it could shake itself out, and for certain abstractions. We didn't give them credit for the rest of it. Behind every stark fact we encounter layers of ambiguity. This is all so alien to the liberal spirit. It's a wonder they're bearing up at all. This haze of conspiracies and multiple interpretations. So much for the great instructing vision of the federal government." (104)

The post-Vietnam paranoid mind, Kinnear implies, has deconstructed the "great instructing vision of the federal government" and its "totally entangling force" often manifested in the form of "technology" by such a "haze of conspiracies and multiple interpretations" that the "liberal spirit" behind American liberal democracy and rationality can no longer operate as a model of the American Self. As the paranoid mind has been substituted for the "liberal spirit" as a model of agency, however, it has lost in the process certain subversive or critical edges it had once cultivated during the sixties. Paranoia now becomes more of an aesthetic experience, as it is hinted in Kinnear's remark about all the "evil" and "interesting" practices of the government. The "uncertainty over sources and ultimate goals" makes the government-sponsored conspiracies all the more intriguing rather than simply outright menacing. Lyle notices in Kinnear's histrionic manner a hint of "Entertainment ... A little show biz" (104). In the same meeting in a secret basement arsenal that stores the "artifacts" or "memorabilia" of the sixties ("Riot shields, tear gas, all that anti-crowd business in the sixties" as well as explosives and weapons), Kinnear notes that "a collection of weapons might have

complex emotional content” for Lyle (103). Paranoia is now an object of “[p]ure nostalgia” (103). Kinnear strongly implies that their terrorist conspiracy to blow up the New York Stock Exchange has more to do with the emotional exhaustion or spiritual ennui they come to feel with the end of the revolutionary era and its counter-cultural paranoia, than with any specific political resentment or grievance over the Federal government.

Although intrigued by Kinnear’s aestheticized, nostalgic vision of paranoia, Lyle seems aware that paranoia can no longer properly function as an alternative or potentially subversive channel for reclaiming agency. He decides to embrace terrorism, less because terrorism can resolve or terminate all the “conspiracies and multiple interpretations” of the paranoid mind (104), but more because it could help continue the same game of paranoid thinking without lapsing into a condition of agential paralysis and inaction, where the once politically impassioned paranoid subject remains totally etherized by the aesthetics of nostalgia. For Lyle, terrorism is a clear call to action, a forbidden road to paranoid romance, promising to reinvigorate his emotional, intellectual, and perhaps even spiritual drives for agency.

He’d never felt so *intelligent* before. His involvement was beginning to elicit an acute response. They had no visible organization or leadership. They had no apparent plan. They came from nowhere and might be gone tomorrow. Lyle believed it was these freeform currents that he found so stimulating, mentally. They gave no indication of membership in anything. They didn’t even have a nationality, really. (121)

Lyle feels that his mere involvement in a terrorist plot, however hazy and nebulous it is, helps him regain the sense of agential elevation and exaltation that has long been denied to a person like him, an anonymous and bored cog in the global capitalist machine. Although shrouded in an air of 60s' counter-cultural paranoid rhetoric, the kind of terrorism Lyle embraces is only remotely political, as is the aestheticized, nostalgic paranoia of the post-Vietnam era.

As DeLillo's next novel further illustrates, terrorism is not any more directly political than paranoia. The ritual killing by an esoteric cult in *The Names* is a form of terrorism that defies any association or identification with specific political agendas or long-held grievances. James Axton, an American expatriate working in Greece as a Middle East risk analyst for an American firm selling political insurance including "ransom policies" (46) to multinational corporations, realizes that the cult's "power" and "its psychic grip" is based on the very absence of "an element of motivation, of attitudes and needs": "No sense, no content, no historic bond, no ritual significance" (216). The cult's violence is as purely arbitrary and "literary" as it is fatally physical, as the group, who call themselves "Abecedarian[s]," "Learners of the alphabet" (210), seem to choose victims solely based on the coincidental link between victims' names and the alphabets of the places where they are murdered. As such, even if the novel is predominantly concerned with US imperial paranoia projected mostly toward the Middle East, DeLillo apparently tends to mystify terrorism by locating it not, for instance, in New York as in *Players*, but in obscure rural villages in Greece and other locations, and by associating

terrorism with the inscrutable, arcane, and antiquated territory of foreignness, beyond history and geopolitics.

Nonetheless, DeLillo avoids depoliticizing—or dehistoricizing—terrorism completely. Indeed, the novel is structured around a curious tension between the paranoid vision of US Cold War neocolonialism and the impenetrable otherness of terrorism. Later in the novel James Axton, still unable to comprehend the cult's mysterious killings, finds out that he has been unwittingly working for the CIA through his boss, George Rowser, whose entire life, “full of the ornaments of paranoia and deception” (44), is devoted to analyzing “tons of research material on the cost-effectiveness of terror” (46). Owen Brademas, an aged American archeologist and epigraphist who befriends Axton and his estranged wife, Kathryn, perceives a symbolic connection between the “Abecedarian” cult and US imperial paranoia: “These killings mock us. They mock our need to structure and classify, to build a system against the terror in our souls. They make the system equal to the terror. The means to contend with death has become death” (308). If the CIA, “America’s myth” (317), represents the paranoid vision of US Cold War neocolonialism, Brademas suggests, the terrorist cult is a “demystifying parody” of the CIA, whose “task,” during the Cold War, “was largely a matter of producing the thrilling paranoia that makes life worth living” (Forster 106). For Owen Brademas, therefore, the cult serves as an ironical mirror that reflects and exposes the ways in which the U.S. creates its own paranoid system, most dramatically represented by the CIA.

If paranoia functions as a channel for America's self-identity through what Melley calls the "paradox" of "agency panic" (6), DeLillo hints that terrorism fulfills a similar function, especially for the people who believe they are the victims of US imperial paranoia. When Kathryn asks why people in the Middle East are more inclined to attack Americans, not other nationals, Axton points to "a certain mythical quality" only Americans have that "terrorists find attractive" (114). Terrorists, Axton opines, not only find America's "[b]ank loans, arms credits, goods, technology," and "military presence" detrimental to their sovereign existence, but also regard America as "the world's living myth," diminishing Americans to "character types" or to embodiments of "recurring themes that people can use to comfort themselves" and "justify" their local "grievances" (114). By mythologizing America as the abstraction of the evil behind all the regional ills, terrorists, Axton implies, become able to construct their own self-identity and retrieve their beleaguered agency through totalizing violence against "the world's living myth." The "Abecedarian" cult, Brademas suggests, exemplifies Axton's theory about what the Middle Eastern terrorists attempt to achieve by mythologizing their enemy: "They may have felt they were moving toward a static perfection of some kind ... One mind, one madness. To be part of some unified vision. Clustered, dense. Safe from chaos and life" (115-16). Both the Middle Eastern terrorists and the alphabet cultists, though not in any direct way connected with each other, profoundly undermine US imperial paranoia not simply by killing Americans, but, as Brademas recognizes, by mimicking American liberal individualism and its paradoxical way of maintaining national agency.

After a brief dialogue with Charles Maitland, a British business consultant, who for about thirty years had worked for “the security of overseas branches of British and American corporations” (40) in the Middle East and other places, where he has experienced violent attacks from natives, James Axton wonders, “Wasn’t there a sense, we Americans felt, in which we had it coming?” (41). Although Axton’s remark unquestionably points towards the Iran Hostage crisis that provides, as it is soon to be made clear (143), a specific historical context for the novel, the same question is revisited in DeLillo’s later novels, most notably in *Falling Man*. If *Players* probes into the dreadful possibility latent in the American psyche that terrorism could be the logical terminus of the paranoid mind, which, substituting for the “liberal spirit,” has served as a mode of American self-fashioning for much of the Cold War period, *The Names* intimates that US Cold War paranoia, now going increasingly imperial, not only fails to “imagine anything beyond the Cold War binary” or to avert “the problems that would emerge from the Middle East and religious fundamentalism” (Longmuir 107); it also fosters its mirror image in the form of Third World terrorism. Although departing from *Players* by associating terrorism exclusively with foreign countries, *The Names*, therefore, does not entirely dissociate terrorism—in this case, foreign terrorism—from US imperial paranoia. Axton understands that Third World terrorism is one of the unsavory consequences of US imperial paranoia, building, as the “Abecedarian” cult does, its own closed and totalistic system of signifying practice that could rival the post-Cold War, auto-referential world order structured around the single global superpower. Avtar Singh, one of the few remaining members of the cult, once reveals to Owen

Brademas that the cult is a desperate response to the world increasingly becoming “self-referring”: now that “the world has made a self of its own,” it is no longer possible to differentiate between “the world” and “the self” (297). To cope with the US neocolonial ambition that has been nurtured and effected by the same system of secrecy and paranoia that was set up mostly for the Cold War conflict, Third World subjects have no choice but to sustain their self-identity, Avtar implies, by creating their own “self-referring,” equally paranoid “world in which there is no escape” (297). Axton’s association with the CIA and his feverish infatuation with the Abecedarian cult indicate, if anything, this disturbingly close affinity between US imperial paranoia and Third World terrorism: both of them tend to cultivate such an absolutist and closed system of belief and mentality that “the self” is in danger of completely losing himself in “the world” that he himself imagines, leaving “the world” to have its own “self” (297). As such, the common danger DeLillo finds most troubling in imperial paranoia and Third World terrorism is that they put liberal individualism in serious jeopardy due to their tendency to close off the space in which the self can construct itself by objectifying the world.

The very affinity between these rivaling visions of paranoia impels DeLillo to salvage a viable mode of national self-fashioning from American Cold War history, one that preserves a certain legacy of liberal individualism in the imperial paranoia that could help ward off its mimicking nemesis. The cult of language and terror in *The Names* manifests the paradox of paranoid self-identity that absolute confirmation of self-identity could entail absolute denial of the self or total loss of self-control, a situation where self-identity is secured only through total surrender of the self to fundamentalist religions,

political ideologies, auto-referential systems of signification, or human collectivities. Despite his “lifelong inclinations toward solitude, toward the sanctity of a personal space in which to live and be,” Owen Brademas finds himself drawn to the spectacle of the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, an occasion in which he fantasizes he could deliriously lose himself in “a whirlwind of human awe and submission”: “To be carried away along, no gaps in the ranks, to move at a pace determined by the crowd itself, breathless, in and of them. This is what draws me to such things. Surrender. To burn away one’s self in the sandstone hills. To become part of the chanting wave of men, the white cities, the tents that cover the plain, the vortex in the courtyard of the Grand Mosque” (296).

Brademas’s fascination with the hajj and its potential power to help escape from the narrow and often paranoid sense of Western individualism, however, does not mean that he endorses straightforwardly the kind of collective unity achieved through individual self-abnegation that the spectacle seems to suggest. In picturing the pilgrims as a faceless “crowd” and the location simply as an “empty place” waiting to be filled with a rushing crowd, Brademas does not conceal the lingering anxiety about surrendering his self-identity to the anonymous and foreign human collectivity. The “enormous fears” he acknowledges he has to “overcome” in order to be “part of the chanting wave of men” are not truly “overcome” or transcended, but deliberately managed and sustained. Brademas is willing to risk his Western sense of the self to a certain degree by suspending his “lifelong inclinations” toward “the sanctity of a personal space,” only because he believes that is the price to pay to “penetrate the desert truly” and “infiltrate Mecca” (296). Brademas’s symbolic infiltration into the Middle

East is not, then, much different from Axton's ambivalent interest in the Abecedarian cult: whether it is configured as a homogenous space emptied out of any individual subjectivity, or as an esoteric system of paranoid individualism and auto-referentiality incapable of engendering any meaningful social communication, each of their imperial explorations serves as an occasion in which they can conserve their sense of agency by imagining its endangerment. In other words, Brademas and Axton are unusually attracted to the spectacle of the mass religious ceremony and the Abecedarian cult of terror and paranoid systemacity respectively, precisely because these occasions do seriously destabilize and disrupt the Western liberal individualist culture of the self, thereby setting off the same paradoxical "self"-defense mechanism of "agency panic" that Timothy Melley believes has helped in constructing and maintaining the American Self, most notably, during the early years of the Cold War.

The Names then appears to reverse *Players*'s nostalgic and aestheticizing trend of paranoia, sensing the possibility that paranoia can still work as a viable metaphor for national self-fashioning. *Players*'s Lyle, who fancies himself participating in a terrorist conspiracy to attack the New York Stock Exchange, exemplifies the danger that paranoia, or "agency panic," can bring about the destruction of the American Self, when the very source of the "panic," as Kinnear suggests, turns out to be the paranoid Self, not the usual Cold War enemies. Whereas *Players* interrogates the crisis of Cold War-style "agency panic" after the Kennedy Assassination and the Vietnam War, *The Names* rediscovers its efficacy in rejuvenating American paranoid subjectivity at the beginning of the Reagan presidency (1981-89), during which period the Cold War officially came

to an end, but only after an explosive second coming, especially in US foreign policy toward Latin America and other parts of the Third World.² Cold War paranoia, DeLillo seems to suggest, is returning once again as the logic of national self-fashioning, now increasingly assuming an air of imperial alarmism toward Third World enemies. No longer mired in a sense of nostalgia for the old days of dissenting conspiracy and paranoid thinking, or forced to strive for an alternative to “agency panic” even if that could mean, as is the case with Lyle, embracing and applying the totalizing logic of terrorism to the homeland, Americans in *The Names* reclaim their agency as “the world’s living myth,” rediscovering, through the very eyes of “terrorists” who find only Americans “attractive,” “a certain mythical quality” in American “character types” and “themes” (114). After he is tipped off by Charles Maitland on the true nature of his job as “risk analyst,” James Axton finally realizes that he has been involved in promoting “America’s myth,” the myth of US imperial paranoia imposed on Third World subjects: “If America is the world’s living myth, then the CIA is America’s myth. All the themes are there, in tiers of silence, whole bureaucracies of silence, in conspiracies and doublings and brilliant layers” (317).

No longer a symptom of a jeopardized American agency, paranoia is restored as a constituting principle of the American national character and mythology in *The Names*. Toward the end of the novel, James Axton, while jogging early in the morning, witnesses by chance an American banker named David Keller being attacked by two mysterious gunmen wearing “sandals” (325). Although “[a] group that called itself the Autonomous People’s Initiative had claimed responsibility,” “no one knew who they

were” (326). Later, Axton looks back on the most climatic and confusing moment of the incident when he found himself suddenly facing one of the terrorists directly.

A pause filled my chest, a blank fear. We stood looking at each other. I waited for the second self to emerge, the cunning unlearned self, the animal we keep in reserve for such occasions. It would impel me to move in this or that direction, strategically, flooding my body with adrenalin. But there was only this heavy pause. I was fixed to the spot. Helpless, deprived of will. Why was I standing rigid on a wooded hill, fists clenched, facing a man with a gun? The situation pressed me to recall. This was the only thing to penetrate that blank moment—an awareness I could not connect to things. The words would come later. The single word, the final item on the list.

American. (328)

At this intense moment of terror and agential paralysis, Axton’s immediate reasoning apparently leads to the possibility that he is being attacked by the gunman because he is American and more specifically because the gunman knows something about his association with the CIA. It soon turns out, though, that he is not the intended target, as he realizes the gunman does not recognize him as such; targeted or not, David Keller, another American expatriate, gets wounded by a gunshot. The terrorists’ motivation remains unveiled and their intended victim unidentified. The question Axton is pondering, then, is not about which American individual is targeted and why: Axton himself has already suggested that terrorists do not usually attack Americans as individual human beings, but as the abstract “themes” and “character types” Americans

are supposed to represent (114). For most of the novel, he has been unaware of his own “mythical quality” as an American until he finds out about his inadvertent and indirect service to the CIA, the “myth” of America that represents US imperial paranoia around the world. But at this brief moment of “heavy pause” and agential blankness when he is facing “a man with a gun,” Axton seems to realize that the “myth” of America, or the “mythical quality” of Americans, contrary to his earlier theory, is more than an abstract diminishment of the American national character imagined by paranoid Third World subjects. While the gunman acts like he comes across a total stranger or even perhaps a potential threat, not in anyway his intended victim, Axton quickly assumes “a man with a gun” to be a terrorist who wants to kill Americans like him. Why did he think and behave as he did at that moment? “Why,” Axton is now asking himself, “was I standing rigid on a wooded hill, fists clenched, facing a man with a gun?” The “only thing to penetrate that blank moment,” he reveals, is the “awareness” that he is the “mythical” American. This critical incident at the end of the novel dramatically illustrates how the paradigm of “agency panic” works: Axton’s “mythical” American identity is “recalled” by the imagined terror against American agency.³

Reflecting the historical juncture when the US government is beginning to conjure up the old Cold War paranoid rhetoric for its increasingly neocolonialist projection of power toward the Third World, *The Names* presents a (post-) Cold War imperial romance, where Americans, seeking to fathom the heart of the mystery and terror they encounter while travelling Third World territories—or, to “penetrate the desert” and “infiltrate Mecca,” as Owen Brademas aspires to do (296)—eventually

reconfirm their American subjectivity. For Axton, the Abecedarian cult of terror, a mimicry of the CIA and other similar US paranoid systems of secrecy and isolation built during the Cold War, serves as a reminder of the danger such systems could pose to American liberal individualism, paradoxically helping him become interpellated as a “mythical” American; for Brademas, it is the Third World “masses” that trigger the paranoid imagination of “agency panic,” evoking the traditional American fear and suspicion of totalitarian political projects, such as fascism and communism. Being a lone “wanderer” who travels remote foreign lands and studies their arcane languages and religions, sleeping in “hotels, bungalows, small cheap lodges near archaeological sites and places of pilgrimage,” Brademas is inclined to recognize Third World subjects as “[m]asses of people,” an image he associates with collective “worship,” “delirium,” and “obliteration of control” (277). Although he often fantasizes about joining “the chanting of men” by “surrender[ing]” his American self (296), he is also apprehensive about the “nightmarish force of people in groups” he connects to the “power of religion” (277). Standing alone among the Third World “masses” and imagining his American self to be on the verge of total obliteration is precisely the moment when he feels most keenly he is American.

2. *Mao II* (1991): Terrorism and the “Radical Nerve” of the American Novel

At the end of an interview with *The New York Times Magazine* that features his upcoming novel *Mao II*, DeLillo tells interviewer Vince Passaro a story of his friend living in Athens: “Somebody fired a shot through his window recently. And this guy is

writing fiction for the first time in his life. ... Of course, he told the police that he assumed the shot had been fired at him because he's an American. And so I wrote him a note and I said, 'They're not shooting at you because you're an American, they're shooting at you because you're a novelist'" (84-85). Evoking James Axton's similar experience in *The Names*, DeLillo's mildly mischievous remark about the shooting incident his novelist friend recently experienced clearly gestures toward *Mao II*'s central metaphor, the writer as the ultimate defender of American liberal individualism against terrorism and totalitarianism. DeLillo revisits in his first post-1989 novel some of the same issues he has presciently explored in *Players* and *The Names*. An arch-individualist American novelist named Bill Gray comes out of a long period of self-imposed silence and seclusion only to face a world dominated by empty media images and sensational world news that pander to the vulgar tastes of American mass consumers, and decides to travel to Beirut to confront a terrorist group, believing that the terrorist is replacing the writer as a new "legislator of the world" influencing people's collective consciousness. Through Bill Gray's tragically perilous and yet mostly meditative journey to the symbolic center of Third World terrorism, DeLillo interrogates how, after the Cold War, the American Self can fare in its competition with the terrorist for the power to provide a narrative structure for global mass consciousness.

Asked about *Mao II*'s possible connection to the Salman Rushdie episode in 1989, DeLillo suggests that Bill Gray is facing a situation similar to the one Rushdie found himself in: they are bound by "the connection between the writer as the champion of the self" and "those [totalitarian] forces that are threatened by this" (Passaro 84). But

the connection DeLillo recognizes between the novelist and the terrorist is not simply an inherently antagonistic or antithetical one: they share a common ambition to create narratives that can truly affect or, if necessary, “terrorize” the masses. “[I]n a society that’s filled with glut and repetition and endless consumption,” DeLillo suggests, “the act of terror may be the only meaningful act” and “[t]here is a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts, and they infiltrate and alter consciousness in ways that writers used to aspire to” (Passaro 84). Bill Gray’s failed adventure to Beirut—toward the end of the novel, he dies on a ferry without meeting the terrorist group—as well as his uncompleted novel clearly imply that the traditional writer is losing the game, not only to the terrorist, but also, as DeLillo later expands the list in another interview, to “the totalitarian leader, the military man,” and the “holy man,” “those who are twisted by power and who seem capable of imposing their vision on the world” (Nadotti 110). DeLillo’s main task in the novel is to imagine a different kind of American agency or “the champion of the self” who can disrupt the ominous alliance between the charismatic religious or political leader with absolute conviction and terrorizing power and the passive masses drawn to that individual.

The novel opens with a distressingly haunting prologue which depicts a mass wedding at Yankee Stadium officiated by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the founder of the Unification Church. From the very beginning, DeLillo makes it evident that the mass wedding, an endless multiplication or repetition of “a time-honored event” (4), is everything America is not. Desperately trying to locate his daughter, Karen, who is about to marry a foreigner who “knows about eight words of English” (5), a Korean man

she met only two days ago, Rodge, an American father, is watching “an undifferentiated mass” of six thousand and five hundred young couples from fifty countries “marching into American sunlight” (3). Frantically “working his glasses across the mass, the crowd, the movement, the membership, the flock, the following” to find Karen (5), Rodge feels a strong need to “remind himself who she is”: “Healthy, intelligent, twenty-one, serious-sided, possessed of a selfness, a teeming soul, nuance and shadow, grids of pinpoint singularities they will never drill out of her” (7).

In *Mao II*, the masses are almost always depicted as foreign, homogenous, and susceptible to totalitarian political or religious visions that put the American Self in jeopardy. “There’s something menacing and violent about a mass of people,” DeLillo imparts his own view to an interviewer, “which makes us think of the end of individuality, whether they are gathered around a military leader or a holy man” (Nadotti 110). At Yankee Stadium, all the young couples from around the world “feel the same ... immunized against the language of self,” becoming “a world family” under “the solar force of a charismatic soul,” their “true father,” Master Moon (8-10). Examining “each sweet face, round face, long, wrong, darkish, plain,” Rodge concludes that “[t]hey are a nation ... founded on the principle of easy belief” and “[a] unit fueled by credulousness,” replacing “all the unexpended faith” in “the Old God” with “a half language, a set of ready-made terms and empty repetitions” and “a few simple formulas copied and memorized and passed on” (7). Like Owen Brademas in *The Names*, who believes that people have a certain perverse longing for self-abnegation to be part of a soulless and uniform human collectivity, Rodge supposes that the Korean Christian cult

leader answers the marrying couples' "yearning" for "the principle of easy belief" and "unburdens them of free will and independent thought"(7).

Obviously, the transnational crowd's invasion of the "American sunlight" and its uncanny spectacle spark off an agency panic for Rodge, a successful middle-aged American man who has "a degree and a business and a tax attorney and a cardiologist and a mutual fund and whole life and major medical" (4). Speaking to his fretful wife Maureen, Rodge reasons that the mass wedding at Yankee Stadium subverts certain fundamental elements of American national imaginary: "I see a lot of faces that don't look American. They send them out in missionary teams. Maybe they think we've sunk to the status of less developed country. They're here to show us the way and the light" (5). Confronted with the alien faces performing a farcical and yet oddly sincere mimicry of "the way and the light" that Americans have assumed it is their role to demonstrate to the "less developed" parts of the world, Rodge is witnessing the United States being spiritually colonized by her own ghostly product of semblance, a wraith that comes back to haunt its American birthplace. Master Moon, a former communist labor camp prisoner and beneficiary of the US Cold War support to South Korea, who once "lived in a hut made of U.S. Army ration tins," is now standing "here, in American light ... to lead [his "world family"] to the end of human history" (6).

Rodge's pained bewilderment in the face of an "undifferentiated mass" (3) of post-national subjects at the symbolic heart of the American "democratic clamor" (9), and his profound desperation in his effort to locate Karen, while constantly trying to "remind himself who she is" (7), is DeLillo's metaphor for America's nonplussed

response to the post-Cold War historical juncture that Francis Fukuyama boldly dubs in his controversial 1989 essay as “the end of history,” “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (4). Audaciously confident and generally triumphant throughout his essay, Fukuyama’s voice suddenly changes to a sentimental and doleful tone when he ponders some historical consequences of the passing of the Cold War global order. Curiously enough, much of Fukuyama’s apprehension echoes DeLillo’s. Although American liberal democracy has emerged victorious from a prolonged fight against communism and other totalitarian ideologies, Fukuyama predicts, “[t]he end of history will be a very sad time” (18): Americans will find themselves ever more acutely experiencing “the impersonality and spiritual vacuity” inherent in the “liberal consumerist societies” they have strived to build (14). As “the worldwide ideological struggle” for “recognition” is “replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands,” American liberalism, no longer “call[ing] forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism” (18), begins to feel “the emptiness at [its] core” (14). The rise of “religious fundamentalism” in recent years, Fukuyama claims, “attests to a broad unhappiness” with the “spiritual vacuity” at the heart of liberalism, a fundamental “defect” or “flaw” in the American ideology (14).

The obvious irony is that American liberalism, particularly the liberalism that marks the Cold War period, comes to face a grave crisis with its victory, not its defeat, in the global struggle for recognition. Although he defines Cold War liberalism as an

anomaly in American history, not a logical continuation or evolution of Western liberal democracy as in Fukuyama's world-historical grand narrative, H. W. Brands arrives at a similar verdict that "the collapse of the Cold War consensus in America was what doomed liberalism" (x). If "the victory of liberalism," as Fukuyama proclaims, had occurred initially and "primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness" rather than "in the real and material world" (4), so will the crisis of liberalism. Believing that the symptoms of the crisis—such as "impersonality," "spiritual vacuity," and "emptiness"—are not "remediable through politics" (14), Fukuyama is clearly yearning for a new language of liberal imagination to enrich and cultivate "the realm of ideas or consciousness" for the post-historical future. At the end of his essay, however, Fukuyama sounds unexpectedly apocalyptic and melancholic: "In the post-historical period," he predicts, "there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history" (18).⁴

Mao II explores some of the same challenges Fukuyama recognizes. In the 1997 interview with David Remnick, DeLillo describes the current moment as "a state of delirium," an uncertain time of "no longer the Cold War and not yet whatever will follow" (144). Although its title comes from Andy Warhol's postmodern pencil drawing of Mao (62) and Warhol's work feels "liberating" to Scott Martineau, Bill's overly loyal assistant, because it appears "unwitting of history" (21), *Mao II* is DeLillo's sobering inquiry into the historical juncture of "no longer and not yet," where Cold War and post-Cold War temporalities converge: Chairman Mao, who represents the dangerous "blend of individual consciousness and mass influence," haunts *Mao II* as a spectral image of

the Cold War (Simmons 686). Reverend Moon, an arch-anticommunist Christian cult leader, is a reincarnation of the Maoist cult of personality that suddenly turns up in post-historical America, conjuring up specters of Cold War paranoia and xenophobia. As Jeremy Green perceptively notes, in *Mao II*, “[a] number of recognizably postmodern themes—the death of the author, the fate of high literary culture, the supposed twilight of ideology—converge with a set of anxieties that have emerged in the wake of a specific historical narrative, namely the Cold War” (“Last Days” 130). Andy Warhol’s Mao series, paintings that Scott appreciates with great interest, constitutes, in this sense, a perfect example of this convergence. Rather than representing the historical Mao and his individuality, Warhol’s repetition of the Mao image —“Photocopy Mao, silk-screen Mao, wallpaper Mao, synthetic-polymer Mao” (21)— creates “no one” or “a crowd of subjectivities” (Karnicky 342), a case supported by DeLillo’s own belief that “[a]n image is a crowd in a way, a smear of impressions,” and that “[i]mages tend to draw people together, create mass identity” (“The Image and the Crowd” 72-73).

Karen is always captivated, as much as frightened, by the apocalyptic images of crowds she regularly and intensively watches on TV. The novel contains several narrated or actual images of crowds DeLillo takes from world news events of 1989, such as the Hillsborough soccer disaster in Sheffield, England, the Ayatollah Khomeini’s frantic funeral, and the Tiananmen Square massacre. And these foreign crowds in the media—almost always presented as “homogenous,” “faceless,” “menacing,” and lacking specific historical or political contexts (Moran 148)—tend to create an apocalyptic religious vision in Karen’s mind. Watching, for instance, the deadly human crush at Hillsborough

Stadium, she thinks of the spectacle as “a religious painting,” “a fresco in an old dark church, a crowded twisted vision of a rush to death as only a master of the age could paint it” (33, 34).

DeLillo tells Adam Begley in an interview that *Mao II* is “an argument about the future” and about “[w]ho wins the struggle for the imagination of the world” between “the secluded writer, the arch individualist, living outside the glut of the image world” and “the crowd, many kinds of crowds, people in soccer stadiums, people gathered around enormous photographs of holy men or heads of state” (101). Apparently, Karen is at the center of this struggle to determine the fate of the American Self in the “post-historical” period. Like Rodge in the prologue, who, in the face of the alien masses that threaten to diminish Karen into a grayed little dot in a humongous and homogenous image, anxiously strives to conjure up in his mind her unique “selfness” (7), Bill takes in Karen to his secluded house located “outside of the glut of the image world” as a substitute daughter and devout follower, thereby implicitly replacing Master Moon, her alien “true father” (9) who came to America to lead his crowd “to the end of history” (6).

Karen, who Bill thinks has “come from the future,” a time that “belongs to crowds” (85, 16), also brings back specters of the Cold War paranoia about “brainwashing.” When Scott first met her, she was wandering erratically in an obscure Kansas street, separated from her usual missionary team. Scott soon finds out that she is delirious out of exhaustion and anxiety, unable to sleep for fear of getting abducted again by the people who attempted to “deprogram” or convert her from Master Moon’s teachings. “Are you here to deprogram me?” are the first words she utters to Scott (77).

Cousin Rick and two strangers abducted Karen, whom they believed was “programmed,” “brainwashed,” and “indoctrinated” (80), and attempted deprogramming, “eighteen hours a day for eight days,” “[citing] case studies,” “repeat[ing] key phrases,” “play[ing] tapes and show[ing] movies on the wall” (79); later “[t]hey brought in Junette, a former sister, carried off by parents, deprogrammed, turned against the church, now used to soften others to the message,” “[tearing] down Master’s teaching” (81).

Karen’s living “messiah” on earth (186), Master Moon, intrudes into the American national psyche, summoning up old Cold War fears about communist infiltration and brainwashing. Originally coined by an American journalist named Edward Hunter with reference to “Chinese communist attempts to reform recalcitrant nationalists during China’s civil war,” the term “brainwashing” quickly entered the American Cold War lexicon through popularized narratives about the “treatment of American prisoners of war (POWs) by their North Korean and Chinese captors during the Korean War of 1950-1953” (Carruthers 90, 76). Also, “the idea that totalitarians were fanatic believers in an ideology comparable to a religion” was “reinforced” by brainwashing episodes during the Korean War (Gleason 94), where the American “encounter with communism became an unusually personal and intimate battle with demons of thought” (Young 55). Master Moon, “a chunky man in a business suit from the Republic of Korea” (186), is described in the novel, despite being a former North Korean labor camp prisoner and life-long anticommunist, as a specter of Chairman Mao: a charismatic father figure who imposes totalitarian ideologies upon individual consciousness.

As a substitute father to Karen, Bill Gray cannot restore her American “selfness” by “deprogramming” or “de-brainwashing” her, for the obvious reason that it would simply repeat the same process of “brainwashing,” only in reverse, and further reinforce “a key tenet of the theory of totalitarianism” behind the practice, namely, the notion that the human individual can be holistically reshaped by the “totalitarians” to conform (Gleason 93). Techniques used by those who attempt to deprogram Karen are disturbingly similar to those allegedly used by the Chinese communists during the Korean War, such as “accusation,” “grievance-telling,” “thought-revealing,” and “criticism and self-criticism” (97). As is proclaimed by Karen when she tries to proselytize the people living in the backstreets of New York by telling them “how to totalize their lives according to the sayings of a man with the power” (176), Moon’s followers or his “universal family” regard themselves as “the total children” “protected by the total power” and “the arms of total control” of their “true father” (179). The marrying couples at Yankee Stadium “eat kiddie food and use baby names because they feel so small in his presence” (6). The novel further indicates that this totalizing spiritual kinship Karen maintains with Master Moon could be readily expanded to include other fatherly figures with totalitarian power, such as Mao Zedong—his portrait attracts Karen’s eyes when she watches the televised Tiananmen Square Massacre (176)—and Ayatollah Khomeini. Watching three million mourners weeping in a frenzy at Khomeini’s funeral on TV, Karen feels like “she could go into the slums of south Teheran, backwards into people’s lives, and hear them saying, We have lost our father” (189). After Bill disappears without telling her about his fatal trip to Beirut, Karen has

become “all drift and spin,” “[a]lways on nameless alert,” suffering panic attacks constantly; Scott feels like she also is missing and “badly want[s] her back” (142). With her life having “no center,” Karen soon returns to her previous life as a Moonie, wandering around New York’s backstreets that “[look]” just “like Beirut” (142, 146); having “Master’s total voice in her head,” she tells people about “a man from far away who had the power to alter history” (194, 172).

Symbolically succeeding Rodge, Karen’s “flesh” father in the prologue, Bill hopes to retrieve the paternal authority usurped by Master Moon that he believes novelists had once possessed to forge and shepherd mass consciousness. Scott implicitly points to Bill’s authorial fatherhood over Karen when he describes her as “a cloud dreamer on a summer’s day, someone drifting out of Bill’s own head” (218). It does not seem likely, however, that Bill would welcome Karen as one of his over-zealous followers who, like Master Moon’s “spiritual children,” might be willing to “totalize their lives” to live up to his writings (179, 176). In fact, Bill dreads to have his own “total children” (179): Having once in the sixties received “a severed finger in the mail,” possibly from an anonymous reader of his novels, Bill has long had a sinister presentiment that he will be shot to death not by “a thief or deer hunter or highway sniper” but by “some dedicated reader” or “some lonely young man” who “might see a mission” in seeking him out in his “deep seclusion” (31, 196-97).

Confronted with a totalizing and homogenizing world of simulacra, faceless crowds, and formulaic beliefs of easy deliverance, Bill still seems trapped in the old-fashioned idea that the novelist, instead of pandering to popular taste and the need for

total assimilation, should maintain an absolute distance or seclusion from the “corrupt” image world of crowds (36). As he reveals to Brita Nilsson, a Swedish photographer who visits his house to take his picture, Bill has long believed that the task of the writer is “to alter the inner life of the culture” (41), and that that task requires the writer to inhabit in “the far margin” of society and do “dangerous things” if necessary (97). For Bill, therefore, the writer is more akin to the figure of the terrorist than to that of the totalitarian political or religious leader, as is revealed in his statement that there is “a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists” (41).

George Haddad, a Lebanese political scientist living in Athens who assumes the role of spokesman for the terrorist group in Beirut that has kidnapped a Swiss UN worker and poet, evokes this “curious knot” between novelists and terrorists when he as “a great admirer” (128) attempts to lure Bill into the group’s dubious scheme to get the widest possible media coverage from Bill’s unexpected appearance at a writers’ conference that would ask for the release of the hostage. Asking Bill’s sympathy for the terrorist group’s members, who are portrayed as fighting against “the colonial police, the occupier, the rich landlord, the corrupt government,” and “the militaristic state,” Haddad reminds him that it is the novelist who truly understands “in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels” and who has an extraordinary “affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark” (130). But Haddad also suggests that the proper strategic territory of the novelist—that is, “the far margin of society”—from which he could “alter the inner life of the culture,” is increasingly occupied by the terrorist, while the novelist is more likely to blend in with the mainstream culture:

“The way they live in the shadows, live willingly with death. The way they hate many of the things you hate. Their discipline and cunning. The coherence of their lives. The way they excite, they *excite* admiration. In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the only meaningful act. ... Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith. Everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated. Give him a dollar, put him in a TV commercial. Only the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn’t figure out how to assimilate him.” (157)

By emphasizing the “affinity” between the novelist and the terrorist as the ultimate outsiders of society who would galvanize, or, if necessary, terrorize the mainstream culture to awaken from its “inertia-hysteria” or spiritual lethargy within the flood of postmodern simulacra and consumerist fetishes, Haddad entreats Bill to forge an alliance with the Lebanese terrorist group, if not for a common political goal, then only for the chance to make a symbolic gesture that the novelist is not yet “absorbed and processed and incorporated” (157).

Although he eventually accepts Haddad’s suggestion to come to Beirut, allowing himself to be taken by the group on condition that they release the Swiss poet and later Bill himself when they get all the media coverage they want, Bill interprets the “spiritual kinship” between novelists and terrorists differently: as “shapers of sensibility and thought,” they are “playing a zero-sum game” for the power to “influence mass consciousness” (156-57). His decision to risk his life to get involved in the hostage episode is not, therefore, a sign of sympathy for the terrorist group; instead, the decision

results from his willingness to play the “zero-sum game” to the end and to prove, if to no one else but himself, that the novelist still can be as “dangerous” as the terrorist claims to be (157). Opposed to Haddad’s portrayal of terrorists, Bill does not see terrorists as consummate defenders of “the language of self” (8) but as underground agents of totalitarianism. Bill replies to Haddad that “the terrorist as solitary outlaw” is nothing but a “pure myth,” because terrorists, often “backed by repressive governments,” are themselves “perfect little totalitarian states,” “[carrying] the old wild-eyed vision, total destruction and total order” (158), and also because the Swiss hostage case is a “miniaturized form” of totalitarianism and the “first tentative rehearsal for mass terror” (163).

Bill Gray “associates terrorism almost always with crowds” and totalitarian leaders (Simmons 686), summoning up Cold War paranoia about the brainwashed masses estranged from American liberal individualism. Analyzing DeLillo’s specific references in the novel to the multilateral conflict involving Syrian, Israeli, and Lebanese militaries and their Shiite or Christian militia coalitions, John Carlos Rowe concludes that the Beirut scenes at the end of the novel take place “between Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in June of 1982 and its military withdrawal in 1985,” a period which notably includes the 1983 terrorist attack on the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Marine headquarters in Beirut (30). Interestingly, DeLillo decides to brand the terrorist group that Haddad speaks for as “a new communist element,” not “a new fundamentalist element” (123). Haddad is depicted as a passionate proponent of the Maoist cult of personality, which he believes could provide “total politics, total authority, [and] total being” to the societies

that are “struggling to remake themselves” according to “a call to unity” (158, 162). As Haddad pungently notices, what Bill truly fears about the terrorist group in Beirut is that they illustrate an uncanny return of the Cold War anxiety that “history” once again is “passing into the hands of crowd[s]” (162).

Refusing to see the Lebanese Civil War as a postcolonial issue, DeLillo reiterates the old Cold War narrative that associates the left with terrorism, “although the main combatants in the Lebanese Civil War were not of Marxist persuasion” (Velcic 415). According to Rowe, DeLillo actually “invents the association of Palestinian terrorist groups with Maoist politics” (3). In *Mao II*, DeLillo certainly repeats and further amplifies the idea he had developed in *The Names* that Third World terrorism is a replacement for global communism as the existential threat to the American way of life, a new catalyst that incites the familiar and time-worn dynamic of “agency panic” that had helped construct American national “selfness” during the Cold War. By bringing the Cold War fear about “crowds”—they are almost always foreign, vulnerable to totalitarian control, and therefore un-American—back to the American psyche, and by associating Third World terrorism, albeit unhistorically, with the Maoist cult of personality, DeLillo suggests that Americans are inclined to see what Fukuyama designates as post-historical challenges to the West within the same framework that had long and successfully served them.⁵

Bill Gray’s answer to the post-historical challenges noted by Fukuyama, such as “spiritual vacuity” and Third World terrorism, is the novel itself. Replying to George Haddad, who proposes a dark alliance between the Joycean romantic modernist writer

and the Maoist Third World terrorist against the complacent mainstream culture of the West, Bill indicates that the “affinity” between the two outsiders is only superficial, and that their alliance will suffocate the true spirit of the novel. The novel is “a democratic shout” not only because “almost any amateur off the street” or “some desperado with barely a nurtured dream” has the potential to “write a great novel,” but also because the novel cherishes and promotes a multiplicity of irreducible individual voices: “One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next. Ambiguities, contradictions, whispers, [and] hints” (159). The novel is “a democratic shout” in a different sense that the novel contains “internal dissent” and “self-argument” even free from the author’s “autocracy” or “total control” over it: “Even if [Bill] could see the need for absolute authority, [his] work would draw [him] away,” and the characters he creates “deny [his] efforts to own them completely” (159). While the terrorist group, by holding an innocent poet hostage, is “empty[ing] the world of meaning and erect[ing] a separate mental state” in which “the mind [is] consuming what’s outside itself, replacing real things with plots and fictions,” Bill attempts to “[write] about the hostage to bring him back, to return a meaning that had been lost to the world when they locked him” up in a makeshift prison (200). Unlike the “fictions” the terrorist creates in his homogenizing and totalizing mind—“One fiction taking the world narrowly into itself, the other fiction pushing out toward the social order, trying to unfold into it”—the novel is an attempt to “reveal” individual human “consciousness” and “increase the flow of meaning” (200). Painted as a cult leader who prescribes programs for the totalitarian social order, Chairman Mao—or his contemporary reincarnation, Master Moon—represents a perfect blend of these

two opposing currents of extremity in the narrative imagination of the terrorist that formulates what Haddad calls “a model that transcends all the bitter history” (158), a totalitarian narrative model that goes against the novel which DeLillo believes can offer “a kind of redemptive truth” and provide “the balance and rhythm we don’t experience in our daily lives” in real history (DeCurtis 56).

Bill Gray’s idea of the novel as “a democratic shout” is strongly reminiscent of Lionel Trilling and other Cold War liberals’ prescription for a post-war American liberalism that needs to reaffirm liberal values at risk with the advent of the Cold War, while at the same time distancing itself from the thirties “old liberalism” and its “old mistakes,” which among others, as Richard Chase sums up, include “the facile ideas of progress and ‘social realism,’” “the idea that literature should participate directly in the economic liberation of the masses,” and “the equivocal relationship to communist totalitarianism and power politics” (v). What Richard Chase marks as the “new liberalism” is, according to Trilling, attempting to recall “liberalism to its first essential imagination of variousness and possibility” (xiii) and to promote “moral realism,” “the product of the free play of the moral imagination” (215). For Chase and Trilling, literature or the novel is “the perfect vehicle for the ironies and paradoxes of the moral life and the social history it produces” (Schaub 22). The task of the novel for Trilling is to retrieve “the “tragic” element of life, one not so easily sloughed off by those clinging to a naïve faith in progress or optimism about human behavior” and to show that accepting “complexity and nuance” is “a more profound attitude toward life than the search for absolutes” (Mattson 35, 39).⁶

In his fight to redeem the American Self from fundamentalism and terrorism—as it is most symbolically manifested in Rodge’s anxious effort to recognize Karen’s “selfness” amid the mass wedding at Yankee Stadium (7), and in Bill’s own attempt to bring the hostage back to “the flow of meaning” (200)—DeLillo’s Bill Gray does not want to “create another all-encompassing narrative opposed to terror” or absolute belief; rather, he “insist[s] upon a return to narrative as personal, partial, incomplete,” and full of “the limitless mosaic of plots that do not insist upon domination” or promise easy and facile transcendence (Walker 337). In this sense, Bill’s faith in the novel resembles the “radical nerve” Arthur M. Schlesinger attempts in *The Vital Center* to restore to the post-war American liberalism. Redefining liberalism as a “fighting faith” or a moral sentiment that rejects any form of totalitarianism and reasserts “the ultimate integrity of the individual” (ix), Schlesinger points out that “the rise of totalitarianism” in Germany and the Soviet Union “signifies more than an internal crisis for democratic society”; it signifies “an internal crisis for democratic man” (250). Strongly echoing Erich Fromm’s influential *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and other similar studies about mass consciousness in the 40s and 50s, Schlesinger argues that the future of American democracy relies upon the “anxious” individual who has enough moral “nerve” or character disposition to resist the false promises of totalitarianism:

The “anxious man,” we have seen, is the characteristic inhabitant of free society in the twentieth century. The final triumph of totalitarianism has been the creation of man without anxiety—of “totalitarian man.” Totalitarianism sets out to liquidate the tragic insights which gave man a sense of his limitations. In their

place it has spawned a new man, ruthless, determined, extroverted, free from doubts or humility, capable of infallibility... . [The “totalitarian man” is] the man incarnating mass purpose and historical destiny, in contrast to an individualism based on the cultivation of personal differences (56).

Charlie Everson, an old friend in the publishing industry Bill meets on “his first day in New York in many years” (94) to be briefed about the hostage business, vividly recalls the “intense conversations” he used to have with Bill in the 1950s about “[w]riting, painting, women, jazz, politics, history, baseball, every damn thing under the sun” (96). As Everson implies, Bill Gray seems still attached to the outdated idea of literature formulated by Cold War liberals like Trilling and Schlesinger. Returning from a long period of self-imposed seclusion to join the contemporary American crowd which is facing a frightening surge of anxiety, terror, and “spiritual vacuity” brought about by post-Cold War instabilities and postmodern dislocations, DeLillo’s Bill Gray does not seem ready to announce the death of the novel and its “radical nerve.”

Mao II suggests that Bill Gray’s chance—to contain the post-Cold War crisis of the American Self with the old language of Cold War liberalism and aesthetic modernism—is precariously thin. When he dies on board a ferry, “an old man with a limp” takes Bill’s “passport and other forms of identification, anything with a name and a number,” to “sell to some militia in Beirut” (216-17). It is Brita Nilsson who, no longer photographing only writers, visits Beirut some time after Bill’s death “on assignment for a German magazine” to photograph Abu Rashid, the leader of the Maoist terrorist group represented by George Haddad (228). Unlike Bill Gray who, according to Scott, “gained

celebrity” or authorial fame as “a myth” “by doing nothing” and leading a secluded life apart from the image world of the masses, “working on and off for twenty-three years” on the novel he could never finish (52), Brita Nilsson fully embraces the postmodern spectacle of the image, all the time traveling around the world. Free from the burden of history and tradition that compromises Bill’s ability to create an effective counter-narrative to the post-historical narrative of terror and homogeneity, Brita describes Bill’s nostalgic belief in the “pure game” of literary creation as something close to fanaticism or “mental illness”; yet, she also suggests that the “lost game” Bill has been “trying to recover as a writer” is “not so lost” (47). Although disinclined to endorse Bill’s maudlin and antiquated idea of authorship, Britta shares Bill’s paranoid view on Third World terrorism and its totalitarian impulses: not spending a moment without “thinking terror” while traveling, she “[carries] a Swedish passport,” “[uses] codes in [her] address book for names and addresses of writers,” and carries “no books with religious symbols on the jacket and no pictures of guns or sexy women” (41). Not only keeping her authorial, if coded, identity protected, Brita shows in her encounter with Abu Rashid that the author’s “game” with the terrorist is not irrevocably lost, because art still can recognize and cultivate individual “selfness” and singular identity against the totalizing force of terror. Incessantly “reload[ing] and shoot[ing]” while keeping Abu Rashid in the viewfinder of her camera (235), Brita strikes up a brief and deceptively casual conversation, which in content is reminiscent of the heavier and more egg-headed conversations between Bill and Haddad. When she asks about Abu Rashid’s picture on the shirts worn by the boys around him, the interpreter intervenes to say that the picture gives “all the children of

Abu Rashid” “a vision they will accept and obey” and “an identity outside the narrow function of who they are” (233). The interpreter also explains why all the boys are wearing hoods on their faces: since “[t]he image of Rashid is their identity,” they “don’t need their own features or voices” (234). When Rashid finishes his “eloquent macho bullshit” about Mao, instead of saying something, Brita, “smiling all the time,” walks to Rashid’s son, “removes his hood,” and then “snaps his picture,” all “on an impulse” (236). “She does this,” DeLillo adds without further explanation, “because it seems important” (236). “Feeling detached, almost out-of-body” after her photographing assignment has been done, “she walks over to Rashid and shakes his hand, actually introduces herself, pronouncing her name slowly” (237).

Mark Osteen argues that *Mao II* demonstrates “the end of the grand narrative of modernist authority” and announces its replacement by what he calls “spectacular authorship”: “the power to use photographic or televised images to manufacture, as if by magic, spectacular events that profoundly shape public consciousness” (644). Thus for Osteen, Brita’s “spectacular authorship,” her authorial “impulsiveness” and “spontaneity” in creating images and manufacturing spectacles, is a redeeming alternative to Bill Gray’s Joycean model of authorship and potentially an effective vehicle to check the “authoritarian” power of terrorism—“itself a form of spectacular authorship” (666, 667, 644). Leonard Wilcox makes a similar point when he claims that Brita “increases the flow of meaning” with her photograph of the young terrorist, a “disruptive presence that arises out of the heterogeneity of the event” and “counters the empty and commutable signs of media-driven terrorism” (103).

Though much celebrated as such, however, Brita's "spectacular authorship" does not offer more than an uncertain hint of triumph: if the novel defined by Bill Gray as "a democratic shout" stands for the "radical nerve" or "fighting faith" of American liberal individualism, it is not clear what a cosmopolitan Swedish freelancing photographer's picture of a Lebanese terrorist in an obscure German magazine could offer, especially in a novel that looks into the "simulation order" of terror as "a foreign threat to American individuality" (Wilcox 91; Hardack 375). The momentary rupture in the "simulation order" of terror that Brita creates with her impulsive act of disruption could, to use DeLillo's own words of warning about contemporary literature, be easily "neutralized" and "incorporated into the ambient noise" of the mass-produced image world (Begley 96-97). Entirely lacking the senses of paranoid urgency, determination, and tragic yearning Bill Gray maintains till his death, Brita's blithe and nonchalant authorial gaze could transform whatever objects turn up in the viewfinder of her camera into "some synthetic mass language, the Esperanto of jet lag" (23), a danger she admits when she says: "No matter what I shot, how much horror, reality, misery, ruined bodies, bloody faces, it was all so fucking pretty in the end" (24-25). It is very likely that the photo she takes of Abu Rashid could be retaken by terrorists as the image of another Mao II, an image for mass consciousness and consumption, like the huge advertising sign for Coke II she witnesses in Beirut (230).

Bill Gray's idea of the novelist, though considered "fanatical" by Britta (47), seems fully endorsed by DeLillo when he proclaims in an interview that we need the novelist who, "working in the margins," "writes against power" and "against the

corporation or the state or the whole apparatus of assimilation” (Begley 96, 97). The novelist, DeLillo argues, must retrieve “the tragic narrative that used to belong to the novel” from “totalitarian leaders” and “terrorists” who are writing a new “world narrative” in the form of “world news” dominated by “disastrous events” they orchestrate (101). For DeLillo, who believes that the novel is “not dead” or “even seriously injured” (Begley 96), Bill’s tragic death, it seems clear, does not herald the end of the novel, but a new beginning. Bill Gray succeeds where Brita Nilsson fails: Bill provides a “tragic narrative” that “absorb[s] and incorporate[s] the culture instead of catering to it” (Begley 96). Paradoxically, it is Bill’s failure, not Brita’s triumphal gesture, that conserves the insurgent spirit of “a democratic shout,” a determined refusal to accept the “final triumph of totalitarianism” that “sets out to liquidate the tragic insights” by creating the “totalitarian man” or “man without anxiety,” who “incarnates mass purpose and historical destiny” (Schlesinger 56). Bill Gray’s tragic death heralds the return of the paranoid American self—the “anxious man” in Schlesinger’s Cold War liberal terminology—who, possessing a Keatsian “negative capability,” refuses to escape from post-historical anxiety or “spiritual vacuity” by succumbing to the “simulation order” of terror.

In *Mao II*, the “end of history” turns out to be a disconcerting moment of déjà vu in which the “radical nerve” of Cold War liberalism is summoned up to register and contain new sources of threat to “the ultimate integrity of the individual” (Schlesinger ix). What DeLillo attempts to do in the novel is not to envision a post-historical American Self free of anxiety, but to bring back a set of familiar Cold War anxieties and

reinvigorate the hygiene of “agency panic.” Through Bill Gray’s journey to the heart of terror, DeLillo indicates that the “tragic insights” of the “anxious man” should be recovered in order to confront totalitarianism and its agent, the terrorist—the “totalitarian man” or “man without anxiety” (Schlesinger 56). Interestingly, it is DeLillo himself, not Master Moon, who literally brings the alien crowd in the prologue into the “American sunlight” under the roof of Yankee Stadium: “an organized, orderly crowd” he once saw in a photograph of a Moonie mass wedding in “a soft-drink warehouse” in Seoul, South Korea (Nadotti 111; Passaro 80).

3. Beyond Cold War Paranoia: “Longing” for the American Crowd in *Underworld* (1997)

Playing with “the dialectic between the isolated, detached white individual and the merged, racialized mass,” DeLillo in *Mao II*, as Richard Hardack points out, tends to “[project] the latter onto the foreign rather than situating it as an aspect of America’s own divided cultural dynamic” (381). The crowds in *Mao II*—whether they are stadium crowds or TV crowds—are almost always imagined as a “foreign” threat to American self-identity, from a perspective that conflates Cold War xenophobia about mass consciousness with a more recent suspicion towards the postmodern culture of simulation. DeLillo’s tendency to associate social collectivity with foreignness significantly curbs the novel’s ability to envision the “American” crowd. By defining the novel as an ultimate antidote to the homogenizing narrative of totalitarian terror, Bill Gray falters in his quest for “a democratic shout” in part because, as Scott tells Brita, he

“doesn’t understand how people need to blend in, lose themselves in something larger” (89). According to Scott, Bill regards “mass marriage” only as a foreign intrusion into the integrity of American individualism, unable to see that “we have to survive as a community instead of individuals trying to master every complex force” of history (89). Against Bill’s microscopic or endoscopic view on the individual, Scott insists on something like a telescopic view on the self, when he claims that we should “learn to see ourselves as if from space” or “from the moon,” thereby being able to see ourselves as “Moonies” to a certain extent (89).

When Rodge watches through his binoculars from the stands of Yankee Stadium the “uniformly smiling” couples moving into the field, he realizes that “‘crowd’ is not the right word” for the orderly mass they are making: he does not know what to call “the crowd” (4). This disturbing moment of confusion and unhomeliness clearly suggests that the multinational wedding mass could pose as deadly a threat to the American crowd an average Joe like Karen’s father expects to see at Yankee Stadium as it could to Bill Gray’s highbrow modernist conception of the self. Momentarily breaking out from the telescopic point of narration predominant in the prologue, DeLillo zooms in on Karen when she attempts to explain to her Korean husband, Kim Jo Pak, the place they are in: “This is where the Yankees play” (8).

“Baseball,” she says, using the word to sum up a hundred happy abstractions, themes that flare to life in the crowd shout and diamond symmetry, in the details of a dusty slide. The word has resonance if you’re American, a sense of shared heart and untranslatable lore. But she only means to suggest the democratic

clamor, a history of sweat and play on sun-dazed afternoons, an openness of form that makes the game a kind of welcome to my country. (8-9)

This is probably the only moment in *Mao II* when the crowd is not painted as a menacing alien force, but directly associated with the uniquely American sense of collectivity that the baseball crowd expresses in its “democratic clamor.” For Bill Gray, on the other hand, baseball evokes the “pure game” of “invention” and “innocence” that he had enjoyed as a kid by making up imaginary ballgames in his mind, but failed to recreate in his professional career as a novelist (46). Being a nostalgic symbol of America’s collective memory of lived history, baseball in the novel mostly works as an agonizing reminder that it is now almost impossible to imagine the American crowd with “a sense of shared heart and untranslatable lore,” or to recover the aesthetic purity of literary imagination that “seamless[ly] and transparent[ly]” corresponds with its objects of representation (46). The “democratic clamor” of baseball briefly evoked by Karen still lingering in our ears, she fast disappears into a faceless mass that her father is unable to recognize as the American “crowd” he knows.

In his most ambitious epic novel *Underworld*, in which he chronicles the 40-year history of the Cold War, DeLillo attempts to accomplish what Bill Gray apparently fails to do: envisioning the American crowd. In the Prologue titled “The Triumph of Death,” DeLillo recreates the legendary ballgame between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants on October 3, 1951, the same day the Soviet Union exploded its second atomic bomb in Kazakhstan. While fulfilling in part Bill Gray’s childhood fantasy of making up imaginary ballgames, DeLillo radically departs from Bill Gray’s latter-day

Cold War xenophobia and paranoia toward the crowd and ironically looks back to the early moments of the Cold War in order to locate an American crowd that does not evoke a sense of “implicit panic” or signify “the end of individuality” (Nadotti 110). For DeLillo, the Dodgers-Giants game, in the midst of the Korean War and the intensifying nuclear arms race, is a rare moment of national unity and cohesion. As DeLillo characterizes it, the game is “a kind of unrepeatable event” that “binds people in a certain way,” through a collective experience of “jubilation rather than disaster of some sort” (Howard 121).

“Longing on a large scale is what makes history” (1), announces DeLillo in the opening page of the Prologue, which recounts how a 14-year-old scrawny black boy named Cotter Martin could end up obtaining Bobby Thomson’s dramatic ninth-inning homerun ball that gave the 1951 National League pennant to the Giants. One of the main narrative threads in the novel proper is a story that traces back to the game day the complicated and ultimately incomplete ownership history of Thomson’s homer, which is currently in 1992 in the hands of Nick Shay, a successful waste management industry executive and an old Dodger fan who at the age of sixteen took his radio up to the roof of his Bronx house to listen to Russ Hodges’ radio broadcasting of the game alone (32). What we see at the end of the novel’s reverse time travel is the crowd at the Polo Grounds vividly dramatized in the Prologue. In the opening scene we encounter Cotter Martin, who, having skipped school for the occasion, is anxiously awaiting the right moment to jump over the turnstile without paying for the ticket and lose himself in the ecstatic crowd. Although he is “just a kid with a local yearning,” DeLillo notes in his

Whitmanian celebration of an animated urban multitude, “he is part of an assembling crowd, anonymous thousands off the buses and trains, people in narrow columns tramping over the swing bridge above the river” (1).

Instead of describing the crowd to which Cotter yearns to belong as a homogenous mass where individuals disappear in a smeared image of total anonymity, DeLillo infuses such a plethora of “textured histories” (14) and individual characters into the crowd that it requires both telescopic and microscopic perspectives to configure it in its entirety. While closely following Cotter’s bumpy adventure into the stadium, his streetwise maneuvers to remain safely anonymous in the camaraderie of baseball fans, and his dogged fight to lay hands on Thomson’s homer, DeLillo frequently zooms in and out on the rapturous stadium crowd, locating a group of influential historical figures near the Giants’ dugout, including Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason, restaurant owner Toots Shor, and “the nation’s number one G-man,” J. Edgar Hoover (17). DeLillo also extends the witnessing community through Russ Hodges’ legendary radio broadcasting of the game to which countless people throughout the streets of New York and beyond are tuning in. “Connected by the pulsing voice on the radio” with “the game’s remoter soul,” the stadium crowd is also “joined to the word-of-mouth that passes the score along the street and to the fans who call the special phone number and the crowd at the ballpark that becomes the picture on television” (32). As such, this “textured” community of singular American individuals forged most dramatically at the moment of Bobby Thomson’s homer, famously termed the “Shot Heard Round the World” (669), extends

far beyond the Polo Grounds, even perhaps to one of Cotter's elder brothers who is serving in Korea (138).

Russ Hodges, who "spent years in a studio doing re-creation of big league games" and "inventing ninety-nine percent of the action" solely depending on the telegraph (25), describes the crowd in the ballpark as living "some solemn scrap" of a raw history that is yet to be processed by the media (16). "The experience of togetherness surrounding the game," Russ implies, "is fundamentally different from the artificial experience of togetherness" that *Mao II*'s Karen may gain by watching endlessly televised spectacles of mass terror and violence (Mexal 324-25). Though as entirely "unpredictable" and disorderly as the unfolding history they are witnessing (15), the crowd, Russ also believes, "will carry something out of here that joins them all in a rare way, that binds them to a memory with protective power," a kind of "people's history" that "enters the skin more lastingly than the vast shaping strategies of eminent leaders" and "the mapped visions that pierce our dreams" (59-60).

Even J. Edgar Hoover's "old stop-cocked soul" gives way to the communitarian spirit of the event (28). Hoover decides to remain among the crowd even after he has been informed by one of his Special Agents of the Soviet Union's atomic bomb test, which "makes him think of the spies who passed the secrets, the prospect of warheads being sent to communist forces in Korea" (23). In spite of his characteristically germophobic conception of human contact as a menacing blending of contagious "unseeable life-forms" (18), Hoover "wants to feel a compatriot's nearness and affinity" amidst the "open and hopeful" faces around him (28). Instead of making him feel

isolated from the blissfully unknowing crowd, his secret knowledge about the Soviet nuclear test, which will appear the next day on the front page of *New York Times* along with Thomson's three-run homer, leads him to appreciate more acutely this special moment of communitarian jubilation. At the same time, however, he also finds himself feeling an odd satisfaction in the prospect evoked by the nuclear explosion in Kazakhstan that the euphoric sense of togetherness the ballgame exudes is soon to be replaced by the tragic sense of shared doom and collective paranoia that will be imposed upon the American crowd by the Cold War:

All these people formed by language and climate and popular songs and breakfast foods and the jokes they tell and the cars they drive have never had anything in common so much as this, that they are sitting in the furrow of destruction. He tries to feel a belonging, an opening of his old stop-cocked soul. But there is some bitter condition he has never been able to name and when he encounters a threat from outside, from the moral wane that is everywhere in effect, he finds it is a balance to this state, a restoring force. His ulcer kicks up of course. But there is that side of him, that part of him that depends on the strength of the enemy. (28)

Hoover believes that a sense of belonging that binds people together is not enough or complete without "a threat from outside," suggesting there is something deeply deficient and unreal in the spectacle he is watching from the box seat. When he snatches *Life Magazine's* color reproduction of sixteenth-century Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel's work, *The Triumph of Death*, from the paper rain the ecstatic crowd in the upper decks is

throwing down, Hoover seems to find a balancing vision of human collectivity that could bring some “deep completion” to the crowd (51). For Hoover, Bruegel’s painting—“a landscape of visionary havoc and ruin,” “crowded with medieval figures who are dying or dead” (41), which makes him think of the Kazakh Test Site “armed with the bomb” (50)—gives aesthetic expression to the Cold War paradigm in which national cohesion is secured by the prospect of the universal terror of nuclear apocalypse. Although apparently far more sinister and perversely pathological than the spectacle of collective jubilation he is witnessing at the Polo Grounds, the American crowd Hoover envisions through Bruegel’s painting maintains a unified national self confronting a common enemy, a self still undivided by Cold War paranoia that would inflict enduring internal divisions on the American psyche for the next several decades to come.

DeLillo successfully contains Hoover’s embryonic Cold War paranoia, a potential threat to the spirit of togetherness among the crowd, by burying it safely under the aestheticized memory of post-war economic abundance and national confidence. Hoover’s lurid fantasy set off by Bruegel’s painting is tempered by “the uproar of the moment” inundated with a celebratory rain of pages the crowd is throwing down, which contain familiar brand names of consumer products, “the venerated emblems of the burgeoning economy, easier to identify than the names of battlefields or dead presidents” (38, 39). Even when Bobby Thomson’s homer drives the crowd into a state of collective rapture, DeLillo does not evoke any of the menacing sentiments Rodge in *Mao II* has felt toward the crowd at Yankee Stadium, a crowd he saw as a human collectivity “immunized against the language of self” (8). Instead, the crowd at the Polo Grounds is

described as forming “a selfness,” expressing its deep-held desire for communal identity through “the contagion of paper” (38):

If the early paper waves were slightly hostile and mocking, and the middle waves a form of fan commonality, then this last demonstration has a softness, a selfness. It is coming down from all points, laundry tickets, envelopes swiped from the office, there are crushed cigarette packs and sticky wrap from ice-cream sandwiches, pages from memo pads and pocket calendars, they are throwing faded dollar bills, snapshots torn to pieces, ruffled paper swaddles for cupcakes, they are tearing up letters they’ve been carrying around for years pressed into their wallets, the residue of love affairs and college friendship, it is happy garbage now, the fans’ intimate wish to be connected to the event, unendably, in the form of pocket litter, personal waste, a thing that carries a shadow identity—rolls of toilet tissue unbolting lyrically in streamers. (44-45)

In his description of the performative process of building a collective “selfness”—malleable and open enough to check even Hoover’s proto-fascist impulse that defines the American crowd according to the rigid grids of Cold War binarism—DeLillo takes great pains to insert all the minute traces of individualities and personal histories into the spectacle of paper waves, thereby reviving in the American crowd at the Polo Grounds what Karen in *Mao II* has lost to the marring mass at Yankee Stadium, “a selfness” possessing “grids of pinpoint singularities” (7).

Tracing back Nick Shay’s life history, from his present as a waste management industry executive living in an isolated suburb of Phoenix, Arizona, like “someone in the

Witness Protection Program” (66), to his years as a fatherless teenage boy full of rebellious energy in the Italian immigrant community in the Bronx, the main text of the novel radiates a profound yearning for a communal “selfness” of the early 1950s thoroughly mythologized in the Prologue and the Italian American sections of the novel, a mythic time of national cohesion still untainted by certain schizophrenic impulses latent in the Cold War paranoid imagination about mass consciousness. This, however, does not mean that the 50s in *Underworld* are mostly free from divisive social tensions or instabilities. On the contrary, the novel paints the period as a time of lively disorder and tragic confusion: the crowd at the Polo Grounds, rowdy and unpredictable, is not an organized mass happily united under any single totalizing vision or lasting purpose; and the Italian American Catholic community in the Bronx has, beneath its surface image of folkloric amicability, idiosyncratic individuals, whose unassuming community lives only beguile their deeply isolated selves silently suffering from untold tragedies, aspirations, or guilt.

The sense of national cohesion DeLillo locates at the beginning of the Cold War emerges not so much from the memory of national innocence and consensus as from the shared experience of disorder and chaos. In the novel’s Epilogue titled “Das Kapital,” Nick Shay, now returned to his Phoenix house from a long business trip to the very Kazakh Test Site where the Soviet Union had conducted its second atomic bomb test, confesses that he is missing “the days of disorder” in the 50s: “This is what I long for, the breach of peace, the days of disarray when I walked real streets and did things slap-bang and felt angry and ready all the time, a danger to others and a distant mystery to

myself” (810). As DeLillo explains, Nick Shay’s longing at the end of the novel is “not for lost innocence” but “for lost guilt” (Moss 160). At the dawn of the post-Cold War era, Nick Shay longs for the original chaos of the Cold War, the unsettled moment of Big Bang when life was real, dangerous, and mysterious.

In its journey to the moment of narrative big-bang, the 1951 Dodgers-Giants game, *Underworld* takes “a janiform historical perspective” toward Cold War history, one that simultaneously points to “an older kind of collective identity, based on shared experience and national self-confidence,” and “the pathological public identities founded on shared anxiety and horror” (Green, “Disaster Footage” 595). Thomson’s homerun ball and the Soviet nuclear bomb represent each of these two competing and yet ultimately connected visions about Cold War national self-fashioning. Oscillating between the two, the novel evokes a historical vision of collective identity that does not rely upon the paradigm of national unity bolstered by paranoia and conspiratorial imagination.

As Peter Knight accurately points out, some of the main characters yearn for the “manageable certainties of Cold War anxiety,” believing that “paranoia” has been “a source of stability” rather than a symptom of internal division (“Everything is Connected” 816-17). The most constant and extreme case is Sister Edgar, “a cold war nun” who in the 50s had “lined the walls of her room with Reynolds Wrap as a safeguard against nuclear fallout” (245). Contrary to the popular belief widespread in a ghetto area in the Bronx where she has been working, she sincerely believes that the AIDS virus is “a product of germ warfare” spread by the KGB (244). As germophobic as J. Edgar

Hoover, her “kindred spirit” and “male half” (826), Sister Edgar identifies religious faith with paranoia. To the last moment of her life, she maintains the “faith of suspicion and unreality,” the “faith that replaces God with radioactivity, the power of alpha particles and the all-knowing systems that shape them, the endless fitted links” (251). At the end of the novel, her ghost appears in the paranoid space of the web, where her image is “hyperlinked” to “the other Edgar” in the H-bomb home page (826).

For Klara Sax, Nick Shay’s one-time lover who is currently engaged in a postmodern art project of recycling old B-52 long-range strategic bombers in the New Mexico desert, the Cold War signifies “the balance of power and the balance of terror,” a “stable,” “focused,” and “tangible” paradigm of social order that “held the world together” and helped us to “measure things” accordingly (76). Now that the balance of power has been shattered, she claims she wants to “unrepeat” its history by repainting the “great weapon systems” of the era that once stirred “a complex sensation” of “greatness, danger, [and] terror” in her younger days (75-77). Feeling nostalgic for the days of Cold War paranoia, she seems tempted to reject the weighty sublimity of history through a postmodern gesture of playfulness, as is suggested in her half-hearted conspiracy theory that the end of the Cold War might be a deliberately manufactured fiction, not a real history unfolding in your face. To Nick Shay, Klara speaks in a tone that sounds like it is “designed to ridicule the idea while conceding its dark appeal”: “We’re painting these old planes as a celebration in a way but how do we know for sure this crisis is really over? Is the breakup of the USSR really happening? Or is the whole thing a plot to trick the West?” (82).

Marvin Lundy, who has a huge collection of baseball memorabilia assembled over half a century, maintains a similar theory of the Cold War. Speaking to Nick's old colleague Brian Glassic, who has been hunting down Thomson's legendary homerun ball, Marvin Lundy says: "You don't know that every privilege in your life and every thought in your mind depends on the ability of the two great powers to hang a threat over the planet?" (182). For Marvin, the Cold War means a "constant," "honest," and "dependable" order of paranoia that provides individuals with "the same dimensions as the observable universe" to "recall a purpose" and "a destination" (170). When the Cold War, which has been dependable as "your friend," comes to an end, Marvin's theory goes, people become so "worried and scared" that they are willing to "pay fortunes for [the] objects" that may pander to their nostalgia for the bygone era (170, 182).⁷

Though deadpan-serious compared to Klara Sax, Marvin has his own conspiracy theories about the Cold War and its end. He believes, for instance, that he saw "the first sign of the total collapse of the Soviet system" in the birthmark in the shape of Latvia on Gorbachev's head (173). Unlike Brian Glassic, who simply wants to "surrender himself to longing, to listen to his host recite the anecdotal texts, all the passed-down stories" about baseball, Marvin makes it clear that resignation to "the deep eros of memory" is not sufficient, because it signals that you are "the lost man of history" (171, 182). In order not to be a "lost speck" in history (170), Marvin mobilizes the same paranoid imagination that had helped buttress the Cold War order. In his long and exacting effort to trace Thomson's ball back to the Polo Grounds, Marvin has visited many places, interviewed countless people, and looked up a million photographs, trying to connect

every little dot of reality to reconstruct a complete and authentic historical narrative of the ball. Listening to Marvin's grail romance in which he is attempting to "reassemble a crucial moment in time out of patches and adumbrations," Glassic feels a sense of "secondhandedness," "an eerie replay of the investigations into the political murders of the 1960s" (180-81). Glassic imagines "Marvin in his darkroom borrowing a powerful theme" from the Kennedy Assassination and "using it to locate a small white innocent object bouncing around a ballpark" (181).

Underworld is, however, DeLillo's attempt to go beyond the narrative logic of Cold War paranoia. Contemplating his reunion with Klara Sax, Nick Shay rejects "this business of life as a fiction, or whatever Klara Sax meant when she said that things had become unreal" (82). Against her theory of history as conspiracy, a fiction made of "missing minutes on the tape" or "ten thousand wisps of disinformation," Nick reaffirms his belief in "the real," a textured totality of "the solid and availing stuff of our experience" and "collected knowledge" (82). What constitutes history or the real for Nick is a collective memory: "Even if we believe that history is a workwheel powered by human blood—read the speeches of Mussolini—at least we've known the thing together" (82). If the paranoid mind, which gravitates towards a totalizing vision of history as conspiracy, points to an implicit acknowledgment of incomprehensibility on the parts of individuals over the increasingly impenetrable world, Nick Shay's theory of history is based on the belief that individuals can still garner "[a] single narrative sweep" from the collective experience of the real, even if they are incapable of connecting all the "missing minutes" (82). Dismissing Klara's suggestion that "nations play-act on a large

scale” in a conspiracy to simulate history, Nick proclaims that he has “lived in the real” and witnessed history together with the American people (82). Contrary to Marvin Lundy’s “dot theory of reality” which assumes that everything is “systematically linked in some self-referring relationship that [has] a kind of neurotic tightness, an inescapability” (175, 183), Nick does not think that some missing dots make people’s experience of history incomplete or incomprehensible.

What Nick Shay longs for is not some “missing minutes” of his adolescence in the Bronx, although he certainly has several traumatic moments of puzzlement and mystery that haunt his adult life: Nick could not, and still cannot, fully figure out why his father disappeared one day and left his family forever, or why George the Waiter lied to him about the rusty sawed-off shotgun with which he shot George to death believing George’s word that it was not loaded, or what it was that led him and Klara, his former science teacher’s Jewish wife, to have an unlikely affair. Like other main characters in the novel, Nick certainly feels nostalgic about the Cold War era; however, his nostalgia is not for the stable social fabric conditioned by Cold War paranoia, or for the “fifties” as a commodity fetish people buy in desperation to call up a new purpose or destination in their life. Marvin Lundy’s nostalgic pursuit of Thomson’s homerun ball maintains a highly paranoid impulse that drives him to connect every missing link or lost dot of history. The total narrative constructed by his paranoid desire for “the privileged lost object” of history (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 19) has, as a result, a quality of “neurotic tightness” or “inescapability” that mimics Cold War paranoia itself (183).⁸ Klara’s “landscape painting” (70), which aspires to “remark the end of an age” (126) with

hundreds of Cold War era strategic bombers in a former military test site in the New Mexico desert, appears to be a nostalgic simulation of the sublime esthetics of Cold War paranoia. Her work expresses a longing similar to one that Jesse Detwiler, a “waste theorist,” explained to Nick in the late 70s when they visited a huge landfill designed to contain toxic industrial and military waste (285): Detwiler predicts that the landfill will become “a remote landscape of nostalgia,” a popular tourist site where people could entertain their “[n]ostalgia for the banned materials of civilization, for the brute force of old industries and old conflicts” (286). Klara’s “landscape painting” also evokes Bruegel’s painting of a medieval “landscape of visionary havoc and ruin” that has triggered Hoover’s paranoid imagination (41).

Nick’s yearning for the Cold War, in contrast, does not tilt towards paranoia or melancholia. Although he now possesses what is supposed to be Thomson’s homerun ball, Nick often forgets why he had bought the “expensive and beautiful object” and wants to keep it “half hidden” on the bookshelf (809). What Nick misses is not the stabilizing order of Cold War paranoia that had shaped “the mapped visions” and “strategies of eminent leaders [and] generals steely in their sunglasses,” but the ghosts of the American crowd and their felt history at the Polo Grounds and in the streets of New York (60).

The only ghosts I let in were local ones, the smoky traces of people I knew and the dinge of my own somber shadow, New York ghosts in every case, the old loud Bronx, hand-to-mouth, spoken through broken teeth—the jeer, the raspberry fart. (82)

Against those characters who tend to nostalgically regress to paranoia in an ironic effort to cope with the end of the Cold War and the accompanying crisis of the paranoid epistemology, *Underworld* seeks to conjure up “the days of disorder” and “disarray” (810), a Big Bang moment when the Cold War and its paranoid order are about to set in. Although at times the novel seems clearly pandering to the 1990s popular nostalgia for the fifties as commodity (Molly 371), it does not altogether mythologize or depoliticize the 1950s as a period of safe domesticity and conformity as the nostalgia President, Ronald Reagan, attempted to do (Duvall 303). Instead, DeLillo describes the early fifties as a creative temporality of indeterminacy and uncertainty, and the Bronx (and the Polo Grounds) as a location for performing or negotiating a communal selfness, a process which remains stubbornly singular and local, but open to a layered vision of collective identity.

Underworld's reverse time-travel to the originating chaos of the Cold War does more than simply invert the teleological narrative of Cold War history: the novel aspires to reject the paradoxical logic of paranoia that sustains the teleological historical discourse of the Cold War. For Francis Fukuyama, who considers the Cold War as a world-historical conflict between the two different visions of Universal History, the victory of the Western idea of liberal democracy over its rival, the Marx-Leninist idea of historical progress, signals the final triumph of the Hegelian teleology and ultimately the end of history. At this moment of celebration, however, Fukuyama finds himself feeling, as DeLillo's Nick Shay does at the end of *Underworld*, “a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed,” the time when the worldwide “struggle for recognition” has

“called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism” (“The End of History?” 18). Fukuyama’s ambivalence between euphoria and melancholia results, in fact, from a dilemma inherent in the very idea of “end of history” that is “implicit in the writing of all Universal Histories,” whether it is a Hegelian teleology or the Christian account of history, the “first truly Universal History in the Western tradition” (*The End of History* 56). Moving forwards to their own termination, Universal Histories, when their missions are accomplished, cannot think of another beginning of history or envision any truly new art or philosophy; the only available option, Fukuyama argues in a tone similar to that of Marvin Lundy in *Underworld*, is “the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history” (“The End of History?” 18). Largely concurring to Nietzsche’s insight that the “last man” of history is essentially “the victorious slave,” who is “composed entirely of desire and reason, clever at finding new ways to satisfy a host of petty wants through the calculation of long-term self-interest,” instead of risking his life in pursuit of some heroic and aristocratic ideals (*The End of History* 301), Fukuyama recognizes in Hegelian Universal History “a curious paradox,” which helps Alexandre Kojève—whose reading of Hegel greatly influenced Fukuyama’s thesis—come to an ironic conclusion about the end of history:

If man reaches a society in which he has succeeded in abolishing injustice, his life will come to resemble that of the dog. Human life, then, involves a curious paradox: it seems to require injustice, for the struggle against injustice is what calls forth what is highest in man. ... In a series of ironic footnotes to his lectures

on Hegel, [Kojève] indicated that the end of history meant also the end of both art and philosophy, and therewith, his own life activity. (*The End of History* 311)

In spite of being a faithful follower of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, Fukuyama realizes that the Hegelian teleology and its most recent and critical world-historical event, the Cold War, are driven by something like a dynamic of paranoid psychology.

If the wheels of history stop moving when there remains no "injustice" to justify the progress of "justice," and if history, therefore, "requires injustice" to move forwards, it could be said that history is driven by a paranoid search for "injustice" as much as by a rational pursuit of "justice."

Similar to Timothy Melley's concept of "agency panic" that applies to the Cold War national self-fashioning we have discussed earlier, this paradoxical logic of paranoia that Fukuyama finds operating underneath the Hegelian discourse of Universal History poses a serious dilemma to his thesis of the end of history. When "injustice" is completely abolished at the end of history, "justice" loses its meaning, the entire history of progress is nullified, and the "last man" reverts to a calculating animal that only cares about his own narrow self-interest. Speaking of the end of the Cold War, Jean Baudrillard goes further to argue that without the possibility of the Apocalypse, history loses its depths and dimensions, and leads to the perpetual "here and now" (119). With the end of the atomic age, Baudrillard claims, "history itself has become interminable," because the Apocalypse and our "messianic hope" that depends on it become unreal and "virtual" (116, 119). As the prospect of the Apocalypse disappears, our "nostalgia" for the origin, which is "the inverted mirror" of our yearning for the "utopia," is replaced by

“melancholia” (120). In Baudrillard’s view, what Fukuyama describes as “nostalgia for the time when history existed” (“The End of History?” 18) is, in fact, melancholia, because for Baudrillard nostalgia “retain[s] within it the presentiment of what has taken place and could have taken place again,” whereas melancholia only expresses “ressentiment” at the disappearance of the possibility of “an end or of a return” (120).

Fukuyama’s “triumphant conjuration” of Marxism and its death, Derrida similarly argues, “is striving in truth to disavow, and therefore to hide from, the fact that never, never in history, has the horizon of the thing whose survival is being celebrated (namely, all the old models of the capitalist and liberal world) been as dark, threatening, and threatened” (52). Part of the reason Fukuyama’s “neo-liberal rhetoric” sounds “both jubilant and worried, manic and bereaved, often obscene in its euphoria” (70), is that after Marxism is “conjured away,” “those sworn to the conjuration” become “afraid that they will no longer recognize it” or “a new “Marxism” will no longer have the face by which one was accustomed to identify it and put it down” (50). Due to these “suspect and paradoxical conditions” of conjuration (52), Derrida implies, “the anxious experts of anti-communism” (50) like Fukuyama ultimately fail to mourn the end of the Cold War without secretly longing to invoke the specters of Marxism and the Cold War history they remember. To paraphrase Derrida, then, Cold War history revisits us as a specter at the very moment of its death, as Fukuyama’s recycling of the old apocalyptic themes of the 50s paradoxically suggests.

In the Epilogue to *Underworld*, Sister Edgar dies and then reappears in the ultimate location of paranoia, a “world without end” where “[t]here is no space or time”

(825). She returns as a ghost of non-history, who, unable to end her former life as a Cold War nun, has to live in a perpetual state of melancholia:

But she is in cyberspace, not heaven, and she feels the grip of systems. This is why she's so uneasy. There is a presence here, a thing implied, something vast and bright. She senses the paranoia of the web, the net. There's the perennial threat of virus of course. Sister knows all about contaminations and the protective measures they require. (825)

Sister Edgar's religion of paranoia does not promise any possibility of redeeming or transcending Cold War history, for in the virtual Hades she resides in, Cold War history repeats itself, unable to mourn its end or return to its original moments.

Underworld's overall nostalgia for the 50s is neither a yearning for the paranoid order of the Cold War that Sister Edgar has lived by her entire life, nor a reactionary melancholia that endlessly conjures undying ghosts of history. Bobby Thomson's homerun ball that Nick is keeping "half hidden" in his house with other family effects certainly evokes nostalgia; yet, it also alludes to the possibility of mourning the death of an era and preparing for a new beginning. *Underworld's* "sublime reference to the origin in nostalgia," to borrow from Baudrillard, is also "the reference to the end in utopia" (120). Unlike Sister Edgar who haunts "the paranoid spaces of the computer net" as a worshiper of the Bomb (Howard 124), Nick seems capable of processing Cold War history by burying its toxic waste under the nostalgic yearning for the origin. When the novel revisits the Kazakh Test Site, we see Nick Shay trying to cut a deal with a Russian businessman named Viktor who claims that waste is "the devil twin" of weapons (791).

It is implied that what Nick and his “mystical twin” of the Cold War are planning to is to “destroy contaminated nuclear waste by means of nuclear explosions” (791). To give a proper end to the paranoid history of the Cold War, or to mourn its death, *Underworld* turns back to the time when it all started with the Bomb and reinvents the authentic American crowd free of paranoia. By imagining the end of Cold War paranoia through a nostalgic yearning for its original Big Bang, the novel gestures towards an alternative vision about post-Cold War history and national selfness.

When on September 11, 2001 a group of Islamic terrorists staged spectacular attacks at the very central symbols of America’s global hegemony, it became painfully obvious that the post-Cold War euphoria could no longer last; nor could nostalgia for the paranoid era of the Cold War. Lately knighted as “America’s foremost bard of conspiracy, paranoia, and terrorism” (Wilcox 89), DeLillo directly responds to 9/11 in his most recent novel, *Falling Man*. Unlike his previous novels like *Players*, *The Names*, and *Mao II*, where the figures of terrorist conspiracy and imperial paranoia are employed rather indulgently, *Falling Man* is far more meditative in tone and restrained in scope. Interestingly enough, there is no direct comment on the Bush administration’s global War on Terror in Afghanistan or in Iraq. The novel is more concerned with telling what DeLillo describes as “counter-narratives” that could stand up to the narrative logic of terrorism and its fundamentalist vision of apocalypse. This community of lived stories told by individual characters about their traumatic experiences with 9/11 are neither pleasantly nostalgic, nor wildly paranoid; but they gesture towards a vision of national community, in which paranoia about terrorism is contained in such a way that it could

itself be a ground for communal discourse and networking. Paranoia never dies out; with September 11, it returns with the oddly familiar and deceptively innocent face of early Cold War paranoia, which DeLillo revived in *Underworld* through a nostalgic lens.

What has really ended the Cold War, then, is not the fall of the Berlin Wall, but the September 11 terrorist attacks. In an article published by *Harper's Magazine* three months after the attacks, DeLillo announces that “a nostalgia for the Cold War” the Bush Administration was feeling is “over now,” that the teleological narrative of its history “ends in the rubble,” and that “it is left to us to create the counter-narrative” (“In the Ruins of the Future” 34). In a tone suggestive of Bill Gray in *Mao II*, DeLillo insists that the writer “[try] to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space” (39) created by the terrorist who “shares a secret and a self” (34). Against the terrorist plots that “reduce the world” into a single flash of destruction (34), DeLillo cries out, the writer should revitalize “all [the] vital differences” and singularities breathing in the streets of a New York that has “accomodat[ed] every language, ritual, belief, and opinion” (40). Just one month before the attack, he had walked the same streets of his hometown “among crowds of people, the panethnic swarm of shoppers, merchants, residents and passersby, with a few tourists as well” (40).

As the title of his unusually forthcoming essay suggests, DeLillo seems to imagine a future American history whose narrative will be founded on the current “ruins” of September 11. DeLillo sounds very much like Marvin Lundy, an expert collector of baseball memorabilia, or Jesse Detwiller, a “waste theorist” in *Underworld*, when he predicts: “For the next fifty years, people who were not in the area when the

attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it. Others will claim to have lost friends or relatives, although they did not” (35). It seems clear that DeLillo wants to believe September 11, 2001 could be another October 3, 1951. What the writer has to do is to fill out the “howling space” (39) created by this singular Big Bang of terror with a crowd of real or imagined counter-narratives: “a hundred thousand stories crisscrossing New York, Washington, and the world”; “stories of heroism and encounters with dread”; and “stories that carry around their edges the luminous ring of coincidence, fate, or premonition” and “a glimpse of elevated being” (34). In *Falling Man* (2007), his excruciatingly painful meditation on September 11, DeLillo evokes a haunting image of “people falling from the towers hand in hand” (“In the Ruins of the Future” 39). Although this striking image of terror to a certain degree reminds us of the Pieter Bruegel painting that fueled J. Edgar Hoover’s twisted imagination in *Underworld*, it does not look back, for a frame of reference, to the old narrative principle of Cold War paranoia, which after the attack, almost feels like a children’s tale of nightmare.

Deeply intrigued by America’s obsession with paranoid narratives and apocalyptic visions as he may be, DeLillo has a mind of profound irony and delicate balance. In his most successful sentences, it seems that every word never stops balancing and reassessing their changing location of meaning, even after each sentence ends. Although many of his novels unswervingly engage the most publicized and intensely charged political issues in contemporary American history, DeLillo seems always determined to maintain a certain level of artistic distance and altitude, where final

meaning arrives not in the form of paranoid individual conviction or total collective submission, but in the form of interpersonal and communicative “longing.” Ultimately, paranoia for DeLillo is a failed form of this discursive “longing,” a tendency that seeks to find immediate meaning everywhere the paranoid subject casts his eyes. Having a fantastical mind of over-interpretation and over-commitment, the paranoid self tends to develop a totalizing vision, a claustrophobically closed system of signification that could rival those of totalitarian world systems like fascism and communism. Seeing both paranoid and totalitarian mentalities, the two conflicting modes of cognitive mapping played out during the Cold War conflict, as being perversely intrinsic, but ultimately detrimental, to the well-being of the American Self, DeLillo attempts in his recent novels to salvage from Cold War history a nostalgic vision of the collective American “longing” which could help fight a more nebulous and fatal nemesis of the American Self, terrorism.

Notes

¹ Francis Fukuyama's thesis of the "end of history," though rather extreme, is not only enthusiastically embraced by a host of Cold War triumphalist pundits like George Will, William Kristol, and Charles Krauthammer, but also widely shared by a school of serious historians who, celebrating the end of the Cold War, tend to frame the history of the Cold War more as an "ideological" or even "moral" conflict between free-market democracy and communist totalitarianism than as a "military" and "geopolitical" struggle between conflicting state interests. Historian John Lewis Gaddis, for instance, defines the Cold War as "an ideological contest" between "capitalism and communism" or "democracy and authoritarianism," and "a competition for the allegiance of, and for influence over, the so-called Third World" (21). John Mueller similarly argues that "the Cold War had much more to do with ideology than with armaments" and that the demise of the Cold War resulted from "the change in ideology" on the part of the Soviet Union (40, 42).

For Ellen Schrecker, this triumphalist interpretation of the Cold War as a "moral parable" uncritically "elides other aspects of the Cold War to create an oversimplified and distorted version of its history that serves to justify Washington's past and present quest for hegemony" (4, 7). On the opposite side of the triumphalist school, there are a group of historians who tend to "[see] the end of the Cold War marking a return to history, not its end," believing that the Cold War conflict "actually slowed a historic trend toward political democracy and market economies, both in the Soviet Union and

elsewhere” (Hogan 4). Countering John Lewis Gaddis’s thesis of the “Long Peace” sustained by the Cold War, Walter LaFeber, for instance, argues that there were multiple “Cold Wars” of “various intensities” and longer “historical continuities in U.S. foreign policy” that are too often “dismissed amid the triumphalism” (“An End to Which Cold War” 13). Bruce Cummings and Chalmers Johnson similarly question Fukuyama and others’ triumphalist interpretation of the end of the Cold War. For Johnson, even if “in Europe, the Cold War seemed to end with the breaching of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991,” the Cold Wars in East Asia and Latin America “continued unabated after the demise of the communist camp” (237). For more detailed discussions about the end of the Cold War and its triumphalist and alternative interpretations, see *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*. Ed. Michael J. Hogan. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992; *Cold War Triumphalism: The Misuses of History After the Fall of Communism*. Ed. Ellen Schrecker. New York: The New Press, 2004.

² For the historical contexts and characteristics of the so-called Second Cold War during the Reagan presidency, see Fred Halliday’s book, *The Making of the Second Cold War*. London: Verso, 1983; Walter LaFeber’s *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997; and Joanne P. Sharp’s *Condensing the Cold War: Reader’s Digest and American Identity*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000. I will discuss the Second Cold War in greater detail in my chapter on Silko.

³ In this sense, James Axton's narrative largely belongs to what John McClure calls the "late imperial romance" typified in John F. Kennedy's speeches that incorporate the old imperial language of romance to address America's Cold War mission towards the Third World. For McClure, Axton is "a kind of imperial pastiche," a mixture of "a Hemingwayesque expatriate," an "innocent abroad," a "Quiet American," and even "a kind of Marlow" (133-34). Rather too constricting in his reading of *The Names* as a Cold War imperial romance about the encounter between the West and the East, McClure unwittingly tends to reinstate the conventional narrative frame of US Cold War neocolonialism he purports to interrogate, without fully recognizing the fundamentally unstable and internally divisive dynamic of paranoia inherent in the Cold War imperial romance. McClure's concept of "late imperial romance" will be more thoroughly discussed in the following chapter about Joan Didion.

⁴ This rhetoric of manic depression at the beginning of the post-Cold War era has a familiar tint of Cold War déjà vu. As he openly admits in the 1989 essay and later in *The End of History and The Last Man* (139), Fukuyama extensively recycles Alexandre Kojève's post-war discourse of the "end of history," including Kojève's identification of the end of history with the post-war "American way of life" ("The End of History?" 5). In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida notes that Fukuyama's "new gospel, the noisiest, the most mediatized, the most "successful" one on the subject of the death of Marxism at the end of history," is "an old repetition" or "a tiresome anachronism," and that Fukuyama is, in fact, a "latecomer" to the end of history (56, 14, 15). Although "[m]any young people

today (of the type “readers-consumers of Fukuyama” or of the type “Fukuyama” himself) probably no longer sufficiently realize it,” Derrida attests, “the eschatological themes of the “end of history,” of the “end of Marxism,” of the “end of philosophy,” of the “ends of man,” of the “last man” and so forth were, in the 50s, that is, forty years ago, our daily bread” (14). In Fukuyama’s conjuration of the old “eschatological themes” of the 50s, everyday “bread of apocalypse” for the generation of Marxist intellectuals who had to witness with great dismay “all the socio-economic disasters of Soviet bureaucracy” and the Stalinist “totalitarian terror in all the Eastern countries” (14-15), Derrida perceives a sign that “a new ‘world order’ seeks to stabilize a new ... disturbance [*déréglement*] by installing an unprecedented form of hegemony” (50).

⁵ The post-war fear about “the masses” and “mass society” was, obviously, a direct response to European fascism during World War II. As Abbott Gleason scrupulously documents in *Totalitarianism: the Inner History of the Cold War*, however, “the anti-Nazi energy of the wartime period” became expeditiously channeled into “the postwar struggle with the Soviet Union” through the concept of “totalitarianism” (3). Much influenced by a group of European thinkers who tried to understand their experiences with fascism, such as Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Hervert Marcuse, and Hannah Arendt, American Cold War liberal discourse “tended to conflate fascism and communism as similar totalitarian systems” which it believed “took root in the anxious passivity of the masses” and threatened individual freedom and autonomy (Schaub 16). In fact, post-war anxiety about the crisis of individualism

contain various, often conflicting, perspectives which define totalitarian agencies—the government, private corporations, the power elite, as well as communists—differently, as suggested by David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (1956), C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (1956), and many other similar books. As such, Cold War liberal intellectuals were concerned about “the anxious passivity of the masses” as much as the problems associated with social conformity in American society.

⁶ Cold War liberals loosely refer to a group of intellectuals who had been mostly sympathetic to the Popular Front during the 1930s and later became “united around anti-communist ideals” (Mattson 9). The group includes theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., economist John Kenneth Galbraith, literary critic Lionel Trilling, philosopher Sidney Hook, sociologist Daniel Bell, and historian Richard Hofstadter.

⁷ Marvin Lundy’s conception of the Cold War is in sync with John Lewis Gaddis’s thesis of the Long Peace. Echoing Lundy, Gaddis proclaims that “the Cold War, the most dangerous, bitter, and protracted rivalry between Great Powers in modern history, did in time become the most protracted period of freedom from Great Power war in modern history” (21).

⁸ In his discussion of postmodern “nostalgia films,” Fredric Jameson argues that “for Americans at least, the 1950s remain the privileged lost object of desire—not merely the stability and prosperity of a pax Americana but also the first naïve innocence

of the countercultural impulses of early rock and roll and youth gangs” (*Postmodernism* 19). The entire scene of Yankee Stadium and Bobby Thomson’s homerun ball in particular, as I hope to elaborate further in the coming paragraphs, nostalgically evokes the two aspects of the 50s Jameson describes.

CHAPTER III

COLD WAR IMPERIAL ROMANCES OF CONSPIRACY: JOAN DIDION

In Joan Didion's latest novel, *The Last Thing He Wanted*, which traces the death of an American reporter named Elena McMahon on an unidentified island in the Caribbean Sea in the midst of the events later known as Iran-Contra, the narrator says that those who understand the kind of secret border-crossing transaction of weapons, money, and drugs so characteristic of the Reagan administration's imperial enterprise to "rollback" communist advances in Central America are "at heart storytellers, weavers of conspiracy" who "see it in a flash, comprehend all its turns, [and] get its possibilities" (55). For these "storytellers" of conspiracy, "no information could be without interest" and "[e]very moment could be seen to connect to every other moment, every act to have logical if obscure consequences, an unbroken narrative of vivid complexity" (56). This is exactly the kind of job Nicholas Branch in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, a retired CIA senior analyst contracted to write the secret official history of the Kennedy assassination, has been trying to do for the last fifteen years in his room of "theories and dreams" densely packed halfway to the ceiling with a "data-slew" of countless documents, reports, transcripts, and books, readily provided by the CIA Curator assigned to him (14-15). In Branch's expanding conglomeration of data, there is, of course, the Warren Report, "with its twenty-six accompanying volumes of testimony and exhibits, its millions of words," "the megaton novel James Joyce would have written if he'd moved to Iowa City and lived to be a hundred" (181).

In her reportorial investigation of the Cuban community in *Miami* (1987), Didion has unearthed “Miami stories, fragments of the underwater narrative,” which are so “low,” “lurid,” and “radically reliant on the inductive leap that they tend to attract advocates of an ideological or a paranoid bent” (201-2). If the Warren Report is, as Nicholas Branch calls it, “the Joycean Book of America,” Didion’s “Miami stories” are the same kind of stories that “had been told to the Warren Commission in 1964,” with an added emphasis on the “logical consequences” of America’s Cold War “imperial yearnings” (202-3). DeLillo’s Branch has spent his entire career as an intelligence analyst and secret historian of conspiracy working to understand “a vast theology, a formal coded body of knowledge” built by the “men in clandestine service, the spy handlers, [and] the covert-action staff” (442), who share the same occupational territory with some of Didion’s heroes in her latest novels. For Jack Lovett in *Democracy*, for instance, who views “information as an end in itself,” “the accidental [does] not figure,” “all behavior [is] purposeful,” and “the purpose [can] be divined [by] whoever attract[s] the best information and read[s] it most correctly” (35, 36).

Yet, Didion’s novels of political conspiracy could not be more different from the Joycean cathedral of paranoid narrative where “nothing is left out” (182) and every seemingly insignificant piece of information claims equally full attention for its potential connectivity and supplementarity to the narrative whole. Departing from her first novel, *Run River* (1963), Didion developed in *Play It As It Lays* (1970) her signature style of minimalist prose writing that verges on imagist poetry and has more or less continued to apply it to her later novels, the main texts of my analysis in this chapter. In her interview

with Sara Davidson in 1977, Didion claimed that what she wanted to achieve in *A Book of Common Prayer* is “a deceptive surface that appeared to be one thing and turned color as you look through it” (14). Didion’s focal attention to narrative “surface,” at first glance, seems rather unusual and unsuited to a story about “the life of the body politic” whose real “movement is going on underneath” (15). The novel tells the story of an American woman named Charlotte who, escaping from the wayward political activism and cultural hedonism of 60s California, drifts into Boca Grande, an imaginary island state in the Caribbean Sea. Despite its deceptive appearance of peacefulness, Boca Grande turns out to be a frontier of perennial revolutions, deadly conspiracies, and unending power struggles among a small group of governing colonial families, a fact that Charlotte never fully or willingly understands and that ultimately claims her life. To a degree, Boca Grande’s deceptive surface of equatorial quietude provides a semblance of order and form for the fluctuating territory of febrile impulses and paranoid ambitions. Likewise, we can make a case that Didion’s extraordinary attention to narrative “surface” and her much acclaimed minimalist literary craftsmanship help effectively contain the wild narrative possibilities present in her recent novels that deal with America’s misfired Cold War imperial adventures in Southeast Asia and Central America, adventures that have produced a series of Joycean megaton novels including the Tower Commission Report.

The same interview with Davidson points to another important and enduring element in Didion’s literary world. In a bluntly frank disclosure of her conservative political views, Didion proclaims that she has “an aversion to social action because it

usually meant social regulation,” “interference,” and “rules” that go against “a Western frontier ethic” in which she was raised (14-15). Describing her ideal politics as close to “anarchic” (“Throw out the laws. Tear it down. Start all over”), Didion adds that “[t]hat is very romantic because it presumes that, left to their own devices, people would do good things for one another” (15). What most interests me here is not Didion’s political views *per se*, but the curious way she associates the frontier milieu with romantic imagination. Her romantic perception of the frontier is not exactly in tune with the more traditional vision of frontier romance, in which Western expansion usually means, behind the rhetoric of escapism and individual freedom, establishing a Western-style social order and the rule of law with all the accompanying political institutions and social conventions. Didion’s romantic frontier is often a land of cultural and historical amnesia; curiously, however, it turns out to be not a political vacuum of Edenic innocence, but a land of excessive politics and paranoid imagination. Miami is one such place, similar to other American Cold War frontiers such as Hawaii, El Salvador, Vietnam, and Caribbean cities and islands, in which Didion has located her reportorial and literary writing. For her, Miami seems “not exactly an American city” but “a tropical capital,” “long on rumor, short on memory” (*Miami* 13-14). This “tropical Ring of exile and conspiracy,” Didion notes, appears “not a city at all but a tale, a romance of the tropics, a kind of waking dream in which any possibility could and would be accommodated” (75, 33).

Directly prompted by post-war extreme right wing political movements, such as McCarthyism in the 50s and the conservative movement in the 60s led by Barry

Goldwater, whom Didion ardently supported in his failed presidential bid in 1964, Richard Hofstadter famously claims that “[b]ehind such movements there is a style of mind” that “evokes qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy” (3).¹ Although he often uses “paranoid mentality,” “paranoid imagination,” and “paranoid mind” interchangeably, Hofstadter defines this mindset more broadly as the “paranoid style,” “a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself” (4). He reminds us that he uses the term “much as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style” and that “[s]tyle has to do with the way in which ideas are believed and advocated rather than with the truth or falsity of their content” (4-5). Especially in the case of “highbrow” paranoids, their style of mind is “far more coherent than the real world, since it leaves no room for mistakes, failures, or ambiguities,” and as a result, it is, “if not wholly rational, at least intensely rationalistic” or even “scholarly” in terms of narrative “technique” (36-37). The “plausibility” of the paranoid style, Hofstadter emphasizes, lies precisely in the “appearance of the most careful, conscientious, and seemingly coherent application to detail, the laborious accumulation of what can be taken as convincing evidence for the most fantastic conclusions” (37).

In both her fictional and non-fictional works, Didion gives ample expression to the “paranoid style” pervasive in the geopolitical frontiers of the US Cold War imperial romance. But, she does so through a style of writing which, probably opposite to the “baroque” style of conspiracy narratology Hofstadter mentions, is paranoid in the sense that it tries to maintain “the appearance of the most careful, conscientious, and seemingly coherent application to detail” in the most frugal and minimalist verbal usage

possible, and which at the same time is extremely reluctant to jump to “the most fantastic conclusions” (37). Although her texts are about the paranoid politics of “exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial imagination,” Didion seems concerned about paranoia as narrative “style” or “technique” as much as paranoia as any specific political “ideas” or “content” (3-5).

Didion has been always fascinated by the twilight zone where frontier wilderness meets conspiratorial fantasies. But her romantic propensity towards the frontier, be it Miami, Hawaii, Hanoi, or the imaginary Boca Grande, is also greatly extenuated, or oftentimes overly sanitized, by her reportorial obsession with accurate, if insignificant and trivial, facts, sources, and contexts, her journalistic reticence or even aversion to all grand theorization, and her writerly attentiveness to narrative “surface” and a stylistic economy of decorum, so much so that Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, in her scathingly critical review of *A Book of Common Prayer*, rebukes Didion for using “style as argument,” refusing to “forge connections” between “the personal and the political,” reducing politics to “personalities” (118, 121, 123). According to Harrison, Didion’s cardinal sin is not simply that she unfairly caricaturizes the 60s social activism, but that her “minimalist” narrative strategy serves to “trivialize[ing]” the political (123).² In Didion’s writing, the expansionist impulse of Cold War imperial romance and the anti-romantic narrative demand of the real are tightly intertwined, creating a curiously convoluted dialectics of the “paranoid style.”

1. Cold War Imperial Romance and the Spectacle of “Calculated Ellipsis”: *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) and *Democracy* (1984)

In a high-ceilinged room of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu in 1969, Didion writes: “I came into adult life equipped with an essentially romantic ethic,” believing that “salvation lay in extreme and doomed commitments, promises made and somehow kept outside the range of normal social experience” (*The White Album* 134). When she visited Honolulu’s Schofield Barracks in 1977, a place immortalized by James Jones’s *From Here to Eternity*, Didion notes that “It is hard to see one of these places claimed by fiction without a sudden blurring, a slippage, a certain vertiginous occlusion of the imagined and the real” (147). A “romantic ethic” with its tragic conception of “salvation” beyond the quotidian world is indeed pervasive in Didion’s fictional world. Didion’s heroines often turn out to be the victims of their own romantic escape to a world outside their normal range of American life, and her heroes, committed to certain promises envisioned in a newly re-invoked national romance of expansionism and exceptionalism, risk their sanity and often their lives in the dangerous and unacknowledged frontiers of America’s imperial dream.

In *Democracy*, Didion attempts to create her own version of the “vertiginous occlusion of the imagined and the real” set not, as is the case of James Jones, in the Second World War, but in the Cold War. In 1952, CIA agent Jack Lovett, whose footprints could be found everywhere from the Atomic Bomb tests to the traumatic evacuation from Saigon, had shown Inez Christian, future wife of Senator Harry Victor, the graveyard at Schofield Barracks, especially the graves of the executed soldiers who

were “buried facing away from the flag” to indicate that “they died in disgrace” (226). In the summer of 1975, sometime after the last helicopter left the American Embassy in Saigon, Inez buries Jack Lovett in the same section of the graveyard at Schofield Barracks, “an American in a body bag” who “had been doing business in situations where there were not supposed to be any Americans” (228-29). As its oddly nostalgic opening—Lovett’s words to Inez in the spring of 1975 about the secret nuclear tests conducted in a Pacific islet in 1952, the same year he first met Inez: “The light at dawn during those Pacific tests was something to see. Something to behold” (11)—suggests, the novel chronicles a new era of American frontier romance from its inception to its doomed end, juxtaposing the national narrative with a secret romance between two lost souls of empire.

During Jack Lovett’s career as “a kind of knight errant of empire” (McClure 81), the official Cold War policy of containment first proposed by George Kennan and authorized by the Truman administration gradually developed into “a narrative of expansion, of spreading democracy” around the world (Nadel 101). This narrative of democratic evangelicalism has its root in nineteenth century American historiography which, according to Dorothy Ross, propounded an “American-centered grand narrative” structured by two closely intertwined strands: “the story of Western progress, a liberal story of growing commercial development, representative political institutions based on democratic consent, and the advance and diffusion of knowledge—processes that were projected to remake the entire world” and “the liberal/republican story of American exceptionalism, which seated world progress in the American nation” (652). George

Bancroft, for instance, believed that American history was a process of searching for national identity that often took “the form of exile, at it began for the New England Puritans,” “a romance, the story of the achievement of America’s divinely ordained identity” (653-54). Borrowing from Northrop Frye’s definition of literary romance in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Dorothy Ross argues that this “American-centered grand narrative” envisioned by Bancroft and his proponents takes the form of romance, which is “not only a type of narrative plot but also a broader mode or tendency that shapes the literature lying between myth on the one side and naturalism on the other and partaking both” (652).

Most Didion criticism has from early on interpreted her novels in light of the romance tradition of American literature from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville to Scott F. Fitzgerald and William Faulkner, as well as in light of the more specific frontier romances of Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, and Graham Greene. Patricia Merivale, for instance, claims that *A Book of Common Prayer* follows the tradition of “elegiac romance” exemplified by Melville, Greene, and many others, a “fictional autobiography which often takes the form of biography about a person now dead” (46). Katherine Usher Henderson likens Didion’s heroines to the heroes of Hawthorne and Melville who “inhabit a world in which good and evil are not merely social or political, but part of the impenetrable universe itself” (143). Likewise, Samuel Coale, in “Didion’s Disorder: An American Romancer’s Art,” points to “Hawthorne’s black territory of the soul” in Didion’s fiction, “a Manichean mystery of self trapped not only in a mysterious world but, worse, within the cosmic disharmonies and labyrinthine spheres of itself”

(161). Coale argues that Grace, the narrator in *A Book of Common Prayer*, “begins as novelist and ends as romancer,” moving “from measurement to mystery, from the testimony of an ‘objective,’ logical spectator to the prophecy of an involved, mystified participant in Charlotte’s story” (168-69). In *Paradigms of Paranoia*, Coale notes that Didion, like Hawthorne, “needs a twilight zone to thrive in, a fictional realm somewhere between fact and fiction that borders on the allegorical,” such as the imaginary Boca Grande and the semi-colonial Hawaii of the Christians, “where the human condition can be rendered as an eerie, vaguely conspiratorial realm of betrayal, self-doubt, and anxiety” (85).

Whereas most of the critics who have acclaimed Didion as romancer remain silent about certain potentially conservative impulses behind the tendency to extenuate political and historical contexts and contingencies in Didion’s fiction, Victor Strandberg bluntly, though ultimately incorrectly, proclaims that “[j]ust as Scott Fitzgerald summoned Gatsby/Nick from their native Midwest so as to limn their ‘fundamental decencies’ against the corruptions of the Eastern elite, Joan Didion brings Charlotte/Grace to Boca Grande to establish in the highlight of contrast the superiority of their original *norteamericana* ethos” (231-32). The romance of Charlotte’s doomed exile, for Strandberg, displays the “quintessence of the North American ethic, outlined in Himalayan relief against the code of the jungle in Boca Grande” (232).³

It is true that Charlotte shares the “romantic ethic” of the frontier Didion describes in *The White Album* (134); yet her North American ethic does not work as straightforwardly or triumphantly as Victor Strandberg suggests it does. “As a child of

the western United States,” Charlotte had been provided with “faith in the value of certain frontiers on which her family had lived, in the virtues of cleared and irrigated land, of high-yield crops, of thrift, industry and the judicial system, of progress and education, and in the generally upward spiral of history” (59-60). Her romantic belief in the “upward spiral of history,” however, does not prepare her to understand Boca Grande’s paranoid politics. In Boca Grande, the “*guerrilleros*,” Grace narrates, are “covertly encouraged to emerge from time to time as foils to the actual politics of the country,” and the “notoriously frequent revolutions are made not by the *guerrilleros* but entirely by people [Grace] know[s],” that is, by Grace’s own extended family who have been governing Boca Grande for decades (28-29). Charlotte’s childhood education with the frontier ethic of romance and her typically American “teleological view of human settlement,” Grace opines, precludes her from understanding the “equatorial view” of the frontier where everything changes arbitrarily or nothing changes in substance (18, 155-56). When warned by Grace that her “presence in certain situations” could be interpreted as “political,” Charlotte casually retorts that she is “not ‘political’ in the least” and her “mind doesn’t run that way” (199). Throughout the novel, Charlotte remains “a tourist, a traveler with good will,” or an “outsider of romantic sensibility,” “immaculate of history, innocent of politics” (199, 29, 60). Charlotte’s death amidst the October Violence, the latest tumultuous episode of “transition” in the political history of Boca Grande, results from her “innocent” belief in the American-centered grand narrative of frontier romance. Or so suggests Grace.

Yet, Grace is not a total stranger to “romantic sensibility,” nor is Charlotte the helplessly “innocent” victim of the romantic ethic of frontier Didion describes them to be. Grace and her late husband Edgar are the children of “two American wildcatters who got rich, [her] father in Colorado minerals and Edgar’s father in Boca Grande politics” (20). Being “a student of delusion, a prudent traveler from Denver, Colorado” for “fifty of [her] sixty years,” Grace’s whole life is that of a permanent traveler (11). After her parents died when she was 8 and 10, she lived “alone in [a] suite at the Brown Palace Hotel” until her sixteenth birthday, and later studied anthropology in California, “worked with Lévi-Strauss at São Paulo,” and traveled around the world until she married Edgar and settled in Boca Grande (12). Much like Charlotte, Grace appears to be unable or reluctant to recognize Boca Grande’s history and politics. “Every time the sun falls on a day in Boca Grande,” Grace tells us, “that day appears to vanish from local memory, to be reinvented if necessary but never recalled,” and this is why “Boca Grande has no history” (14). She also believes that “the expression of proletarian resentment in Boca Grande remains largely symbolic” (28). As far as Grace is concerned, the real history of Boca Grande begins when the country was virtually founded by Edgar’s father, “a St. Louis confidence man named Victor Strasser,” only several decades ago (16); and the real, not merely “symbolic,” politics of Boca Grande is the perennial “transition” of hegemonic power among Grace’s brothers-in-law and their followers. Grace can not be “innocent of politics” at all, considering her own telling revelation that Edgar’s death left her “in putative control of fifty-nine-point-eight percent of the arable land and about the same percentage of the decision-making process” in Boca Grande (18-19).

As much as Grace's narrative authenticity is suspect, her claim—made at the very beginning of the novel—to be a factually objective and emotionally detached “witness” of Charlotte's brief sojourn on the island sounds increasingly doubtful. At the beginning, Grace calls Charlotte's story a story of “delusion” (11); but at the end of the novel, she admits that she “has not been the witness [she] wanted to be” and that she is “less and less certain that [Charlotte's] story has been one of delusion,” implying that her own witnessing could be delusional (272). Ironically, the process of Grace's narration is one of calculated delusion or selective amnesia, which belies the voice of impersonal neutrality and disinterestedness she takes as her narrative methodology after dispensing with her previous anthropological interest in “personality” (12). And it also neuters her implied criticism of Charlotte's “romantic sensibility” and frontier ethic. As it turns out, Grace is complicit in Charlotte's “delusion” and they are, in the end, inseparable.

In spite of Grace's tendency to obfuscate even the most obvious connection among facts, Charlotte's apparent obliviousness to Boca Grande's political culture of paranoia is not difficult to explain. For political involvement of any sort is the last thing Charlotte wants in Boca Grande. Though the exact reason why she chose the island remains untold, it seems quite certain that Boca Grande was the final destination of her desperate flight from the excess of paranoid politics in California that made her already reckless life even more unbearable. She had maintained a torturous and enduring relationship with an untenured college instructor and harassing radical named Warren Bogart she first met at Berkeley and lived with in New York until she fled to San Francisco and married Leonard Douglas, a well-known liberal lawyer with some dubious

business associations. But it is Marin, her eighteen-year-old daughter with Warren Bogart, who changed Charlotte's comfortable bourgeois life forever: Marin detonated "a crude pipe bomb in the lobby of the Transamerica Building," hijacked "a P.S.A. L-1011 at San Francisco Airport," burned it in Utah "in time for the story to interrupt the network news," and then went underground (58). In a taped manifesto of revolution later aired, Marin claims that "the Transamerica Building was one of many symbols of imperialist *latifundismo* in San Francisco" (82). As Grace puts it, Charlotte lost her child to "history" and paranoid politics (11), and she presumably imagines Boca Grande as a territory oblivious or "neutral" to paranoid politics and history, a romantic frontier of exile where she seems to believe she can somehow and someday rejoin Marin.

Although Grace leads us to believe otherwise, it is not, then, Charlotte's lack of political perceptiveness or sense of history that prompts her to remain exempt from Boca Grande's political drama. It is entirely possible to suppose that Charlotte, "a tourist, a traveler with good will" (199), knows the territory much more than Grace, a colonial resident, is willing to admit, and that she chose to stay in the island precisely because of its paranoid political milieu as a romantic territory of permanent revolution and conspiratorial excitement, crowded by paranoid imperialists, local guerilla warriors, and transnational revolutionaries. Boca Grande is an ideal laboratory of radical conspiracy, a playground of romantic revolutionaries like Marin Bogart. When Grace tells Charlotte "there would come a day she should leave Boca Grande," Charlotte insists on staying on the island "where nothing need be real" as "an interested observer of everything" she sees and "wait[ing] for Marin" (199).

Charlotte's motivated obliviousness as tourist and Marin's radical delusion as revolutionary terrorist ultimately converge. Charlotte's tourist gaze invokes what John Frow describes as the "logic of tourism," which, "promising an explosion of modernity," "brings about structural underdevelopment" for the territorial Other and consequently perpetuates the "inequalities of power between center and periphery, First and Third Worlds, developed and underdeveloped regions, metropolis and countryside" (151). For her romantic frontier ethic to prevail, in other words, Charlotte should accept the paradoxical paradigm of tourism that the tourist seeks the sites of historical and political vacuum only to vindicate his or her own standards of modernity and underdevelopment and impose them on the imagined location of wilderness. As Steffen Hantke puts it best, the tourist shares with the terrorist the "ability to change location repeatedly and without genuine commitment to any single place on the global map, the chauvinist self-assuredness and arrogance that this ability depends on, [the] ontological and emotional dissociation from the experience he supposedly seeks, and the shifting strategic alliances that these practices encourage and foster" (229). There is a logic of self-delusion in Marin's heroically puerile manifesto against US imperialism, part of which "had been lifted from a handbook by a Brazilian guerilla theorist" (83), as well as in Charlotte's "impenetrably euphemistic 'Letters from Central America'" that she tried to no avail to sell to *The New Yorker*. In her "Letters," Charlotte portrays Boca Grande as the "economic fulcrum of the Americas" and as a "nation that refuses to emphasize technology at the expense of its traditional culture" (231). Charlotte and Marin as travelers of uncommon territories believe in the ethic of romance and its narrative

imperative of oblivion. This is why Charlotte's unrealistic but acutely strong wish to meet Marin in Boca Grande appears less than a total delusion.

Grace is not merely a helpless witness to Charlotte's tragic story. As is revealed, everyone including Grace is, at least symbolically, implicated. On the evening she is arrested, Charlotte mails to Grace "the big square emerald ring she wore in place of a wedding ring" (271). Sometime after the end of the October Violence, Grace tries unsuccessfully to contact Marin in order to give Charlotte's ring. As it turns out, it is the same emerald ring that Leonard Douglas had one day brought to Charlotte from his business trip to Bogotá where he got the ring as a "memento" from "the men who financed the Tupamaros," an Uruguayan urban guerilla organization believed to be responsible for the unusual developments of the otherwise routine ritual of "transition" in Boca Grande, the situation that leads to Charlotte's death (95, 271). And this man Charlotte's husband had met turns out to be none other than Edgar, Grace's late husband (259). The ring as a signifier of paranoid connectivity reveals Grace's symbolic and political implication in Charlotte's fatal delusion of romance through the conspiratorial connection between Edgar, an imperial wildcatter, and Leonard, a San Francisco liberal. It also signifies that Grace's rhetoric of resignation and detachment and Charlotte's gesture of romantic delusion are no more innocent or accidental than Edgar's clandestine backing of the Tupamaros and Marin's domestic terrorism, which seems undoubtedly inspired by radical political ideas pervasive in Latin America, a fact Leonard and Warren Bogart need no one to explain for them (83). With the ring in her possession, Grace lays a T-shirt "printed like an American flag" she has bought at the airport on Charlotte's

coffin, ready for the first Pan American flight to leave the island after the October Violence. Grace confesses at the end of the novel: “Marin and I are inseparable” (272).

In *A Book of Common Prayer*, Didion takes romance as a literary vehicle to meditate upon the national myth of frontier romance which has been continually regenerated from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the Cold War era. Three generations of the Strassers— from Victor Strasser, Edgar and his three younger brothers, and Gerardo, son of Edgar and Grace—have lived in the island during the period from Theodore Roosevelt’s aggressive foreign policy of hegemonic, if not territorial, expansionism, through Truman’s Cold War policy of containment and Eisenhower’s covert interventionism, to Kennedy/Johnson’s Cold War imperialism.⁴ The history of Boca Grande reflects the history of America’s gradual ascendancy to global hegemony. If Victor Strasser represents the Roosevelt generation in the early twentieth century when “the US-Latin American relationship had begun resembling an informal empire, where decisions taken in Washington would be carried out by local power holders,” Boca Grande’s paranoid politics as practiced by the generation of Edgar and his three brothers is a Third World mirror of the post-war US foreign policy vision (exemplified for example by Eisenhower’s 1954 decision to intervene in Guatemala) which virtually “create[d] the Third World as a conceptual entity” (Westad 144, 131). John F. Kennedy’s re-invocation of the romance of the frontier in the twilight struggle of the Cold War appears to be mimicked in Gerardo’s puerile political adventurism and Charlotte’s blindly romantic humanitarianism, both of which come to a tragic denouement, suggestive of the fall of the American Camelot.⁵

Nonetheless, no specific contexts of Cold War history are provided in the main narrative of the novel (although it clearly points to the late 60s or early 70s), unless their historical significance is so deliberately attenuated that they look almost completely submerged under the narrative surfaces, floating like “ripples on an ocean,” as Didion puts it (Davidson 15). It seems that the “big square emerald ring” is a facile camouflage that obscures the obvious: the collective complicity of the novel’s characters in America’s Cold War imperial dream and its fallouts. By foregrounding “the equivocal nature of even the most empirical evidence,” the novel tricks the reader into feeling like he too is part of “the colonial pronoun, the overseer’s ‘we’” (271). Nor does any noticeable native voice enter into the novel. You don’t remember any native character except as faceless “*guerrilleros*” Charlotte (in fact, the entire novel) refuses to recognize, or as silent victims of the island’s tropical diseases or uncultivated civil consciousness, in which Charlotte shows an unusually fierce interest. As it is, the story of Boca Grande is one of the American colonial romancer’s “we,” an imperial romance shrouded with anti-romantic narrative surfaces. By emphasizing the “equivocal nature” of Third World realities, Didion’s narrative strategy of selective amnesia serves to shield the American “delusion” of frontier romance from confronting the real.

In *Democracy*, which covers Cold War history from America’s ascendancy to a global hegemony symbolized by the Atomic Bomb to her imperial decline in Vietnam, Didion is forced to test the narrative vision of romance she has developed in the previous novel in a more direct confrontation with the real. Now assuming Grace’s position of narrator, “Didion” openly discusses her philosophy of storytelling: “the heart of

narrative is a certain calculated ellipsis, a tacit contract between writer and reader to surprise and be surprised, how not to tell you what you do not yet want to know” (161). In her technique of “calculated ellipsis,” a technique of not telling what the reader does not want to know, Didion frankly announces, “the role played by specificity,” that is, “specificity of character, of milieu, of the apparently insignificant detail,” is essential (162-63). What remains intentionally untold in a tacit agreement or compliance with the reader are the possible connections among the specific and “apparently insignificant detail[s]” about “character” and “milieu.” Didion poises *Democracy* as a conspiracy fiction which demands a willing suspension of the paranoid imagination that drives, by its nature, to “connect the dots.”

What remains most emphatically and specifically untold in the novel, of course, are Jack Lovett’s clandestine activities as a CIA agent in the service of US national interests in the Pacific for the last three decades of the Cold War. Being a former army major, Lovett was in Thailand in 1953, “setting up what later became the Air Asia operation”; as early as 1955, he was already working in Saigon, “setting up lines of access” to what would later be called “the assistance effort” to deal with “the insurgency problem” (90); and he was literally one of the last undeclared Americans to leave Vietnam in the summer of 1975, when the American Service Radio announcer in Saigon said “Mother wants you to call home” and played Bing Crosby’s “I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas” as a coded signal for the beginning of evacuation (206). Although his final mission to Saigon was not an officially commissioned one and his effort to rescue Inez’s rebellious daughter, Jessie Victor, apparently required him to cut some inglorious

deals in Phnom Penh that would later occasion the investigation and eventually claim his life, Jack Lovett is depicted as the John Wayne of the Cold War frontier romance invoked by President Kennedy.⁶

Reversing Frederick Jackson Turner's announcement of the end of the frontier, John F. Kennedy in his acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention in 1960 proclaimed "a new era of romance," and by "returning and expanding the trope of the frontier," attempted to summon his contemporaries to see themselves as "heroic participants in the ongoing national romance, the frontier saga" of the Cold War (McClure 43-44). Kennedy's New Frontier foreign policy, which was based on "a revised version of the 'progressivism' and 'exceptionalism' of Turner and [Charles E.] Beard," called for "a counteroffensive against Communism" in the Third World, "the New Frontier's frontier," where the American model of development would also be tested (Slotkin 490). In his invitation of younger generations to a heroic struggle, Kennedy offered "two twilight outfits" for them to join: "the Green Berets," who are "the first military unit put into the field in Vietnam," and "the Peace Corps" (Engelhardt 162, 164). As the novel implies, Jack Lovett and Inez Victor seem ultimately to accept the "twilight outfits" Kennedy proposed for the implementation of the regurgitated frontier romance: Jack Lovett as a kind of undercover Green Beret, Inez as a benevolent practitioner of American good will toward the Third World.

Democracy's final sanction of the Cold War frontier romance summoned by Kennedy, however, takes a curious detour through a narrative process of "calculated ellipsis," a process that simultaneously disenchants and preserves the "twilight zone" of

romance through what might be called the spectacularization of the specific. The opening page of the novel best illustrates how the technique of “ellipsis” works:

The light at dawn during those Pacific tests was something to see.

Something to behold.

Something that could almost make you think you saw God, he said.

He said to her.

Jack Lovett said to Inez Victor.

Inez Victor who was born Inez Christian.

He said: the sky was this pink no painter could approximate, one of the detonation theorists used to try, a pretty fair Sunday painter, he never got it. Just never captured it, never came close. The sky was this pink and the air was wet from the night rain, soft and wet and smelling like flowers, smelling like those flowers you used to pin in your hair when you drove out to Schofield, gardenias, the air in the morning smelled like gardenias, never mind there were not too many flowers around those shot islands.

They were just atolls, most of them.

Sand spits, actually. (11)

All the facts behind the opening lines become clear at the end of the novel: in 1975 after Jack Lovett died in Jakarta, Inez Victor, carrying his dead body to Hawaii, remembers when they walked together in the graveyard at Schofield Barrack, Hawaii, in 1952, where Jack Lovett said to then Inez Christian about the nuclear tests he had witnessed in the Pacific (230). As Samuel Coale in *Paradigms of Paranoia* best describes, however,

Didion is converting what is considered “objective truth” to “stylized artifice and contrivance,” reducing “all systems of thought” to “basic images in search of seemingly arbitrary human connections” (60). By zooming in from the sublime spectacle of the nuclear tests on to the color of the sky and the smell of the air at the time of explosion, further to Inez’s hair, and also by reducing the cognitive boundary of Cold War geopolitical mapping from the Pacific, to “shot islands,” to “atolls,” and finally to “sand spits,” Didion’s technique of “calculated ellipsis” ultimately works to romanticize America’s Cold War history and its myth of frontier.

In *A Book of Common Prayer*, Didion spectacularizes “the big square emerald ring,” which, like Poe’s “purloined letter” that the thief hides by placing it in plain sight, works to obscure the broader truth behind Charlotte’s death, that is, not only Grace’s complicity with Boca Grande’s paranoid politics, but even Didion’s own willing amnesia about the history of America’s imperial yearnings. Likewise, Didion’s narrative strategy of “calculated ellipsis” in *Democracy* helps implicate the reader in the rhetoric of Cold War imperial romance, not by hiding some hazardous dots of information, but by almost obsessively displaying them in plain sight.

Commenting on the exposure of Iran-Contra affair, Michael Rogin points to “the two political peculiarities of the postmodern American empire: on the one hand the domination of public politics by the spectacle and on the other the spread of covert operations and a secret foreign policy” (499). What connects the two opposite faces of the Cold War empire is, Rogin argues, the power of “political amnesia,” which allows covert actions to be invisible from public eyes through “the imperatives of spectacle, not

secrecy” (503). As a form of “motivated forgetting,” political amnesia points to “a cultural impulse both to have the experience and not to retain it in memory,” “signifies not simply memory loss but a dissociation between sensation and ego that operates to preserve both,” and “signals forbidden pleasure or memory joined to pain,” “representing the return of the repressed” (507). In much the same way that spectacle, for Rogin, works as a “cultural form for amnesiac representation” (507), Didion’s announced attention to “specificity of character, of milieu, of the apparently insignificant detail” serves her need for “a certain calculated ellipsis” in telling the romance of empire (162-63).⁷

Seen through Didion’s intermittent sketches, Jack Lovett looks always shadowy, even though his presence is felt almost everywhere in the novel. In spite of all the specific information “Didion” has assembled about the “wide range of his interests and acquaintances and of the people to whom he routinely spoke” (30), multiple aliases, and the dates and locations of his arrivals and departures in a number of frontier cities ranging from Honolulu, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur, to Manila, Jakarta, Saigon, Phnom Penh, and Miami, Jack Lovett still remains undefined.⁸ Or, to put it differently, Didion seems intent on constructing Lovett’s character as hollow and devoid of content, as if to protect his inner self, precisely through an excessive slew of overly detailed and specific data. Suggestive of Didion’s own narrative obsession, Jack Lovett is one of those customers of “Hiltons around the world” who are “reserved, wary, only professionally affable” and whose “responses seem pragmatic but often peculiarly abstract, based on systems they alone understand” (36). Lovett, in this sense, joins the

agents of deterritorializing self-exemption in which Steffen Hantke includes the figures of tourist and terrorist, who share the “ability to change location” frequently “without genuine commitment to any single place” and an “ontological and emotional dissociation from the experience” they seek (229). Remaining “unattached to any particular place or institution,” Lovett find himself “most comfortable not exactly alone but in the presence of strangers,” “on airplanes,” or “in hotel lobbies and transit lounges” (34-35). As paranoid as “Didion” is about specificity, he sees information as “an end in itself” and views “all nations” as “state actors,” registering them “abstractly, as friendly or unfriendly, committed or uncommitted” (36, 37). While assuming that Lovett’s “tendency to obscure even the most inconsequential information” is possibly “a professional reflex,” Didion further recognizes in his paranoid will to amnesia and abstraction “something more basic, a temperamental secretiveness, a reticence that had not so much derived from [his] occupation as led him to it” (41). Although it is “inaccurate to call Jack Lovett disloyal,” Didion notes, his “emotional solitude” or “detachment” “extend[s] to questions of national or political loyalty” (219). For Lovett, who even “regard[s] the country on whose passport he travel[s] as an abstraction, a state actor,” the last activities he has undertaken to rescue Jessie out of Vietnam are “never black or white” and may be even “devoid of ethical content altogether” (219).

Described as a quintessentially anti-romantic character, whose “ontological and emotional dissociation from the experience” (Hantke 229) he encounters on Cold War frontiers is so complete that even his “ethical” integrity or “loyalty” to the United States is questioned, Jack Lovett seems the last person to wave the flag of the imperial romance

of spreading democracy, as does Harry Victor, a caricature of a Kennedy Democrat. Lovett's demythologizing temperament of emotional detachment from any possible idealistic impulse behind his missions and his paranoid attentiveness to quotidian specificities certainly make him look like a challenge to the American delusion of the frontier romance. Yet partially true as this may be, Lovett is not immune from romantic aspirations: he is after all "a man who for more than twenty years had maintained a grave attraction to a woman whose every move was photographed" (41). When he first met then seventeen-year-old Inez Christian in Honolulu during the winter of 1952, Major Lovett believed he had "discerned in the grain of her predictable longings and adolescent vanities an eccentricity, a secretiveness, an emotional solitude to match his own" (85). Later, to "Didion," whom he considers Inez's friend rather than a reporter, Lovett divulges the secret image of Inez that has never been entirely absent from his mind since their first meeting: a "pretty goddamn romantic" picture of Inez "wearing the gardenia in her hair and the white dress she had worn to the ballet" (87). Under the disciplined look of absolute emotional detachment, Lovett conceals a romantic self who, in and out of multiple marriages, has maintained a clandestine relationship with "'one of the most noble' women he had ever met" (40).

Lovett is not entirely immune from the political or ethical imperative of imperial romance, either. When he accompanies Harry Victor's "human rights" visit-cum-"family vacation" trip to Jakarta in 1969 (101) and witnesses Victor's political rhetoric of spreading democracy, calculated precisely to appeal to the American public through the American press even as it turns a blind eye to the inconvenient realities of a turbulent

country where freedom of speech is glaringly violated and Westerners are attacked by local terrorists with increasing frequency, Jack Lovett shows that he can be highly emotional and that as an undeclared foot soldier of the New Frontier, he cares deeply about the ways in which the American design of world order is effectively implemented. In Lovett's direct confrontation with Harry Victor, Inez for the first time sees Lovett showing "two of many emotions that [he] made a point of not showing": "dislike and irritation" (100). Evidently, what provokes Lovett's emotional and moral indignation is not so much Victor's liberal fantasy of promoting American conceptions of democracy and human rights in the Third World as his political exploitation of that romantic narrative. When Jakarta's situation continues to deteriorate with the rioting and the grenade explosion in the American Embassy, threatening the safety of Victor's whole family and his co-travelers, Jack Lovett says to Billy Dillon, Victor's congressional chief of staff, while looking directly at Victor: "You don't actually see what's happening in front of you. You don't see it unless you read it. You have to read it in the *New York Times*, then you start talking about it. Give a speech. Call for an investigation" (100-01). In Inez's presence, Lovett openly reprimands Victor for "trot[ing] around the course wearing blinders" and mistaking Jakarta for "a regular Waikiki," "a swell choice for a family vacation" (101). Whereas Victor's politically motivated blindness to Jakarta's realities—its brazen violation of human rights and suppression of democratic discourse, and the consequent domestic turbulences and attacks on Americans—can be read as a tacit endorsement of the anti-democratic power in Jakarta and eventually delegitimizes his own Cold War frontier romance rhetoric, Jack Lovett's willed amnesia or trained

detachment from any political or ethical ramifications of the imperial enterprise ironically helps him to be a genuine John Wayne of the American national myth of frontier, as his trained indifference enables him to be keenly tuned in to the specificity of the milieu and to take the children and women up to a safer “hill station,” a colonial bungalow the US Ambassador has at Puncak (101).

The romantic relationship between Lovett and Inez, even if its “clandestine nature” has never been “questioned” (89), is not any more illegitimate than Harry Victor’s openly displayed relationship with his mistress, Francis Landau, whom he lets accompany Inez and the children on the same family vacation trip to Jakarta. Inez’s clandestine romance with Lovett, although it started at first out of her characteristically “extreme recklessness” and “temperamental refusal to deal with the merely problematic” (89), gradually develops into a moral alliance against Victor’s facile rhetoric and political exploitation of the trope of frontier romance. Inez, like Lovett, is “evanescent,” “emotionally invisible,” “unattached, wary to the point of opacity, and finally elusive”; they seem “not to belong anywhere at all, except, oddly, together” (84). Throughout her life as the wife of a prominent politician who once campaigned, albeit unsuccessfully, for the White House, Inez appears impervious to politics and immune from history, despite her Jacqueline Kennedy-like public image that circulates in the national press. During the 1972 presidential campaign, “Didion” interpreted Inez’s “capacity for passive detachment as an affectation born of boredom, the frivolous habit of an essentially idle mind”; yet, after the events of 1975, she begins to rethink it as “as the essential mechanism for living a life in which the major cost [is] memory” (70). However, just as

Jack Lovett's emotional remoteness from the political and paranoid attentiveness to specific information unprocessed by any ideological bent disguise his genuinely chivalric commitment to the romance of empire, Inez's emotional invisibility and seeming detachment from history camouflage the deeply-held romantic frontier ethic that she has inherited from her Hawaiian family, the Christians, whose "every member" has been marked by the "colonial impulse" (26). Inez's father, Paul Christian, particularly during the last few years of his life, postures as "a romantic outcast, a remittance man of the Pacific" (26); Inez's younger sister, Janet, behaves as if she is "an English royal touring the colonies" when she joins the Jakarta trip (94); and at the end of the novel, Jessie—now rescued from Vietnam—writes a novel, "a historical romance of Maximilian and Carlota," while staying in Mexico City (233). Like Charlotte in *A Book of Common Prayer*, Inez herself believes in what Didion describes as "a Western frontier ethic" (Davidson 14-15) or, in her essay about Hawaii, as "an essentially romantic ethic" (*The White Album* 134): Inez "had spent her childhood immersed in the local conviction that the comfortable entrepreneurial life of an American colony in a tropic without rot represented a record of individual triumphs over a hostile environment" (211). Inez's childhood immersion in the narrative of frontier romance may explain at least partly why she has spent "her adult life immersed in Harry Victor's conviction that he could be president" (211). Inez turns out to be another closet romantic, a true believer in the national frontier romance who becomes disillusioned by Victor, a false and opportunistic romancer. As Jack Lovett replaces Harry Victor as a rugged individualist representing the strenuous life of the frontier, the relationship between Inez and Lovett no longer

remains “clandestine.” Inez decides to leave for Saigon via Hong Kong to rescue Jessie, with Jack Lovett, Jessie’s John Wayne, not with Harry Victor, a “radio actor,” as Lovett had once called him at Puncak in 1969 (148).

Inez’s criticism, therefore, is not necessarily directed at Harry Victor’s vision of imperial romance, but at his opportunistic appropriation of the national myth for his selfish political purpose. And her disillusionment with “Harry Victor’s Burden” has started much earlier than the events of 1975: during the 1972 presidential primary, Inez scolds Victor for suddenly beginning to pretend that he represents “the voice of a generation that had taken fire on the battlefields of Vietnam and Chicago” only after “the second caucus” when he realizes he has not garnered enough votes (179-80). While anxiously waiting alone in Hong Kong for Lovett’s return from Vietnam, hopefully with Jessie, Inez rethinks American exceptionalism and its potentially inglorious ramifications for the Cold War frontier. During this period in Hong Kong, she realizes that “her passport [does] not excuse” her from what she characterizes to “Didion” as “the long view” or “history” that may not be configured solely according to the American design (211). Having already witnessed Victor’s selfish blindness to Jakarta’s realities, and now suffering from Jessie’s equally blind-eyed and hopelessly romantic perception of Vietnam, Inez decides not to “claim the American exemption” any longer (211). And this is why “Didion” believes that Inez’s decision is “defined by no special revelation, no instant of epiphany, no dramatic event” (211). If Lovett embodies one aspect of JFK’s New Frontier that is channeled through the image of Green Berets, Inez embraces the other, the benign face of the Peace Corps. Instead of forcefully imposing the American

model of democracy upon the Cold War frontier, Inez seems to believe in the idea of nurturing with imperial care and sacrifice the seed of democracy transplanted in the Third World. At the end of 1975, after Vietnam and after Lovett's burial at Schofield, Inez decides to fly to Kuala Lumpur and stay there: "One evening a week she teaches a course in American literature at the University of Malaysia ... but most of her evenings as well as her days are spent on the administration of what are by now the dozen refugee camps around Kuala Lumpur" (234). Born out of the nuclear tests in the Pacific and mobilized by the liberal fantasy of spreading democracy, the Cold War national romance recedes from the enchanted land of Vietnam to come back home to be buried. Although Jack Lovett's death symbolizes the end of the national romance and his burial at Schofield betokens that he died in disgrace, the novel implies that he is a "noble" man of the imperial dream, part of which still lives on in Inez's humanitarian work in Kuala Lumpur.

Critics have read Didion's narrative "spectacle" of romancing amnesia predominantly as an evasion from "a moral demand" on "the state of democracy" (Jarvis 94), or as an attempt to "deny the relevance of history" altogether (Parish 175).⁹ Janis P. Stout best describes this most prevalent trend of interpreting *Democracy's* narrative technique when she argues that Didion jettisons "the troubling cargo of memory" with its accompanying "moral muck" by jettisoning "the cargo of excess of verbiage" (186). What these critics decide not to see is the dynamic of "motivated forgetting" working behind the novel's display of narrative reticence. *Democracy* does not simply jettison the romance of empire, but spectacularizes it. In its "specular displays" of the very practice

of erasing history or evading moral judgment, the novel reveals what it works to forget (Rogin 507). In other words, Didion's narrative technique of amnesia—Didion's foregrounding of the novel's almost naturalistic narrative surfaces and minimalist textual processes of signification—operates, to borrow from Michael Rogin, “not simply through burying history but also through representing the return of the repressed” (507). Just as Jack Lovett and Inez Victor ultimately preserve a romantic frontier myth precisely through their technique of emotional detachment and political amnesia that resists Harry Victor's shallow and excessive abuse of the trope of romance, so Didion aspires to condense the Cold War history of romantic excess through her narrative strategy of “calculated ellipsis,” and thus looks back to a mythic time of frontier romance. Bringing Lovett's body back to Honolulu, Inez remembers the nuclear twilight in the Pacific Lovett had described to her in the early 50s. The “light at dawn during those Pacific tests” (11) that had heralded America's Cold War imperial romance is now remembered as an image of lost frontier and innocence.

2. Toward the Post-Cold War Romance: *The Last Thing He Wanted* (1996)

With her latest fiction, Didion returns to the Caribbean, but this time as a novelist rather than a romancer. Beginning in the early 80s, Didion's journalistic and literary interests shifted markedly from the twilight territory of romance that summons “a certain blurring” between “the imagined and the real” (*The White Album* 147) to what the narrator of *The Last Thing He Wanted* calls the “real world,” “a time and a place and an incident about which most people preferred not to know” (13).¹⁰ In her reportorial

writing of the 80s, Didion documented the return of Kennedy's Cold War imperial narrative in the Reagan administration's "heady dreams of rollback" in Central America (*Fixed Ideas* 37). In El Salvador, a place "marked by the meanness and discontinuity of all frontier history," Didion witnesses the "official American delusion" unfolding like "a dreamwork devised to obscure any intelligence that might trouble the dreamer" (*Salvador* 73, 92). She observes that the Reagan administration's indiscriminate rhetoric of "anti-communism," "the Procrustean bed" the US itself has created, is utilized by the local right to stigmatize "anyone in the opposition" as a communist, including most of the American press and the Catholic Church (95). In the resurgent narrative of Cold War imperial romance, El Salvador exists as a territory of "mirage" or as "a temporarily fevered republic in which the antibodies of democracy needed only to be encouraged" (96). For Ronald Reagan, whose foreign policy signals "an authentic recrudescence and revision of the Frontier Myth" that had been re-invoked by John F. Kennedy two decades before (Slotkin 645), El Salvador may be another "new frontier" of imperial yearning; but, as Didion illustrates, it is America's myth of frontier romance itself that is being mimicked and demystified in the "political tropic" of Central America (96).

When she visits the American city of tropical romance and conspiracy in the early 80s, Didion discerns that "certain familiar words and phrases" and certain underwater political currents "suggestive of the early 1960s" are resurfacing (*Miami* 150). What might have been unknown anywhere except Washington in the spring of 1985 was an open secret to some Miami Cubans who, having been "recruited" and "trained" at a local camp, happened to join the Nicaraguan contras at that time (151).

The promise of a Free Cuba made by Kennedy at the Orange Bowl in 1962 after the Bay of Pigs is made again in 1983 by Ronald Reagan, “the first American president since John F. Kennedy to visit Miami in search of Cuban support” (160). As such, the Miami stories Didion documents are recited stories of broken promises, a Cold War romance of “seduction and betrayal” (168).

The Last Thing He Wanted is one such Miami story behind Iran-Contra, the latest spectacle in a long list of Cold War romances including, of course, the Bay of Pigs in 1961. For a young senator named Mark Berquist, who had worked at age twenty-seven as a senior foreign policy aid in the Senate for “level[ing] the playing field for democracy in the area” in question, such a story is no more than “one of those sick conspiracy fantasies” that have already been “thoroughly and totally discredited” (213). As Berquist told DIA agent Treat Morrison at that time, the story contains “a puzzle with a lot of pieces you may not want to put together” (177). For the people in Miami, however, that kind of story is neither a conspiracy fantasy nor a puzzle, because they are themselves living pieces of a narrative that requires no effort of paranoid construction. The very fact that their stories are now dismissed as “conspiracy fantasies” by Washington, or a series of “puzzles” Washington has no interest in putting together, is another telltale sign that their romantic dream is once again betrayed. This is what Dick McMahan might have felt when he was assassinated by someone he had known and worked with for a long time, while Elena McMahan was trying to complete her father’s murky business deal on a Caribbean island the narrator refuses to identify. It is also possible that that is what Elena McMahan herself felt when she got fired and killed by a

professional assassin who came from the direction of the capital of imperial “dreamwork,” Mark Berquist’s Washington. According to Washington’s “imperfect memories” recollected in 1996, Elena’s story, or broadly, the “actions taken in 1984” related to the matter later known as “the lethal, as opposed to the humanitarian, resupply,” is a “certain incident that should not have occurred and could not have been predicted” by “any quantitative measurement” (226).

As the narrator says toward the end, the novel is “a romance after all,” one more Cold War romance in which the imperial dream of frontier is once again called upon and betrayed, with its disillusioning dénouement nostalgically lamented in the form of a romantic union between the hero and the heroine (209). But the novel is also an anti-romance in that the “dimensions of ‘real’ conspiracies” in the novel, as Samuel Coale argues, tend to “limit and kill the fictional possibilities” of Didion’s previous, more conventional romances (*Paradigms of Paranoia* 86). Not only that, the novel’s narrator—a Didionian journalist-foreign policy scholar-revisionist historian-novelist narrator—proclaims early on that she has lost interest in masquerading in the persona of the romance writer who follows the “traditional dramatic line” of the genre—“the romance of solitude, of interior struggle, of the lone seeker after truth,” and, somewhat later, that she has also “lost patience ... with the conventions of the craft, with exposition, with transitions, with the development and revelation of ‘character’” (73). What mainly interests her is “the technical,” the facts and information pertaining to the story of Elena McMahan, not the “business of what ‘changed’ her, what ‘motivated’ her, what made her do it” (74-75). Like Jack Lovett in *Democracy* who seeks and sees any and every

piece of “information as an end in itself” (31), Didion’s first-person narrator believes that “any piece of information [is] a potential fragmentation mine” (103). She has reviewed an endless list of related documents—from the FBI interviews in which “the evasion [is] so blatant that it inadvertently billboards the very fact meant to be obscured,” “the published transcripts of the hearings before the select committee,” arresting for their “collateral glimpses of life on the far frontiers of the Monroe Doctrine” (10), to countless cable traffics, testimonies, depositions, and scholarly works. She has even participated in the crisis management study undertaken by the Rand Corporation on behalf of the State and Defense Departments and provided “facts of such stupefying detail and doubtful relevance that none of the several Rand analysts engaged in the project thought to ask the one question [she] did not want to answer” (12).¹¹

Purportedly written as a kind of “reconstruction” or “a corrective” to the Rand study (12), the novel seems to engage the narrative technique of “spectacle” that helped *Democracy* simultaneously criticize and preserve the Cold War ideology of frontier romance through politically motivated forgetting. At times, indeed, Didion appears reluctant to connect obvious dots of information and more concerned about creating a spectacle of “the technical” by citing a pile of meaningless hints and allusions whose ultimate connection may not materialize. Notice, for instance, the moment when Didion refuses to identify the name of the island Elena McMahon arrived at from San José, Costa Rica, a kind of Boca Grande “where the incident occurred that should not have occurred”: “This is deliberate, a decision on my part, and not a decision (other writers have in fact named the island, for example, the authors of the Rand study) based on

classification” (88-89). Without naming the name, as if designating it in the real world could foil the narrative demand of romance, Didion provides a slew of historical data and specific hints about the Caribbean island: “High points: Arawaks, hurricane, sugar, Middle Passage, the abandonment known as The Independence”; “a larger embassy than extant American interests on the island would seem to require”; its “annual per capita incomes in three digits”; the US government supported its independence believing that through the island “private capital could be siphoned off the Asia rim and into *mare nostrum*,” America’s lake (90). What Didion is actually doing here, however, is not an amnesiac representation or spectacularization of the imperial intent. For she is trying to expose, rather than concealing or obscuring, our own complicity in the imperial amnesia. “If you knew the name,” Didion speaks to the colonial “us,” “you might recall days or nights [you had to spend] on this island en route to or in lieu of more desirable islands” due to bad weather, jammed airport schedule, or simple misunderstanding with the carrier. Didion asks “us” to face the uneasy truth that “You did not, during your sojourns on this island, want to know its history” (89-90). Didion’s deliberate decision not to name the island works, therefore, to highlight the imperial romancer’s “guilty pleasure” of amnesia, his “determined resistance to gravity,” and his “uneasy reduction of the postcolonial dilemma” to an innocent “misunderstanding” (89-90).

Didion’s departure from the previous narrative modes of romance is not, then, achieved through receding from her signature attentiveness to a narrative surface hard-crusted with facts and images, which are too bare and barren to inspire any luxuriant imagination of paranoia. If her previous novels tend to extenuate and almost replace the

historical content of imperial conspiracy with a narrative style that foregrounds a seemingly autonomous play of unconnected narrative dots of history, Didion deploys a similar narrative style in *The Last Thing He Wanted*, but this time, not to spectacularize but to reveal the mechanism of romantic self-delusion working behind the Iran-Contra conspiracy. To put it differently, Didion, as she does in *Salvador* and *Miami*, uses dots of factual history in an almost journalistic or reportorial effort to reconstruct a bigger, well-connected picture of history, instead of screening history with an overwhelming façade of unconnected fragments. At the beginning of the novel, Didion makes her intention quite clear: “The facts of Elena McMahon’s life did not quite hang together. They lacked coherence. Logical connections were missing, cause and effect. I wanted the connections to materialize for you as they eventually did for me” (6).

In the novel, the era of Cold War imperial romance comes to a symbolic end with the death of Elena McMahon in an unnamed Caribbean island while trying to complete an illicit transaction on behalf of her father, Dick McMahon. Like a character walking out of *Miami*, Dick McMahon has spent his entire life believing in the promises of Cold War romance from the Bay of Pigs to Iran-Contra. When Elena meets him in Washington in 1982, Dick McMahon tells her about the atmosphere that he has recently picked up in the streets: “things [are] hotting up again” (18). When she speaks to her father again in Miami two years later, Elena notices that her father is “getting involved with the people” he has known for a long time (31). His life-trajectory from Havana to Miami is one of many Miami Cubans, converging on the dark spectral history of American Cold War experiences, domestic and abroad, which is more dramatically

represented by his dubious business associate and friend named Max Epperson. Dick McMahon's "footnote to history" (31), his life and death as a Cold War romancer, cannot be explained without the figure of Max Epperson, an American with "an apparent gift for being in interesting places at interesting times": he was for example "managing an export firm in Guatemala at the time Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown" in 1954; he "happened to have been managing a second export firm" in Nicaragua "at the time the Somoza regime was overthrown" by the Sandinistas in 1979; and he also happened to have been in El Salvador in the early 80s, at the time of the Mozote Massacre (178). Epperson's "interesting history" (178) in Central America during the period from Dwight Eisenhower to Ronald Reagan can be matched only by the domestic history of national conspiracies in which he has allegedly been involved. "An exploration of what Dick McMahon knew," Didion reveals, could lead to a series of "corrupted files, crossed data, [and] lost clusters in which the spectral Max Epperson would materialize not only at the Texas Book Depository but in a room at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis with Sirhan Sirhan and Santos Trafficante and Fidel and one of the Murchisons" (52). The person, who is believed to be behind Elena's assassination, and known as Bob Weir in the island, turns out to be the same Max Epperson who has arranged the death of his long time partner and old friend, Dick McMahon (198). With the deaths of Dick McMahon and Elena McMahon by the same ghostly personification of the post-war American imperial enterprise, JFK's New Frontier, a Cold War romance of Dick McMahon's generation, dies its second death in Ronald Reagan's "heady dreams of rollback" (*Fixed Ideas* 37).

Narrating this double death of Cold War romance, Didion is also critically reassessing her previous narrative strategy of amnesia in *Democracy* in which the essence of the New Frontier is sustained through the figures of Jack Lovett and Inez Victor. Didion does so by creating the matching couple of Treat Morrison and Elena McMahon, who commonly suffer from “the core dislocation in the personality” (154). Similar to what happens when Lovett and Inez first meet, Treat Morrison and Elena intuitively know when they first see each other on the island that they are “the same person” and that they are “equally remote”: “Of course they knew each other, understood each other, recognized each other, took one look and got each other, had to be with each other, saw the color drain out of what they saw when they were not looking at each other” (144-45).

Despite all the apparent similarities, however, Didion makes a point of underlining some critical differences between the Morrison-Elena couple and the Lovett-Inez couple. Unlike Jack Lovett, who does not hide his contempt for those who, out of political correctness, are critical of the imperial tint of US Cold War policy toward Southeast Asia, DIA agent Treat Morrison—“America’s man-on-the-spot in the world’s hottest spots, ambassador-at-large with a top-secret portfolio” (137)—seems at first more casual and open about admitting that the US government has “gotten as far as claiming the Caribbean as our lake, our sea, *mare nostrum*” (69). “Tourism—Recolonialization by Any Other Name?” is “the wishful topic at the noon brown-bag AID symposium” when he arrives at the American Embassy on the island to handle the Elena McMahon case (8). He would be perfectly at home in that kind of environment and more than ready to

exchange his opinions with others. But Didion tells us that from early on in her extended study of Treat Morrison she comes to believe that he is “fundamentally dishonest,” not in the sense that he deliberately lies or “misrepresent[s] events as he himself construe[s] them,” but “in the more radical sense” that “he remain[s] incapable of seeing the thing straight” (135-36). At the outset, Didion considers his inability to be honest as “an idiosyncrasy” or “a personal eccentricity” that is “peculiar to the individual”; but she soon realizes that what she has regarded as “personal” is “deep in the grain of what he [is] and where he [comes] from” (136). As opposed to the case of Jack Lovett, whose “tendency to obscure even the most inconsequential information” is viewed as “a temperamental secretiveness” in his basic personality rather than “a professional reflex” (41), Didion views Morrison’s case as a necessary product of his professional and political function rather than a matter of individual personality.

What is more broadly implied by this revelation about Morrison’s reluctance to “see the thing straight” is that Didion now recognizes a certain “dishonest” political impulse in Lovett’s gesture of emotional, ethical detachment and his paranoid obsession with information and detail, as well as in Inez Victor’s theatrical recklessness or impatience with quotidian reality and historical memory. Although both Morrison and Elena have these same tendencies, Didion attempts to show them as the dehumanizing consequences or casualties of the kind of life they are required to live, mobilized in the “twilight struggle” for the nation’s imperial dream. Treat Morrison, like Jack Lovett, has “built an entire career on remembering the details that might turn out to be wild cards, using them, playing them, sensing the opening and pressing the advantage,” and he has

“mastered his role, internalized it, perfected the performance until it betray[s] no hint of the total disinterest at its core” (155). Similarly, Elena McMahon’s “performance” of her roles—as a reporter for *The Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, as Elena Janklow, a Westlake Mom and a Hollywood celebrity fundraiser, later as Elena McMahon, a political campaign reporter for *The Washington Post*, and finally as Elise Meyer, a name given to her by the people associated with her father’s last project in the island—is “so attentive to detail” that she appears “impenetrable” (76). After reading Elena’s notebook entries which reflect “elements of both modes, the personal and the reportorial,” Didion concludes: “Elena remained remote most of all to herself, a clandestine agent who had so successfully compartmentalized her operation as to have lost access to her own cut-outs” (152). Instead of protecting an uncontaminated ideal of frontier ethic as it does for Lovett and Inez, the spectacle of “details” that Morrison and Elena meticulously labor to sustain reflects, as it turns out, the profound sense of loss and void in their roles as “clandestine” Cold War romancers. Although the novel never clarifies whether Elena McMahon is in fact a commissioned “agent” working for certain government-related entities with high-minded names and foggy objectives, she—like most of the heroines in Didion’s previous novels—navigates the same frontier territories her male counterpart frequents and suffers the same “core dislocation in the personality” that Morrison suffers (154).

Elena’s “apparently impenetrable performances in the various roles assigned her”—continually reinventing her identity with “all those fast walks and clean starts” and growing up “watching her father come and go and do his deals without ever noticing

what it was he dealt”—have been achieved, Didion observes, with more “considerable effort” and at far greater “cost” than Morrison’s (154). The reason she becomes a victim of the “weavers of conspiracy” is that she is after all “not one of those who [see] in a flash how every moment could connect” (55-56). The most obvious “cost” of living on the fringes of America’s “dreamwork,” for Morrison and in particular for Elena, is individual “personality.” The fatal decisions Elena has made—for instance, the decision to leave her reporter job and to complete her father’s deal—are described as not being “conscious” decisions: she is often “unaware even that the decision [has] been made” until she finds herself doing things (153).

As Barbara Grizzuti Harrison points out, Didion tends to “[reduce] politics to personalities” in *A Book of Common Prayer* and, to a lesser degree, in *Democracy* (123). When Grace finally meets Marin Bogart, who believes that “her mother died on the wrong side of a ‘people’s revolution,’” Grace tells her in a benignly reprimanding tone that there is no such thing as “right side” or “wrong side” in Charlotte’s death and that there is no specifically political “issue” involved in the incident upon which you can make a moral judgment, and that if there is any, it is an issue of “personalities” (214). This tendency to emphasize individual “personalities” over overtly political or historical issues continues in *Democracy*. It is not, for instance, Jack Lovett’s particular political ideology, but his “temperamental” eccentricities and his personality, that drive him to openly stand against Harry Victor. But in *The Last Thing He Wanted*, the main characters’ personalities are not simply considered as “personal,” immune from history and political milieu. Elena’s dislocated “personality”—her impenetrable remoteness

even from her own self-consciousness— and Morrison’s “personal eccentricity” are cited as casualties of history.

A strong elegiac mood, almost tilting towards sentimentalism, is pervasive in the closing moment of the novel. When she hears the news of Treat Morrison’s death four years after Iran-Contra and the incident on the island, Didion fantasizes about an imaginary foreign policy conference held in a pink hotel in the Florida Keys where the spirits of Treat Morrison and Elena McMahon appear like a romantic couple, together with several actual historical figures like Robert McNamara and Arthur Schlesinger. Didion wonders what Treat Morrison’s “reassessment” of “certain actions taken in 1984” would be like (226). The senses of ending and nostalgia are, however, evident already in the novel’s opening pages. Looking back on the days of Iran-Contra, Didion meditates upon the end of the Cold War:

Weightlessness seemed at the time the mode in which we could beat both the clock and affect itself, but I see now that it was not. I see now that the clock was ticking. I see now that we were experiencing not weightlessness but ... as a sustained reactive depression, a bereavement reaction to the leaving of familiar environments. I see now that the environment we were leaving was that of feeling rich. (3-4)

The days of Ronald Reagan’s dream of “rollback” were at the time believed by many people like Dick McMahon and Max Epperson to be a returned season of frontier romance unshackled by the gravity of history. On behalf of her father, Elena McMahon “walked into this heightened life,” “for a brief period lived it,” and died right in front of

the eyes of Treat Morrison who came to the island to rescue her (56). But “the clock was ticking” and those days turn out to be the last moment of Cold War imperial romance. Didion now believes the “heightened” atmosphere of “weightlessness” and “feeling rich” at the twilight of the Cold War romance was, in retrospect, “a bereavement reaction to the leaving of familiar environments” (4). To borrow from Nick Shay and Marvin Lundy in DeLillo’s *Underworld*, the Cold War—the “days of disorder” and “breach of peace” when people were feeling “alive,” “dumb-muscled and angry and real”—was “your friend,” “honest” and “dependable” (170, 810).

The Last Thing He Wanted is an elegy for a lost genre of national narrative summoned from the older grand narrative of American history. The Cold War re-enchanted American history as “romance,” expanded the myth of Western frontier all over the Third World, and in the process produced a “core dislocation” in the national psyche and individual personalities. The novel is also a “reassessment” of romance as a literary form: Didion now finds the genre “a trying concept” (73) or “an artifice to no point” (5). Whereas in her previous novels Didion’s minimalist style of writing with its emphasis placed on narrative surface works to create a “neutral territory” that blurs and glides over the historical real of America’s imperial governance of the Third World, the same style is used, so to speak, to dry up “a fictional realm somewhere between fact and fiction” (Coale, *Paradigms of Paranoia* 85) even as it exposes the victims of romance and their impenetrably hardened personalities. Didion’s “reassessment” of romance as a literary “construct” (5) is also a reassessment of romance as a Cold War literary “construct.” For post-war American literary critics including, most notably, Richard

Chase and Lionel Trilling, “the struggle between 1930s ‘realism’ and the 1950s ‘modernism,’ between totalitarianism and freedom, left and right, was framed,” as Geraldine Murphy argues, often “in terms of the novel and the romance” (740). At its birth in Americanist literary discourse, romance was “an aesthetic counterpart to the vital-center liberalism of the first Cold War” (738). Didion understands there is something to reassess in the Cold War alliance between Hawthorne’s “neutral territory” and Arthur Schlesinger’s “vital center.”¹²

Didion’s skepticism towards the literary romance, however, does not push her to the point of a complete rejection. Samuel Coale is right when he says Didion “needs” Hawthorne’s “twilight zone to thrive in” (*Paradigms of Paranoia* 85). But she needs it without its not-always wholesome connection to the “vital center”-Cold War liberalism. When the news of Treat Morrison’s death reaches her, Didion remembers a *New York Times* article about “a conference, sponsored by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, at which eight members of the Kennedy administration gathered at an old resort hotel in the Florida Keys to reassess the 1962 Cuban missile crisis” (225). In a deeply melancholic voice, she says she would like to see “such a reassessment take place at the same hotel in the Keys,” with the same participants including, of course, the author of the “vital center,” Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Treat Morrison and Elena McMahon (226). Evidently, the “pink” resort hotel in the Florida Keys where real New Frontiers and imaginary romancers meet is Didion’s own “neutral territory.” And yet, it is not an imaginary zone away from history. Didion needs it in order to properly reflect upon Cold War history and to commemorate the “cost” of a life

spent living its imperial dreams. *The Last Thing He Wanted* is “one more romance” Didion has written about America’s Cold War experiences on the frontier (209); but the novel finally refuses to be another Cold War romance.

Didion conjures the ghosts of Treat Morrison and Elena McMahon to the Florida Keys and lets them meet the “old men at a pink hotel in a storm” (226). About four decades ago, Jack Lovett told Inez Christian in Hawaii about what he had witnessed in the Pacific: “The sky was this pink and the air was wet from the night rain, soft and wet and smelling like flowers, smelling like those flowers you used to pin in your hair” (*Democracy* 11). Like DeLillo’s *Underworld*, whose narrative trajectory circulates around the Bomb, Didion’s post-Cold War romance looks back to the dawn of Cold War romance, with its once vivid color of sublimity now faded into a mark of irony.

Notes

¹ In her recent collection of essays about the presidential campaigns and politics, Didion gives us a detailed explanation of her political beliefs and how she became a Democrat after starting out as a conservative Californian Republican who had strongly supported Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater: “The people with whom I grew up were interested in low taxes, a balanced budget, and a limited government. They believed above all that a limited government had no business tinkering with the private or cultural life of its citizens. In 1964, in accord with these interests and beliefs, I voted, ardently, for Barry Goldwater. Had Goldwater remained the same age and continued running, I would have voted for him in every election thereafter. Instead, shocked and to a curious extent personally offended by the enthusiasm with which California Republicans who had jettisoned an authentic conservative (Goldwater) were rushing to embrace Ronald Reagan, I registered as a Democrat, the first member of my family (and perhaps in my generation still the only member) to do so” (*Political Fictions* 7).

² Harrison further suggests that Didion’s “more subtle and covertly political messages” are in tune with “Ayn Rand’s characters Howard Roark and John Galt—both rugged individualists whose religion is laissez-faire capitalism” (129).

³ John A. McClure discusses Didion’s work in relation to the British tradition of “late imperial romance” explored by writers like Conrad, Kipling, and Forster. Late imperial romance “interrogate[s] the popular romance of civilizing mission or

“development” and relate[s] in its stead a counter-romance of descent into realms of stubborn strangeness and enchantment” (8).

⁴ Grace tells us that Victor Strasser “died at ninety-five,” so it is likely that he died in the late 50s, or at least before 1959 when Edgar’s brother, Luis, was shot to death on the steps of his presidential palace after a 15-month-long presidency. When he was twenty three, Victor Strasser “floated some Missouri money to buy oil rights, at age twenty-four fled Mexico after an abortive attempt to invade Sonora, and at age twenty-five arrived in Boca Grande.” It seems that he had lived in Boca Grande for more than sixty years (“for the last sixty years of his life,” he “preferred to be addressed as Don Victor”) (16-18). His eldest son, Edgar, lived at least beyond 1965, when an American aluminum mining company operating in Boca Grande left for Venezuela (18). The October Violence and Charlotte’s death most likely occur in the early or mid 70s. In this thin chronology that I have reconstructed from what little historical context the novel provides, Victor’s frontier adventures and his arrival in Boca Grande occurred probably at the turn of the century, when Theodore Roosevelt reinterpreted the Monroe Doctrine (1823) by “stressing his belief in the obligations—and rights—of ‘civilized’ nations” to exercise an international police power over troubled nations in the Western Hemisphere (LaFeber, *The American Age* 539).

Although Boca Grande is Didion’s imaginary creation inspired by her 1973 trip to Cartagena, Colombia (Davidson 14), Boca Grande’s political history, particularly its founding figure, Victor Strasser, have real-life counterparts. In a study of late nineteenth

century American involvement in Latin America and other places, Matthew Frye Jacobson provides an interesting case history that imitates the story of Boca Grande: “Throughout the 1850s, private filibustering expeditions set sail from U.S ports to conquer Central American nations for personal gain. The most renowned interventionist, William Walker, actually installed himself and served as the ruler of Nicaragua—and received U.S diplomatic recognition—from 1855 to 1857. (Significantly, the power that unseated him belonged not to any Nicaraguan counterfaction, or even to any European rivals in the region, but to [an American shipping and railroad magnate] Cornelius Vanderbilt, whose Nicaraguan steamship line was threatened by Walker’s ambitions.)” (39).

⁵ Despite being the grandson of the transplanted American patriarch, Gerardo “still persists in tracing his line to the court of Castile” (20). Totally oblivious to the increasingly exacerbated political situation on the island, Charlotte tries to keep her humanitarian spirit alive when she continues her voluntary work to give inoculations “for thirty-four hours without sleeping” during the cholera epidemic (213), or when she voluntarily advises local women at the birth control clinic (230). Even when everyone believes a terrible clash of violence is imminent, Charlotte does not stop working on her unrealistically high-minded projects such as preparing a “film festival,” opening a “boutique,” and doing “research” on Boca Grande. At one point, after reading “a volume” she has borrowed from the US Ambassador’s wife that is “obviously a CIA-

sponsored ‘handbook’ on Boca Grande,” Charlotte tries to send her own observations and suggestions to “a post-office box in Washington” (220-21).

⁶ When back in Saigon Lovett finally locates Jessie who had absentmindedly decided to go to Vietnam “to get a job” (176), he promises her “a John Wayne movie” to calm her nerves (214). For Jessie, who believes that the entire Vietnam business is “only politics” and that politics belongs to politicians like her father Harry, or, as she prefers to call them, “assholes” (176), Lovett represents a man of chivalric action.

⁷ In DeLillo’s *Underworld*, Marvin Lundy, a collector of baseball memorabilia and a guru of Cold War conspiracy theories, speaks to Brian Glassic: “People sense things that are invisible. But when something’s staring you right in the face, that’s when you miss it completely” (173). Didion’s “calculated ellipsis” seems to work towards creating a condition of conspiracy thinking similar to what Lundy points to. What Didion tries to do with the narrative technique of amnesia is, in other words, not to formulate any particular conspiracy theory (or what Lundy calls “the dot theory of reality” (175)), but in fact to thwart any such attempt while throwing out tons of tempting dots of information in plain sight.

⁸ Jack Lovett’s acquaintances and the people he occasionally speaks to, for instance, when he works in Manila, in Jakarta, and around the Malacca Strait, include “embassy drivers, oil riggers, airline stewardesses, assistant professors of English literature traveling on Fulbright fellowships, tropical agronomists traveling under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation, desk clerks and ticket agents and salesmen of

rice converters and coco dryers and Dutch pesticides and German pharmaceuticals” (30-31).

⁹ Drawing upon Michael Rogin’s conception of “spectacle,” Richard Levesque argues: “‘Joan Didion’ creates a spectacle of herself, hiding the secret that she has no authority/authorial voice while at the same time behaving as though she does by narrating the story and making the act of narration a part of the story. In this way, *Democracy* itself could be seen as the spectacle within which narrator ‘Didion’ hides the secret of her absent authority” (74). Levesque’s rather too narrow focus on the novel’s meta-fictional elements, I believe, does not do justice to some of the broader political implications Rogin’s theory has for the novel.

¹⁰ About this shift in Didion’s writing, Mark Royden Winchell comments: “Unfortunately, Didion’s work in the 1980s has done nothing to enhance her critical stature. Her detractors now feel vindicated, her admirers betrayed, and those who had yet to choose up sides generally perplexed” (134). In his critique of *The Last Thing He Wanted*, Samuel Coale claims that in the novel “the darkness of the human heart shrinks to the dark but traceable lineaments of class warfare and paranoid scenarios” (*Paradigms of Paranoia* 86). As such, those who are critical about Didion’s latest works often point to Didion’s increasing tendency to recede from the genre of romance.

¹¹ Didion also departs from a narrative convention of the “elegiac romance” tradition Patricia Merivale has associated with *A Book of Common Prayer*. The first-person narrator in *The Last Thing He Wanted* is not a central character as much as Grace

Strasser is. Nor is the novel a “fictional autobiography” taking “the form of biography” in any serious way (Meivale 46). At the outset, the narrator introduces herself: “For the record this is me talking. You know me, or think you do. The not quite omniscient author” (5). The narrator proceeds to claim that she has “jettisoned” her preliminary intent to create an imaginary narrator named “Lilianne Owen,” “a career foreign service officer,” to tell the story of Elena McMahon, because such a literary construct appears “limiting, small-scale, an artifice to no point” (5). Unlike “Didion,” the narrator of *Democracy*, the first-person narrator of *The Last Thing He Wanted* is not a self-conscious, postmodern meta-fictional writer figure. For these reasons and for the sake of convenience, I consider the narrator as Joan Didion herself.

¹² For a detailed discussion of Schlesinger’s thesis of the “vital center” and Cold War liberalism in general, see my previous chapter on DeLillo.

CHAPTER IV

WHITE PARANOIA AND NATIVE CONSPIRACIES: LESLIE MARMON SILKO

In many ways, Leslie Marmon Silko's two novels, *Ceremony* (1977) and *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), are starkly different. They are so different in terms of historical background, scale, length, and literary qualities that many readers of *Ceremony* find *Almanac* unusually disturbing and even "frightening." This dark and apocalyptic novel of geopolitical and epic dimensions does not seem to be the kind of storytelling people expect from the author of *Ceremony*, a peaceful Native American story of the "spiritual," as well as physical, "healing" of a returning World War II veteran of Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico. Unlike the almost unanimously welcoming responses to *Ceremony*, *Almanac* has received far more negative reviews from popular magazines and newspapers, and less than enthusiastic acclaim from the academic world. Characterizing *Almanac* as "an angry exposé of the effects of imperialism in the western hemisphere," Melody Graulich, for instance, argues that Silko's *Almanac* is "very different from her first two works," its style having "little of the sensuous lyricism of Silko's early work or its rich treatment of tradition" (24-25).¹

Apparently, Silko is not happy with the negative responses to *Almanac*. She even suspects a "conspiracy" to suppress her new novel: "within the New York literary world, attempts had been made to 'suppress' this book" (Coltelli, "*Almanac*" 133). But she was, in fact, fully aware that her new novel might terrify some of the readers who had welcomed *Ceremony*. In an interview with Kim Barnes, Silko remarked that her new novel, which she was currently working on, "will horrify the people at the MLA" who

have helped canonize *Ceremony* (69). More interestingly, Silko herself confesses to interviewer Ellen L. Arnold that “everything about the *Almanac* has been really eerie” (7). Writing *Almanac* she felt she was “taken by” the “old spirits” who urged her to finish it and somehow influenced its publication date (“November 2 is the Day of the Dead. November 2 was the day in 1977 that the doctors told me that I would probably die in surgery.”). And Silko half-jokingly adds that “its ISBN number has 666 in it” (7). Certainly, it is downright naïve to believe everything she tells us here is true, much more so when we consider that Silko is using here some of the traditional Native American oral storytelling techniques such as exaggeration and witticism. But her story becomes suddenly and eerily serious and real when she adds: “And of course the ultimate thing that [*Almanac*] did--January 1, 1994, I pick up a Sunday paper, and it says that the Zapatistas in the mountains outside of Tuxtla Gutierrez. . . . Then the hair on my neck stood up” (7-8). Silko felt an uncanny déjà vu when she was witnessing the Chiapas revolt in 1994, the very historical, actual event that she had fictionalized (or prophesied?) only a couple of years before in *Almanac*.²

Almanac is a story of uncanny déjà vu, post-Cold War geopolitical apocalypse, conspiracy, and prophecy. Indeed, *Almanac* is full of conspiratorial narratives, ranging from global conspiracy theories, secret political plots and paranoid narratives, to petty gossip, rumors, and urban myths. *Almanac* is a post-Cold War battleground for the competing transnational conspiratorial narratives of the more than 70 characters: spies, diplomats, revolutionaries, terrorists, smugglers of drugs, weapons, and human organs, corrupt missionaries and politicians, border patrol police, Marxist guerillas, migrant

laborers, homeless Vietnam veterans, and indigenous peoples of the American continent. Whereas DeLillo's main characters in *Underworld* escape from the culturally and spiritually dilapidated post-Cold War East and "seek refuge, renewal, and security in the American West," blissfully blind to the Native American experience in the nuclear West (Noon 86), *Almanac* portrays the West not as an idyllic location of national romance, free from urban weariness and paranoia, but as an alternative space of the (post-)Cold War American "wild west," where the American national imaginary is reconfigured in its multi-layered geography of minority conspiracies.³ Silko appropriates, challenges, and re-imagines the American national myths of origin, progress, and unified identity by relentlessly evoking conspiracy narratives generated from transnational locations and identities, rather than by containing them within the Cold War liberal discourse of the American Self as some of DeLillo's characters are inclined to do, or by emptying out any historical and political meaning they might have as Joan Didion's minimalist paranoid narratives often appear to do. Silko mixes Cold War conspiracy narrative conventions with Native American mythology in order to envision alternative world histories and geopolitical landscapes.

As Laura Coltelli points out, some "pivotal themes already treated in *Ceremony* also shape the meaning and structure of *Almanac*": "reverence for the earth," "the spirit energy of a story," and the self-destructive "witchery" of the "destroyers," which finds its final symbolic dramatization in the Jackpile uranium mine in Laguna, New Mexico ("*Almanac*" 131). It is particularly significant that Silko chooses the same uranium mine as the site of narrative dénouement in both of her novels. In this respect, Joy Harjo is

right when she considers *Almanac* as “an exploded version” of *Ceremony* (209). *Almanac* is, indeed, a continuation and historical development of *Ceremony*, not only in the sense that some of *Ceremony*’s “pivotal themes” of Native American storytelling continue to appear in *Almanac*, but also, in the more particular sense that *Ceremony*’s historical narrative milieu (post-World War II, early Cold War America) is replaced and updated with the so-called “second” Cold War and “post” Cold War geopolitical context in *Almanac*. Both of Silko’s novels literally and symbolically end at the Jackpile uranium mine. The site is a geographic symbol of the Native American experience of the global Cold War, where Silko’s Laguna Indian protagonists, *Ceremony*’s Tayo and *Almanac*’s Sterling, finally understand all the apocalyptic geopolitical turmoil and environmental disturbances that they have witnessed in Laguna and the outside world. As Connie A. Jacobs illustrates, the Jackpile mine for the Laguna people symbolizes “an enduring toxic legacy” of the Cold War, “a modern version of witchcraft” (41).

From a different angle, *Almanac* is another kind of “explosion” of *Ceremony*: *Almanac* radically revises Silko’s identity politics in *Ceremony*. *Almanac*’s post-Cold War transnational politics of ethnic resistance “explodes” what I see as the Cold War politics of Native American identity and sovereignty envisioned in *Ceremony*. By situating *Ceremony* within the American Cold War historical context, I will argue that *Ceremony*’s politics of ethnic identity and its literary modernism reflect Native American responses to the Cold War ideologies of “American-ness,” national security, and containment. *Ceremony* is a Cold War narrative of Native American “homeland security” and traditional spirituality, which is fundamentally undermined and re-

envisioned by *Almanac*'s post-Cold War conspiratorial imagination of subversion. By characterizing *Ceremony* and *Almanac* as (post-) Cold War conspiracy narratives, I will argue that Silko's strategic appropriation of Cold War conspiracy destabilizes the seamless continuum between the US national imaginary and its official (hi)story, dismantles the frontier-homeland, or periphery-center paradigm of national self-fashioning, and, finally, enables the "others" of Cold War discourse to claim a new kind of myth-making agency, clearly different from the Cold War paranoid subject forever panicked by an insidious alien menace.

1. "Hybrid Patriotism": The Cold War and the Native American Quest for Identity in *Ceremony* (1977)

Ceremony, as Silko characterizes it, is about "one person trying to recover his health and well-being," whereas *Almanac* tackles "the whole Earth trying to save herself," telling a global story about "slavery and otherness" (Coltelli, "*Almanac*" 131-32). Silko's characterization of *Ceremony* as a story about "illness and self" (132) is more than a simplistic summary as it seems. Even if Tayo's ceremony of healing is a journey for self-realization and recovery, his "quest" is not complete until he understands what Silko calls "a communal truth" (*Yellow Woman* 32) in his personal suffering and regeneration. The "illness" of Tayo is ultimately "communal," and the "self" Tayo is trying to recover is a "communal" self. Furthermore, the "communal truth" Tayo will find out at the end of his journey is, as it turns out, symbolically and physically relevant to both the people of Laguna, New Mexico and ultimately "the whole

Earth.” At the center of this “communal truth” lies the atomic bomb, which, originating from Tayo’s native homeland, destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, heralding the global Cold War, a new age of “mutually assured destruction” (MAD).

Ceremony is a “quest” narrative in which Tayo affirms his identity by configuring Native American locations of cultural sovereignty within the global Cold War context. The geopolitical nature of his journey is very clear from the beginning of *Ceremony*. Post-traumatic symptoms Tayo is struggling with after his return from the Pacific front of World War II imply that his problem can not be contained within the framework of an isolated “self.” Tayo cannot sleep without hearing “voices”:

Tonight the singing had come first, squeaking out of the iron bed, a man singing in Spanish, the melody of a familiar love song, two words again and again, “*Y volveré.*” Sometimes the Japanese voices came first, angry and loud, pushing the song far away, and then he could hear the shift in his dreaming, like a slight afternoon wind changing its direction, coming less and less from the south, moving into the west, and the voices would become Laguna voices (5-6)

Spanish, Japanese, and Laguna voices being “entangled” in his blurred consciousness, he “had not been able to sleep for a long time—for as long as all things had become tied together like colts in single file” (6). Tayo believes he can not get any “rest as long as the memories were tangled with the present” (6).

As an effort to secure a clear sense of direction and peace of mind, Tayo tries to “think of something that wasn’t unraveled or tied in knots to the past—something that existed by itself, standing alone like a deer” (7). Tayo’s desire for “something” that

could help him remain free from the “entangled” memories and human connections of the past and regain self-confidence originates from one of the most traumatic events he experienced in the war. In the jungle of “some nameless Pacific island,” Tayo is ordered to execute Japanese prisoners “lined up in front of the cave with their hands on their heads,” but he fails to pull the trigger:

The fever made him shiver, and the sweat was stinging his eyes and he couldn't see clearly; in that instant he saw Josiah standing there; the face was dark from the sun, and the eyes were squinting as though he were about to smile at Tayo. So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he *knew* it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was *still* Josiah lying there. (7-8)

In the dying Japanese soldiers' faces, Tayo sees Uncle Josiah's face, a substitute for Tayo's absent father, who could be “a Mexican or possibly an Anglo” (Jaskoski 3). Even if he “couldn't see clearly” because of the fever and the sweat, he absolutely believes “it was Josiah” they killed. For Rocky, who volunteered and motivated his cousin Tayo to enlist in the military, “it was impossible for the dead man to be Josiah, because Josiah was an old Laguna man, thousands of miles from the Philippine jungles and Japanese armies” (8). As logical and factual as Rocky's reasoning may be, Tayo could not feel it to be entirely true.

Tayo's main task in *Ceremony* is to find a certain way to fully understand a connection that he vaguely feels exists between the Japanese soldiers and Uncle Josiah, a

connection among Japanese, Laguna, and possibly Spanish voices. Tayo is also aware that his task of finding the connection requires a vision different from white rationalism that connects “all the facts” (8) following a narrow and secular logic. When in a Veterans’ hospital in Los Angeles, Tayo feels that he is “invisible” to the “white world,” and that his consciousness is fogged by “white smoke” (14). He finds himself unable to communicate with the white doctors, who see Tayo only as a “hollow” “outline” (15). Just as he was unwilling or unable to accept “all the facts” and “reasons” (8) Rocky puts forward to him, Tayo cannot accommodate himself to the white world and its “logical” way of connecting “facts.” Unlike his “full-blood” Laguna Indian cousin Rocky, who has always eagerly sought assimilation into white America, “mixed-blood” Tayo is resistant to white rationalism and scientific thinking.

Once again at a train station after he is released from the hospital, Tayo sees a Japanese face, not overlapping with Josiah’s face this time, but with Rocky’s, who has been dead for years now. Critically wounded, Rocky was killed by the jungle rain and humid greenery during their long and tragic march to a Japanese prison camp. Tayo later believes that his prayer to save Rocky’s life brought to the Laguna reservation a severe drought: “So he had prayed the rain away, for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences of his praying” (14). When he sees a little Japanese child at the station, Tayo becomes nauseous and vomits “because it was Rocky’s smiling face from a long time before, when they were little kids together” (18). During and after the war, Tayo has gone through similarly mysterious experiences of Japanese faces overlapping with Laguna

faces. Although “the teachers at Indian school” he went to before the war “taught him not to believe in that kind of ‘nonsense’” (19) or “old-time superstition” (194), Tayo persists in believing that “Josiah had been there, in the jungle” and that “he had done nothing to save him” (19).

It is only when he begins to accept the traditional native vision of spirituality that Tayo becomes capable of recognizing the connection between the Laguna reservation and Hiroshima, and facilitating his geopolitical mapping in the post-war world. When Tayo is visited by a Laguna medicine man named Ku’oosh, whom old Grandma enlisted for his recuperation, he realizes that old Ku’oosh does not understand the realities of modern warfare: “the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies had evaporated” (37). Even though there is no way for Ku’oosh to imagine the monstrosities of “the white people’s big war” (35), Ku’oosh hints that Tayo’s quest for healing has a communal significance: “It is important to all of us. Not only for your sake, but this fragile world” (36). Ku’oosh takes great pains to explain to Tayo why his well-being has social, and even cosmological, significances. Since, as Ku’oosh believes, everything in the world is interconnected just like a spider’s intricate and fragile web, the diagnosis and cure of Tayo’s illness must be understood accordingly. Ku’oosh tells the “old stories,” where “It was only one person to tear away the delicate strands of the web, spilling the rays of sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured” (38). Ku’oosh’s native cosmological vision allows Tayo to imagine “the atomic heat-flash outlines” (37) within the context of the “intricate” global “web” of human connection.

It is through the help of a Navajo medicine man Betonie that Tayo finally sets out on his healing ceremony. As Robert C. Bell illustrates, Silko faithfully follows part of “the ritualistic procedures of the Red Antway curing ceremony” of the Navajo (26). Guided by Betonie, Tayo comes to understand more clearly the central mystery of his traumatic war experience. When Tayo relates to Betonie his story about the Japanese soldiers and Uncle Josiah, Betonie offers his view:

“You’ve been something all along. All this time, and now you are at an important place in this story.” He paused. “The Japanese,” the medicine man went on, as though he were trying to remember something. “It isn’t surprising you saw him with them. You saw who they are. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done: you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world.” (124)

Before fully accepting Betonie’s explanation, Tayo remembers what the white doctors “had yelled at him—that he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like ‘we’ and ‘us’” (125). But he can now see that “[h]is sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything” (125-26). Tayo clearly sees the connection between Laguna and Hiroshima, and recognizes what the “witchery” has done to the “fragile world,” dividing humanity and destroying human connectedness:

They will take this world from ocean to ocean

they will turn on each other

they will destroy each other

Up here
 in these hills
 they will find the rocks,
 rocks with veins of green and yellow and black.
 They will lay the final pattern with these rocks
 they will lay it across the world
 and explode everything. (137)

Following Betonie's vision of "the stars and the woman, the mountain and the cattle" (186), Tayo visits Mount Taylor, finds the spotted Mexican cattle lost after Josiah's death, meets a mysterious woman named Ts'eh, who, like old Betonie, has spiritual powers of vision, and finally returns home with the cattle. After passing the witchery's final test of mutual destruction in his last confrontation with Emo, who fits into the stereotype—"a drunk Indian war veteran" (253)—perpetuated by white people, Tayo's healing is complete and the rain returns to the Laguna reservation.

As such, Tayo's newfound understanding of Native American spirituality "provides the missing link that makes his cure possible in that it eventually leads him to see a connection between the persecution of Native American peoples [and] the invention and testing of the bomb in Japan" (Cutchins 84). Tayo's final moment of fulfilling Betonie's prophecy comes during the autumnal equinox in the Jackpile uranium mine, where he confronts his archenemy Emo. Tayo remembers Old Grandma's story about the first atomic test at Trinity Site on July 16, 1945: "a flash of light through

the window. So big, so bright even my old clouded-up eyes could see it” (245). Now Tayo knows why all the symptoms of the “witchery” are set in motion in his homeland.

... Trinity Site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the southseat, at White Sands. And the top-secret laboratories where the bomb had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo: Los Alamos, only a hundred miles northeast of him now, still surrounded by high electric fences ... There was no end to it; it knows no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. (245-46)

Tayo sees the atomic bomb, harbinger of the global Cold War, as the central symbol of white men’s original sin, by which the sacred Eden of American Indians was irrecoverably destroyed and all humanity, both the victims and the victimizers, are forced to face the same monolithic “cycle of death.” At this critical moment of “nuclear epiphany,” Tayo finally arrives at the answer to his central question of why he saw Uncle Josiah in the face of a Japanese soldier.

From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah’s voice and Rocky’s voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery’s final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas,

who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (246)

Tayo's journey of healing ceremony comes to an end when he decides not to kill Emo, a personification of the "witchery" of death and destruction. By doing so, Tayo repudiates the Cold War logic of mutual annihilation, and reasserts the solidarity of universal humanity under the common threat of total destruction. Tayo's recovery of his communal self gestures towards "the possibility of a multiethnic coalition" (Tarter 105), transforming the atomic threat into "the possible source of humanity's non-violent resistance and regeneration" (Rice 134).

Despite the fact that Tayo's spiritual healing is made complete through his discovery of the historical "missing link," *Ceremony* seems to avoid directly tackling the specific post-war historical realities of the Native American people. Contemporary Native American struggles for political self-determination, environmental justice, and tribal sovereignty are given only limited and less dramatic attention. Taking on the "standard Native American myth pattern"—the "worldwide 'monomyth' of separation, initiation, and return" (Bell 23)—as a basic narrative framework, *Ceremony*, bypassing contemporary Cold War historical conditions, casts its eyes back to the mythic time-space, a Native American garden of Eden before the advent of white people. When he stands on the top of Mount Taylor, Tayo feels he is outside of history: "But from this place there was no sign the white people had ever come to this land; they had no existence then, except as he remembered them" (184-85). And when he meets Ts'eh on Mount Taylor, Tayo feels she belongs to a timeless world: her "house was like the mesas

around it: years had little relation to it” (183). Even the atomic bomb, the most critical and contemporary historical link in Tayo’s entire journey of healing, is associated with the mythic time with no “sign” of white existence. Betonie’s explanation of Tayo’s illness does not have any real relevance to the Cold War geopolitical context. Instead, it mystifies the contemporaneity of Tayo’s illness: “Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done: you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world” (124). The historical link is pushed backward into a mythic past, and the atomic bomb is attributed to the “evil,” the “witchery” of native mythology.

Silko’s use of the “hero-quest” narrative pattern and the “worldwide ‘monomyth’ of separation, initiation, and return” (Bell 23) works in such a way that Tayo’s story reads as remote and distant from specific historical realities. Many critics, not surprisingly, have read *Ceremony* as an Indian version of bildungsroman. For Beidler and Nelson, for instance, *Ceremony* is a “straightforward” story of one man who “grows from confusion to clarity, from being lost to being found ... from being alone to getting connected” (5). James Tarter argues that although *Ceremony* differs from the traditional bildungsroman in the sense that the question of “identity” in Tayo’s “ego development” is radically intertwined with the concepts of “historied, multipopulated place” and “community,” Tayo’s story presents “a thoroughgoing, detailed narrative of the process of healthy identity formation” (102). Similarly, John Purdy states that Tayo “moves from an isolated, ill individual to a powerful, competent representative of his people” (63).

Since Tayo’s self-development or ego-formation entails the formation of communal consciousness and communal involvement, it is not surprising that many

people recognize *Ceremony* as following the narrative conventions of the grail romance, where “a young hero undertakes a quest for a remedy to rescue his community from a plague or disaster (in *Ceremony* the plague is a drought)” (Jaskoski 2). For Alan Velie, *Ceremony* is “an Indian analog of the grail legend” (110): “Tayo plays the role of the wounded king, Betonie is the healer, and the Laguna reservation is the wasteland” (111). For many who regard *Ceremony* as a “hero-quest,” *Ceremony* is a universal narrative of the timeless struggle between good and evil. Nelson describes the novel as a “timeless struggle between life and the forces of witchery that seek to consume life” (251). Arnold argues that in *Ceremony*, “the boundaries of difference are subsumed within a universal history and a timeless universal binary of creation/destruction” (“An Ear for the Story” 82). And Velie adds that Silko’s use of Laguna myths produces “a timelessness, or a sense that the action has happened before and will happen again” (110). In Tayo’s “Grail narrative,” Zamir discerns an “ahistorical nostalgia for mythical transcendence” (406).

Yet Silko is fully aware of the historical impact of the Cold War on her Native American homeland. For the Cold War began on her reservation. In *Yellow Woman*, her collection of essays, Silko talks extensively about the history of uranium mining in the Jackpile Mine, north of her hometown Laguna (43-44), and its devastating economic, environmental, and psychological impacts on her people (124-45). Silko believes that with the advent of the Cold War her reservation homeland became a “matter of national security” (127). Even though the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima was not created with the uranium produced in the Jackpile Mine, and the Mine itself did not open until

1952 (LaDuke 123), Silko chooses the Jackpile Mine, which was by 1980 “the largest open-pit uranium mine in the world” (Ali 80), as the climatic location of Tayo’s journey.

In discussing *Ceremony*’s expeditious canonization as a “mainstream” American classic, Kenneth M. Roemer argues that Silko’s appropriation of some familiar narrative patterns well-established by white modernist writers helped Tayo’s story be “recognizable to literary critics and teachers, but not redundant” (14). In order to attract the attention of the white literary world, which has been searching for the kinds of Native American fiction that could be safely included in the more open and multicultural landscape of the American literary canon, *Ceremony* “must be different enough to be distinctive but familiar enough to be recognizable” (14). Silko chooses the “mythic quest” narrative pattern, especially the motif of an “alienated returning veteran” (14), as a framework for her “authentic” (20) Native American story. Another element of *Ceremony* that makes Tayo’s story “safe” and “essential” (20) to mainstream readers is its clear and optimistic ending, which “relieves the dramatic tensions of the protagonist’s narrative and reassures the readers that, despite societal oppression and family tragedies, there are traditional forces of regeneration that can still help Indians to survive and survive beautifully” (25).

Ceremony is a precarious negotiation between Silko’s project of reclaiming Native American cultural identity and sovereignty, and her appropriation of the white modernist literary conventions well-cultivated and familiarized by writers such as Joyce, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and T.S. Eliot. These tensions are thoroughly reflected in Tayo’s journey. While endeavoring to find his place in the Laguna reservation as a

World War II veteran, he has to also find his place in the post-war American political and ideological milieu. As soon as they return home, Tayo and his Laguna veteran comrades suddenly realize that post-war America no longer wants them, regarding them “again as ‘un(wanted)-American(s)’ as they were before the war” (Ganser 154). They come back home as “Indian problems” that need to be handled by a patronizing, newly confident white America, which has ascended to geopolitical hegemony after liberating the Nazi concentration camps and defeating the Japanese with atomic bombs.

Returning Native American veterans witnessed the beginning of a new era of government policy toward Native American peoples. The new “Cold War-driven termination policies” bring to an end the co-called Indian New Deal represented by the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, which “provide[ed] federal funds to tribal governments for use in adding land to reservations” and allowed Indian tribal governments to “expand sovereign powers over reservation boundaries and resources through regulations codified in tribal constitutions” (Rosier 1306). As such, Native American veterans realized that they had fought the war only to lose their own native homelands. The Soviet Union eagerly took advantage of the American ill-treatment of Indians, associating Indian reservations with the Nazi concentration camps. Interestingly, US federal officials shared this Soviet characterization of Indian lands as “concentration camps,” thus making Native American questions a “site of Cold War concern and competition” in quite an ironic way (1301). During the post-war termination era, which lasted until Richard Nixon officially reaffirmed Indian self-determination by repudiating the termination policy in 1970 (Nagel 217), the federal government “attempted to

dismantle the reservation system and relocate Native Americans in ‘mainstream’ American society,” mobilizing “the Cold War imperative of ethnic ‘integration’”:

The discourse of termination was that of the Cold War—the avowed goal was to “liberate” the enslaved peoples of the world, who, according to American cold warriors, included Indians “confined” in “concentration camps” or “socialistic environments.” (Rosier 1301)

Proponents of termination and cultural assimilation policies assaulted the “socialist” and “communistic” nature of Indian tribalism and its tradition of “communal ownership” (1305).

In order to blunt this Cold War rhetoric of individualism, integration, and national unity, Native American activists often exploited the same Cold War ideology of democracy, patriotism, and self-determination in their defense of reservation rights, reconfiguring “concentration camps” as reservation “homelands” (1315). In their justification of the reservation system, Native American veterans, in particular, put forward what Rosier calls “a hybrid patriotism” that “embraced national service to strengthen both Native American identity and the ‘democratic way of life’ that protected it” (1310). For instance, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), which had many World War II veteran founding members (Nagel 162), was very active in the anti-termination movement, but took every care not to be associated with “un-American organizations” (Rosier 1300).

In interviews with Per Seyersted, Silko offers her own perspectives on Native American involvement in the history of Cold War American ethnic politics. In the 1978

interview, Silko describes American Indians as highly “patriotic Americans,” who were among “the first people to join up” during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War (117). Although the first atomic bomb test “happened so close to the Pueblo people,” Silko says, “it is just one of those accidents of history” (113).

Concerning Tayo’s story in *Ceremony*, which culminates at the Jackpile uranium mine, Silko concludes that “nothing happens ... The only thing that changes is his awareness, his perception of himself in relation to the rest of the world,” and his realization that he is “part of humanity” (118). In another interview conducted by Seyersted, one year before *Ceremony*’s publication, Silko makes it clear that she does not endorse the kind of radical protest activism supported by the American Indian Movement (AIM), a “major Red Power activist organization” in the 1970s (Nagel 129). Although AIM activists are “on the road that runs parallel to the road that [she] travel[s],” and she “can sympathize and understand what they are saying,” Silko declares that she does not agree with their radical activism:

But there’s no subtlety to their view. They oversimplify the world. ... [W]hat they miss is all of the personal subtleties and the unique experiences and aspects of this individual’s life ... I feel it is more effective to write a story like “Lullaby” than to rant and rave. I think it is more effective in reaching people. A.I.M. is simply another political group, and I find them too similar to other American political groups. (110)

In these interviews, by distancing her strategy from AIM’s direct and often violent activism, and by taking up what Rosier describes as “hybrid patriotism,” Silko, in

fact, defends what she has attempted in *Ceremony*. While a decade later she backs off a little by stating that she is “still a believer in subversion” and “not even critical of anything particularly that the American Indian Movement has done” (Coltelli, “Leslie Marmon Silko” 148), it is clear that in *Ceremony*, Silko offers, as Roemer characterizes it, an “authentic” Native American quest narrative which reads as “different” but “safe” enough to be recognized by the mainstream. Tayo is a “patriotic American,” who joined up in the war and, now back home, defends his native “homelands,” taking a position similar to the anti-termination activists in the early decades of the Cold War.

Put in this particular Cold War context of Native American “hybrid patriotism,” *Ceremony* can be read as a story of Tayo’s transformation from an “un(wanted)-American” to a “Native American.” While his veteran comrades like Emo express their post-war disappointment and anger towards white America in drinking binges and blind violence, Tayo chooses a different and “more effective” means of resistance. Rather than “rave and rant,” Silko decides to write a story dramatizing the “personal subtleties” and “unique experiences and aspects” of one Native American individual’s life. This focus on “intense-individuality” (Arnold, “An Eye for the Story” 75) in *Ceremony* allows Silko to present her agenda of indigenous cultural sovereignty in a manner more acceptable to mainstream white American readers.

Silko’s mobilization of modernist literary conventions such as bildungsroman and grail romance does not simply signal her retreat into an “ahistorical nostalgia for mythical transcendence” (Zamir 406), or her desire to escape from contemporary historical realities into the “metaphysical security” Native mythology seems to provide

(408). Silko strategically exploits Native American myths and Cold War liberal individualism in order to propagate tribal self-determination and communal values. In light of this, Louis Owens is right when he points out that “Silko moves far beyond anything imagined by T.S. Eliot [M]ythology in *Ceremony* insists upon its actual simultaneity with and interpretation into the events of everyday, mundane world” (168). Tayo’s “hybrid patriotism” allows Silko to indicate that the reservation is not a “concentration camp,” but a natural “homeland” to be defended against the global nuclear threat as well as white economic exploitation.

Silko’s double, hybrid narrative strategy becomes apparent when she re-envisions the indigenous cult of Ck’o’yo magic (247). In his final confrontation with Emo at the Jackpile Mine, Tayo meditates upon the “witchery,” the dark Ck’o’yo magic, which he must contain in order to make his healing complete.

The witchery would be at work all night so that the people would see only the losses—the land and the lives lost—since the whites came; the witchery would work so that the people would be fooled into blaming only the whites and not the witchery. It would work to make the people forget the stories of the creation and continuation of the five worlds; the old priests would be afraid too, and cling to ritual without making new ceremonies as they always had before, the way they still made new Buffalo Dance songs each year. (249)

While white people desecrated Mother Earth and created the atomic bomb, as Navajo medicine man Betonie has already intimated to Tayo in the middle of *Ceremony*, “blaming only the whites” is not a correct answer. Disgusted by his previous meeting

with Emo, who plays with the teeth of dead Japanese soldiers that he brought home as a souvenir, Tayo asks Betonie how to cope with “the sickness which comes from [white people’s] wars, their bombs, their lies.” Betonie warns him that it is “the trickery of the witchcraft,” not “white people” that brings about all the tragedies (132). Betonie adds that “white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates” and that Indians “invented white people” (132). Blaming white people, therefore, is another trick of the witchery. Just as they “invented white people” (132), they can re-invent them by “making new ceremonies” (249). Although white people might be the most devastating invention, they are not the real enemy of Native Americans: the Indian witchery is. At the last moment of his confrontation with Emo, Tayo “almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo’s skull the way the witchery had wanted” (253), but decides not to because he knows Emo is not the real enemy, either.

Criticizing Silko for her globalizing or Christianizing “local oral narratives into a comprehensive cosmological mapping of evil,” which is “not found in the Native American cultures of the Southwest,” Shamoan Zamir argues that “the largest part of the witchery myth in the novel, the narrative of witchery’s creation of white people and its manipulation of whites as the primary instruments of a horrific and global destruction” (135-138), is “almost entirely Silko’s own creation” (401). But Silko’s inventive adaptation of the traditional witchery myth is justified by Tayo’s belief that new historical changes require “making new ceremonies.” By creating new narrative ceremonies, Silko attempts to defend her native homeland and its cultural identity, while,

at the same time, proposing “a vision of human connectedness beyond boundaries of ethnicity and a view of tradition that is adaptable and expansive” (Rice 139).

Silko’s narrative strategy of Cold War “hybrid patriotism” is a precarious undertaking, even more so when we think about white America’s “long and sorry history of blaming the victims of its criminal abuse for the existence of that abuse” (LaDuke 127). In a poem, “It Was That Indian,” Simon J. Ortiz, Acoma poet and Silko’s close friend, tells a story of a Navajo named Martinez, who “discovered uranium” in Grants, New Mexico, in 1953, when the uranium boom was “another Old West gold rush adventure” (Amundson 58). After the boom has gone, Martinez, once a “celebrated” town hero, finds himself being blamed by the white Chamber of Commerce for environmental aftereffects from “chemical poisons” to “cancer” (295-96). Shifting the blame for the atomic bomb and its environmental and geopolitical aftermaths from white people onto the Indian “witchery,” and thus relieving white America’s guilt and responsibilities, Silko leaves herself open to the accusation that she helps justify the Cold War ideology of cultural integration and assimilation. Within the historical context of Native Indian “hybrid patriotism” in the early decades of the Cold War, however, Silko’s acceptance of the “blaming the victims” rhetoric could be understood as a narrative tactic to contain white America’s paranoid anxiety around the atomic bomb and its global significance. Silko blames the Indian “witchery” in exchange for, or in the hope of, white America’s endorsement of Native American patriotism and cultural sovereignty.

Silko's "hybrid patriotism" is a precarious strategy from a radically different perspective, American Indian nativism. Paula Gunn Allen questions Silko's use of Laguna oral materials in *Ceremony*: "the story she lays alongside the novel is a clan story, and is not to be told outside of the clan" (60). Allen goes further to warn that "telling the old stories, revealing the old ways, can only lead to disaster" (62), and is equivalent to "security leaks" (61). Whereas Silko blames the "witchery" magic, Allen blames "revealing the old ways" to the outside world for all the tragedies from World War II to the Jackpile environmental disasters, and to Native Americans' political and cultural insecurities (61). Allen's remark clearly illustrates that Native Americans are not immune to a Cold War paranoia and anxiety for homeland security. For Allen, even writing a novel about the Indian "witchery" and thus revealing the clan secrets to the white world could endanger Native American cultural and political security. As Tayo's entire journey in *Ceremony* implies, the atomic bomb is a homeland security issue for both the mainstream American society and Native Indians.

During the first few years of post-war America, the period of Tayo's healing ceremony, the atomic bomb was a critical factor in envisioning a new American self-image. The US nuclear monopoly, her dream of enduring nuclear supremacy in the future, exaggerated atomic spy scares, and the monopoly's surprising end in 1949 by the Soviet Union, all contributed to framing the US Cold War foreign policy and national imaginary (Herken 340). The atomic bomb was forever inscribed into the Cold War paranoid imagination and the pseudo-religious embrace of a "new technological deity" of "nuclearism" (Lifton 369). In *Ceremony*, Silko attempts to contain the Cold War

paranoid anxiety around the atomic bomb and national security by imagining an inventive narrative of the “witchery” myth, which promises “a new collectivity that subsumes social differences into a new clan, united by shared danger” (Stein 203). *Ceremony*’s “hybrid patriotism” allows Silko to explore the possibility that a Native American “homeland” coexists with white America as a “unified clan.” But at the same time, Silko also has to contain Native American Cold War paranoia that has, literally and symbolically, originated from the Native homeland, the home of the atomic bomb. The rhetoric of “hybrid patriotism” leads Silko to a direction squarely different from Allen’s conspiratorial nativism. Silko believes that Native American cultural sovereignty can be earned not by securing the cultural and narrative borders, but by opening or cross-mixing them, intertwining the native mythology and the white ideology of Cold War liberal individualism.

2. From Cold War Psychological Hygiene to Native American Spirituality: A Quest for Revolutionary Conspiracy in *Almanac of the Dead* (1997)

A significant part of *Ceremony*’s success in the mainstream literary world could be explained as a function of Silko’s ingenious integration of a story of Indian tribal identity formation into the familiar narrative conventions of US Cold War national self-fashioning. In an effort to reclaim Native American cultural sovereignty in the paranoid historical environments of the global Cold War, Silko’s “hybrid patriotism” ultimately leaves white liberal individualism fundamentally intact, even if highly mystified by Native American spiritualism. Under the heavily spiritualized narrative of Tayo’s

geopolitical journey lies a thinly-veiled western liberal individualism, its more nakedly political and paranoid version in the contemporary United States being the Cold War teleology of Manifest Destiny, which envisions the post-war global conflict as a struggle between good and evil, a narrative structured, as in Tayo's quest narrative, by "a timeless universal binary creation/destruction" (Arnold, "An Eye for the Story" 82). Tayo's Cold War national subjectivity is finally achieved when he becomes capable of identifying his personal struggle with a "universal"—tribal as well as national—struggle between the intrinsically "good" forces of "creation" and the "evil" forces of "destruction."

This bipolar and universalizing world view is the epistemological and ideological frame of Cold War national subject-formation, where the "same" creates itself through creating the "other." And this Cold War subject is essentially a paranoid subject, who must take on the impossible task of policing the arbitrary border between "us" and "them," denying any differences within each of the binaries, and homogenizing both sides of the imaginary border. The inevitability and impossibility of the task put the Cold War subject into a paranoid condition of perpetual self-policing, where the subject is forced to remain forever vigilant not only about protecting its integrity from the imaginary "other," but also about detecting and exorcizing anything associated with the "other" within itself. As such, in order to construct its self-image, the Cold War subject needs to imagine the "other" within, as well as outside, itself. Because of its essentially schizophrenic condition of self-identity, the Cold War subject proves to be a paranoid

subject, whose desire to construct a self-image by exorcizing the “other” within itself leads only to conjuring up a wraith of the “other.”

Ceremony tried to defuse the white paranoid anxiety and guilt around the atomic bomb by employing Native American spiritualism, which helps Tayo imagine a hidden connection between the Japanese and Native Americans, the historical victims of the atomic bomb. The prime source of US Cold War paranoia is here safely mythologized and naturalized as part of the ancient history of Native American spiritualism, as one of the many recent incidents of history that have already been prophesied and retold from time immemorial. Tayo’s “vision quest” is rendered in such a way that it could be effortlessly translated into white liberal humanist terms of individual agency and communal purpose, thus providing a Native, but still “patriotic,” American narrative that could stabilize and pacify the inherently paranoid and schizophrenic Cold War national psyche.

In *Almanac of the Dead*, however, Silko questions her previous strategy of “hybrid patriotism” and radically rewrites what she has to compromise in *Ceremony*. Instead of attempting to contain Cold War paranoia within the liberal humanist paradigm, Silko chooses to “explode” (borrowing from Joy Harjo) Cold War paranoia and white liberal humanist conceptions of agency and identity. Neither does she seek to placate, nor dismiss as unfounded, Native American Cold War paranoia, which has found its highly dramatic expression in Paula Gunn Allen’s conspiratorial nativism. Recognizing conspiracy narrative as a narrative of the Cold War paranoid subject, Silko accommodates and mutates Allen’s conspiratorial vision, not into a narrow ethnocentric

Native American perspective, but into a global vision of multi-ethnic, multi-national coalition in post-Cold War, postmodern geopolitical conditions.

What makes *Almanac of the Dead* such an extraordinary conspiracy novel is its unique and complicated employment of what John McClure characterizes as “postmodern spirituality.” Challenging the characterization of postmodernism as “thorough secularization” by Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, and Brian McHale, McClure argues that contemporary American spirituality “remains so vigorous,” “so often politically engaged and so often entangled with consumerism and sensationalism,” and “increasingly culturally eccentric in its inspiration and practices” (142). Silko, of course, is one of the most celebrated contemporary American writers whose fiction “captures and reflects this turbulent situation of spiritual engagement, uncertainty, and experiments” (142). Unlike in *Ceremony*, however, Silko’s Native American spirituality in *Almanac* is not wary of becoming associated with, and thus trivialized as, a conspiratorial vision of a Cold War paranoid subject. Rather, Silko fearlessly spiritualizes a conspiratorial vision and creates a post-paranoid conspiracy narrative that ultimately subverts the Cold War paradigm of geopolitics and national identity.

Indeed, *Almanac of the Dead* is densely packed with countless conspiracy theories and secret plans for conflicting political and ideological agendas mapped out by myriad groups of people in the Americas, who are struggling in their own different ways to come up with new geopolitical visions to cope with a new era of the global Cold War. After Vietnam and Watergate, after the first Cold War cycle died out, “a new Cold War”

began in the late 1970s, a “conflict more dangerous and unmanageable” than the first one, since Americans now could no longer enjoy “superior nuclear force, an unchallenged economy, strong alliances, and a trusted Imperial President” to direct the nation against the Soviets (Lafeber, *The American Age* 283). The “heightened danger” in the Second Cold War (1979-1985) was “underscored by the prominence of Third World political revolutions” and unrest in places like Nicaragua and Iran (Sharp 122). In order to contain the Third World within the old geopolitical frame of “anticommunism,” the Reagan administration aggressively launched the so-called “democracy promotion campaigns” in Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and other countries (Carothers 238). The Second Cold War meant a reversion to the foreign policy of ideological simplification and reductionism, which configures the entire Third World, “squeezing out the concerns and aspirations of the peoples,” as “a section of cartographical space” that is to be claimed by the competing superpowers (Dalby 423). The second coming of Cold War foreign policy also meant a resurgence of the paranoid political culture, namely “the suspicious, fearful, and often primitive way in which foreign policy is viewed” (Halliday 105). The Iran-Contra scandal in 1986, “a conspiracy at the highest levels of government” (Marshall 2), exposed part of what did actually happen behind the deceptively simplified and seamless picture that US reductionist foreign policy had projected to the public’s eyes. With the Second Cold War, paranoid imagination revisits us, once again propagating conspiracies and conspiracy theories everywhere.

Almanac of the Dead reflects geopolitical turbulences, uncertainties, and also aspirations and visions during the period from the Second Cold War to Operation Desert Storm, the first post-Berlin foreign war. In a 1987 interview with Rolando Hinojosa, Silko claimed that in 1981, soon after moving down to Tucson, Arizona from Laguna Village, New Mexico, she “began to get transmissions, life from outer space, and little notes and things” that, she now believes, portended “what’s going to happen in the whole eastern hemisphere” (92). She found Tucson to be “another Saigon” where a secret war between the United States government and Mexico was being waged, a border city that “wasn’t any better than Argentina when there were disappearing people” (Gonzalez 101, 102). One frightening and vivid dream she had in 1981 changed her original plan to write “a very short, simple, commercial novel. Something that anyone could read, not political, something [she] would call a cops-and-robbers novel about cocaine smuggling” (Irmer 153). In the dream that became “a kind of marker post” for *Almanac*, Silko saw “the helicopters were flying very low and they were coming from Mexico and they were full of wounded US soldiers” (Pett 1992). As she started writing, she found out that there was something going on in Tucson far more malicious and complicated that could not be contained in her original “cops-and robbers novel” or, as she described elsewhere, “action thriller novel” that “could be sold at the book stand in the supermarket” (Coltelli, “*Almanac*” 125). In an interview with Thomas Irmer and Matthias Schmidt, Silko explains how an “action thriller” became *Almanac*.

[T]he US government was bringing the cocaine in because they wanted to finance the Contras to fight the Sandinistas. That is common knowledge and yet

a big scandal, and the US covered it up. The CIA glutted the cocaine market in the US and brought the price down. They would bring it in with military aircraft. So this was common knowledge in Tucson, and when I started writing I began to realize this is not simple, what is going on. I began to lose control of the novel and to feel that all of the stories came in, and I felt the presence of the spirits. It was taken over. (Irmer 153)

In a 1986 interview, Silko made it very clear that *Almanac* is a product of the Second Cold War, “a time when the struggle which the indigenous peoples are having now in Guatemala and Honduras and Nicaragua spreads north into Mexico” and “The United States, of course, intervenes and sends troops and tanks and so on into Mexico” (Barnes 83).

Almanac is brimming over with a multitude of characters and their stories, none of which singularly dominates the entire narrative. Silko loosely organizes *Almanac*'s lengthy and labyrinthine plot by arranging those abounding stories of numerous characters along the line of some central geographical locations, including, most importantly, Tucson, Arizona and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, capital city of the Mexican state of Chiapas. Tucson is a frontier stronghold, through which the hegemonic power of US anticommunist geopolitical vision is projected toward Mexico and other Latin American peripheries of the global Cold War. All kinds of politically motivated border-crossing activities are secretly planned and undertaken in Tucson: clandestine military and intelligence operations, international and domestic assassinations, drug trade and arms smuggling, and ruthless capitalist ventures that benefit from third world political unrest.

Tucson political elites like Judge Arne, the Senator, and the police chief are behind Iran-Contra style secret agendas, in close cooperation with the mysterious Mr. B, ex-military, Max Blue, a retired Mafia boss who is an expert on political assassination, and Greenlee, an arms dealer who has CIA connections. Leah Blue, Max's wife and real estate developer, and spinal cord-injured Trigg, who owns a plasma donor center in Tucson, always busy themselves in speculating about new business opportunities that might emerge as Tucson becomes a central base for US Cold War military and intelligence operations directed at Central and South America. On the Mexican side, Tuxtla Gutiérrez is a Third World facsimile of Tucson. The city's elite group of white people wholeheartedly accepts US Cold War reductionism and protects their racially exclusive hegemony by conveniently branding indigenous people or any group of people who challenge their power as communist subversives. The Chiapas governor, the former US ambassador, General J, and Menardo, a mixed-blood capitalist, all cherish their, quite often secret but mutually acknowledged, political and economic affiliations and connections in the United States. These elites of Tuxtla, all El Grupo Gun Club members, believe they are fighting in the frontline of a global war against communism. The US imperial will of anticommunism is actualized more violently, but is also more abstractly felt, in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, itself bordering with Guatemala.

As such, the US Cold War global vision is channeled southward along a vertical geographical line from Tucson to Tuxtla and from Tuxtla to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and far down to Colombia and Argentina. Yet Silko envisions that the same geographical line could be a channel for alternative global visions and

resistance. While Tucson is a central base of the US government-sponsored anticommunist conspiracy against the indigenous peoples of Central and South America, it is also a breeding ground of counter conspiracies of various groups of people plotting against the government. *Almanac* begins with Lecha's return to a Tucson home, where her twin Yaqui Indian sister Zeta has been preparing for the future upheavals prophesied by the ancestors. The twin sisters set out to decipher and understand the Native prophecies recorded in the ancient Almanac notebooks they had inherited from old Yeome, their eccentric grandmother. In Tucson, they are preparing, spiritually and militarily, for the day when they will retake all the ancestral lands stolen by white people. Calabazas, another Yaqui living in the Sonoran desert with his nephew Mosca, whose mind is full of conspiratorial imagination, senses certain foreboding changes in the Tucson political scene and his old border-crossing business environments. Rambo Ray, who had fought an unknown war in Thailand for two years, secretly recruits and organizes Vietnam veterans and other homeless people around Tucson for his Army of the Homeless. Wearing his full Green Beret uniform everyday, Clinton, a black veteran with one foot, who thinks himself an African American Indian, prepares programs for his future revolutionary radio broadcasting. Awa Gee, a Korean computer hacker, helps Zeta and radical environmentalists, experiments with powerful guerrilla weapons, and designs a plot to shut down electricity all across the US

Likewise, in the Chiapas state of Mexico, a group of Mayan Indians conspire against the political elites of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, whose Cold War ideology and ruthless political oppression are met with a mixture of native spirituality, revolutionary

conspiratorial vision, and guerrilla resistance. Angelita La Escapía leads loosely organized military units, dubbing them the Army of Justice and Redistribution, whereas El Feo promotes something like spiritual and political awakening among the indigenous people living in the remote mountain areas. Tacho, El Feo's twin brother and Menardo's Indian chauffeur, works in the realm of his master's dreams. Further down in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, U.S.-backed anticommunist regimes and their secret death squads are spreading terror and destruction among indigenous peoples, forcing them to flee north. Although the Mexican elites in Tuxtla are more than willing to take every means possible to protect their southern border against the massive human waves escaping from the southern peripheries of the global Cold War, *Almanac* foretells that this massive human wave of border-crossing migration provoked by political unrest in the South will ultimately arrive in the United States, hegemonic center of the global Cold War. The indigenous people's northward movement is accompanied by all sorts of spontaneous narratives that are running wild underneath the paranoid conspiracy narrative told by the imperial center: ancestral stories, gossip, rumors, conspiracy theories, religious beliefs, and alternative world visions, which could gradually and imperceptibly undermine the US Cold War geopolitical vision.

Framing *Almanac of the Dead* is the journey of Sterling, an old Laguna Pueblo who had been expelled from his home village for his alleged conspiracy with the Hollywood film crew who desecrated the Laguna spiritual heritage. The novel begins with Sterling's arrival and employment in Tucson by Ferro, Lecha's rebelling son, as gardener and handyman for the Yaqui sisters, and ends with his return to Laguna as a

different person. Though not a World War II veteran, Sterling belongs to the same generation as *Ceremony's* Tayo, the generation which was forced by the federal government to experience the white world outside the Indian reservation system and to assimilate fully into white society. After Indian boarding school, where he was sent at a very young age, because his parents had passed away early (88), Sterling remained in California working in the railroad construction business until his retirement back to Laguna. Sterling's life-long experience with white people, however, turns out to be the main cause of his later misfortune, when the Tribal Council appointed him as Laguna Pueblo film commissioner, believing that he could safely guide and control the Hollywood people not to commit any cultural or religious crimes, which they did.

Not only accused of failing to prevent the Hollywood "conspirators" from doing unforgivable things like filming the sacred stone snake inside the kiva, Sterling was suspected of being an active conspirator with the Hollywood intruders (90-91). In a hearing held by the Tribal Council, Edith Kaye, a Laguna woman frustrated with Sterling's lukewarm response to her sexual invitation, zealously accused that "Sterling had conspired to steal the giant stone snake" (93). Back home, Sterling was told by Aunt Marie that everyone in Laguna believed he was "using drugs with those Hollywood people" (94), that "he had been involved in the love triangle involving the young man" he had known in California, and that he was "going to help the movie people steal the stone snake so [he] and the movie people could buy more drugs with the money" (95). Sterling now realized he was a victim of the Laguna gossip culture that he had forgotten for a long time, in which "[t]he worst charges traveled in wildfire gossip propelled from

village to village by imaginations so uncontrolled and so vivid that ordinary and innocent actions were transformed into high intrigue” (94). Sterling, however, understands that Laguna gossip does not merely serve as “entertainment” (94), but also reflects Laguna’s long history of victimization from Francisco Vázquez de Coronado to the contemporary Cold War period. The Laguna people have “hundreds of years of blame that needed to be taken by somebody,” blame for a long list of historical losses (34).

Sterling’s case is then only a recent and rather insignificant incident in the long history of Laguna victimization and gossip culture. But for the Laguna people, Sterling’s case exemplifies a far more comprehensive and profound current of contemporary US history. As in *Ceremony*, Laguna people suddenly got entangled in the global Cold War history when uranium was found in the sacred land of Laguna Pueblo. Though Sterling is not exactly one of them, some of the Laguna World War II veterans had benefited from the uranium mining industry.

And then there was the blame for the most recent incidents. Sterling had already gone to Barstow to work on the railroad when uranium had been discovered near Pagate Village. ... In the end, Laguna Pueblo had no choice anyway. It had been 1949 and the United States needed uranium for the new weaponry, especially in the face of the Cold War. That was the reason given by the federal government as it overruled the concerns and the objections the Laguna Pueblo people had expressed. Of course there had been a whole generation of World War II veterans then who had come home looking for jobs, for a means to have

some of the comforts they had enjoyed during their years away from the reservation. The old-timers had been dead set against ripping open Mother Earth so near to the holy place of the emergence. (34)

Obviously, white men's desecration of the holy place in the Laguna Pueblo foundation myth is ultimately to blame for all the sinister post-war incidents like the one Sterling has experienced with the Hollywood film crew. But Laguna people could not blame white people with completely clean hands, since they, at least part of them, were complicit, or even actively cooperative, with white people's destruction of the Earth. The whole World War II generation "became the first of the Pueblos to realize wealth from something terrible done to the earth" (34). Laguna gossip works with its full force and irony, when some of the blame needs to be taken by "somebody" within the Laguna community. Even though he had nothing to do with the uranium mine, Sterling was chosen as that "somebody," partly because he had spent most of his life away from Laguna. There were not many people he was well acquainted with except his old Aunt Marie who could defend him before the Tribal Council. Even Aunt Marie was worried about the rumors around Sterling. The Tribal Council's decision to expel Sterling permanently reveals behind Laguna gossip culture this deep-rooted fear and anxiety toward white intruders and native accomplices.

[T]he Council had concluded that "conspirators" could not be permitted to live on the reservation because, in their opinion, all of the current ills facing the people of Laguna could be traced back to "conspirators," legions of conspirators who had passed through Laguna Pueblo since Coronado and his men first came

through five hundred years ago. Sterling shook his head. This was terrible. They had probably confused “conspirator” with “conquistador.” (96)

The Council’s confusion between white “conquistador” and native “conspirator” is not just a simple accident or a misunderstanding, as Sterling suggests above. The confusion exposes Laguna people’s unconscious recognition that not only white “conquistadors” but also native “conspirators” have contributed to “all of the current ills facing the people of Laguna.” Laguna gossip functions not only as a means of cultural resistance against the long history of white colonialism and victimization, but also as a means of collective self-policing and self-expurgation.

Now in Tucson, Sterling strives to forget all about Laguna, its history, gossip, and politics. Suffering from chronic depression, Sterling wants to live in the present moment, trying to “get his mind off such thoughts—Indians flung across the world forever separated from their tribes and from their ancestral lands—that kind of thing had been happening to human beings since the beginning of time” (88). For Laguna old-timers, who “had not believed in the passage of time at all” (19), and who remembered an old crime “as though it had just been committed” (31), old tribal losses and grievances are never forgotten but always living fresh and vivid in their oral storytelling tradition in which Laguna gossip culture has its root. But for Sterling, forgetting is the way to go.

Rejecting the conspiratorial logic of Laguna gossip, which creates a narrative of “high intrigue” out of “ordinary and innocent actions” by “imagination so uncontrolled and so vivid” (94), Sterling believes “the incident involving the Hollywood movie crew

and the shrine of the great stone snake was no crime; it had been the result of a simple mistake; a small misunderstanding, a total accident” (31). As Laguna gossip stopped working as entertainment for him a long time ago, Sterling now looks for entertainment to old Hollywood cowboy movies and popular stories of famous criminals and outlaws, whose fates are often decided by pure “accident and luck” (76). Now that “he has made it his hobby to learn and keep up with the history of outlaws and famous criminals” (26), Sterling becomes an ardent reader of *Police Gazette* and *True Detective* magazines.

As a way of forgetting all the Laguna gossip and stories, Sterling now “remembers his *Reader’s Digest* magazines—‘Laughter, the Best Medicine’” (23)—and takes pains to “emphasize the positive aspects of life and not dwell upon the terrible things that had happened at home between himself and the Tribal Council” (25). *Reader’s Digest* instructs Sterling to believe the incident as a happening that cannot be reversed.

Sterling had been carefully following advice printed recently in a number of magazines concerning depression and the best ways of combating it. He had purposely been living in the present moment as much as he could. One article had pointed out that whatever has happened to you had already happened and can’t be changed. Spilled milk. . . . What had happened to Sterling was in the category of things magazine articles called “irreparable” and “better forgotten.” Water under the bridge. (24)

The magazine's "mental hygiene" (36) promises a secure and self-contained world free from historical memory and psychological baggage, the exact opposite of the Laguna world of gossip, blaming, and remembering.

As "an icon of conservative, small-town Americanness" (Sharp xiv), *Reader's Digest* has been involved in US cold war history from the beginning.⁴ It is *Reader's Digest* along with *Life* magazine that published excerpts from George F. Kennan's so-called "X" article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," in 1947, and "gave his views a popular exposure that helped mightily to shape America's sense of itself and of its adversary" (Diemert 23). While popularizing Kennan's messianic rhetoric, these magazines had a tendency to overlook and minimize Kennan's realist vision of foreign policy and to mythologize or "canoniz[e] the single idea that America was committed to an unending struggle with a sinister enemy" (Weisberger 73). During the Second Cold War, "the *Digest's* naturalization of the Soviet Union as America's Other was fully achieved" and the "complexities of foreign policy decisions were truly condensed to a conflict of good and evil" (Sharp 123). Ironically, Kennan himself was highly critical about this new US Cold War foreign policy vision, which he believed was based on "endless series of distortions and oversimplifications," "systematic dehumanization of the leadership of another great country," "routine exaggeration of Moscow's military capabilities and of the supposed iniquity of Soviet intentions," and "monotonous misrepresentation of the nature and the attitudes of another great people" (10). As such, the *Digest* is credited with helping to create the popular images of Cold War Others, from the Soviet Union to Third World countries, and later "at the close of the Cold

War,” “America’s new Others” in the form of global terrorism or Islamic fundamentalism (Sharp 143). And the magazine was also concerned about the potential “moral dangers of the end of communism” (162).

Undoubtedly, the *Digest*’s condensing or reductionist geopolitical imagination grew out of the US political soil where foreign policy is imagined, as Halliday observes, in “the suspicious, fearful, and often primitive way” (165). Promoting, on the one hand, the paranoid politics of ideological simplification that offers a Manichean picture of the global conflict to the American public, the *Digest*, on the other hand, has cultivated a politics of “mental hygiene,” which could help to protect and immunize the American national psyche from Cold War paranoia and anxiety. The *Digest*’s discourse of “mental hygiene” that Sterling rigorously follows for combating his depression is, to a considerable degree, a product of the early decades of the Cold War, when “concerns about mental illness and the use of psychiatric drugs skyrocketed” and an increasing number of Americans were looking for religious or spiritual affiliation (Urban 362). In the 1950s, the American people, more than anytime in the twentieth century, were willing to mobilize various movements of self-help psychology and religious cult, such as Norman Vincent Peale’s “Positive Thinking” and L. Ron Hubbard’s “Scientology,” as well as the traditional Christian faith, in order to fight the apocalyptic vision of nuclear holocaust and the real and imaginary Communist menace (362). Self-help techniques the *Digest* offers, such as positive thinking, mind control, stress management, and confidence building, help Sterling, like tranquilizer pills, to banish himself from the Laguna world of wild gossip and conspiracy thinking to a sanitized world of historical

amnesia and Hollywood fantasy, a world of pure “accident and luck,” free from paranoid connectedness and confusion.

The only real friend Sterling can find in Tucson is a young white drug addict who now works for Lecha as a secretary and nurse, preparing and typing the transcripts of Lecha’s ancient Mayan almanac notebooks. Having lost her baby son Monte in San Diego, Seese came to Tucson to seek help from Lecha, whom she saw on a daytime TV talk show where Lecha demonstrated her psychic power to locate the dead and lost. Although she is not a total stranger in Tucson, having once worked there as nightclub dancer, Seese, just like Sterling, is an absolute outsider to all the secret planning and mysterious mission of the Yaqui twin sisters. Being outsiders with painful pasts, Seese and Sterling fast become mutual friends.

Yet Seese does not irreversibly reject a world of confusing mystery, conspiracy thinking, and paranoid connectedness. Unlike Sterling, who only sees “accident and luck” in Tucson, Seese senses that “Nothing happens by accident here” (21). Even the location of the house, she figures, is “no accident either, but part of the old woman Zeta’s secrecy about herself and everything she and Ferro and Paulie are doing” (22). Whereas Sterling wants to forget and suppress his recent memories in Laguna, Seese makes every effort not to forget what little memory she has about Monte, and even creates in her mind the current image of Monte that the baby might have if he were still alive. In Tucson, she determines to quit drugs; yet, it is not to live in the perpetual present of immediate reality with a clear mind as Sterling wants to. Cold War “mental hygiene” or Hollywood entertainment is the last thing she wants now. Seese wants to see

something beyond, or more than, mere facts and immediate rationality. She understands that finding Monte is not like finding hard and detailed facts, and accepts Lecha's demand that she "must be careful never to ask Lecha *directly* to find her baby son" (21). Instead of factual information and concrete memory, she has nightmares, visions, and strange images, the "signs and symbols" that must be "decoded" or "translated" into a certain "message."

She has nightmares about diving into a pool that is too deep. Before she can manage to surface she is out of air. High above her she can see the sky and round, puffy clouds as she drowns. She remembers having the nightmare only twice before she had the baby. Both times it was the night before a math test in college. She got lost in the lines and equations; she could imagine any number of possibilities from all the signs and symbols. She read many things into them, many more than mathematicians had anticipated. Now she knows that all of it is a code anyway. The blue sky and puffy clouds seen through the deadly jade water of the nightmare pool was a message about the whole of creation. The loss of the child was another, more final message, or at least that was how it was translating—she was only just finding out that this was a translation, that the last morning she had held little Monte in her arms loving him perfectly—that had been an end too. (43)

Seese's ability to recognize or read "all the signs and symbols" of coded dreams and visions that require "translation" to be understood makes her a special help for Lecha, who has been working on the ancient almanac notebooks, which is by no means a factual

record of the indigenous people's history, but "a mosaic of memory and imagination" (574). The almanac notebooks Lecha inherited from Yoeme are in fact "fragments," much "lost or condensed into odd narratives which operated like codes" (569). Yoeme herself had told Lecha that the old almanac is "all in a code, so that meaning would not be immediately clear" (128); in order to decode its message a "suitable code" must be found (129). Realizing her gift to locate the dead, Lecha finds that dream could be "a sort of narrative in code" (161). Obviously, what Seese needs to learn in Tucson is how to find a "suitable code" for her nightmares, in which she saw Monte's image.

Monte's sudden disappearance while she was on drugs in San Diego has initiated Seese into a world of dream vision, at first causing her to seek help from Lecha's visionary power, but later in the story, to be Lecha's potential successor and the next carrier of the old almanac. After Monte had been kidnapped, Seese creates Monte's image out of any ordinary objects she sees. Her brain instantly gives any "shadows or shapes of clouds, patterns the dampness made on the beach sand" she lays her eyes on certain "definite forms" that remind her of Monte (44). Seese's way of reading "definite forms" out of specific images and facts is quite similar to Lecha's way of finding the dead—reading "accurate emblems or dreams" out of minute and precise "facts."

The letters and messages Lecha got had been the exact opposite of nightmares or daydreams. The letters were invariably lists of facts, recitations of precise locations at hours and minutes of specific months and days: height, weight, and eye and hair color, descriptions of birthmarks, jewelry, and clothes. From the facts Lecha's task was to find the appropriate or accurate emblems or dreams.

Lecha said the world had all it ever needed in the way of figures and facts anyway. Lecha admitted it was difficult to understand. A matter of faith or belief. Knowledge. Or maybe grace. Something like that. Lecha only had to slit open an envelope or listen to a recording of a long-distance phone message, and suddenly she would seize the tin ammo box full of crumpled pages and notes and sift them carefully until a single word or a short phrase revealed “the clue” to her. (173)

In locating the dead, Lecha tries to find a “suitable code” hidden in the “emblems or dreams” that she envisions inspired by the “figures and facts” that clients have provided. But she makes it clear to Seese that “No one but the client would ever be able to understand fully the clue’s meaning” (173). Later in the novel, Seese finally has an “accurate dream” about her baby: she finds Monte dead in her dream. Since she is her own client, Seese immediately realizes that her son is dead and “Lecha must have known from the beginning” (595). Now capable of finding the dead just like Lecha, Seese “type[s] a description of the dream” in the old almanac, instead of Lecha’s transcriptions (595). Although Yoeme had warned Lecha that “Nothing must be added that was not already there” in the almanac and that “Only repairs are allowed” (129), Lecha had once written down Yoeme’s story about her encounter with the real Geronimo in the almanac. And this new addition proved to be “the first entry that had been written in English” and “Yoeme claimed that this was the sign the keepers of the notebooks had always prayed for” (130). Seese’s addition of her dream about Monte’s death into the almanac notebooks implies that she might be the almanac’s next new keeper, even if she is not a Yaqui, but white.

What Lecha and Seese achieve with their dream decoding or translating is described as “something like” “faith,” “belief,” “knowledge,” or “grace” (173), which is more spiritual than psychological, and more communal than ego-centered. Lecha suggests that her dream reading has healing effects, when she reveals her “crackpot theories” on Freud, who “had interpreted fragments—images from hallucinations, fantasies, and dreams—in terms patients could understand. The images were messages from the patient to herself or himself” (173-74). For Lecha, however, Freud’s interpretation or translation of fragmented mental “images” into coherent “messages” seems more concerned with communal destiny and purpose than personal psychological wellbeing. Lecha identifies herself with the Freud who “had sensed the approach of the Jewish holocaust in the dreams and jokes of his patients” and “had been one of the first to appreciate the Western European appetite for the sadistic eroticism and masochism of modern war” (174). Lecha and Seese’s spiritual dream vision offers an alternative to the *Digest*’s cold war “mental hygiene.”

At the end of *Almanac of the Dead*, Tucson becomes dangerously engulfed in violence and conflict as the mysterious northward march of the indigenous peoples from the South is about to arrive in the US-Mexican border areas and the imperial North’s secret war of paranoid conspiracy is intensifying. Lecha and Seese are heading for South Dakota to make preparations for the future when the ancient prophecies will be realized, and Sterling returns to Laguna as a totally different person. Tucson has changed Sterling: “after Tucson with all the violence and death, after everything Lecha had revealed, Sterling felt as if he knew too much, and he would never be able to enjoy his life again”

(754). Leaving Tucson behind, Sterling now believes he has forever left the world *Reader's Digest* has created for his “mental hygiene” and light entertainment, “that safe old world that had never really existed except on the pages of *Reader's Digest* in articles on reducing blood cholesterol, corny jokes, and patriotic anecdotes” (757).

With Sterling's homecoming, *Almanac of the Dead* seems to withdraw from the paranoid world of the Second Cold War, crowded with countless individual groups and loners full of “feverish plots and crazed schemes” (755), and to revert to the nostalgic post-war Laguna in *Ceremony*, where Cold War anxiety about nuclear holocaust is safely contained and pacified within Laguna mythology. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Sterling mostly recapitulates Tayo's final realization in *Ceremony* about Laguna's geopolitical significance and spiritual mission in the global Cold War. After seeing “the distant blue peaks of Mt. Taylor,” which is known to the Laguna people also as “Woman Veiled in Rain Clouds,” Sterling continues to walk to the most climatic location in Tayo's healing journey, the open-pit uranium mine, which he, like Tayo, believes to be a work of the Destroyers.

But in *Almanac*, the uranium mine is transformed from an old Cold War location of the atomic bomb to a new geographic center for the future post-Cold War political and spiritual revolution of the indigenous peoples of America. Silko uses the mysterious appearance of the giant stone snake in the same uranium mine shortly after the publication of *Ceremony* as a symbolic event that foretells the rebirth of the Native American world. Unconsciously “walking in the exact direction of the mine road where the shrine of the giant snake was,” Sterling remembers Lecha's talk about the Lakota

prophecy, the returning of buffalo to the Great Plains (758). Now Sterling recognizes “a connection the giant snake had with Mexico” and recalls the “old story” told by Aunt Marie and other old-timers: “Hundreds of years before the Europeans had appeared, sorcerers called Gunadeeyahs or Destroyers had taken over in the South. The people who refused to join the Gunadeeyahs had fled” to the area, today’s Pueblo country in Arizona and New Mexico (759-60). What Sterling has witnessed in Tucson is another continental migration of the indigenous people in America, who are once again marching toward the North, this time escaping from the secret wars and political unrest in the South. But now it is the indigenous people, not the Destroyers, who are taking over the continent, bringing political uncertainty and apocalyptic spiritual vision into the hegemonic center. When the giant stone snake had suddenly appeared in the Jackpile uranium mine and the “old folks said Maahastryu had returned,” Sterling did not believe, because “back then, talk about religion or spirits had meant nothing to Sterling, drinking beer with his section-gang buddies” (761). After Tucson, however, Sterling begins to believe in Native spirituality and prophecy and to have “ghost armies” in his dreams (762). Even though back in Laguna there is still “gossip and speculation” about him, Sterling no longer suffers from depression and anxiety.

Sterling didn’t look like his old self anymore. He had lost weight and quit drinking beer. The postmaster reported Sterling had let go all his magazine subscriptions. Sterling didn’t care about the rumors and gossip because Sterling knew why the giant snake had returned now; he knew what the snake message

was to the people. The snake was looking south, in the direction from which the twin brothers and the people would come. (762-63)

Whereas in *Ceremony*, Silko attempted to inscribe Native American cultural sovereignty in the white American national psyche by containing its Cold War paranoid anxiety within Tayo's healing journey, in *Almanac*, whose entire narrative is similarly framed by a story of another Laguna Indian's journey, Silko explores Native American spirituality and its often conspiratorial political imagination that could overtake and "explode" the white Cold War paradigm of paranoid global vision.

3. Exploding White Cold War Paranoia: A War of Stories, Spirits, and Conspiracies

After witnessing all the suspicious Iran-Contra-style clandestine activities in Tucson, which is, "as the Native American-African beliefs of Voodoo religion tell us," like "a crossroad in a place of intense conflict between all the spirits, and all the forces" (Coltelli, "*Almanac*" 119), Silko confesses she "began to lose control of the novel and to feel that all of the stories came in," and she "felt the presence of spirits" and the novel was "taken over" (Irmer 153). *Almanac*, indeed, lacks the kind of conventional narrative structure that *Ceremony* certainly has. Sterling's story provides only a thinly veneered narrative frame that can barely hold together all the labyrinthine narrative threads, each of which presents different, often conflicting, geopolitical concerns and visions. Obviously, "a clear analytical distinction between actual conspiratorial politics and 'conspiracy theories' in the pejorative sense of the term" (Bale 45) is made almost

pointless and even impossible in *Almanac*, where innumerable antagonistic paranoid narratives and conspiracy theories are clashed with each other, and more importantly, “actual conspiratorial politics” has no other way to operate but in the discursive framework of “conspiracy theories.” Jeffrey M. Bale argues that the “totalistic, all-encompassing quality” of conspiracy theories, which assume that “nothing that happens occurs by accident” and “Everything is the result of secret plotting in accordance with some sinister design,” makes us able to distinguish them from “the secret but mundane political planning that is carried out on a daily basis by all sorts of groups, both within and outside of government” (53). But what Bale describes as the “quality” of conspiracy theories could be easily applied to the “actual” US Cold War “conspiratorial politics,” particularly, the one based on the US foreign policy vision fully solidified in the Second Cold War: a politics of reductionism and oversimplification, which condenses the complexities of foreign policy into “a conflict of good and evil” (Sharp 123), ascribing the changes in the Third World to Soviet intervention (Halliday 82). For Silko, conspiracy narratives, bogus or real, are, more than anything, “stories,” and they are quite often associated with “spirits.” Being “taken over” by these conspiratorial “stories” and “spirits” (Irmer 153), Silko produces, as she puts it, “not just an almanac” but “a sort of Voodoo spell” (Coltelli, “*Almanac*” 119).

In *Almanac*, Silko has charted out a global contest of conspiratorial stories and spiritualities that has been waged in both the hegemonic center of Cold War neocolonialism and its Third World peripheries. It is a contest not only between the two geographic locations, Tucson, Arizona and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, but also between

the Cold War establishments and the disenfranchised within each of the two locations, for the global center of Cold War “will to power” has its “others” within its own territory as well, as Silko contends that “The United States is never going to be, it never has been, what they said. We’ve always had the Third World right here, always” (Niemann 111).

The Tucson political scene is divided by increasingly disquieting and opposing “rumors” and “stories.” Rambo Roy, who is now leading an army of veterans and homeless people in Tucson, “had heard rumors about Tucson before he ever hopped the freight train in Baton Rouge.”

Hoboes said Tucson had communist priests and terrorist nuns and even the Methodist churches in Tucson were communist. Then Roy heard the opposite too, that just outside Tucson the US military had begun to create a “bastion of strength” to run the length of the US southern border. In Baton Rouge stories circulated about the mysterious recruiters in white shirts, dark blue suits, and dark glasses who were looking for “good soldiers” willing to relocate to Tucson. (398)

As a “bastion of strength” of US Cold War neocolonialism, Tucson is a place where multifarious groups of people—ranging from alleged communist spies and provocateurs, secret government agents and private contractors, crazed visionaries with apocalyptic messages, mysterious visitors from the South, to drug smugglers and homeless veterans—converge with their own “stories” and “rumors” to tell. Tucson is getting more and more tense and paranoid, as the “[r]umors and conflicting reports” about secret

wars and political unrest are coming from the direction of Mexico, which is becoming dangerously destabilized by Salvadorian and Guatemalan refugees and their stories (630).

At the center of Tucson's anti-communist campaign is the Owls Club, Tucson's all-male white elite society which has a long history, from the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty through World War I to the present (643). This "closet club" (644) has Judge Arne, the Senator, and the Tucson Police Chief as its current, politically powerful members, who work for the US government in secret collaboration with undercover figures like the ex-military Mr. B., or with private contractors like Max Blue, a retired Mafia boss, who has "performed special 'services' for the US government at home and abroad" (441). The Senator does not conceal the essentially neocolonialist drive behind the US anti-communist campaign in Mexico and other Latin American countries, the drive that had already existed from the beginning of the Cold War and continued to the present, dramatically intensified.

The senator claimed the CIA had bought members of the Mexican aristocracy fifty years ago, and it was only a matter of time before the Mexican president and his cabinet would request US military aid and intervention to prevent the antigovernment forces from taking Mexico City. How could the senator be certain of the events to come in Mexico? Their mutual friend, Mr. B. Mr. B. had been working for more than ten years against the communists in Mexico and Guatemala. (637)

With the Second Cold War, the campaign has only been more privatized and less publicized. Mr. B. "had turned to the private sector, to independent contractors such as

Max Blue and his wife, Leah,” who could perform certain unsavory or criminal missions on behalf of the US military (647). All the charges of neocolonialism, secrecy, and criminality, however, are readily cleared by the familiar reductionist rhetoric of anti-communism that vindicates the culture of conspiratorial political elitism. In order to fight “against the spread of communism in the Americas,” Jude Arne suggests, the US government, like “[a]ll civilized nations,” has “secret agendas known only to a select circle of government figures” and should not allow “[f]ortunes and national fates” to be “left in the hands of the ignorant masses” (648). Judge Arne insists on the necessity of the government-sponsored conspiracy that could facilitate, on the one hand, military containment in the Third World and on the other hand, domestic social engineering, which is intended to check any political challenge from “the ignorant masses.”

Cocaine smuggling could be tolerated for the greater good, which was the destruction of communism in Central and South America. The fight against communism was costly. A planeload of cocaine bought a planeload of dynamite, ammunition, and guns for anticommunist fighters and elite death squads in the jungles and cities of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Communism was a far greater threat to the United States than drug addiction was. Addicts did not stir up the people or start riots the way communists did. (648)

While the Senator and Judge Arne are providing political support and cover for the government anti-communist conspiracy, Mr. B. and other fringe elements perform all the dirty jobs behind the scene. Greenlee operates as a secret channel for arms transaction between the US government and the anticommunist groups in the South. Max Blue, “a

scholar, an expert” (354) on political assassination, who has developed a strange fascination with death (353), has “made ‘arrangements’ to solve ‘problems’ for a great many interest groups including the ‘family,’ foreign governments, even the US CIA” (654). His killing machine consists of members selected from the “out-of-town” applicants who had recently lived abroad in the Middle East or Asia” (357). Leah Blue does not stop planning and preparing for her huge real estate development project, dreaming of the day she “would be rich beyond imagination,” when US troops are “sent into Mexico to restore order at the request of the Mexican president” and “Tucson and all the border states would be booming again” (656). Though not directly connected to the Tucson anticommunist elite or its fringe groups, Trigg represents what Silko describes as “vampire capitalists” (312), who ruthlessly commodify Third World bodies and benefit from Cold War neocolonialism. Trigg always has “a childlike enthusiasm for all the schemes and plots” to expand his “biomaterials” business. “Biomaterials” is “the industry’s ‘preferred’ term for fetal-brain material, human kidneys, hearts and lungs, corneas for eye transplants, and human skin for burn victims” (398). Currently running a plasma donor center, which has exploited Tucson’s homeless and poor population, Trigg, himself a spinal cord patient, has a “comprehensive plan” to “make Tucson an international center for human-organ transplant surgery and research” (663), and believes he could “harvest” (444) better and cheaper “biomaterials” from Mexico, where “recent unrest and civil strife had killed hundreds a week” (404).

Silko presents Tucson’s elite cold warriors as “closet” homosexuals, who are obsessed with racial purity and political secrecy and control. It seems that Silko

understands homosexuality as a logical conclusion of white males' fetishization of "pure blood" and hierarchy, and their misogynistic abhorrence of female bodies. Janet St. Clair contends that Silko uses Euro-American males' "[v]icious, manipulative homosexuality and injurious—even murderous—sexual perversions" as "relentless metaphors of the insane solipsism and phallogentric avarice" and "infantile self-gratification" that characterize the dominant US culture ("Death of Love" 141-42). St. Clair further claims that Silko's metaphor of white male sexuality "works precisely because it taps into the very stereotypes that have led to the continuing oppression and denigration of gay males in America" ("Cannibal Queers" 216). As St. Clair clearly suggests, Silko tends to give the impression that she completely rejects gay sexual politics, by identifying Tucson's paranoid cold warriors with homosexuals, who are characterized as "cold, conspiratorial, brutal, exploitive, aggressive sexual predators" (217).⁵

This impression, however, is rather misleading and overly simplistic. First of all, not all the homosexual men in *Almanac* are what St. Clair calls "cannibalistic homosexuals," who "serve as emblems of the destructive self-absorption that characterizes for Silko contemporary culture in the Americas" (220). And not all of them are white racists. Ferro, Lecha's son, is a gay Yaqui, who has homosexual relationships with Paulie, his assistant, and later with Jamey, an undercover Tucson policeman. Not all the white gay men are cold-blooded, conspiratorial sexual predators. Eric, Seese's only real "friend and ally" (59) in San Diego, is a white gay, who grew up in West Texas, rebelling against the Bible Belt bourgeois ethics (59). Though Eric ends his life with a tragic suicide, frustrated by the rejection of David, Monte's father, Silko creates him as a

more sympathetic and agreeable figure, who questions, rather than perversely exploits, the US dominant culture. We later meet “a gay rights activist ill with AIDS,” who has, with other eco-terrorists, killed himself blowing up Glen Canyon Dam (729). These homosexuals could be as paranoid and conspiratorial as the elite members of the Owls Club. But they are not “closet homosexuals” who are paranoid about their secret sexual drive, while perversely fetishizing pure Euro-American masculinity. Ferro is extremely paranoid, not about the secrecy of his sexual identity, but about Jamey’s undercover cop friends, who could spy on his drug business.

Judge Arne best represents Tucson’s paranoid homosexuals and their perverse politics of racial purity and Cold War national security. Being “himself a blue blood from a Mississippi timber dynasty,” Judge Arne ridicules the “hilarious pretensions” of Tucson’s “aristocracy,” who are “deeply concerned about ‘good breeding,’” while in reality they were all “spawned by the whisky bootleggers and whoremasters who had fattened off the five thousand US troops who had chased Geronimo and fifty Apaches for ten years” (645). As a genuine “blue blood,” who sincerely believes that his exploitive homosexuality is part of the aristocratic privileges he was born with, Judge Arne reveals his own philosophy of sexual identity.

The judge did not consider himself homosexual; he was an epicurean who delighted in the delicacies of both sexes. In classical times it had not been necessary to talk about contact between men. Contact was action, and action was behavior. Behavior was not identity. A gentleman had a myriad of choices open

to him at appropriate places and times. The judge had always been certain of his sexual identity.... (645)

Though “certain of his sexual identity,” the Judge defines sexual identity as essentially and categorically different and independent from sexual “contact,” “action,” and “behavior.” For him, sexual identity is not performative: even if he performs homosexual contacts or actions, or even if it becomes his pattern of sexual behavior, or habit, he could still remain heterosexual. His exploitive homosexuality makes him think himself as “heterosexual”: “Around the young police chief, Judge Arne always felt very heterosexual” (646).

Although Judge Arne believes he has an inherited and exclusive political right to be a sexual “epicurean,” he does not want it known outside of the “closet club.” His sexuality is, then, a paranoid sexuality, which dangerously depends on the absolute separation between his public heterosexual identity and secret homosexual activities, and its condition of existence is conspiratorial, for it could be secured only when the entire group of the Owls Club cooperates to keep it secret. Thus, when a gay pinup calendar attracts public attention, spreading wild rumors about the Tucson Police Department and Judge Arne, not only is the Department’s public image involved, but Judge Arne’s paranoid sexual identity is also seriously endangered. The Cop Cakes pinup calendar, published by Jamey’s “friends,” advertises that all the nude gay pinups are Tucson’s “actual law enforcement officers” (456). Though the Police Department could not notice that “Judge Arne’s ‘pinup’ for the month of August was no trick-photography shot,” Judge Arne immediately senses that there is a “security problem at the Owls Club” (460).

Judge Arne's paranoia about his sexuality symptomatically reflects Cold War security discourse and its paranoid logic of absolute separation and reductionism. Just like Judge Arne, who secures his sexual identity by denying his own sexual activities, the Tucson Police Department considers the Cop Cakes calendar as "not a simple act of blackmail," but "a subversive act" (462) by "homosexual artists," who conspired to "incite disrespect for the law and contempt for the police and court system" (460). The Department further claims that this "subversive act" could endanger not only Arizona's "law and order," but more seriously "the whole American way" (460). As such, the Tucson Police insist on representing and defending "the whole American way" against the "subversive acts" committed by their own officers, a logic attainable only when they believe in the absolute separation between the "American way" they are supposed to defend and their own secret "un-American" activities. If, as the Cop Cakes calendar scandal implies, the whole American way of life depends on an artificial separation between the US national imaginaries and actual "un-American" "contacts," "actions," or "behaviors," national security then turns out to be a question of securing this imaginary distinction and keeping its entire operation in secrecy.

The Cold War logic of security and secrecy behind Judge Arne's exploitive homosexuality operates likewise in geopolitical terms. He regards the "refugees," "thick as flies in barbed-wire camps all along the U.S border," who had escaped from "the chaos spreading Mexico," in the same way he sees poor white and brown homosexuals in Tucson (461). Both groups are potential threats to US national security; yet, at the same time, they are sacrificial victims of America's unpublicized and nefarious

“activities,” which, though never acknowledged, help maintain American “identity.” In a foursome golf meeting with Max Blue and the chief of police, Judge Arne meets the senator, who “had flown in from Washington with a top-secret briefing concerning internal American security as well as security along the international border with Mexico” (461). Having retired from “epicurean” adventures since being appointed to the federal bench, Judge Arne has “stay[ed] at home with his photography and basset-hound stud,” away from “all the rose-bud rumps of all the brown street boys” (461). Judge Arne’s bestial sexual perversions and his fear of contagion by racial others reflect the Cold War germophobia that had figured communism as “contamination, an invasion of the body politic that challenged the nation’s immune system and corrupted the hearts, minds, and bodies of healthy Americans” (Diemert 34). As Michelle Jarman accurately points out, *Almanac* dramatizes “how the fear of contagion evokes a fetishization of purity and tends to naturalize difference as absolute separation” (158). Judge Arne’s paranoid obsession with misogynistic and racial purity and difference is an extreme symptom of the Cold War mindset that “provides a moral tolerance for stories of murder, torture, disease, oppression, and suffering as something that happens to *them*, not *us*” (Jarman 158-59). Indeed, the US Cold War foreign policy can be predicated upon the same logic that enables Judge Arne to maintain his sexual “identity,” which is constructed, regardless of, or rather as a result of, his inglorious and confidential sexual practices. *Almanac of the Dead* fearlessly exposes how the US Cold War national imaginaries of democracy, anticommunism, and free capitalism are projected over the Third World as conspiracy, neocolonialism, and vampire capitalism.

While the Owls Club emblemizes the US Cold War paranoid meta-narrative that could be secured only through government-sponsored secrecy and conspiracy, Tucson's underworld characters like Zeta, Calabazas, Mosca, Roy, and Clinton propose counter-narratives, which destabilize the meta-narrative by mimicking, sensationalizing, and reproducing its paranoia about secrecy and fear of contamination. This unbridled reproduction of paranoid narrative leads to a situation where the Cold War will to power can no longer enforce narrative, as well as psychological and political, containment. Recognizing an insidious and colossal white conspiracy in U.S Cold War history, each of Tucson's dissidents in turn offers flagrant interpretations and conspiracy theories.

From the assassination of Martin Luther King to the AIDS virus, Clinton, a black Indian who has "pure contempt for any authority but his own" (404), reads recent US Cold War history as a history of white conspiracy.

Clinton's paranoia knows no boundaries. He has cousins and stepbrothers in the army, and the word gets around among the brothers and the sisters. The army has to have lab technicians; there are security guards; there must be cleaning crews. The word leaks out. ... Clinton says the AIDS virus was developed in a biowarfare laboratory by the US government and was stolen by military personnel sympathetic to white supremacists in South Africa. ... Clinton says J. Edgar Hoover ordered the assassination of Martin Luther King. Right there Hoover's wings got clipped. The old faggot was crazy. Assassination wasn't "gradual," and assassination had a way of creating folk myths and heroes. A secret bipartisan congressional panel had hastily concluded only a cover-up could

save US cities from burning and the outbreak of a race war. Clinton said J. Edgar had first practiced assassination on John F. Kennedy because Hoover hated the Kennedys. (405)

As a Vietnam veteran, Clinton believes the Vietnam War was part of the white conspiracy that is intended to eliminate colored races and poor whites. “[S]ounding like a communist,” Clinton claims that “the entire war in Southeast Asia had been fabricated as a location and occasion for the slaughter of the strongest and most promising young men of black and brown and poor-white communities (407-08). For Clinton, the Vietnam War was not only part of the US military containment policy in the Third World after Korea; it was also part of the Cold War domestic social engineering that aims to deter any challenge against white hegemony and its Cold War reductionism: “Everyone had the same thought: black people all knew deep down the Vietnam War had been aimed at them to stop black riots in US cities. The war had destroyed some of their best young men. The war had destroyed two generations of hopefulness and cultural pride. A dangerous generation had emerged from the Korean War” (408). Suspecting the government’s secret hands behind the propagation of drugs in black communities, Clinton similarly claims that “only dope stopped young black men from burning white America to the ground” and “drugs were intended to keep them weak, to keep them from rising up—to demand justice” (426).

Diagnosing the white conspiracy does not end with spawning boundless conspiracy “theories,” but further leads to planning actual counter-conspiracies. Rambo Roy and Clinton, while pretending to work for Trigg’s plasma donor center, secretly

recruit veterans and homeless people in Tucson, who are “incensed” and “outraged, at the government” (399), for their own Army of the Homeless. Preparing and waiting for a future war against the government, “until the riots across the United States [are] kick[ing] up again,” they share “ideas” about “strategies and planning,” which are like “popcorn kernels popping inside [their] brain” (410). Clinton premeditates “a call to war” message in his future radio broadcast: “Homeless US citizens would occupy vacant dwellings and government land” (410). Roy imagines the day when he “would lead his ragged army against the government” and the “fat cats gluttoned with blood,” “all the giant corporations” who “had made money off the Vietnam War” (393). Though most of their conspiracies remain unfulfilled, Roy and Clinton, toward the end of the novel, kill the “vampire capitalist” who has coldly exploited Third World bodies like themselves. Tucson police conclude that “Trigg had been killed by two homeless men, a black and a white man who had both worked for Trigg as night watchmen” (751).

Zeta is the most intensely militant among the Yaqui Indian family: believing “[a]ll the laws of the illicit governments” must be “blasted away,” she spends “[e]very waking hour” “scheming and planning to break as many their laws as she could” (133). For her cause, Zeta does not hesitate to buy illicit weapons from dangerous enemies, or to work with crazed loners and radical terrorists. She is “the only Mexican or Indian who would deal with Greenlee,” “a true believer in the white race” who has some friends “now located in ‘high places’ in the US government,” which Zeta suspects as CIA (179). She also works with Awa Gee, a Korean computer hacker, to aid eco-terrorists “in their efforts to hit interstate power lines, dams and power plants all at once” (690). Fascinated

with “the purity of destruction” and “the perfection of complete disorder and disintegration” (683), Awa Gee busies himself creating secret “computer viruses and time bombs” (680) and perfecting his “solar war machine” (684), all targeted at “the giants of the world” (683). Although he does not need “the company of other human beings,” Awa Gee believes he is working for “the poor and the dispossessed” with “his own thoughts and the numbers” (683). After killing Greenlee with a .44 magnum in his secret underground vault, Zeta walks away with “the disks and readouts Awa Gee need[s] to complete his work” (705).

Zeta’s secret plans and conspiracies are for the war that has a longer history and deeper cultural ramifications than the current US Cold War and its world conspiracy. Zeta’s is the war that “had been declared the first day the Spaniards set foot on Native American soil,” and “had been going on ever since: the war was for the continents called the Americas” (133). Similarly, Calabazas, Zeta’s longtime friend and business partner, makes it clear that with his border-crossing smuggling business, he has been fighting “the war for the land” that “had never ended” (178). For Calabazas, who now has mysterious visitors with Samsonite suitcases from El Salvador looking for him (193), the current Second Cold War is merely the most recent stage of the same ancient war of the native people for their ancestral land. Calabazas has lived long enough to witness the US Cold War from the beginning to the impending close: he remembers “[t]he whole world had gone crazy after Truman dropped the atomic bombs” and “[w]hite people were scared because they didn’t know where to go or what to use up and pollute next” (628); just like Clinton, he believes that the Vietnam War was the government’s strategic

decision to send “young black and brown men” away and “stop the riots in US cities” (630). Now, probably in the late 80s, Calabazas finds that the government is no longer the exclusive author of conspiracy: everyone is busy “planning and plotting”; “the riots and the looting” have returned “in a dozen US cities”; but “this time the rioters did not loot or set fires in black neighborhoods. They set fire to Hollywood instead, and hundreds and hundreds of both black and white youths had blocked fire fighters and fought police on Sunset Boulevard” (630). In the current second coming of the age of conspiracy, Calabazas recognizes that conspiracy and conspiratorial thinking, once monopolized by the government and whites during the 60s, are now spreading across different races and even different nationalities. In this sudden explosion and propagation of conspiratorial mentality and politics, Calabazas senses that “Yoeme’s great war for the land” is fast spreading across the Americas and “in a few years there would be no safe perch for anyone” (631). “Rumors and conflicting reports” he hears “from village couriers, and from Salvadorian and Guatemalan refugees” do not simply confirm that “Mexico [is] chaos” (631), but they ultimately undermine the US Cold War global vision, its paranoid narrative structured like a seamless conspiracy.

Subsuming Cold War history under the ancient history of Native American war for the land entails spiritualizing the Cold War narrative paradigm of conspiracy within the Native American storytelling tradition. Zeta’s secret plans and conspiracies against the “illicit governments” in the Americas (133) are thoroughly political as much as they are spiritual. Yoeme’s old war continues through Zeta, who had learned Yoeme’s spiritual power to talk to snakes. The ability to communicate with snakes would help

Zeta, as it did Yoeme, to have “her own picture of things,” a vision or a perspective not allowed to white “churchgoers” (130). Snakes are spiritual messengers of people’s untold stories and secrets, Yoeme tells young Zeta and Lecha.

Snakes crawled under the ground. They heard the voices of the dead: actual conversations, and lone voices calling out to loved ones still living. Snakes heard the confessions of murderers and arsonists after innocent people had been accused. Why did Catholic priests always kill snakes? ... Snakes moved through the tall weeds, and under the edges of rocks and up through the branches of trees. They saw and heard a good deal that way: where husbands crept away, where wives embraced lovers. Snakes saw what illicit couples did, in turkey pens after dark, in the arroyo by the trash pile, all the sexual excesses the two girls had been able to imagine, but were not allowed to hear. Yoeme had the girls begging.

(130-31)

Yoeme also gave to Zeta “the smallest bundle of loose notebook pages and scrapes of paper with drawings of snakes,” which is “the key to understanding all the rest of the old almanac” Lecha received from Yoeme (134). In Zeta’s “the Snakes’ Notebook,” Silko inserts the story of the giant serpent in the Laguna foundational myth and the prophecy of the “spirit snake” about “a story” that “will arrive with a stranger or perhaps with the parrot reader” from the south (135-36).

As such, Silko takes Cold War conspiracy narrative and fuses it with Native spirituality. But it is Clinton who most dramatically epitomizes this fusion of conspiracy and spirituality. According to Clinton’s “latest theory,” “the little jungle people” in

Vietnam “weren’t just good fighters”; they “used all kinds of poisons and spells and prayers to spirits to attack the GIs in Vietnam” (411). Though admitting his theory sounds rather “superstitious,” Clinton still believes that “the spirits had tipped the scale in the Vietnamese’s favor” (411). By characterizing the Vietnamese not as atheistic communists but as voodoo spiritualists, Clinton challenges the US Cold War global vision and its domestic ideological discourse, which could indiscriminately accuse any dissenting voice, like Clinton’s, of being “red, commie red” (412). Being an African-Native American, whose family “had been direct descendents of wealthy, slave-owing Cherokee Indians” (415), Clinton has found out that “there had been an older and deeper connection between Africa and the Americas, in the realm of the spirits” (416). Though “Americanized” (424) and “short-tempered” (423), the spirits of Africa, the first African slaves discovered, had located themselves in the new continent and joined the spirits of the Americas, just as “Damballah, great serpent of the sky and keeper of all spiritual knowledge, joins the giant plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl” (429). Clinton is aware of the Cold War historical context that might favor the kind of spiritual politics he has been preparing for the future war between the US government and the Army of the Homeless, or as he prefers to call it, “the Army of Justice” (424). After the atomic bomb, Clinton theorizes, more and more anxiety-stricken white people began to search for alternative spiritualities besides the Christian God.

Clinton knew his life, body and soul, belonged to the world of the spirits. When Clinton had looked around, he saw people were all terrified, all fearful of death.

Poor people were just as scared as rich people. Clinton had noticed that each time

he had traveled. Clinton had read somewhere that the number of baptized Christians had been steadily falling in America since the Second World War. Clinton wondered if this had been the effect of the atomic bomb—to drive people away from churches; people blamed God so they did not have to listen to him anymore. Clinton had done the same; he had let go of one God when another had protected him in battle. (424)

After witnessing in Vietnam that “[m]ilitary solutions were no solutions at all” (415), Clinton envisions his war as a spiritual war where the slave “accumulates power in the realm of the Master’s dreams,” and then induces the white Master to defeat himself by “inhabit[ing] the Master’s idle thoughts during his waking hours” until his paranoid “obsession enslaves him” (428). Instead of attempting to destroy the Master’s material wealth directly, the slave, Clinton believes, should work on the Master’s dream and unconscious, for his economic wealth originates from the greed that “arises out of terror of death” (428). Since the Master’s “terror of death,” contained deep in the unconscious but sporadically revealed in nightmares and daydreams, ushers in his greed and wealth, Clinton implies, the slave’s spiritual engagement in the “realm of the Master’s dreams” could effect a true and more fundamental change. Clinton’s spiritualism is, therefore, a clever political tactic designed to attack the US Cold War vision, not its reductionist, universalizing logic or imperialistic ideology, but its dark psyche of paranoia, terror, and anxiety.

Clinton’s spiritualized conspiracy openly and unflinchingly revels in, rather than perversely exploits, the paranoid imagination and apocalyptic fantasy that dramatize

most white Cold War paranoid narratives. His complicated stories of African and Native American spiritualities, prophecies, and political conspiracies read close to Yoeme's snake stories to the young Lecha and Zeta, which are menacing but at the same time so oddly entertaining that they begged for more (130-31). These stories are often deadly serious and solemn, but at the same time, they could be no more than casual jokes and amusing wisecracks. Most often, however, you cannot tell whether they are completely serious or not, like the Geronimo stories told on a number of different occasions throughout the *Almanac*. Calabazas remembers one Geronimo story told by the "old-timers," who claimed the "real" Geronimo was not caught because he could hide in the Yaqui sanctuaries and strongholds in the rugged mountains of Sonora (223).

High in the mountains, the old ones claimed they were that much closer to the clouds and the winds. They claimed people of the mountain peaks got special attention from the planets and moon. Calabazas had looked at each face trying to determine in an instant if this was a joke or not. Because if it was a joke and he appeared to take it seriously, they would have him. And if it wasn't a joke, and he laughed, they would have him too. But when Calabazas realized the old ones were serious about this Geronimo story, he had given in. (224)

Unlike, for instance, Judge Arne's paranoid narratives that anxiously but vainly aspire to narrative closure and totalistic rationality, Native American conspiracy narratives, following the rich storytelling tradition, thrive on "the world of the different" (203), welcoming performative differences and varieties, freely exploring between the ancestral-spiritual world and the present-historical world. Calabazas believes that Native

American “[s]urvival depend[s] on differences”: “Those who can’t learn to appreciate the world’s differences won’t make it. They’ll die” (202-03). Just as Geronimo could escape because of white people’s blindness to “the world of the different,” Calabazas believes that he can continue his illicit border-crossing family enterprises, without being caught by the authorities, because they “would never touch him unless they go inside” (220). They are “outsiders” (220), who fail to recognize small, but critically important differences and varieties in the Sonoran desert. Being “outsiders” of the borders and “the world of the different,” they only see meaningless repetitions and similarities. Like the Geronimo stories that have been retold and reinvented with difference in each storytelling performance, and could be jokes and not jokes at the same time, Native American conspiracy narratives in the *Almanac* seem more concerned with dramatizing, almost flippantly and playfully, the paranoid imagination of Cold War apocalypse, than with its immediate realism and menacing political representations.

In an interview with Niemann, Silko rather mischievously admits that *Almanac* is “kind of a dangerous book,” which “you shouldn’t give to somebody who’s depressed” (110). As she elaborates further, however, *Almanac*’s extremely graphic and harrowing storytelling follows “the way the Pueblos would use the ogre Katchina to scare the bad kids. It’s like, read this book and be horrified, and then don’t let it be this scenario” (111). By blending Cold War conspiracy narrative with Native American spiritual storytelling, Silko creates a unique genre of sensational entertainment that scares the reader, but never stops entertaining. More than anyone else, Sterling understands that people tend to be unusually fascinated with sensational stories of “high intrigue” (94).

Being a victim of the Laguna entertainment culture of village gossip, Sterling does not believe that “anything on television [could] match Laguna gossip for scandal and graphic details” (94). But Lecha has a different idea, when she “ha[s] a bright future on the daytime television talk show circuit” (147) as an Indian psychic who demonstrates her ability to locate the dead: murder victims, suicides, and kidnapped children.

Television audiences do not want Lecha to talk about the cases that do not end in death: “TV viewers were mainly interested in death” (162), or in “all the bizarre and freakish ways one might be injured or fall ill, all the terrifying, hideous ways a psychopath might torture and kill his victims, all the possible and apparently innocent actions that lead up to the disappearance and loss of a small child” (161). But sensational entertainment in the Laguna gossip culture and daytime television talk show circuit does not remain pure and innocent; it suddenly becomes fatally relevant to the nightmarish Cold War political realities and apocalypses. In her last appearance on daytime TV, in front of a studio audience, which has been patiently waiting for “[a]t least one thrill,” “one hair-raiser or spine-tingler” (163) from her, Lecha finally reveals what she sees in her vision: In the floating gardens of Xochimilco, she sees “two human heads, their blue eyes open wide, staring at the sky” inside “a bright red and yellow woven-plastic bag floating in the dark green water,” and announces that they are “the US ambassador to Mexico, and his chief aide” (164). Lecha’s vision is soon confirmed by a news break next morning: “The U.S ambassador to Mexico and his chief aide had been caught in an ambush by Indian guerillas outside Mexico City” (164).

In Mosca, Calabazas's young Yaqui assistant, we encounter a character that best and most inclusively represents the main narrative elements Silko has blended together in *Almanac*: Cold War conspiracy, Native American spirituality, and sensational popular entertainment. Being himself a sorcerer with limited powers (602), Mosca believes that he has the ability to "detect wizards or sorcerers, and assassins and spies," though "only as he [is] driving past them" (601), and he has recognized real "witches" living in Tucson (207-09). According to Mosca's theory, those "sorcerers" or "weirdos," "like antelope or coyotes, [do] not fear detection from moving vehicles" and they tend to "hit the streets at the same time," because they are "on the same brain wavelengths as lizards and migrating birds and [possess] the mysterious ability to converge simultaneously on the same location" (601-02).

For Mosca, Cold War conspiratorial imagination and Native American spirituality are no longer distinguishable, as both wizards/sorcerers and assassins/spies are "weirdos" sharing "the same brain wavelengths." More and more "ideas and theories" are coming into his head each day, "like gifts from God" (609). After suddenly beginning to hear "the cry of a spirit voice that had settled in his neck, near the base of his right shoulder" (606), Mosca feels "a great sadness he could not identify," "a burden, not his alone—ancient losses, perhaps to war and famine long ago" (607). But the "cry of a spirit voice" he hears is a warning of future struggles and losses as much as it is a voice from the past. Through Mosca's spiritualized conspiracy thinking, Silko imagines a prophetic vision about the impending Indian war, which could be as distressing and calamitous as any previous chapter of "the war that never ended," and yet, still could be

better prepared for, if the indigenous people, like Mosca's "weirdos," conspire to be "on the same brain wavelengths as lizards and migrating birds" which "[possess] the mysterious ability to converge simultaneously on the same location" (601-02). Mosca believes that his conspiracy of spirituality is working in mysterious conjunction with the natural forces that had helped, and probably will help again, the tribal people to survive.

All the notions, the suspicions, the schemes, the reveries, the theories, and the hunches belonged to him. They were locked up inside compartments of flesh and bone deep in Mosca's body. Mosca could feel what he knew: the surge of a great flood, the muddy, churning water of what, he couldn't yet say. Mosca's eyes were shining. Tribal people in South America had navigated the most treacherous rivers and had traveled icy mountain paths with the aid of Mama Coca. (602)

But the people around Mosca regard him as a "joke": Calabazas, his Catholic wife Liria, and Root are all "quick to laugh and make jokes whenever Mosca [tries] to discuss" all the "ideas and theories that filled Mosca's head more and more each day, like gifts from God" (609). Indeed, Mosca has developed all sorts of conspiracy theories ranging from rich people's diets to the Pope's involvement in a world conspiracy: Mosca claims that "[t]he rich [diet] 'frantically lest one day they be killed for their fat by the starving people (608); he thinks 'the pope was part of the Mafia,' which consists 'a world conspiracy' with 'the Devil and the Church' (623-24). Although sincerely believing in his theories, Mosca does not hesitate to admit that he has "always enjoyed imaginary plots" and "fantasies," especially those scenarios in which he appears as a "traitor," who relishes the "pain" Calabazas and others "would feel at the moment his treachery [is]

revealed to them” (611). Like Lecha’s daytime television stint as an Indian psychic, Mosca’s spiritual conspiracy narratives (the “ideas and theories,” which are like “gifts from God”) could serve as a sensational entertainment, as Mosca enjoys the “imaginary plots” and “fantasies” that he himself has created. Mosca does not remain satisfied with creating extravagant and far-out conspiracy theories, which are mostly targeted at white enemies, from white mass-murderers (212) to the pope; he goes further to fantasize about himself playing a conspirator or a double agent in his sensational “plots” of conspiracy, betrayal, and dramatic exposé. Mosca not only authors conspiracy narratives, but he also wants to be a protagonist in his conspiracy dramas.

In juxtaposing Tucson’s white Cold War conspiracy narratives with Native American spiritual conspiracy narratives, Silko destabilizes the distinction between real conspiratorial politics and bogus conspiracy theories, the distinction Jeffrey M. Bale believes to be viable and necessary for social scientists who want to treat in a scholarly fashion “the activities of actual clandestine and covert political groups, which are a common feature of modern politics,” without being accused of dallying with “‘conspiracy theories’ in the strict sense of the term, which are essentially elaborate fables” (48). Although a “belief in conspiracy theories helps people to make sense of a confusing, inhospitable reality” by way of “reductionism and oversimplification,” and to “rationalize their present difficulties and partially assuage their feelings of powerlessness” (51), conspiracy theories are, Bale argues following Richard Hofstadter, “the fantastic product of a paranoid mindset” (50). For those who believe in conspiracy theories, everything is the direct result of secret, but conscious plotting by a “monolithic

and unerring” “conspiratorial center” with “some sinister design” (51-53). Ironically, Bale’s characterization of conspiracy theories can be easily applied to the US government’s “genuine conspiratorial politics” in the Cold War era, which, based on a reductionist ideological paradigm over global conflict, portrays the Soviet Union as the “single conspiratorial center” and facilitates often “clandestine and covert” interventions in the Third World to fend off the Soviets’ “sinister design.” Silko has depicted Tucson’s elite group of cold warriors as paranoid subjects who are constantly plotting conspiratorial political schemes across the US-Mexican border, and justifying them by blaming the world communist conspiracy of the Soviet Union and its local proxies. Instead of being the product of the “feelings of powerlessness” or crackpot worldviews fantasized by certain disenfranchised people, Tucson cold warriors’ conspiracy theories certainly empower them to maintain their domestic and international hegemonic power and privilege.

The fact that conspiratorial imagination could be a means of political empowerment, rather than a symptom of powerlessness and victimization, is more evident in Tucson’s Yaqui characters and Veteran duo. Although their counter-conspiracy narratives are often as paranoid and fantastic as the white elite’s, Silko has impregnated them with Native American spirituality, so indomitably vital and vehement that a claustrophobic sense of paranoia and persecution gives way to a carnivalesque exhilaration of sensational entertainment, which simultaneously scares and entertains in a similar way that “the Pueblos would use the ogre Katchina to scare the bad kids” (Niemann 111). Doria Donnelly perceptively points out that Silko prefers invoking

“revolutionary consciousness” to seeking “narrative resolution,” because she believes “justice is most realized in the act of storytelling” (253). *Almanac* is, therefore, “best described as a revolutionary entertainment,” which “pleasures the reader by revealing a pattern in the fragments collected by marginal people and implicit in seemingly unconnected events” (253). By spiritualizing the Cold War conspiracy narrative with the Native American storytelling tradition, Silko has produced a “revolutionary entertainment,” one which refuses to read Native American history in terms of victimhood, and promises Native Americans “positive agency in the present and future” (Fischer-Hornung 217). As a “revolutionary entertainment,” *Almanac* can be also described as a post-paranoid, or post-Cold War, conspiracy fiction, where the Cold War conspiracy imagination often “paralyzed” by white elitist “paranoia” or populist “feelings of victimization, powerlessness, and pessimism” has been converted or transubstantiated into what Anita M. Waters might call as an “ethnological” imagination that may “foster political mobilization” and historical “agency” in ordinary people’s conspiratorial social understanding and participation (Waters 113, 123). In *Almanac*, Silko has completely abandoned *Ceremony*’s narrative strategy of containment, and has decided to unbridle the paranoid energy of the Cold War conspiracy imagination, channeling it into a cosmic narrative explosion of post-Cold War revolutionary fantasies and prophecies of the indigenous people in America.

4. The Politics of Spiritual Conspiracy in the Third World

Almanac of the Dead dramatizes the geographical intersecting and crisscrossing of the US Cold War will-to-power and indigenous spirituality across the U.S -Mexican border: while the North American imperial vision is forcibly projected toward the South, a revolutionary spiritual movement of the indigenous people in the South marches northward to the U.S border and beyond. This continental clash is also an ideological and political struggle between the Cold War superpowers and their “others.” *Almanac* subverts the Cold War geopolitical paradigm, which reduces Third World countries to a homogeneous, one-dimensional, ahistorical space of limited political and cultural subjectivity, “a section of cartographic space in which each superpower’s ‘projected power’ seeks spatially to contain that of the other” (Dalby 423). Although, as Simon Dalby points out, the US in the Second Cold War furthers its ideological project to construct the Soviet Union as an evil “Other” (415), the Third World remains, for the most part, blank, unrecognized, and repressed in the US Cold War cartographical imagination. For Silko, who believes that the US has “always had the Third World right here” (Niemann 111), the Third World represents the true “others” of the global zero sum game: Native Americans across the continent, as well as the dispossessed peoples of Central and South American countries. In *Almanac*, Silko explores the ways in which these Third World “others”—those who, being repressed in the US Cold War consciousness and historical memory, appear in its nightmares and paranoid narratives—could regain subjectivity and agency.

Third World subjects in the novel are well aware that Cold War paradigms, whether imposed by the US or the communist block, could be used as an all-around alibi for neocolonial ambitions and domestic political repressions. In US Cold War neocolonialism, Manifest Destiny is redefined so that “it reflects the notion of containment symbolized by the Iron Curtain or the Berlin Wall” (Archuleta 128). Now that “Manifest Destiny may lack its old grandeur of theft and blood,” Silko claims in an essay, “The Border Patrol State,” “‘lock the door’ is what it means [today], with racism a trump card to be played again and again” (*Yellow Woman* 121). In *Almanac*, Manifest Destiny, redefined as an ethnocentric vision of national unity and territorial integrity, seeks to implement its old tenets of American exceptionalism and expansionism through paranoid anticommunist campaigns and conspiratorial politics aimed at Third World subjects in and outside of the national border.

The conflict between Cold War political establishment and indigenous resistance in Tucson finds a more naked self-image in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico. The governing elite of Tuxtla are extremely paranoid about “communist” insurgents who they suspect have been infiltrating into the Mexican government and national territory from the southern border. The police chief believes the “southern border was particularly vulnerable to secret agents and rabble-rousers, sewage that had seeped out of Guatemala to pollute “the pure springs of Mexican democracy” (272). Mimicking the US ideology of Manifest Destiny redefined as Cold War neocolonialism, Tuxtla’s cold warriors obsessively pursue racial and territorial containment as essential parts of anticommunism. General J., who, besides his official military duties, is doing security work for

Menardo's private insurance company, associates "Marxist conspirators" in the Mexican government with the revolutionary movement of indigenous people, which he believes threatens Mexico's territorial and racial integrity.

He himself had seen Marxists in the highest levels of the Mexican government, Marxists who routinely castrated the budget requests from military commanders such as himself. Marxist conspirators in government refused the general the manpower and the modern equipment necessary to protect the southern border while Cuba was supplying Indian bandits and criminals sniper rifles with infrared scopes. ... The same subversive elements in the government sent him raw recruits—not soldiers—scrawny Indians who wore army-issue boots dangling by laces around their necks. (293)

General J. and the police chief are convinced that "communist agents [are] everywhere spreading their cancer of communism among ignorant, lazy Indians and half-breeds who would like nothing better than to see communism feed them while they [idle] away the day" (489).

Tuxtla's race-conscious Cold War environments pose a unique challenge to Menardo, a middle-class "half-breed" who has "moved up in the world" with the financial success of his company, Universal Insurance, which offers "special policies that [insure] against all losses, no matter the cause, including the acts of God, mutinies, war, and revolution," to the entire region of Chiapas (260-61). As a mixed-blood Indian, Menardo instinctively understands that to be a hardcore cold warrior is probably the only way open for him to rise up to the ruling class and to completely shed his Indianness, a

cause of political suspicion as well as racial prejudice in Tuxtla. Menardo seeks to turn Chiapas's Cold War geopolitical condition to his advantage: The Chiapas State "had [the] misfortune of being too close to the border, which leaked rabble-rousers and thieves like a sewage pipe," and his Universal Insurance "had been the first insurance company to employ a private security force to protect clients from political unrest" (261). Menardo's rise to Tuxtla's Cold War elite has allowed him to get married to Iliana, whose family is one of the oldest in Tuxtla Gutiérrez and whose "great-great-grandfather on her mother's side had descended from the conquistador De Oñate" (269), and soon after Iliana's untimely death, to Alegría, a young Venezuelan architect who has designed Iliana's luxurious mansion.

Menardo's precipitous and bizarre downfall results from the same Cold War conflict that helped his rise. As the US-backed secret war with indigenous insurgents is getting more and more intensified and violent, the Tuxtla ruling class's nerves become greatly frayed. Their Cold War paranoia, however, is far more complex and multifaceted than the Tucson elite's. Not only threatened by the Indian "Bolsheviks" from the southern border (261), they are also paranoid about their secret connections with the US. Each member of El Grupo Gun Club maintains unpublicized political, military, or economic ties in North America: Menardo acquires military equipment from Greenlee (265), buys a bulletproof vest from Sonny Blue for his personal security (317), and "[keeps] safety deposit boxes full of gold and US cash in Tucson" (505); General J. has certain allegedly CIA-sponsored covert missions in Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica (299, 501); the police chief gets surveillance "video cameras from mysterious US

agents” (501); the governor and the former ambassador put their money in “bank accounts and real estate in Arizona and southern California” (331). Menardo is told by Greenlee not to worry about the rumors around Alegría’s leftist political activities when she was studying in Spain, because, Greenlee insists, “Mr. B. and the others at the “Company” [are] looking out for all of them” (331). As such, for the Tuxtla ruling class, political and economic connection with the US is the basis of their security and power. But the US connection is also the source of paranoia and suspicion: “Conducting business with the US government or its citizens had always aroused some nervousness and wariness even between friends and partners” (498). As the traffic with the US increases, Alegría anxiously observes, so does paranoid anxiety: “The whole town had begun to suspect each other. Menardo had had visitors from the United States. The ambassador had also [had] visitors from the United States. The police chief not only had had visitors, he had got himself video cameras and equipment with promises of more to follow” (505).

Tuxtla’s Cold War patriarchs have absolute belief in US military technology and science, represented by U.S.-provided guns, airplanes, surveillance cameras, and other military equipment. But it is Menardo who goes to extremes: he almost deifies the bulletproof vest Sonny Blue sold to him as something like a voodoo charm that has divine and spiritual, as well as physical, power of protection. After the mysterious, ill-boding nightmares and bad dreams that visit him more and more frequently, Menardo becomes unable to fall asleep without wearing the vest and reading the reassuring technical information and instructions in the brochure (473). Contrary to Menardo’s

belief, however, his Indian chauffeur Tacho, who has “special abilities to interpret dreams” (483), “trace[s] Menardo’s decline to the visit by the *norteamericano* who had given the boss the bulletproof vest” (472). Although the vest could better protect him from the communist “terrorists” (482), it certainly fails to contain Menardo’s Cold War paranoia. Being a “mestizos,” who “savored the luscious fruit of a skinny white woman” (472), Menardo fears that General J. could find out about the bulletproof vest he has acquired from “the *norteamericano* without General J.’s permission” and that “the general would have him murdered” (473). Menardo’s paranoid belief in the vest, a symbol of U.S military technology and science, mimics what Jane Caputi calls “nuclear fundamentalism” in the US Cold War discourses that mythicize/divinize nuclear technology” (424). Although nuclear technology, with its scientific claim of absolute truth and unassailability, supposedly sanctions a God-given right of the US Cold War Manifest Destiny (Tillett 167), it has also generated an unprecedented degree of national anxiety and paranoia. Likewise, Menardo’s bulletproof vest, though signifying unfaltering US political protection and technological insurance for security, is also a cause for Cold War paranoia, ultimately bringing about Menardo’s death. Desperate to shake off General J.’s and others’ suspicions and eager to “witness the superiority of man-made fibers that stopped bullets and steel and cheated death” (500), Menardo stages a theatrical demonstration in front of the powerful gun club members, where he orders Tacho to shoot at his chest. With Menardo’s tragic death, allegedly caused by “[m]icroscopic imperfections in the fabric’s quilting” (509), Silko suggests that the U.S Cold War will-to-power is essentially defective and destructive to Third World subjects.

Menardo's death shows that the US imperial desire, however internalized and deified by Third World cold warriors, remains the Other's desire, leaving the Third World self trapped in a paranoid cycle of perpetual self-policing and self-alienation.

In Tuxtla, Cold War paranoia is not simply a symptom of social malaise in the body politic. It is in itself a means by which the US imperial will is functioning. As part of its conspiratorial politics, the US seeks to engineer Cold War anxiety and paranoia among Third World subjects in such a way that they could better facilitate its neocolonial intentions. The secrecy around the US government fuels rumors, gossip, and speculations, and these paranoid narratives displace Tuxtla's public communication and democratic deliberation. Though often victimized by the political culture of mutual suspicion and malicious gossip, Tuxtla's ruling elite are ultimate beneficiaries of this situation, since their political power is based upon their secret connections with the US. Favoring secrecy and information control, they hold a strong antipathy toward mass communication media such as television and newspapers that could expose secrecy and rein in misinformation. One night, Menardo sees the human "larvae" or "mobs of angry brown people swarming like bees from horizon to horizon" in his TV screen, and realizes that the days of "long-haired, filthy communists" have returned (481). Blaming television for helping instigate political disturbances, Menardo insists on secrecy.

Menardo blamed television. Monkey see, monkey do. There was nothing wrong with television for entertainment, but the broadcasting of mobs and riots was precisely what the terrorists had wanted. All anyone had to do was look around. At the market, rival food vendors had rigged tiny Korean televisions with wires

to car batteries to lure customers, who ate friend dough or tripe while their eyes never left the TV screen. Television showed everything—it showed too much. ... Television spoiled secrecy. What common people did not see, they did not covet. (482-83)

What Menardo fears most is television's politically sensational entertainment, its profit-motivated blending of potentially revolutionary news broadcasting with the elements of entertainment. Menardo condemns "television commercials" that are "designed to seduce and bewitch viewers who would never get any closer to the objects of desire than the television screen," for those commercials give the "ignorant rabble" and "looters" false dreams that they too can have the objects on the screen (483). Television also forces independent business owners like Menardo to "face competition from giant insurance companies with multinational holdings" (483). Menardo's nightmarish fear about television that "lure[s] customers" with "the broadcasting of mobs and riots" (482) is realized in a grotesquely twisted way when Bartolomeo, a Cuban Marxist, has made and spread all around Tuxtla the sensational handbills ("This is How Capitalists Die") out of "the front page of the newspaper with the photograph of Menardo's body inside a dark circle of his own blood" (509-10). Menardo's death and its aftermath suggest that his attempt to keep entertainment and revolutionary politics safely detached and separated has failed.

The wives of the Tuxtla elite understand that entertainment and conspiratorial politics could go especially well together. Alegría, Menardo's new wife, finds that for the country club wives, gossip and rumors provide "the only entertainment": She is

“aware of the former ambassador’s wife and the governor’s wife whispering behind their hands as they [watch] her” whenever she misses a regular meeting (506). The wife of the former Mexican ambassador to the US, who is currently “working for the American company,” “attempt[s] to construct possible links and plots” about Iliana’s huge new mansion (274). Bitterly resenting Iliana’s luxurious house project, “[t]he judge’s wife spent three days making discreet midmorning calls on all the members of the club,” discussing the rumor about Menardo’s secret love affair with Alegría (287). After the rumor turns out to be real, “Iliana let the club members make strategic phone calls” to destroy Alegría’s professional career (296). Unlike the Laguna entertainment culture of gossip, which is part of the ancient tribal storytelling tradition and spirituality, Tuxtla’s gossip is relentlessly political and conspiratorial. The wives of Tuxtla’s Cold War elite are “encouraged to report gossip and incidents out of the ordinary so they would be used to their husbands not simply as wives and the mothers of their sons, but as patriots” (271). For them, therefore, gossip is not merely a harmless housewifely pastime, but a patriotic entertainment, which could help consolidate their husbands’ political power, thereby maintaining Tuxtla within the US Cold War geopolitical framework.

Even if the wives of Tuxtla’s ruling class entertain the possibility of paranoid narratives to serve for Cold War domestic maintenance and self-policing, their “patriotic gossip,” as it turns out, has a very limited capability to contain Tuxtla’s Cold War anxiety and paranoia. Their politics of gossip, contrary to its patriotic intention, contributes to destabilizing Tuxtla’s political geography, which has increasingly begun to lose people’s confidence as more and more unpalatable and grave rumors and gossip

are circulating. Soon after Menardo's "freak accident" (509), members of Tuxtla's power elite "[begin] to suspect one another" (505) and "[a]ll the talk" in the country club "is about the gringos: US dollars and US equipment are for grabs. Menardo, the general, and the police chief—they all had visitors from the United States recently. The former ambassador's US-born wife watches their three wives suspiciously" (506). Now, "rumors" about US Cold War involvement are spreading like the "mobs of angry brown people swarming like bees from horizon to horizon" Menardo had watched on television (481), and these "rumors spread unrest like wind spread wildfire" (513) .

Rumors say United States troops will soon occupy Mexico to help protect US-owned factories in Northern Mexico as well as the rich Mexico City politicians on the CIA payroll since prep school. There are shortages of cornmeal and rioting spreads. Rumors say the richest families have already opened bank accounts and purchased homes "in the North," which is understood to be San Antonio, San Diego, Tucson, or Los Angeles. Rumors say the refugees fleeing from the South have greatly increased in number as civil wars ignite in Costa Rica and Honduras. (506-07)

Long hatched in conspiratorial geopolitical environments, paranoid narratives now strike back with a vengeance against the authorial centers of Cold War narratology. Alegría "imagine[s] a map of the world suspended in darkness until suddenly a tiny flame blazed up, followed by others, to form a burning necklace of revolution across two American continents" (507). Although Alegría plans to escape Tuxtla, believing Tucson to be a place safely removed from the continental revolution she is witnessing, *Almanac*

foretells that both places are soon to be consumed by the wildfire of paranoid narratives and overrun by the human “larvae” of Third World subjects. It is not Sonny Blue, Alegría’s secret lover in Tucson, but Calabazas’s wife, Sarita, and her sister Liria, with other “communist nuns and priests” (600) in Tucson, who will rescue Alegría on the US side of the Sonoran Desert.

Against the Cold War coalition between Tuxtla and Tucson, Silko positions a parallel army of Native Americans on both sides of the border. As the ultimate victims and witnesses of the old Manifest Destiny, Silko’s Native American characters in Tucson have challenged Cold War Manifest Destiny with spiritual conspiracies to retake the ancestral lands, rejecting white men’s “boundaries” and “borders,” which Calabazas describes as “imaginary lines” (216), existing, as Lecha claims, only “in the white man’s mind” (592). In order to successfully disrupt and dismantle the Cold War geopolitical continuum from Tucson to Tuxtla, Silko implies, a spiritual connection between the two symbolic locations must be recognized and rebuilt by the indigenous people, a connection that can be achieved by sharing the same stories and dreaming the same dreams. In the alternative map of Native American politico-spiritual cartography, Tuxtla is not merely a Cold War periphery, but a spiritual center, from whose direction a harbinger of the future Native American revolution might come to the North. Zeta’s “notebook of the snakes,” which is “the key to understanding all the rest of the old almanac” that Lecha keeps in her hands (134), includes a prophecy about “a story” from the south:

One day a story will arrive at your town. It will come from far away, from the southwest or southeast—people won't agree. The story may arrive with a stranger or perhaps with the parrot trader. But when you hear this story, you will know it is the signal for you and the others to prepare. (135-36)

Toward the end of the novel, the Mayan twin brothers, Tacho and El Feo, and Angelita La Escapía, an Amazonian guerilla warrior, lead a great mass of indigenous populations up to the U.S border, creating a revolutionary religious cult that believes in an old tribal story that the white men's world is soon to end and a new world will arrive with the retaking of all the stolen lands. For Tacho, who was "nicknamed Wacah" because he tamed colorful native parrots called "*wacahs* or macaws" (468), the impending war is, more than anything else, a spiritual war. Tacho works on Menardo's dreams, faithfully following the spirit voice of the macaw parrots he has been keeping "in a tree behind the old garage" (269).

Witnessing Tuxtla's growing political upheavals that have been driving its elite cold warriors into self-destructive paranoia and mutual mistrust, Tacho senses that a new revolution is at hand, as his macaw spirits seem to foretell. While working as Menardo's chauffeur, he is chosen by "two big blue macaws" as their "servant" (475-76). Tacho realizes that he and his twin brother El Feo have a serious mission for the people, like the "Twin Brothers" or the "parrot priests" in the old tribal myths, who "had answered the people's cry for help" from the "Destroyers, humans who were attracted to and excited by death and the sight of blood and suffering" (475). Like Tayo in *Ceremony*, Tacho believes that "the worldwide network of the Destroyers" has long "fed off energy

released by destruction” (336). In a theory comparable to Clinton’s theory of the worldwide spiritual migration, interfusion, and transformation among African and Native American gods, Tacho explains the five-hundred-year history of the Euro-American encounter as a spiritual coalition between European sorcerers and American sorcerers that has brought endless bloodshed and destruction to the American continent, forcing many indigenous people into an unwanted diaspora in their own homeland.

The Destroyers secretly prayed and waited for disaster or destruction. Secretly they were excited by the spectacle of death. The European invaders had brought their Jesus hanging bloody and dead from the cross.... The old parrot priests used to tell stories about a time of turmoil hundreds of years before the European came, in a time when communities had split into factions over sacrifices and the sight and smell of fresh blood. The people who went away had fled north, and behind them dynasties of sorcerers-sacrificers had gradually taken over the towns and cities of the South. In fact, it had been these sorcerers-sacrificers who had “called down” the alien invaders, sorcerer-cannibals from Europe, magically sent to hurry the destruction and slaughter already begun by the Destroyers’ secret clan. (475)

Tacho recognizes the working hands of the ancient Destroyers behind the recent “changes” he is witnessing “all around Tuxtla,” which include “the relentless stream of refugees from the wars in El Salvador and Guatemala” and the increasingly violent and indiscriminate border control by the Mexican government (476-77). Chosen as a contemporary incarnation of the mythic Twin Brothers, Tacho realizes he has sacred

obligations to make his people understand the present Cold War coalition between Tucson and Tuxtla correctly as an extended history of the spiritual coalition between European sorcerer-cannibals and American sorcerers-sacrificers, and to help prepare his people for a future continental upheaval. Named Wacah by his spirit macaws, Tacho “no longer [thinks] about anyone—not his parents or his twin, El Feo”— or anything except “what [is] going to happen next” that the spirit macaws would tell him about (476). More specifically, his mission is working “in the realms of dreams”: “The macaws said the battle would be won or lost in the realms of dreams, not with airplanes and weapons” (475). Tacho is confident that the current Cold War is part of the ancient spiritual war, and its redefined ideology of Manifest Destiny could be better fought against by recovering the Native American spiritual coalition between the South and the North.

Although both recognize the Destroyers’ global networking, Chiapas’s Tacho and Laguna’s Tayo propose quite different answers concerning how to take on the Cold War historical challenges that the ghoulish coalition has created. Unlike *Ceremony*’s Tayo, who, by identifying violence indiscriminately with the work of the Destroyers, precludes the possibility of armed resistance, Tacho is fully aware that he is not complete without his twin brother, El Feo, who is leading “Indian guerrilla units” in the mountain area of Chiapas near the Guatemalan border (508). His distrust of “political parties, ideology, or rules” notwithstanding, El Feo “believe[s] in the land” (513): he “had been chosen for one task: to remind the people never to lose sight of their precious land” (524). After Menardo’s death, Tacho escapes to the mountains to join El Feo’s “Army of Justice and Redistribution” (309), also known as “the People’s Army” (290),

which has been slowly but persistently marching toward the North. *Almanac* clearly points to the future Native American spiritual coalition that could be formed when Chiapas' twin brothers, Tacho and El Feo, join with Tucson's twin sisters, Lecha and Zeta, dismantling the US Cold War vision of Manifest Destiny, its "imaginary" spatial divisions and reductionist ideological distinctions. Obviously, *Almanac*'s transnational, border-crossing spiritual coalition does not confine itself to *Ceremony*'s Arcadian vision of Native American "supratribal affiliations in the Southwest" portrayed through Tayo's quest for spiritual healing (Sadowski-Smith 96). Silko makes it very clear that armed resistance is necessary part of the coalition against the "worldwide network of the Destroyers": El Feo's Army is as essential as Tacho's spiritual guidance to the revolutionary movement for retaking the stolen land. The transnational borderland, across which the spiritual counter-network is to be built, is "no cross-cultural utopia" (Bowers 273), but an uncelestial frontier, where fierce conspiratorial politics and illicit activities are everyday realities.

Angelita La Escapía, El Feo's close collaborator and a colonel in his Army (309), represents the militant elements within the Native American revolutionary movement in *Almanac*. She is as conspiratorial as any white Cold Warrior, having no hesitation in employing all means available to achieve her political goals, no matter whether it is clandestine military operation, or deliberate disinformation, or populist propaganda. Angelita "believe[s] in diesel generators, minivans, and dynamite" (477). "[D]runk on politics," she is "a raving orator, who might someday gather together hundreds and hundreds of fighters for El Feo's army" (467). Though often called "Comrade La

Escapía” and accused of being “a communist” by her own people in the mountain villages (309, 311), Angelita is a Machiavellian capable of impersonating whatever imaginary roles and identities outside worlds impose upon the indigenous people.

El Feo left the politics to Angelita, who enjoyed the intrigues and rivalries between their so-called friends. All that mattered was obtaining the weapons and supplies the people needed to retake the land; so Angelita had lied to all of them—the US, Cuba, Germany, and Japan. ... If Angelita was talking to the Germans or Hollywood activists, she said the Indians were fighting multinational corporations who killed rain forests; if she was talking to the Japanese or US military, then the Indians were fighting communism. Whatever their “friends” needed to hear, that was their motto. (513-14)

Angelita’s Machiavellian tribalism has made Havana confused about the true political orientation of the Indians: Cuban Marxists are no longer confident “which groups of Indians [are] true Marxists, and which tribes [are] puppets for the US military, or worse, tribes which [are] corrupted by nationalism and tribal superstition” (504). Although Havana wants Bartolomeo to keep the Indians under its influence, Angelita uses him merely as “the funnel for financial aid wheeled away from comrades all around the world,” realizing that “[w]hen the issue [is] the indigenous people, communists from the cities [are] no more enlightened than whites throughout the region” (291). For Angelita, Bartolomeo belongs to the long list of “outsiders” who have willingly misunderstood Native American tribalism and helped to prevent any indigenous revolution throughout history (292).

Angelita's militant tribalism, however, does not endorse the essentialist view of authentic "pure-blood" Indianness; nor does it approve the divisive, ethnocentric politics of the American Indian Movement (Romero 623). Instead, Angelita proposes a politics of international trans-tribal coalition, which, by forming international alliances from both sides of the global Cold War conflict, aims to retake the stolen lands, the only "truth" divergent tribal groups could agree upon (310). Against Bartolomeo's accusation that Indian tribal culture is a "primitive" and "animalistic" tradition, nothing other than "the whore of nationalism and the dupe of capitalism" (526), Angelita claims that her people are "not just tribal" but "[t]ribal internationalists" (515), who are aggressively seeking international support, whether it comes from "a crackpot German industrialist who wanted to see the tribal people of the Americas retake their land," or from "Japanese businessmen who wanted to avenge Hiroshima and Nagasaki any way possible," or from the Cuban Marxists who have tried to mobilize Native Americans for their fight against the US capitalist system (515).

Through Angelita La Escapía's theory of international tribalism, Silko proposes a Third World alternative global vision that could challenge Marxism as well as capitalism, both of which "require exploitation of natural resources and industrial development of the earth, and thus conflict with the Native American lifeway which holds the earth sacred" (Teale 157-58). Having "graduated at the top of her class at the Marxist school" that "the Cubans ran in Mexico City" (310), Angelita takes some of Marx's materialist understanding of history in her critique of capitalist exploitation by the white race. But she radically reinterprets Marx from the tribal perspective, boldly claiming that Marx

had “stolen his ideas” of “egalitarian communism” from the Native Americans (311). Marx, an “old white-man philosopher” who “had something to say about the greed and cruelty,” is the first “white man who ever made sense” to Angelita: “For hundreds of years white men had been telling the people of the Americans to forget the past”; but now the white man Marx came along and he was telling people to remember” (311). As Joe Lockard points out, however, “[n]o evidence suggests that any germ of classical Marxist political theory lies in indigenous America.” In “inventing an ahistorical Marx” (Lockard), Angelita attempts to tribalize, or spiritualize Marx and his political vision. Although she does not sanction the “white man Marx” and “all Marxists who oppose the return of tribal land,” Angelita has “understood instinctively” that Marx must be her political “ally,” since he is the “[a]vowed enemy of the priests and nuns, of the Baptists and Latter-day Saints—enemy of all missionaries” (519-19). As such, Angelita does not find Marx’s economic and political theory or specific communist programs particularly valuable, but she recognizes a certain spiritual or ideological value in Marx. Marx the white communist philosopher is reconsidered as “Marx, tribal man and storyteller.”

Marx understood what tribal people had always known: the maker of a thing pressed part of herself or himself into each object made. Some spark of life or energy went from the maker into even the most ordinary objects. Marx had understood the value of anything came from the hands of the maker. Marx of the Jews, tribal people of the desert, Marx the tribal man understood that nothing personal or individual mattered because no individual survived without others. ... Marx, tribal man and storyteller; Marx with his primitive devotion to the

workers' stories. No wonder the Europeans hated him! Marx had gathered official government reports of the suffering of English factory workers the way a tribal shaman might have, feverishly working to bring together a powerful, even magical, assembly of stories. In the repetition of the workers' stories lay great power; workers must never forget the stories of other workers. The people did not struggle alone. Marx, more tribal Jew than European, instinctively knew the stories, or "history," accumulated momentum and power. No factory inspector's "official report" could whitewash the tears, blood, and sweat that glistened from the simple words of the narratives. (520)

By characterizing Marx as a "tribal shaman" and "storyteller," Angelita envisions a coalition between "Marx of the Jews, tribal people of the desert" and the tribal peoples across the Sonoran desert in America, which could effectively counter the sweeping denunciation of tribal culture by the Cuban Marxists and Christian missionaries. What Angelita is attempting to achieve is envisioning a political coalition between Native American spirituality and Marx's revolutionary politics, by strategically misreading or recasting Marx as a "tribal shaman" and "storyteller," not a social philosopher who posits a theory of universal human history.⁶

It is, therefore, no accident that Angelita decides to indict and persecute Bartolomeo "before a people's assembly for crimes against the revolution, specifically for crimes against Native American history; the crimes were the denial and attempted annihilation of tribal histories" (515). According to Angelita, the "Indians' worst enemies" are "missionaries," who have "sent Bibles instead of guns," "preached blessed

are the meek,” “warned the village people against the evils of revolution and communism,” and “warned the people not to talk or to listen to spirit beings” (514). Nonetheless, Angelita perceives some of the same dangers posed by Christian missionaries in their “avowed enemy,” Marxism. Bartolomeo, who maintains “[j]ungle monkeys and savages have no history!” (529), represents a bastardized version of Marxism, which, similar to the teachings of missionaries, regards Native American tribal history merely as an unenlightened and “primitive” stage of universal human history, thereby dismissing any contemporary Indian tribalist movement as misguided reactionary fantasy or superstition. Even if Angelita seeks to salvage “Marx the man” from Marxism (519), by reconfiguring the white man Marx as “Marx, tribal man and storyteller,” she also recognizes Marx’s limitation: just like missionaries, “[p]oor Marx did not understand the power of the stories belonged to the spirits of the dead” (521). Marx could not fully understand the spiritual dimension of “the stories” or “history” that he himself had assembled for *Das Kapital* (520). Although much “inspired by reading about certain Native American communal societies,” Marx still “misunderstood a great deal” (519), because he could not be totally free from the European way of thinking, blind to the spiritual dimension of human history. In a long and impassioned address before the people’s committee which is about to give its final verdict on Bartolomeo’s “crimes against Native American history” (515), Angelita takes Marx’s theory of material determination of historical change, and transforms it into a vision of tribal revolution, where socio-economic, natural, and spiritual forces are working together without contradiction.

We are the army to retake tribal land. Our army is one of many all over the earth quietly preparing. The ancestors' spirits speak in dreams. We wait. We simply wait for the earth's natural forces already set loose, the exploding, fierce energy of all the dead slaves and dead ancestors haunting the Americas. We prepare, and we wait for the tidal wave of history to sweep us along. (518)

Through Angelita's theory of "the tidal wave of history," Silko envisions an alternative tribal perspective on human history that, challenging Marx's universal meta-narrative of material progress, affirms a spiritual continuum between the past and the present, in which the past does not die out but remains alive in the present through the stories of the dead and their spirits. Revisiting the issue at the end of *Almanac*, Angelita further completes her critical appropriation of Marx, with a conclusion that for a truly successful revolution to happen, spirituality must be rediscovered in what have often been thought of as merely material beings or objects, so that no one can claim the exclusive property ownership over them (749).

Almanac puts into question the fundamental paradigm of the global Cold War that, prioritizing the conflict between capitalism and its other, socialism, denies historical agency to Third World subjects, whose lived experiences and stories remain petrified as old curiosities of a bygone era of primitivism subsumed under the linear narrative of universal human history. Silko purposely misreads Marx as a "tribal shaman" and storyteller, who, like Native Americans, sees history not as a linear narrative of materialist progress or economic determination, but as a multidirectional channeling of "stories," where history emerges only as a contingency overdetermined by

spiritual and natural, as well as politico-economic, forces. With Angelita's theory of transnational tribal coalition, Silko imagines a post-Cold War model of revolution that could accommodate all the triad forces working in history, which can not be entirely or exclusively "possessed" and contained by any group of "individuals or corporations," or "cartel of nations."⁷

Almanac is an epic example of what Gerald Vizenor insightfully describes as "the new Ghost Dance literature, the shadow literature of liberation that enlivens tribal survivance" (28). Conjuring the Ghost Dance tradition from the Native American history of victimization, Silko dramatizes a post-Cold War vision of spiritual global connectedness, an alternative esthetics of totality that could secure "tribal" or Third World "survivance" beyond the historical continuum from the Cold War paranoid paradigm to the post-Cold War logic of "supranational Oneworldedness," which homogenizes "the planet as an extension of paranoid subjectivity" (Apter 366). Weaving through a stored mass of fragmented narratives told by Tucson's Twin Sisters, the Mayan Twin Brothers in Chiapas, Angelita La Escapía, the Barefoot Hopi, Wilson Weasel Tail, and other Native American characters, Silko offers a paradigm of "spiritualized glocalism," a transgressive model of planetary connectedness that incorporates "global and local forms of consciousness and agencies" (Priewe 227, 223). In an interview with Thomas Irmer and Matthias Schmidt, Silko explains her vision of spiritual oneworldedness.

The world that the capitalists envision is the one-world economy; that is their fifth world. But the fifth world [from the Native American perspective] is a new

consciousness in the hearts of all human beings, the idea that the earth is shared and finite, and that we are naturally connected to the earth and with one another.

(161)

The fact that Silko's maternalistic rhetoric of "new consciousness" and planetary connectedness sounds oddly reminiscent of the lyrical language of *Ceremony* hints that Silko as a figure of radical visionary and apocalyptic ghost dancer is in fact the same spiritual healer and storyteller who has sought to treat the wounds of the Cold War witchery by re-enchanting the Jackpile uranium mine with a ceremony of planetary "oneworldedness."

Notes

¹ *Time*'s John Skow, whom Silko describes as a "hysterical reviewer" (Coltelli, "Almanac" 132), portrays her as a "very angry author," whose new novel "foretells with exultant rage ... the fury of Native Americans from Mexico to Alaska who have had to live for 500 years on what she sees as an infected continent." Alan Ryan of *USA Today* similarly claims that *Almanac* lacks "that special insight into the lives and minds of Native Americans that we have come to expect from books like *Ceremony* and *Storyteller*."

² Interviewer Ellen Arnold has a similarly uncanny story that she experienced in 1992: "One of the reasons I had so much trouble reading it is because the Los Angeles riots happened right in the middle of my reading it, and I could hardly pick the book up without feeling like it was coming to life all around me. It was very frightening" (7).

³ *Underworld*'s Nick Shay, currently living in a suburb of Phoenix working for Waste Containment as "a sort of executive emeritus," sometimes takes a drive "out past the regimented typeface on the map and down through the streets named for Indian tribes" and makes a visit to Tuscon to see his daughter and granddaughter (804, 803). Pointing out the Kazaks are "the only indigenous people who appear in the novel" (104), David Noon argues: "Although *Underworld* ruthlessly emphasizes the costs and consequences of the nuclear arms race, and as DeLillo challenges one of the central narratives of American empire, he is nevertheless unable to fully imagine the domestic

consequences of the cold war for other communities, especially those in the nuclear West, that were most severely trampled by it” (86).

⁴ Ironically, the magazine granted the Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Writers Award to Silko in 1991 (Coltelli, “*Almanac*” 33).

⁵ Similar to Silko’s association of the Tucson’s cold warriors with paranoid homosexuality, DeLillo in *Underworld* describes J. Edgar Hoover as tormented between his Cold War paranoia and latent homosexuality: “Conflict. The nature of his desire and the unremitting attempts he made to expose homosexuals in the government. The secret of his desire and the refusal to yield. Great in his conviction. Great in his harsh judgment and traditional background and early American righteousness and great in his quibbling fear and dark shame and great and sad and miserable in his dread of physical contact and in a thousand other torments too deep to name” (573).

⁶ Although his ideas of “egalitarian communism” had not originated, as Angelita suggests, from Native Americans, Marx later realized that Native American tribal culture provides important historical examples that could confirm and solidify his materialist conception of historical progress, when he read Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877), in which Morgan, originally drawing from his study of the Iroquois Indians in the state of New York, explains universal human progress from “savagery” through “barbarism” to “civilization,” accompanied by corresponding social changes from tribal social network to the family structure based on monogamy, from the matriarchal order to the patriarchal, from the collective, communal economy to the individual, property-

owning, monetary economy. Drawing from Marx's notes on *Ancient Society* as well as his own, Engels wrote after Marx's death *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, where Engels "sharpened the implications of the comparison Morgan drew between primitive communal and class society, using it as an argument for socialism" (Leacock 15). In his "Preface to the First Edition," Engels states that "Morgan in his own way had discovered afresh in America the materialistic conception of history discovered by Marx forty years ago, and in his comparison between barbarism and civilization it had led him, in the main points, to the same conclusions as Marx" (71). It is not surprising for Engels to hear Marx's voice in Morgan, especially when, toward the end of *Ancient Society*, Morgan predicts "a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity" of the ancient tribes and communities in the next stage of civilization, which could rein in the "unmanageable power" of property (552), which has "given mankind despotism, imperialism, monarchy, privileged classes, and finally representative democracy" (342). While Engels reads Morgan's "higher form" of civilization as socialism, Morgan himself sees it as a higher stage of capitalism that will fully realize itself among Americans, who have been "educated in the principles of democracy, and profoundly impressed with the dignity and grandeur of those great conceptions which recognize the liberty, equality and fraternity of mankind" (342). As starkly different as their predictions about the fate of civilization may be, Marx-Engels and Morgan, therefore, believe in the universal, unilinear history of human progress, where the entire history of Native Americans remains flattened out and safely

mummified, allowed to surface in their vision of future society only as a nostalgic ideal of the ancient past. Angelita would not, of course, endorse any universalistic vision of human history, which, “exil[ing] American Indians to remote antiquity” and thereby “distan[c]ing them more effectively than their reservations on marginal lands along the frontiers,” asserts “the inevitability of Progress from the unutterable Otherness of primitives, i.e., non-Western peoples, through the corrupted history of Europe to the American crucible where ‘the next higher plane of society’ is nascent” (Kehoe 176).

⁷ The model of indigenous revolution dramatized by the People’s Army of Angelita and the Mayan Twin brothers finds its real-world counterpart in the Zapatista Movement, when the Zapatista National Liberation Army declares war on the Mexican government. The indigenous people in Chiapas “took up arms in 1994 to challenge the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) trade accords and the economic misery experienced by Mayan Indians” (Rubin 110). Curiously enough, some of the revolutionaries had actually read Silko’s novel “the summer prior to the revolt,” a fact that encouraged critics to argue that “Silko’s novel was the catalyst for this revolution” (Romero 637). Thoroughly convinced that the Zapatista uprising exemplifies the post-Cold War model of indigenous revolution she has envisioned in *Almanac*, Silko describes the uprising, in a 1995 interview, as a historic occasion where “all these [spiritual, natural, and political] forces could interconnect in a way that would bring down this world capitalism” and “a few Mayan Indians in Chiapas [could] shake North America” (Irmer 161). This revolution that has been spreading northward from the South,

Silko claims in another interview, is “a change that rises out of the earth’s very being,” “rebellious against what’s been done to it in the name of greed and capitalism,” a historical development that does not follow the Western humanist narratives of historical progress, but works like “a natural force—human beings massed into a natural force like a hurricane or a tidal wave” (Boos 144). Pointing to “the repercussions of the end of the Cold War” that helped bring about some of the early successes of the uprising, Jeffrey W. Rubin claims that “in the new post-Cold War context, President Carlos Salina’s charges of communist subversion were rejected nationally and internationally, with observers quickly characterizing the Zapatistas the way they sought to be characterized—as impoverished Indians under economic attack” (115). But for Silko, the Zapatista Movement is, more than a Third World rebellion against the capitalist vision of the US Manifest Destiny, a truly post-Cold War event in that it rediscovers spiritual-natural forces in history, and politically mobilizes them to complicate and thus nullify the paranoid narrative paradigm of the Cold War global conflict.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: PARANOID ONEWORLDEDNESS AND CONSPIRING

TOTALITY

Although auto-referential postmodern art and popular conspiracy theories often function like the Althusserian concept of ideology, Fredric Jameson argues, they are equally “degraded” instances of cognitive mapping.¹ If we follow Jameson’s characterization, we can safely say that the works of DeLillo, Didion, and Silko all belong somewhere between these two extreme and “degraded” modes of representing the historical totality of the Cold War. To exploit Althusser’s definition of “ideology” for my purpose, history is always a belated “imaginary” narrative construction written after the historical “real.” It is precisely this imaginary nature of writing history that could diminish any attempt to represent history to “the poor person’s cognitive mapping,” Jameson’s definition of conspiracy. Curiously, Jameson finds Althusser’s “conception of ideology as a necessary function in any form of social life” to be “positive,” partly because it works “to span or coordinate, to map, by means of conscious and unconscious representations,” the social totality. Of course, for Jameson, the social totality is “capital,” and mapping its cognitive geography is the necessary condition for imagining Utopia. As he admits “in more earthly terms,” however, “no one has ever seen or met the thing itself; it is either the result of scientific reduction ... or the mark of an imaginary and ideological vision.” Jameson’s dilemma is obvious: totality, if not the concept of totality in Marxist science, always exists as “an imaginary and ideological vision” and therefore as a “degraded figure” of itself (“Cognitive Mapping”

353-56). If the long list of conspiracy narratives produced by DeLillo, “America’s foremost bard of conspiracy, paranoia, and terrorism” (Wilcox 89), tells us anything about this matter, it is that any serious writer who seeks to understand, interrogate, or simply bear witness to the layered history of people’s cognitive mapping during the Cold War has no choice but to go paranoid along with them and to attempt, as best as he or she can, to create “an imaginary and ideological vision” about the historical “real.”

Compared to the novels of DeLillo and Didion, which maintain a certain level of critical distance or reflective altitude from the Cold War paranoid history they seek to represent, Silko’s fiction takes the theme of paranoia to the limit of explosion by relentlessly invoking brazenly political and post-colonial narratives of conspiracy. Contrary to Jameson’s remark about conspiracy as a “desperate attempt” to make sense of the complicated world, Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* lacks, at least for Native American conspirators and Third World subjects, any sizeable sense of the despair or desperation clearly noticeable in the works of DeLillo and Didion. Jameson also claims that conspiracy’s “failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content” (“Cognitive Mapping” 356). For some uninformed eyes, who do not appreciate Silko’s inventive and diverse ways of appropriating Native American storytelling traditions in her previous work including *Ceremony* and in her most recent novel *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), *Almanac of the Dead* can indeed be seen as a “slippage into sheer theme and content,” less keen about literary form and craftsmanship than, for instance, Didion’s novels. On the other hand, it is not that Didion’s more self-conscious and auto-referential postmodern novels become any less conspiracy narratives for their much

acclaimed attention to literary form and style. As Jameson's indictment of both conspiracy and auto-referential postmodern art suggests, there is a deeper affinity between these two failed forms of cognitive mapping that have flourished in the Cold War cultural milieu. The "Abecedarian" cult in *The Names* is probably the most telling example where terrorist conspiracy and the auto-referential paradigm of signification converge. To cope with US imperial paranoia, Avtar Singh, spokesperson of the cult implies, Third World subjects seek to maintain their political agency and identity by envisaging their own "self-referring" and paranoid "world in which there is no escape" (297). In this sense, Silko's conspiracy fiction is a clear departure from the narrative impulse latent in both the postmodern play with auto-referentiality and the equally paranoid self-referential mentality of terrorism.

From Pynchon to Silko, going paranoid or conspiratorial is akin to going religious or spiritual. If totality—or, in Jameson's words, "the thing itself" that "no one has ever seen or met" but must exist for us "to imagine Utopia"—is another name for God, its existence is proved by the poor person's "faith" in it or by his "longing" for it.² In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon implies that one way, or perhaps the only way, to see God in the age of spiritual "exitlessness" is to go paranoid, for God himself is "the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself" (170, 128-29). Sister Edgar in DeLillo's *Underworld* is an extreme embodiment of Cold War paranoid spirituality, where Cold War paranoia is identified with Christian eschatology. Her "faith of suspicion and unreality," DeLillo narrates, "replaces God with radioactivity, the power of alpha particles and the all-knowing

systems that shape them, the endless fitted links” (251). Marvin Lundy’s “dot theory of reality” assumes that everything is “systematically linked in some self-referring relationship that [has] a kind of neurotic tightness, an inescapability” (175, 183). With the end of the Cold War, as Fukuyama diagnoses, Cold War paranoid spirituality is now in crisis and people encounter “spiritual vacuity” and “emptiness” which are not “remediable through politics” (“The End of History?” 14). DeLillo seeks to mitigate the post-Cold War spiritual crisis by adding historical depth and telescopic perspectives to the “neurotic tightness” of the auto-referential signifying paradigm of Cold War paranoia. Utterly secular and even blasé about America’s unsavory Cold War adventures in the Third World as her narrative tone may be, Didion hopes to leave the possibility of romancing paranoid history still open for a new era. Silko, on the other hand, dreams of an unholy alliance between conspiracy thinking and Native spirituality that could radically invert and de-center the paranoid nuclear spirituality embraced by Sister Edgar. Against the constricting figure of a paranoid God, Silko proposes a conspiring vision of spirituality, where Cold War others—true to the original meaning of the word “conspiracy”—are breathing, cooperating, and plotting together against the hegemonic vision of global totality with the help of their own disparate and hybrid spiritual traditions.

The different modes of Cold War conspiracy narrative among Silko, DeLillo, and Didion can be also explained in light of Ann Douglas’s broad contextualization of the postmodern and the postcolonial in Cold War history. Instead of the “postmodern” or the “postcolonial,” either of which is often in denial of each other, Douglas proposes the

“Cold War” as a term for both cultural critics and historians to use for periodizing the second half of the twentieth century, on the ground that both “post’s” “make sense only in reference to late capitalism and its expansionist and hegemonic tendencies” during the Cold War period, their common site of origin and development (74). The tension between postmodern and postcolonial is inevitable because postmodern mostly “refers to white Euro-American sites and modes of modernity and modernization,” whereas postcolonial refers to “less developed countries of the Third World ... and its populations of color whom the European powers colonized and exploited” (74). Whereas the conspiracy narratives of Pynchon, DeLillo, and Didion represent, to a large extent, the symptoms of postmodern paranoia or panic about authorship, text, representation, totality, and history, Silko’s conspiracy narrative, relatively free from some of the lagging questions and obsessions of postmodern fiction, serves to voice the “postcolonial” perspective of Third World subjects on US Cold War imperial paranoia.

In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko vastly expands the geographic boundary of global cognitive mapping already extensive in *Ceremony* to include the entire American continent and even beyond, so that it can match up with the US Cold War sphere of global influence. From Donald E. Pease’s perspective, Silko’s fiction is a truly “postnational” or post-Americanist counter-hegemonic narrative, in which hitherto “disenfranchised groups” under the Cold War meta-narrative of national consensus and universal identity conspire to plot their own multiple identities and narratives (“National Identities” 2, 3). According to Emily Apter, the fiction of Pynchon and DeLillo illustrates “an American paradigm of oneworldedness” hatched during the early Cold

War (386). Contrary to some Utopian conceptions of global connectivity—like the world systems, planetarity, and transnationalism imagined by Immanuel Wallerstein, Etienne Balibar, and others—this uniquely American paradigm of global totality, Apter argues, “envisages the planet as an extension of paranoid subjectivity vulnerable to persecutory fantasy, catastrophism, and monomania” (366). Curiously enough, Apter omits Silko’s name in her extensive list of writers from Hawthorne to Didion whose work constitutes “the canon of American paranoid fiction” (387). Apter’s glaring omission of Silko in the American canon of paranoid fiction, however, further attests to the “postnational” or post-Americanist character of Silko’s conspiracy fiction, which adds a corrective perspective to the “American paradigm of paranoid oneworldedness,” and points toward the possibility of imagining the planet not as “an extension of paranoid subjectivity” but as a transnational location of Utopian conspiracy and populist fantasy.

Notes

¹ In his “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” Althusser posits that “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (162). Jameson’s conception of “cognitive mapping” is much inspired by Althusser’s definition of ideology, especially its spatial figure of the gap between “imaginary” and “real” (“Cognitive Mapping” 353).

² In “Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality,” John A. McClure, though without addressing the question of conspiracy, discusses the resurgence of spirituality in the postmodern fiction of DeLillo, Pynchon, Silko, and Ishmael Reed.

WORKS CITED

- Ali, Saleem H. *Mining, the Environment, and Indigenous Development Conflicts*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2003.
- Allen, Paula Gunn. "Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*. Ed. Devon A. Mihesuah. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998: 55-64.
- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.
- Amundson, Michael A. "Uranium on the Cranium: Uranium Mining and Popular Culture." *Atomic Culture: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Ed. Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundson. Boulder: UP of Colorado, 2004: 49-63.
- Apter, Emily. "On Oneworldedness: Or Paranoia as a World System." *American Literary History* 18.2 (2006): 365-89.
- Archuleta, Elizabeth. "Securing Our Nation's Roads and Borders or Re-circling the Wagons? Leslie Marmon Silko's Destabilization of 'Borders.'" *Wicazo Sa Review* (Spring 2005): 113-37.
- Arnold, Ellen L. "An Ear for the Story, an Eye for the Pattern: Rereading *Ceremony*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.1 (1999): 69-92.
- . "Listening to the Spirits: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 10.3 (1998): 1-33.
- Bale, Jeffrey M. "Political Paranoia v. Political Realism: On Distinguishing Between

- Bogus Conspiracy Theories and Genuine Conspiratorial Politics.” *Patterns of Prejudice* 41.1 (2007): 45-60.
- Barnes, Kim. “A Leslie Marmon Silko Interview.” *Conversations With Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 69- 83.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of the End*. 1992. Trans. Chris Turner. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994.
- Beidler, Peter G. and Robert M. Nelson. “Grandma’s Wicker Sewing Basket: Untangling the Narrative Threads in Silko’s *Ceremony*.” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 28.1 (2004): 5-13.
- Begley, Adam. “The Art of Fiction CXXXV: Don DeLillo.” 1993. *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005: 86-108.
- Bell, Robert C. “Circular Design in *Ceremony*.” *Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony: A Casebook*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. New York: Oxford UP, 2002: 23-39.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Birchall, Clare. *Knowledge Goes Pop: From Conspiracy Theory to Gossip*. Oxford: Berg, 2006.
- Boos, Florence. “An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko.” *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 135-45.
- Bowers, Maggie Ann. “Eco-Criticism in a (Post-)Colonial Context and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*.” *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Human Rights in a ‘Post’-Colonial World*. Ed. Peter H. Marsden and Geoffrey V. Davis. New York : Rodopi, 2004: 267-76.

- Brands, H. W. *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.
- Caputi, Jane. "The Metaphors of Radiation, Or Why a Beautiful Woman is Like a Nuclear Power Plant." *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 14.5 (1991): 423-42.
- Carothers, Thomas. *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991.
- Carruthers, Susan L. "The Manchurian Candidate (1962) and the Cold War Brainwashing Scare." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 18.1 (1998): 75-94.
- Chase, Richard. *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* 1949. New York: Hafner, 1971.
- Coale, Samuel Chase. "Didion's Disorder: An American Romancer's Art." *Critique* 25.3 (1984): 160-70.
- . *Paradigms of Paranoia: The Culture of Conspiracy in Contemporary American Fiction*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005.
- Coltelli, Laura. "Almanac of the Dead: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko." *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 119-34.
- . "Leslie Marmon Silko." Interview. *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1990. 137-53.
- Cutchins, Dennis. "'So That the Nations May Become Genuine Indian': Nativism and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *Journal of American Culture* 22.4 (1999): 77-89.
- Dalby, Simon. "Geopolitical Discourse: The Soviet Union As Other." *Alternatives* 13

(1988): 415-441.

Davidson, Sara. "A Visit with Joan Didion." *Joan Didion: Essays and Conversations*.

Ed. Ellen G. Friedman. Princeton, NJ.: Ontario Review Press, 1984: 13-21.

DeCurtis, Anthony. "'An Outsider in This Society': An Interview with Don DeLillo."

Introducing Don DeLillo. Ed. Frank Lentricchia. Durham and London: Duke UP,

1991: 43-66.

DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007.

---. "The Image and the Crowd." *Creative Camera* (1993): 72-73.

---. "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of

September." *Harper's Magazine* 303.1819 (Dec. 2001): 33-40.

---. *Libra*. New York: Viking, 1988.

---. *Mao II*. New York: Viking, 1991.

---. *The Names*. New York: Knopf, 1982.

---. *Players*. New York: Knopf, 1977.

---. *Underworld*. New York: Scribner, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and*

the New International. Tran. Peggy Kamuf. New York and London: Routledge,

1994.

Didion, Joan. *A Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977.

---. *Democracy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.

---. *Fixed Ideas: America Since 9.11*. New York: New York Review Books, 2003.

---. *The Last Thing He Wanted*. New York: Knopf, 1996.

---. *Miami*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

---. *Political Fictions*. New York: Knopf, 2001.

---. *Salvador*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983.

---. *The White Album*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Diemert, Brian. "Uncontainable Metaphor: George F. Kennan's "X" Article and Cold War Discourse." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35.1 (2005): 21-55.

Donnelly, Daria. "Old and New Notebooks: *Almanac of the Dead* as Revolutionary Entertainment." *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1999: 245-59.

Duvall, John N. "Baseball as Aesthetic Ideology: Cold War History, Race, and DeLillo's 'Pafko at the Wall.'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 41.2 (1995): 285-313.

Engelhardt, Tom. *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995.

Engels, Frederick. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State: In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*. New York: International, 1972.

Esquire. May 1966.

Fenster, Mark. *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1999.

Fischer-Hornung, Dorothea. "Economies of Memory: Trafficking in Blood, Body Parts, and Crossblood Ancestors." *Amerikastudien* 47.2 (2002): 199-221.

Fiske, John. *Power Plays; Power Works*. London: Verso, 1993.

- Forster, Dennis A. *Sublime Enjoyment: On the Perverse Motive in American Literature*.
New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Frow, John. "Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia." *October* 57 (Summer 1991):
123-51.
- Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Summer 1989): 3-18.
---. *The End of History and The Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 1992.
- Gaddis, John Lewis. "The Cold War, the Long Peace, and the Future." *The End of the
Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*. Ed. Michael J. Hogan. New York:
Cambridge UP, 1992: 21-38.
- Ganser, Alexandra. "Violence, Trauma, and Cultural Memory in Leslie Silko's
Ceremony." *Atenea* 24.1 (2004): 145-59.
- Gleason, Abbott. *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*. New York:
Oxford UP, 1995.
- Gonzalez, Ray. "The Past is Right Here and Now: An Interview with Leslie
Marmon Silko." *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold.
Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 97-106.
- Graulich, Melody. "Introduction." "*Yellow Woman*": *Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Melody
Graulich. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1993: 3-25.
- Green, Jeremy. "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction." *Modern
Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 571-99.
- . "Last Days: Millennial Hysteria in Don DeLillo's *Mao II*." *Essays and
Studies* 48 (1995): 129-48.

- Halliday, Fred. *The Making of the Second Cold War*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Hantke, Steffen. "'God save us from bourgeois adventure': The Future of the Terrorist in Contemporary American Conspiracy Fiction." *Studies in the Novel* 28.2 (1996): 219-43.
- Hardack, Richard. "Two's a Crowd: *Mao II*, *Coke II*, and the Politics of Terrorism in Don DeLillo." *Studies in the Novel* 36.3 (2004): 374-92.
- Harjo, Joy. "The World Is Round: Some Notes on Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *Blue Mesa Review* 4 (Spring 1992): 207-10.
- Harrison, Barbara Grizzuti. "Joan Didion: Only Disconnect." *Off Center: Essays*. New York: Dial, 1980. 113-37.
- Henderson, Katherin Usher. *Joan Didion*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980.
- Herken, Gregg. *The Winning Weapon: the Atomic Bomb in the Cold War 1945-1950*. New York: Knopf, 1980.
- Hinojosa, Rolando. "The Boss I work for Dialogue: Leslie Marmon Silko & Rolando Hinojosa." *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 84-96.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- Hogan, Michael J. "Introduction." *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*. Ed. Michael J. Hogan. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992: 1-12.

- Howard, Gerald. "The American Strangeness: An Interview with Don DeLillo." *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005: 119-30.
- Irmer, Thomas and Matthias Schmidt. "An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko." *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 146-161.
- Jacobs, Connie A. "A Toxic Legacy: Stories of Jackpile Mine." *American Indian Culture And Research Journal* 28.1 (2004): 41-52.
- Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Cognitive Mapping." *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. London: Macmillan, 1988: 347-60.
- . *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.
- . "Totality as Conspiracy." *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Fredric Jameson. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. 9-84.
- Jarman, Michelle. "Exploring the World of the Different in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *MELUS* 31.3 (2006): 147-68.
- Jarvis, Stephen. "Didion's *Democracy*: 'Dated in a Deconstructing Universe.'" *Angelaki* 5.3 (2000): 93-104.
- Jaskoski, Helen. "Thinking Woman's Children and the Bomb." *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* 13.2 (1990): 1-22.

- Johnson, Chalmers. "The Three Cold Wars." *Cold War Triumphalism: The Misuses of History After the Fall of Communism*. Ed. Ellen Schrecker. New York: The New Press, 2004: 237-261.
- Karnicky, Jeffrey. "Wallpaper Mao: Don DeLillo, Andy Warhol, and Seriality." *Critique* 42.4 (2001): 339-56.
- Kehoe, Alice Beck. *The Land of Prehistory: A Critical History of American Archaeology*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Kennan, George. "On Nuclear War." *New York Review of Books* 21 Jan. 1982: 8-12.
- Knight, Peter. *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- . "Everything is Connected: *Underworld's* Secret History of Paranoia." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 811-36.
- . "Introduction: A Nation of Conspiracy Theorists." *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ed. Peter Knight. New York: New York UP, 2002. 1-17.
- . *The Kennedy Assassination*. UP of Mississippi, 2007.
- LaDuke, Winona and Ward Churchill. "Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism." *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 13.3 (1985): 107-32.
- LaFeber, Walter. *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.

---. *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad Since 1750.*

New York: Norton, 1989.

---. "An End to Which Cold War?" *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and*

Implications. Ed. Michael J. Hogan. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992: 13-19.

Lasch, Christopher. *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times.* New York:

Norton, 1984.

Leacock, Eleanor Burke. "Introduction." *The Origin of the Family,*

Private Property and the State: In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H.

Morgan. Frederick Engels. New York: International, 1972. 7-67.

Levesque, Richard. "Telling Postmodern Tales: Absent Authorities in Didion's

Democracy and DeLillo's *Mao II.*" *Arizona Quarterly* 54.3 (1998): 69-87.

Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life.*

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979.

Lockard, Joe. "Shamanic Marxism and the Ghosts of Capital." *Bad Subjects* 45 (Oct.

1999). 22 April 2007 <<http://bad.eserver.org/issues/1999/45/lockard.html>>.

Longmuir, Anne. "The Language of History: Don DeLillo's *The Names* and the Iranian

Hostage Crisis." *Critique* 46.2 (Winter 2005): 105-22.

Marshall, Jonathan, Peter Dale Scott, and Jane Hunter. *The Iran-Contra Connection:*

Secret Teams and Covert Operations in the Reagan Era. Boston: South End

Press, 1987.

Mason, Fran. "A Poor Person's Cognitive Mapping." *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of*

- Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ed. Peter Knight. New York: New York UP, 2002: 40-56.
- Mattson, Kevin. *When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Postwar Liberalism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.
- McClure, John. *Late Imperial Romance*. London: Verso, 1994.
- Melley, Timothy. *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.
- Merivale, Patricia. "Through Greene-Land In Drag: Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer*." *Pacific Coast Philology* 15 (Oct. 1980): 45-52.
- Mexal, Stephen J. "Spectacularspectacular!: *Underworld* and the Production of Terror." *Studies in the Novel* 36.3 (2004): 318-35.
- Molly, Wallace. "'Venerated Emblems': DeLillo's *Underworld* and the History-Commodity." *Critique* 42.4 (2001): 367-83.
- Moran, Joe. "Don DeLillo and the Myth of the Author-Recluse." *Journal of American Studies* 34 (2000): 137-52.
- Morgan, Lewis Henry. *Ancient Society*. 1877. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2000.
- Moss, Maria. "'Writing as a Deeper Form of Concentration': An Interview with Don DeLillo." *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005: 155-68.
- Mueller, John. "Quiet Cataclysm: Some Afterthoughts on World War III." *The End of the Cold War: Its Meaning and Implications*. Ed. Michael J. Hogan. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992: 39-52.

- Murphy, Geraldine. "Romancing the Center: Cold War Politics and Classic American Literature." *Poetics Today* 9.4 (1988): 737-47.
- Nadel, Alan. "Failed Cultural Narratives: America in the Postwar Era and the Story of Democracy." *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*. Ed. Donald E. Pease. Durham: Duke UP, 1994: 95-120.
- Nadotti, Maria. "An Interview with Don DeLillo." 1993. *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005: 109-18.
- Nagel, Joane. *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Nelson, Robert M. "Leslie Marmon Silko: storyteller." *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. Ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth Roemer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 245-56.
- Niemann, Linda. "Narratives of Survival." *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 107-112.
- Noon, David. "The Triumph of Death: National Security and Industrial Erasures in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 37.1 (2007): 83-110.
- O'Donnell, Patrick. "Engendering Paranoia in Contemporary Narrative." *boundary 2* 19.1 (1992): 181-204.
- Ortiz, Simon J. *Woven Stone*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1992.
- Osteen, Mark. "Becoming Incorporated: Spectacular Authorship and DeLillo's *Mao II*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 643-74.

- Owens, Louis. *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. Norman and London: U of Oklahoma P, 1992.
- Parrish, Tim. "After Henry Adams: Rewriting History in Joan Didion's *Democracy*." *Critique* 47.2 (2006): 167-84.
- Passaro, Vince. "Dangerous Don DeLillo." 1991. *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005: 75-85.
- Pease, Donald E. "National Identities and Postnational Narratives." *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*. Ed. Donald E. Pease. Durham: Duke UP, 1994: 1-14.
- . "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon." *boundary 2* 17.1 (1990): 1-37.
- Pett, Stephen. "An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko." *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Ellen L. Arnold. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 113-118.
- Pipes, Daniel. *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. New York: Free Press, 1997.
- Priewe, Marc. "Negotiating the Global and the Local: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* as 'Glocal Fiction.'" *Amerikastudien* 47.2 (2002): 223-235.
- Purdy, John. "The Transformation: Tayo's Genealogy in *Ceremony*." 1986. *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. New York: Oxford UP, 2002: 63-70.
- Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. Philadelphia & New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1966.

- . *Vineland*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990.
- Remnick, David. "Exile on Main Street: Don DeLillo's Undisclosed Underworld." 1997. *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DePietro. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005: 131-144.
- Rice, David A. "Witchery, Indigenous Resistance, and Urban Space in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *SAIL* 17.4 (2005): 114-43.
- Roemer, Kenneth M. "Silko's Arroyos as Mainstream: Processes and Implications of Canonical Identity." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.1 (1999): 10-37.
- Rogin, Michael. "'Make My Day!': Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease. Durham: Duke UP, 1993: 499-534.
- Romero, Channette. "Envisioning a 'Network of Tribal Coalitions': Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *American Indian Quarterly* 26.4 (2002): 623-40.
- Rosier, Paul C. "'They Are Ancestral Homelands': Race, Place, and Politics in Cold War Native America, 1945-1961." *Journal of American History* (March 2006): 1300-1326.
- Ross, Dorothy. "Grand Narrative in American Historical Writing: From Romance to Uncertainty." *American Historical Review* 100.3 (1995): 651-77.
- Rowe, John Carlos. "*Mao II* and the War on Terrorism." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.1 (2004): 21-43.
- Rubin, Jeffrey W. "Meanings and Mobilizations: A Cultural Politics Approach to Social

- Movements and States.” *Latin American Research Review* 39.3 (2004): 106-42.
- Ryan, Alan. “An Inept *Almanac of the Dead*.” *USA Today*. 21 Jan 1992, 6D.
- Sadowski-Smith, Claudia. “The U.S.-Mexico Borderlands Write Back: Cross-Cultural Transnationalism in Contemporary U.S Women of Color Fiction.” *Arizona Quarterly* 57.1 (2001): 91-112.
- Schaub, Thomas Hill. *American Fiction in the Cold War*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr. *The Vital Center: the Politics of Freedom*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949.
- Schrecker, Ellen. “Introduction.” *Cold War Triumphalism: The Misuses of History After the Fall of Communism*. Ed. Ellen Schrecker. New York: The New Press, 2004. 1-24.
- Seyersted, Per. “Two Interviews with Per Seyersted.” *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Study of the Short Fiction*. Helen Jaskoski. New York: Twayne, 1998. 104-119.
- Sharp, Joanne P. *Condensing the Cold War: Reader’s Digest and American Identity*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.
- Siebers, Tobin. *Cold War Criticism and the Politics of Skepticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Almanac of the Dead*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- . *Ceremony*. New York: Viking, 1977.
- . *Yellow Women and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

- Simmons, Ryan. "What is a Terrorist? Contemporary Authorship, the Unabomber, and *Mao II*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 675-95.
- Skow, John. "People of the Monkey Wrench" *Time*. 138.23 (9 Dec. 1991): 86
- Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1992.
- St. Clair, Janet. "Cannibal Queers: The Problematics of Metaphor in *Almanac of the Dead*." *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1999. 207-221.
- . "Death of Love/Love of Death: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *MELUS* 21.2 (1996): 141-56.
- Stein, Rachel. "Contested Ground: Nature, Narrative, and Native American Identity in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. Ed. Joy Porter and Kenneth Roemer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 193-211.
- Stout, Janis P. *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austin, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990.
- Strandberg, Victor. "Passion and Delusion in *A Book of Common Prayer*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 27.2 (1981): 225-242.
- Tarter, James. "Locating the Uranium Mine: Place, Multiethnicity, and Environmental Justice in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *The Greening of Literary*

- Scholarship: Literature, Theory, and the Environment*. Ed. Steven Rosendale. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2002: 97-110.
- Teale, Tamara M. "The Silko Road from Chiapas or Why Native Americans Cannot be Marxists." *MELUS* 23.4 (1998): 157-166.
- Tillett, Rebecca. "Reality consumed by reality: the ecological costs of 'development' in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*." *European Journal of American Culture* 24.2 (2005): 153-69.
- Towers, Robert. "From the Grassy Knoll." Rev. of *Libra*, by Don DeLillo. *New York Review of Books* 16 Aug. 1988: 6-7.
- Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*. New York: Viking, 1950.
- Urban, Hugh B. "Fair Game: Secrecy, Security, and the Church of Scientology in Cold War America." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 74.2 (2006): 356-389.
- Velcic, Vlatka. "Reshaping Ideologies: Leftists as Terrorists / Terrorists as Leftists in DeLillo's Novels." *Studies in the Novel* 36.3 (2004): 404-18.
- Velie, Alan R. *Four American Indian Literary Masters: N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Gerald Vizenor*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1982.
- Vizenor, Gerald. "The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance." *American Indian Quarterly* 17.1 (1993): 7-30.
- Walker, Joseph S. "A Kink in the System: Terrorism and the Comic Mystery Novel."

- Studies in the Novel* 36.3 (2004): 336-51.
- Waters, Anita M. "Conspiracy Theories as Ethnosociologies: Explanation and Intention in African American Political Culture." *Journal of Black Studies* 28.1 (1997): 112-25.
- Weisberger, Bernard A. *Cold War Cold Peace: The United States and Russia since 1945*. New York: American Heritage, 1984.
- Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.
- Wilcox, Leonard. "Terrorism and Art: Don DeLillo's *Mao II* and Jean Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*." *Mosaic* 39.2 (2006): 89-105.
- Willman, Skip. "Spinning Paranoia: The Ideologies of Conspiracy and Contingency in Postmodern Culture." *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ed. Peter Knight. New York: New York UP, 2002: 21-39.
- Winchell, Mark Royden. *Joan Didion*. Rev. ed. Boston: Twayne, 1989.
- Wood, Michael. "post-Paranoid." Rev. of *Underworld*, by Don DeLillo. *London Review of Books* 5 Feb. 1998: 3.
- Young, Charles S. "Missing Action: POW films, brainwashing and the Korean War, 1954-1968." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 18.1 (1998): 49-74.
- Zamir, Shamoan. "Literature in a 'National Sacrifice Area': Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*." *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*. Ed. Arnold Krupat. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993: 396-415.

VITA

Name: Seung Gu Lew

Address: Department of English
Texas A&M University
227 Blocker Building
College Station, TX 77843-4227

Email Address: dexterlew@gmail.com

Education: B.A., English, Kangnung National University, 1995
M.A., English, Sogang University, 1997
M.A., English, Texas A&M University, 2001
Ph.D., English, Texas A&M University, 2009