REVIEW ESSAY:

Gilbert Adair, Hollywood's Vietnam. From The Green Berets *to* Full Metal Jacket. London: Heinemann, 1989.

"Welcome to Vietnam, the Movie"

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National myths do not merely offer versions of the past: they also proffer visions of the future. In the nineteenth century, the most cherished of all American myths, that of the frontier, was used to give a religious foundation for the Indian Wars, but it proved equally serviceable as a rationalization for the superiority implied by the 'manifest destiny'. Internationally, the frontier myth could be made to justify American isolationism as well as imperialism and the Pax Americana. Indeed, the frontier has continued to play a central role in contemporary American political mythology; to mention just one example, it was useful in securing the billions of dollars required by the New Frontier of the Apollo space program.

　　Such myths and metaphors are what we live by: by decontextualizing events, they seem to make history intelligible, postulating a recognizable kind of continuity and unity in the confusion of specific events. In a society with conflicting views on how reality should be interpreted, the dominant myths need to be recreated daily. Such 'manufacturing of consent' is carried out by the media; the result is often termed 'popular culture'.

　　Considering the fact that the Vietnam War was the dominant international issue in the late 60's and early 70's, that major contemporary myth-maker and distributor, the Hollywood motion-picture industry, was surprisingly slow in cashing in on it. Compared with the large number of films made during and about World War II and the Korean War, Hollywood's 'Vietnam war effort' was remarkably limited. One reason for this was to be found in the very character of the war; officially termed only a conflict, it never had the unanimous support that could be mustered for the clearer aims of earlier American war efforts (especially World War II). However, it was also a reflection of the fact that Hollywood's prime concern is that of making money, which is done by appealing to the widest possible audiences rather than by

taking up controversial issues. In the words of Leonard Quart and Albert Auster:

> The films of the early seventies provide a good illustration of how long it takes for major cultural changes to register with some degree of subtlety in Hollywood films. Whether or not their critiques were inspired by the right or the left, these films were a spillover from the ideological conflicts and social tensions of the sixties. In a similar fashion the films of the second half of the seventies were a belated acknowledgement of some major trends of the early seventies, most particularly the need to bind up the nation's wounds implied in slogans like Nixon's 'bring us together', Ford's 'time of healing' and Carter's 'government as good as its people' .... In contrast to films of the first half of the decade, which either attacked American capitalism and culture for its corruption, murderousness and creation of ersatz values, or saw criminality aided by liberalism overwhelming traditional institutions, many of the second-half films affirmed traditional American values such as mobility, family, technology, and religious belief. Perhaps the ultimate test of these values was to be seen in how Hollywood handled the Vietnam war.'[1]

Hollywood had, of course, treated the Vietnam War already in the 60's, but with few exceptions it had been done only very indirectly. Apart from John Wayne's notorious *The Green Berets* (1968), which had been planned as early as 1965,[2] Vietnam had been largely an off-screen presence. Events like the My Lai massacre might be—and were at the time—read into the ever useful western genre that seemed for a while to become a vehicle for treating the genocidal tradition in American history (e.g. Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* or Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970)); yet for a long time Vietnam appeared largely as the impending draft (e.g. in Penn's *Alice's Restaurant* (1969)) or in the shape of veterans as the protagonists of films like Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) or Jeremy Paul Kagan's *Heroes* (1977). It was only in 1978, five years after the withdrawal of American troops and three years after the final debacle in Saigon, that the major studios ventured to take up the war for direct treatment in Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* and Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter.*

In 1981 this remarkable reticence about Vietnam attracted Gilbert Adair to writing a book-length study, *Vietnam on Film – From* The Green Berets *to* Apocalypse Now.[3] Without coming to grips with why the movie industry had treated the Vietnam War only indirectly, Adair ended his study with the release of Francis Ford Coppola's mammoth film, suggesting that "in the scale of its ambitions, the movie which *Apocalypse Now* most resembles is *2001 — A Space Odyssey* and it may well set a style in filming the war as Kubrick's did for the exploration of space."[4]

After another decade of Vietnam War movies, a revised and expanded edition has been published with new titles for some of the original six chapters and with four additional chapters covering the 80's. Without the many

well-chosen illustrations of the first edition, it has been re-titled *Hollywood's Vietnam—From* The Green Berets *to* Full Metal Jacket. As the change of title suggests, these movies "have rather more to tell us about Hollywood than about Vietnam," and seen from 1989 Adair says that

> it was almost as though, with ***Apocalypse Now,*** and its direct, though stylised, confrontation with the realities of the war, Hollywood judged that it had finally got Vietnam out of its system. The subject had been dealt with, the boil had been lanced, and the major studios could gratefully, guilelessly, revert to the business of populist, apolitical moviemaking.[5]

Apart from the change of title and the addition of four new chapters, other shifts of emphasis can be found when one compares the two versions; whereas the filmography in the earlier version listed 75 titles, the revised edition lists 'only' 79. This does not mean, however, that few films on the war have been made in the eighties; as only 45 titles appear in both editions, 30 films have been left out in the revision as having had only a marginal relationship to the war (e.g. all films prior to 1968). In other words, the years 1980-87 have contributed 34 new titles, so rather than saying that the Vietnam War is "out of the system," one might claim that, on the contrary, it has been incorporated and made manageable by Hollywood. Adair says as much in the introduction to the revised edition, where in retrospect he now distinguishes between two phases in the Vietnam War movies:

> Vietnam is at long last 'entering the system', so to speak, and starting to acquire its own generic conventions and energies, on which every director and screenwriter will henceforth have a right to call. ... What distinguished the second grouping of films from that preceding it was basically that they had the opportunity to build on a foundation which had already been laid.[6]

In view of the fact that such "generic conventions and energies" have been exploited mainly in a number of "paramilitary adventure films",[7] it is surprising that the second grouping of films referred to is identified as "a cluster of prestigious *films d'auteur"* such as Stephen Frear's *Saigon—Year of the Cat* (1983), Roland Joffé's *The Killing Fields* (1984), Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)—all of which were *British* productions; the only prestigious Hollywood productions mentioned are Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), Francis Coppola's *Gardens of Stone* (1987), and Barry Levinson's *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987). Frear, Joffé, and Levinson are treated only very briefly by Adair, and the three major films, which he does discuss in detail (Stone, Kubrick, Coppola), are all rather untypical of the Vietnam War movies of the Reagan era.

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In the 1970's, the general consensus among American historians and political scientists held that the Vietnam War (meaning, of course, the American part of the war) was largely a 'mistake': the United States was seen as having been drawn into a gradually escalating conflict without ever realizing what was at stake. American policy, in this view, represented a noble failure, the failure of ignorance or innocence. With the 80's conservative hegemony, a different interpretation came to the forefront: the Vietnam War was seen as having been fought for noble ends, but Americans had been suffered to lose through self-imposed restraints. In the words of the Reagan administration: "Let us tell those who fought in that war that we will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in *a war our Government is afraid to let them win.*"[8]

The 'liberal' interpretation of the 70's held out the prospect of a major revision of American myths: if the war was a 'mistake,' America is not infallible; hence, one might have serious misgivings about, say, an invasion of Grenada. The 'conservative' interpretation of the 80's, on the other hand, upheld the myth: America cannot go wrong, provided she is not hampered by craven politicians and watchful media. No second thoughts need be harbored about what is called a liberation of Grenada; indeed, controlling media access to Grenada would be essential for the success of the draconian mission. In this view, the political and moral confusion that had come to be diagnosed as the 'Vietnam syndrome' was an aberration from an otherwise healthy body politic; instead of the silence of the mid–70's, the 'Vietnam Experience' or the 'Vietnam trauma' was something that had to be 'lived out' so that America could pursue what America is said to be all about. The therapy did not involve a recognition of failure, however, as that would imply revising or perhaps even scrapping cherished national myths—instead of re-inventing America, Vietnam would be re-invented.[9]

Re-invention did not imply a simple return to earlier myths: in the American technowar of the sixties, John Wayne was an anachronism by any standards. Instead, the Vietnam War had to be re-invented so that the events and consequences could be accommodated within *a new, yet recognizable framework;* nowhere has this been clearer than in Hollywood's reflection of the war in terms of conventional story-telling where a linear narrative structure suggests a well-defined beginning, middle, and end—a 'mission completed' and controlled by the central character, the 'hero'. Such a structure makes events explainable in terms of cause and effect, and by closing the narrative, it suggests the return of the survivors to 'everyday life' after going through a series of more or less extraordinary events.[10]

Indeed, it was only when the war was re-invented to be told in conventional narrative form that the Vietnam War movie became established as a

genre of its own. In films such as *First Blood* (1982) or *Uncommon Valor* (1983) and their sequels, Hollywood at last found a vehicle for 'managing' the war, because as Adair observes, "the premise of these films is that the Vietnam War has not in reality ended; or rather, having constituted an American defeat, that it cannot be permitted to end."[11] Rambo could now ask "Do we get to win this time?" and after a spectacular display of derring-do, his mission was completed though more missions (and more films) were in store. With an unchanged narrative structure throughout the sequel of films, all traces of the historical Vietnam War were lost, leaving only "a certain guerilla iconography" where the emphasis was on spectacular action, the technicalities of weapons systems, etc.; the war became a timeless fiction, a symbolic abstraction — a myth.

> For the cinema's purposes, then, this has become a war that can be waged virtually anywhere and at any time. It has been reduced to a 'style', a set of visual, thematic and ideological parameters, a semi-abstract chequerboard arena in which light contends with dark, white with black, good with evil.[12]

One of the remarkable features of the re-inventing of the war has been the replacement of the unit by the individual: where World War II and Korean War movies emphasized the training and the combat activities of the fighting group consisting of a variety of privates and officer-types, several Vietnam War movies have concentrated on the plight of the 'grunts' or the lone 'Vet Cong' paramilitary.[13]

This change can be seen as the creation of a 'new' version of the traditional American western hero representing the law, order, and morality of the Frontier myth in the lawless, disorderly, amoral environment of the frontier landscape; like him, the maverick hero of the paramilitary Vietnam War movie typically stands outside and even has to contend with existing bureaucratic hierarchies, displaying an extreme individualism that is claimed to win wars unwinnable by such bureaucracies. Rambo can do what his superiors— officers or government--cannot, and he comes into his own when dressed like an Indian he adopts guerilla tactics in addition to the technological weaponry that in itself proved so ineffectual. Unlike the standardized regimentation of a military bureaucracy, he fights with a *style* of his own. Where the military system fails, leaving a mess (e.g. fellow grunts held as POWs)—in South-East Asia or even in Afghanistan — Rambo the individual comes in its aid and slugs it out on his own, embodying a unification of physical strength and martial know-how of a perfect one-man weapons system, begging the question how, with a Rambo on its side, the United States could possibly lose the war? The inevitable answer is that America lost the war because of a *Dolchstoss:* Rambo and the POWs were betrayed by an America that refused to let them

fight an all-out war, and they were doubly betrayed by an America that ignominiously preferred to forget about them.

In the political climate of the Reagan years the paramilitary adventures seemed to go down so well at the box office that the genre soon spilt over from Vietnam to other 'troublespots': apart from Rambo in Afghanistan, Sidney J. Furie's *Iron Eagle* (1986) was set in the Middle East, and Clint Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986) focussed on Grenada. The genre expanded into other fields: the glorification of the military career in *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982) and *Top Gun* (1986) or the 'war on drugs' and its blurring of distinctions between peace and war, between domestic and foreign policy. The strong individual as opposed to the incompetent bureaucracy has re-emerged on the domestic American scene as well, with Travis Bickle, Dirty Harry, Magnum and cohorts engaged in an urban warfare where the police force is at best helpless, at worst corrupt and in league with the criminals. Though the fighting military or police units, are replaced by fighting loners, the frontier myth idea of 'regeneration through violence' remains, however: only through a violent purging of the forces of evil is a temporary equilibrium obtained.[14]

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Mythical treatments of war are not a product of the 80's, though; they are part and parcel of Hollywood descriptions of American wars.[15] Basically, the American hero has been portrayed throughout Hollywood history as the uncommon common man who would rather stay at home, but when Uncle Sam calls, GI Joe goes. This 'Guts'n'Glory'-type of war movie continued straight into the supposedly morale-boosting, hawkish *Green Berets,* where a man goes to war to learn things that cannot be learned elsewhere, and where a liberal reporter is taught the so-called facts of life in South-East Asia. Among the messages to be learned was that the war was a simple antithesis of good guys vs. bad guys, of American cowboys vs. Vietnamese Indians. Even though the gung-ho didacticism was crude, *The Green Berets* was exceptional in that it did actually address some of the political questions raised by the war: Americans, according to John Wayne, were in Vietnam so that the Vietnamese might have a chance of becoming Americanized.[16]

With the growing disillusionment about the war and its outcome,[17] there was little by way of addressing the political issues of the war in the films of the Nixon and Ford years; instead, the focus was on the plight of the veterans, and Vietnam itself was shown as an 'experience', a testing-ground of morality. Learning to live with the lessons of the war rather than dealing with the war as an historical event was what the first major Vietnam War movies were about: in Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and Francis Ford

Coppola's Apocalypse Now (1979) the war was described as a psychological battleground. Both films were versions of the time-honored heroic quest, but the journeys undertaken by the main characters were symbolic ones into their own inner natures rather than the actual nighttown of Saigon or the river near the Cambodian border. Instead of the actual Vietnam, the films presented projections of American consciousness; with Cimino the contrast between the benign and majestic outdoors of the deer hunt and its macho cameraderie, and, on the other hand, the dark and gruesome steel-mill in Clairton and Vietnam. According to John Hellmann, "Vietnam [was] viewed as the self-projected historical nightmare through which America [could] awaken from its dream of innocent mastery into a mature consciousness."[18] If Cimino saw in the Vietnam War an opportunity for Americans to recognize what was postulated as self-destructive impulses, he also held out the possibility of a return to America with a new self-awareness, turning Vietnam into a *felix* culpa: but his 'mature consciousness' merely upheld the American myth of exceptionalism and virtue in a kind of primitivist communion with nature (where the hero abstains from killing a deer with the control implied by 'one shot', the central theme of the film).

Coppola, too, in his treatment turned to an established myth, viz. that of the hard-boiled detective who confronts and eradicates evil for the time being. But unlike Cimino's re-affirmation of values ('God Bless America' in the coda of The Deer Hunter), he went one step further, literally blowing the myth sky-high, treating the Vietnam War as a totally alien landscape where American values were exposed as full-fledged madness, or as Adair points out: Coppola showed the basic obscenity of the warfare.[19] Vietnam was not a place, but a state of mind as implied by the very first words heard in the film: Jim Morrison of The Doors singing 'The End'.

Even in the weird landscape of Apocalypse Now, however, the military system and its lone detective managed to 'terminate' the evil that had placed itself beyond moral law, though it was done only through a ritualistic killing no less savage than the heinous acts supervised by the victim, the renegade Green Beret Kurtz. The quandary remained, however, for though Kurtz was slain—after a lengthy and rather confusing lecture on the moral vacuum of the war, replete with references to i.a. T. S. Eliot's The Hollow Men—other specimens of military madness continued their pursuits: notably the lieutenant colonel who ordered an air strike on a Vietnamese village so as to make it possible to go surfing and who stated that "I love the smell of napalm in the morning." Unlike the low-key ending of The Deer Hunter, Coppola let his hallucinatory Vietnam end in total conflagration (but with the protagonist returning to tell the story: mission completed).

Adair succinctly juxtaposes "Cimino's reactionary cynicism" and "Coppola's liberal sentimentality."[20] In spite of their differences and ambiguities,

however, both films postulated mitigating circumstances: describing the Vietnam War in a framework provided, however tenuously, by Cooper's *Deerslayer* or Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (or the myths of the frontiersman or the hard-boiled detective) meant that learning to live with the lessons of the war implied recognizing and eradicating (some of) the rot at the heart of darkness: In the Vietnam War, America was purged and purged itself.

As an act of social hygiene, such a purge was also at the center of one of the most widely acclaimed Vietnam War films of the eighties: Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) that was marketed as, at last, a 'true' description of Vietnam. As one of the film's qualities, Adair points to the *feel* of geographical presence (like *Apocalypse Now,* it was shot in the Philippines), but

> As for historical accuracy, ... *[Platoon]* was not about history at all but about *geography.* What crucially distinguished it from its predecessors in the canon is that it defined Vietnam not as a time or an event, but as a place, a geographical and even meteorological location.[21]

In so doing, however, Stone also turned Vietnam into a mythical scene, "a neo-Boschian Garden of Eden, an Eden bereft of Eves but rife with serpents,"[22] and the film became a struggle between diametrically opposed doveish and hawkish figures for the possession of the protagonist's/America's soul. The Vietnam War remained describable only in terms of black and white, good and evil, even though *Platoon* also contained elements hitherto suppressed in the genre such as the gang rape of a Vietnamese girl (from which she is rescued by the hero) while her village is set on fire, or the indiscriminate American use of violence as displayed in the air strike on their own compound.

Whereas he does not share the general critical enthusiasm that claimed for *Platoon* the status of being the definitive Vietnam War film, Adair does seem to put the issue of the war at rest in a parallel to the first edition of his book: ending on a conciliatory note in the treatment of *Gardens of Stone* (1987), where after serving in Vietnam the soldiers are literally put to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, Adair this time re-phrases the prospects held out by a Coppola movie:

> In the case of the Vietnam War movie ... it is not impossible that ... the genre, if such it is, will *only now* begin to enjoy the kind of consensual support of which ... it has been deprived in the past. ... The significance of *Gardens of Stone,* then, whatever its failings, is that it is perhaps the first of the Vietnam movies to be set *in the past,* the first, in short, to acknowledge that the war is over.[23]

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The war may be over, but what made it possible is not. To make that clear, one need turn only to the one crucially different 'Vietnam War movie' to date:

Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), where the total dehumanization is implied already in the opening shots of the crew-cutting of the rookies at the Marine Corps training camp at Parris Island, South Carolina.

In its total absence of myth-making, *Full Metal Jacket* presents a radical critique of (Vietnam) war movies: the training sequence does not lead to the creation of a well-knit unit of fighting men of the *Dirty Dozen* type. The number of films where even Fatso becomes a man and has a place in the Army is legion, but in *Full Metal Jacket* the product is a terrorized robot who becomes a deranged killer; and unlike the effective combat unit of standard war movies, the group breaks down when ambushed by a sniper.

Hollywood films have traditionally depicted the individual and human characteristics of the citizens trained to become soldiers so as to rid the world of the dangers of militarism, nazism, the yellow peril, etc., yet civil normality is always present, or, at least, revived in the end. In *Full Metal Jacket* what we see is the total destruction of whatever normality may have existed prior to military training and it re-emerges nowhere in the film (except perhaps in the sniper's plea to be shot).

As a key to Kubrick's films, Adair points to his "depersonalising approach to language" that makes it impossible or irrelevant to distinguish the characters from each other (in this sense, language is a central theme in *Dr. Strangelove,* 2001: *A Space Odyssey, A Clockwork Orange* as well as in *The Shining*). The drill sergeant's verbal diarrhoea has its counterpart in the inanities of the privates. The anonymous protagonist is aptly dubbed 'Joker', and he is capable of carrying an anti-war badge on his jacket and the inscription 'Born to Kill' on his helmet — neither representing any depth of meaning or conviction. Indeed, he is in Vietnam merely so as to become "the first guy on the block with a certified kill." Likewise, the Marine newspaper for which he works in Vietnam carries only two kinds of stories according to the lieutenant briefing his staff: "Grunts who give half their salary to buy gooks toothbrushes and deodorants, winning hearts and minds. And combat actions that result in a kill, winning the war." With pride, the drill sergeant praises ex-Marines Lee Harvey Oswald and mass murderer Charles Whitman: "These individuals showed what one Marine and his rifle can do."

> Depersonalising language is, however, only part of a more comprehensive strategy by which Kubrick does not so much 'dekumanise' his material as emancipate it of every conceivable *mitigating circumstance..* ... Kubrick removes trace after trace of ordinary, decent, human unkemptness from the micro-society depicted in his film ... what is in evidence in *Full Metal Jacket* is a *strange and disquieting annihilation* of the will.[24]

Disquieting indeed: one senses a deep uneasiness on Adair's part at the uncompromising qualities of *Full Metal Jacket.* He thus speaks critically of "a degree of narrative austerity unusual for a Hollywood war movie,"[25] yet this is

precisely where Kubrick differs from the 'generic conventions' that the Hollywood motion picture industry has been establishing for a decade or more.

For soldiers like those in Full Metal Jacket, Vietnam is neither a place, nor a state of mind, but a movie—a symbolic experience to be consumed not unlike the prostitutes that, with the one crucial exception of the sniper, are the only women who appear in the film. Joker is one more average American brought up on surrogate experiences of reality as provided by television and Hollywood, and when Kubrick has a television crew interview the Marines on location, they are welcomed to "Vietnam, the movie": the complexities of the war reduced to terms offered by movie-myths for soldiers and audiences alike.

It is remarkable that Adair, who criticizes Kubrick for the "oneupmanship" that is said to be characteristic of all his works whatever the genre, refrains from considering whether that which he calls Kubrick's "vivisection" can be seen as a comment upon the genre of Vietnam war movies. He argues instead that the film has been included in his study for "technical" reasons: because he sees it as inaugurating a particularly gruesome way of depicting killing, in a sense outdoing Hollywood's standard ways of describing death. Yet at the same time Full Metal Jacket, if anything, meets the very demands that Adair calls for elsewhere in the study.[26]

Above all, however, it is surprising that Adair—otherwise an astute critic--completely disregards Kubrick's 'coda' where Joker and other Marines march along to the strains of the 'Mickey Mouse Club Song', totally unaffected by the preceding horrendous 'climax' of events. What we see is a perfect Brechtian example of *Verfremdung*: identification with the plight of grunts is replaced by contemplation on the part of the spectator, thus avoiding Hollywood's attempts at creating a sense of being/having been there. Where other directors go for surface 'realism' and empathy, Kubrick aims elsewhere: at reflection and critical understanding. Where Coppola had Apocalypse Now end with a bang (and not a whimper as the reference to Eliot would imply), Kubrick's war ends not with a bang, but a giggle.[27]

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Far from Adair's closing the issue and acknowledging that the war is past, Stanley Kubrick offers in Full Metal Jacket a cool scrutiny of the dehumanizing intentions and consequences of military training and, especially, of mythical ways of 'understanding' war. As such it is by far the most significant 'Vietnam War movie' to date. For though it may not be surprising that a Ronald Reagan turned to motion pictures for his political rhetoric (thereby offering a framework for 'understanding' politics).[28] Hollywood's re-inventing the Vietnam War so as to accommodate traditional myths is bound

to make the long-term impact of the war on American popular culture profound and enduring.

If the popular myths and metaphors become those of Hollywood's Vietnam, the need to get behind the myths is all the more evident. The 'paramilitary culture' of the movies is also one that legitimates state secrecy including, for instance, the 'right' to lie and deceive Congress that was openly professed by Oliver North who "perfectly played the paramilitary warrior acting against craven 'self-imposed restraints' created by politicians."[29]

NOTES

[1] Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, *American Film and Society Since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 116f.
[2] John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 90.
[3] Gilbert Adair, *Vietnam om Film—From* The Green Berets *to* Apocalypse Now (New York: Proteus, 1981).
[4] *Ibid.,* p. 168. Incidentally, 2001 has remained unique, a long shot from e.g. the George Lucas myths set in outer space.
[5] Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam — From* The Green Berets *to* Full Metal Jacket (London: Heinemann, 1989), pp. 5, 121.
[6] *Ibid.,* pp. 2, 4. Later in the book, Adair seems to question whether there is a special genre, cf. pp. 195f., and note 23 below.
[7] Cf. James William Gibson's excellent essay, "American Paramilitary Culture and the Reconstitution of the Vietnam War," in Jeffrey Walsh and James Aulich, eds., *Vietnam Images: War and Representation* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), pp. 10-42.
[8] *Ibid., p.* 13. Italics added.
[9] Cf. the 'handling' of e.g. the Challenger disaster in 1986 as described by Niels Thorsen, "Political Rituals in America," in David Nye et al., *Inventing Modern America: An Introduction to American Studies* (Copenhagen: Åbent Universitet, 1988), p. 91ff.
[10] Walter Hölbling, "Literary Sense–Making: American Vietnam Fiction," in Walsh and Aulich, *Vietnam Images,* p. 136. Hölbling gives a good, brief account of literary treatments of the war, emphasizing the impossibility of describing war as a linear progression of events.
[11] Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam,* p. 134.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Richard Berg, quoted by Alasdair Spark, "Flight Controls: The Social History of the Helicopter as the Symbol of Vietnam," in Walsh and Aulich, *Vietnam Images,* p. 103. This characteristic feature of Vietnam War movies is described as

'devolution of loyalites' by Leo Cawley in "Refighting the War: Why the Movies Are in Vietnam," *Village Voice,* September 8, 1987, p. 20.

14 Cf. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

15 A good study is Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen. The American World War II Film* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985).

16 Adair quotes an illuminating example from *The Green Berets* where Sergeant Muldoon becomes the spokesman for official US policy: "The school I went to taught us that the thirteen colonies, with proper and educated leadership, all with the same goal in mind, after the Revolutionary War, took from 1776 to 1787, eleven years of peaceful effort, before they came up with a paper that all thirteen colonies could sign." Pause. "Our present Constitution," *Hollywood's Vietnam,* p.

17 As Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War"* : *The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) points out, this disillusionment was to be found among Washington policy–makers at an earlier date than in the media and the population at large. Conservative claims that the media were responsible for demoralizing the fighting spirit were largely unfounded, but useful in explaining failure.

18 Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam.,* p. 188; a good study of *The Deer Hunter* is found in Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 270-298.

19 Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam,* p. 119.

20 *Ibid.,* p. 114.

21 *Ibid.,* p. 146; cf. p. 156: *"Platoon,* in which America is never seen ...is nevertheless, deceptively, a movie about America, not Vietnam, an allegory of the profound schism that the war opened up within the collective American psyche."

22 *Ibid.,* p. 147.

23 *Ibid.,* pp. 195f.; Adair finds in *Gardens of Stone* "the ethos of understated patriotism and gentle gallantry that John Wayne ... always personified in Ford's cinema", and "in its Fordian reverberations, its relative serenity and warmth, its absence of horrors, its melancholic detachment from the pain and passion of the period that it depicts and, above all, its indifference to the hyper–realist aesthetics of *being there,* it differs crucially from every other move on the subject", *ibid.,* pp. 192, 196. Cf. note 6 above.

24 *Ibid.,* pp. 174f.

25 *Ibid.,* p. 174. Adair rightly points out the lack of narrative in the first half of the film, yet he criticizes Kubrick for not doing the Hollywood thing, cf. *ibid.,* p. 175: "[W]hat makes this whole training camp sequence especially creepy and disturbing to watch is that it appears to be about *absolutely nothing.* ...[A]s a work of fiction, *Full Metal Jacket* might reasonably have been expected to circulate among its characters, eavesdrop on their thoughts and feelings, sensitize their relationship to each other and to their environment—in short, animate the *tabula rasa* that the white

screen represents for us before a movie is projected on to it. Kubrick's project, perversely, would seem to have been to retain that state of *tabula rasa".*

26 *Ibid.,* p. *159,* note: "Is it then, so quixotically naïve to hope that a *cinéaste* (though probably not an American) will one day make a cool, reflective, neo—Brechtian · film about the Vietnam War?" A precise description of *Full Metal Jacket,* indeed.

27 Cf. Cawley, *Refighting the War,* p. *21.*

28 Cf. Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 1-43.

29 Gibson in Walsh and Aulich, *Vietnam Images,* p. *39.*