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# Speak of the Dead, Speak of Viet Nam

The Ethics and Aesthetics of Minority Discourse

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“[Y]ou must not tell anyone what I am about to tell you.”

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

AS A CHILD, I WAS ALWAYS AWARE OF THE PRESENCE OF THE DEAD. Although my Catholic father and mother did not practice ancestor worship, they kept photographs of their fathers and their mothers on the mantel, as was the custom, and prayed to God before them every evening. In the eighties, news of my grandparents' passing into another world arrived one after the other, accompanied by more black-and-white photographs of rural funeral processions marching through a bleak northern landscape, of mourners dressed in simple country clothes and white headbands, of wooden coffins lowered into narrow graves. We mourned their deaths from a distance of both space and time. The space was one of an ocean. The time was a separation of twenty years for my mother, and forty years for my father, before they were reunited with their families in Viet Nam.

I knew the fathers and mothers of my father and mother only through their photographs, in which they never smiled and posed stiffly. Visiting

the homes of other Vietnamese friends, I always paused to study the photographs of their relatives, invariably captured in black and white. These photographs, emblematic of a lost time, a lost place, and, in many cases, of lost people, were universal signs of our place in the world as refugees, found in every household as keepsakes of memory, hallowed signs of our haunting by the past. Photographs are the secular imprints of ghosts, the most visible sign of their aura, and the closest many in the world of refugees could come to living with those left behind. For many refugees, the clothes on their backs and a wallet full of photographs were all the things they carried with them on their flight. In the strange new land they found themselves, these photographs transubstantiated into symbols of the missing themselves, as in le thi diem thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*. The narrator's mother keeps the only treasured photograph of her own mother and father safe in the attic. When their home is demolished to pave the way for gentrification and the family is evicted, the mother forgets to take the photograph with her in the family's frantic attempt to rescue their belongings. Watching the destruction of her home, the mother calls out to her lost parents, "Ma/Ba." The narrator, a child, listens to her mother's cry and thinks of the world as "two butterfly wings rubbing against my ear. Listen . . . they are sitting in the attic, sitting like royalty. Shining in the dark, buried by a wrecking ball. Paper fragments floating across the surface of the sea. There is not a trace of blood anywhere except here, in my throat, where I am telling you all this" (le thi diem thuy 2004, 99).

This passage, and much of the writing, art, and politics of Vietnamese refugees, is about the problem of mourning the dead, remembering the missing, and considering the place of the survivors in the movement of history. This problem is endemic to refugees, for whom separation from family and homeland is a universal experience. When civil and revolutionary war causes that separation, the imperative to remember becomes more than simply nostalgic. It becomes, as Nguyen-Vo Thu-Huong (2005) argues, a "political and ethical act involving choice," leaving us with this question she poses: "[H]ow shall we remember rather than just appropriate the dead for our own agendas, precluding what the dead can tell us?" (159).

Common in the world of refugees are memories and stories of the dead, the missing, and the ones left behind, those relatives, friends, and countrymen facing the consequences escaped by the refugee. In some cases, the refugee may even benefit from telling about those consequences. Speaking of the dead in a different context, Maxine Hong Kingston (1989) captures perfectly the ethical challenge for the writer when she opens *The Woman Warrior* with her mother telling her, “You must not tell anyone what I am about to tell you” (3). But she must. The writer and the witness face the ethical demand to speak of things others would rather not speak of, or hear about, or pass on into memory, even if in so doing they may perpetuate the haunting rather than quell it. Kingston, reflecting upon the story she tells of an anonymous aunt whose suicide was the consequence of her family’s neglect and her neighbors’ abuse, says, “I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute” (19). Kingston inhabits the ethically fraught territory of the substitute, as do all writers who speak of ghosts. She tells this ghost story out of what Avery Gordon calls a “concern for justice” (64), the only reason, Gordon argues, for bothering with ghosts. “The ghost will inaugurate the necessity of doing something about it,” Gordon goes on. The existence of ghosts forces us to ask “how can we be accountable to people who seemingly have not counted in the historical and public record?” (187).

Drawing from Gordon’s work on the historical and social significance of ghosts, Yen Le Espiritu (2005) declares that we must “become tellers of ghost stories” when we speak of the war in Viet Nam and its aftermath (xix). So far as the storyteller takes her narrative act public, ethical and political questions surface, both in terms of how the dead or missing are spoken of and how the act of speaking turns our attention to the speaker. Ethics forces us to consider how the speaker or storyteller must take responsibility for speech and not merely claim poetic or aesthetic license. The ethical considerations for speaker and storyteller are particularly burdensome for minorities, those who are not only smaller in terms of

numbers but smaller in terms of power as well. Power is a hazardous territory, for thinking of themselves as inferior on this landscape, minorities may also be tempted to see themselves as victims, either explicitly or implicitly. But to see oneself only as a victim simplifies power, providing an excuse from the obligations of ethical behavior in relation to both political and other acts, including the act of representation in culture, and the more personal, intimate acts that take place in memory, family, and community.

The question of ethics has surfaced more recently in the discourse around Asian Americans because of the increasingly visible limits to identity and its politics. More and more, thinkers have concluded that there is no such thing as Asian American identity. It is not only contradictory but paradoxical. Kandice Chuh (2003) calls that paradox a “subjectless discourse.” For Vincent Cheng (2004), it is called “inauthenticity.” Cheng redeems inauthenticity by arguing that the search for authenticity is a human delusion, not just a minority one. These conclusions are not surprising in our postmodern moment, when the very notion of being human has been called into question. And yet notions of humanity, racial identity, and subjectivity persist. Even if they are fictions or social constructions, they function as realities. For those of us who work with fictions as critics or writers and who see fiction as an inevitable part of our existence, this is hardly news. Conceiving of fiction’s relationship to reality is the writer’s ethical task, and ethics is likewise necessary to negotiating any kind of postidentity world.

What ethics forces us to answer is the question of the harm that we ourselves can do. Writers, artists, and critics can inflict various kinds of harm with the symbolic power they wield. So can minorities, and those who stand up for them, do damage. Harm is a consequence of holding power, and raising the issue of how a minority can inflict harm is a tribute to that minority’s existence in the world as an agent, and not merely a victim, a romanticized hero, or a passive subject in history. The idea of the minority as an agent is important in minority discourse, but usually only in the context of agency as a form of resistance against dominant and oppressive power. The possibility of the minority possessing power, with all of its implications, may be forgotten or overlooked. The type of power wielded

by the minority is not equivalent to the majority's, but for the minority to claim responsibility for the power it possesses is the logical consequence to the idea that a minority can and must resist.

For minority discourse, resistance and identity are braided together so tightly they may be inextricable. To be a minority is to be defined, to some extent, by the wounding or damage done to one on the basis of being a minority. It makes sense, then, for minorities to lick their wounds together, although they may in the end develop a taste for those wounds. But if identity has little meaning, what happens to the resistance or the politics or the culture stemming from it? In the same way that identity persists even if it is an illusion, so do the resistance, the politics, and the culture based upon identity continue. Ethics must intervene to complicate them, render them richer and suppler, more responsive to the communities from which they stem. Ethics is necessary, in short, for justice, both for movements of social justice but also for our attempts as artists, critics, historians, and writers, or simply as survivors and descendants, to do justice to the memory of those for whom there was no justice.

But thinking about justice, politics, and power purely in the realm of movements and social struggle is only partially adequate to our ethical task. The problem of damage is that it warps intimate life, rendering impossible any attempt to separate individual, personal failure from its historical causes. Art's enduring emotional power and claim to legitimacy in representing injustice can only be nailed down by its truthfulness about the harm we inflict upon each other in everyday scenes of living. In his elegant work on Indian literatures, *Bombay London New York*, Amitava Kumar (2002) points to Akhil Sharma's *An Obedient Father* as "a novel that puts an end to the debate about the authenticity of Indian expatriate writers. The question is rendered nearly moot" because the novel does not traffic in banal notions of the exotic or the victim (182). Instead, the novel's subject is a minor Indian bureaucrat who rapes his child and collects bribes. Woven into the novel is the history of colonialism and state corruption, but they cannot excuse this individual, whose skin we inhabit uncomfortably for most of the compelling narrative, a triumph of both aesthetic technique and ethical insight. Sharma, in his interview with Kumar, mentions how his elder

brother's near-death by drowning, and subsequent brain damage, gave Sharma "a sense of guilt and an ability to identify with the victimizer instead of the victim" (185). For Asian Americans and other minorities, it is crucial to identify with the victimizer. We must embrace what Taro Iwata calls a "problematic Asian American agency" (181) that rejects the comforts of victimization if it is to claim a viable politics and espouse a credible demand for justice.

Those photographs upon my parents' mantel and in their photo album, of the people who stayed and who suffered through forced labor, religious persecution, educational discrimination, and social marginalization, remind me of the human consequences of politics without ethics. Political movements do not need ethics to be successful, but they do need ethics to be just. Vietnamese refugees fleeing to the west bring haunting reminders with them, about the failure of the Communist revolution when it came to the ethical treatment of one's enemies and opponents. This revolution inspired movements for social justice around the world, including Asian American and other minority or radical movements in the United States. But the revolution—as well as French colonialism, American aggression, and South Vietnamese nationalism—divided families, persecuted the opposition, killed the innocent, and struggled to erase the history and the memory of those associated with their enemies. The experiences of Viet Nam under colonialism and communist rule raise troubling questions for those of us concerned with the radical politics of movements for justice based upon identity or ideology. How do we as survivors, witnesses, or participants do justice both to the demands of radical movements and their human costs? How do we mourn for the dead, the missing, and the lost, including those who are among our enemies, or those for whose absence we bear some responsibility? How can we anticipate the almost inevitable ethical failures of the political movements with which we may be involved? Must we prophesize the dark side of our utopian imagination, and must we see ourselves capable of brutality and betrayal, both on the historical and the personal scale? I believe so. Like the narrator of Kingston's book, our obligation is to report crimes, but not only the ones done to ourselves. Even as we must tell upon the acts of others, we must also tell upon ourselves.

## THE HAMMER AND THE MIRROR

So much is told about Viet Nam, and so little is understood. The war and its aftermath lodge uncomfortably in my imagination, as it does in the American imagination. In between these two versions, the personal and the national, stands the collective imagination of minority discourse. Perhaps not surprisingly, Asian American memories about the American war in Viet Nam are as conflicted, as tangled, and as ambivalent as American memory in general. In the same way that Americans are often at odds over how to remember the war, so do Asian Americans sometimes find themselves opposing each other. Like other Americans, Asian Americans participate in Viet Nam vicariously, in the way Michael Herr (1991) describes when he writes, “Vietnam, we’ve all been there” (260). This journey to Viet Nam is usually undertaken through visual images, both in film and photography. These screen memories, as Marita Sturken argues, substitute for other, more unpleasant memories the individual or the nation would rather forget.

If screen memories from movies like *Apocalypse Now* or *The Deer Hunter* are what Americans remember, they are what I and many other Vietnamese Americans want to forget: peasants massacred on a boat, prisoners playing Russian roulette with the Viet Cong. The new and defiant refrain among some young Vietnamese Americans is that Viet Nam is the name of a country, not a war. We practice the same compulsion of selective memory the nation and other minorities engage in, forging imagined communities through acts of remembering and forgetting. Minority memory’s relationship to national memory is often dissonant, taking on the shape of what Foucault calls counter-memory. Counter-memory is fundamental to Asian Americans as we stake our claim to America and to Asia. Our forgettability defines us as an American minority, a trait we share at present only with Native Americans. But whereas Native Americans are seen as belonging to the land, when they are recalled at all, Asian Americans are seen as foreigners or aliens who have not been here for long, and who do not speak the language well. Asian Americans belong to America neither in memory nor in the present.

For Asian Americans, speaking out against this perceived foreignness and silence works through counter-memory’s passionate story. For one to



call oneself an “Asian American” today means one must remember a shared past the nation itself is bent on forgetting, since the treatment of Asian immigrants is a shameful rebuke to the national myth of inclusion and opportunity for all. Claiming a shared Asian American past extending to the eighteenth century leads both to an official history for the books and a much more intangible and ambiguous creation, collective memory. Collective memory for Asian Americans begins in the late 1960s, with the igniting of an Asian American movement on college campuses in the San Francisco Bay Area. Asian Americans took their cues not only from the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and the antiwar movement, but also from the Cultural Revolution in China and the National Liberation Front in Viet Nam. The new term “Asian American” spoke both to a domestic racial identity and a revolutionary one. The Asian American movement told a dynamic story whose plot linked the domestic and the international, the racial cause and the antiwar cause. In this global tragedy, billed with the grammatically incorrect title of “The Vietnam War,” American soldiers killing Vietnamese made no distinction between the Vietnamese in particular and Asians in general; nor did these soldiers notice the difference between Asians in Asia and Asians in America. The climax of this story was the birth of a new kind of citizen, the Asian American, who fought against both racism and the war because those fights were one and the same.<sup>1</sup>

Strangely, for all the visceral impact the war had on Asian American consciousness, for all it animated an early generation of Asian Americans, we see little cultural work about the war or its survivors. So it was with great anticipation, and some wariness, that I went to see Jude Narita’s one-woman show, *Walk the Mountain*, where she speaks in the voices of several Vietnamese and Cambodian women.<sup>2</sup> We witness “a doctor working in the jungle hospitals, a freedom fighter imprisoned in a tiger cage, a mother searching for her sons, and an immigrant in America who dreams of flying.”<sup>3</sup> Narita portrays them as courageous women struggling against terrible threats and the power of American invaders. During one performance, an audience member faints, overwhelmed. At the conclusion of the play, the audience applauds, but I exit the theater unmoved and uneasy, even though I should be grateful for the way she celebrates these women. I

don't see them as human even if they are heroic. Revolutionaries and survivors deserve celebration, but her drama participates in a basic flaw of Asian American and left-wing thinking from the 1960s, at least regarding the Vietnamese. This is the romanticization of revolution, accompanied by a one-sided criticism of the American abuse of power that overlooks, or forgets, a basic dilemma of revolution and movements of resistance. The hammer of revolution and revolutionary art is not only wielded to shape reality but also to destroy it.<sup>4</sup>

From Latin America to Africa to Europe, the war is remembered by the left as the struggle of a heroic, valiant Asian people against an imperial power. That collective counter-memory of the global left is as false and distorting as many American versions of the war. In the end, remembering the Vietnamese as heroic revolutionaries or suffering victims says much more about the desires of the one who remembers than those memories say about the Vietnamese themselves. We must ask of Asian America not only what it remembers but how it does so, for what purposes, and in whose interest. The dominant Asian American protagonist striding through collective memory, from the late 1960s until the present, is the one who learns to resist being victimized by oppressive power. Narita's one-woman show dramatically enacts this kind of counter-memory, implicitly seeking to use the historical evidence of resistance to oppression in the past, and elsewhere, to bolster the struggle against oppression in the present, here. In this theater of collective memory, the harm Asian Americans inflict upon each other, or upon others, becomes secondary, even forgotten. Forgetting is crucial and necessary, but because amnesia and memory are fraternal twins, what to forget and how to forget are also political and ethical choices. For the victim to see herself as capable of doing harm transports her beyond the clearly lit theater of identity politics and into the more shadowy realm backstage. Here, minority discourse can no longer be only about the damage done to minorities. It must also be about the damage minorities do. If these two types of damage are not equivalent, discerning how and why they are not should also be fundamental to minority discourse.

Peter Bacho's (2005) raw and ragged novel, *Entrys*, pulls back the curtain on this darker world, populated by wounded people grappling with

the political, ethical, and moral consequences of choices they have made. *Bacho's* is the first major fictional account dealing with Asian Americans and Viet Nam, published thirty years after the end of the war. Set from 1967 to 1975, the novel tells the story of Rico Divina, a barely literate half-Filipino, half-Indian working-class young man from Seattle who volunteers for the Marine Corps and serves in Viet Nam. His time in Viet Nam is recounted briefly, in nightmarish episodes: committing atrocities upon the bodies of communist soldiers, being grievously wounded, witnessing the death of his best friend, a working-class white youth named Jerome. *Bacho* leaves Viet Nam quickly, and for good reason. Reading *Bacho* on Viet Nam, the reader cannot say that she has been there, unlike the experience the reader may have with Michael Herr, Tim O'Brien, Bao Ninh, or Duong Thu Huong. Most of the novel concerns Rico Divina's postwar experiences after returning to the United States, where *Bacho* is on terrain he knows better, the mean urban streets of the West Coast. Back in the world, dim and fragmented memories of Jerome's death torment Divina. Even worse, his trauma is compounded by schizophrenia, an illness he treats with gobbled pills and too much alcohol. In the years after his tour of duty, Divina works menial jobs, drifts in and out of mental hospitals, and sleeps with a variety of women spanning the racial spectrum: white, Filipino, Indian, and mixed-race. Along the way, he learns how to write and yearns to be a writer, recording a lyrical first person voice in diary entries that give the novel its title.

The diary's intimate lyricism is offset by a more brutal version of Rico Divina who walks through the novel's third-person accounts, told from his point of view and from the points of view of his lovers. *Bacho* does not flinch from depicting Divina as a homicidal man and an undependable lover and friend, even though in the immediate years after the war, depictions of the American veteran as a raging, dangerous psychotic, a threat to others and himself, were common enough to become a stereotype, part of the popular lore around the returning soldier that veterans resented. *Bacho* redeems Divina from the stereotype by charting the genealogy of racism and imperialism that gives birth to him. Divina discovers his monstrous heritage through the women he encounters. His first lover, a white woman

and his high school teacher, inspires him to learn how to read and write. Another lover, a wealthy woman from the Philippines, takes him to the Philippines, where he encounters the martial-law society of Ferdinand Marcos and nearly murders her father. A third lover in the United States, also Filipino, exposes him to the anti-Marcos resistance movement. Perhaps his most important lover, a Native American, brings him to her reservation after they murder her abusive husband. There, a medicine man treats him unsuccessfully for his mental illness, and Divina deals half heartedly with his Indian heritage. Through Divina's journeys, the reader is exposed to what John Blanco (2005) calls the "gothic underside of U.S. imperialism." From the American West to the Philippines to Viet Nam to Iraq, this dark belly of American history, the belly of the beast, is where we find the wretched of the earth.

Rico Divina's story is explicitly about the problem of memory and counter-memory for those wrecked by their passage through racism and imperialism. But Bacho goes a step further than bringing up the legacies of oppressive pasts. He not only connects past to present but also yokes different peoples and straddles a vast geography through Divina's mixed racial heritage. The novel explicitly suggests that different nationalities, in this case Filipinos and Indians, share a common history and inhabit a common gothic world where they must forge alliances to recover their past and win their future. Bacho could have written a redemptive novel about a more heroic, virtuous, or victimized protagonist who recovers from his past and is reborn, à la the protagonist of Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*. Instead, Bacho is unrelenting in drawing Divina as a schizophrenic, a murderer, and a perpetrator of atrocities. Divina's awakening to history, which occurs as he enrolls in college, sharpens his writing skills and becomes increasingly anti-war, is not enough to overcome the weight of that history or the burden of his own personal wreckage. Divina ends up in the psychiatric hospital again, overwhelmed by his trauma. When a friend visits, Divina assaults him. In return, the friend reveals that Divina killed his own best friend, Jerome, and not the enemy, and that Divina's violent tendencies were not caused by Viet Nam, but merely aggravated by his tour of duty. Divina, already violent before he descended on Viet Nam, discovered there

the opportunity to cut off the enemy's ears and noses, going so far as to mail home a finger to this friend. Divina, like other wild men in American history, discovers the savage in himself when he encounters the other. Unable to cope with these memories of his savage self, Divina commits suicide by walking into San Francisco Bay, a death rendered in the novel as something voluntary and peaceful.

The greatest contribution of Bacho's novel is the harsh light it casts upon the treacherous territories of history and memory. It is in history that the humanity of the oppressed is warped and distorted, and it is in memory that the distortion and warping must be accounted for, in ways fitful, fragmentary, or self-serving. Divina's coming into memory is both damning and liberating. While Bacho suggests that Divina's schizophrenia and belligerence are outcomes of racism and imperialism, or even allegories of the effects of racism and imperialism upon the oppressed, he, nevertheless, also implies that the oppressed bear responsibility for the harm they inflict with their own hands. Divina sees no way out of this history and his memory of his actions. His schizophrenic condition becomes emblematic of entrapment in a prison house of capitalism and racism that does not always fashion heroes out of the oppressed, but often obliterates them or, at the least, scars them.

Encountering these scarred survivors, even in fiction, can be unpleasant, especially if they are monstrous, like Rico Divina or his blood brother, Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*. The monstrosity of Bigger Thomas and Rico Divina can be read usefully, as signs of their creators' determination to force readers into a zone of discomfort, ushering them into that haunted house of violence and hopelessness inhabited by the most tormented among men of color. These are the ones who must be sacrificed for the sins of society and history by suicide or by execution, as in the case of Bigger Thomas. Unlike photographs of dead relatives or strangers, Bacho's novel does not allow a reader the experience of contemplation, of quiet reflection, or of passing on. Deliberately or otherwise, his prose is rough, his structure jagged, his protagonist monstrous, his characters often sketchy, and his history bloody and violent. A reader cannot savor this novel, cannot take delight in it, and cannot admire it for

the sinew and grace of its sentences. The novel slams those doors shut. You must be angered by the novel, either by its gothic vision of American history, or by its hammering rhythms, or both.

You can also be saddened by the devastation of Rico Divina, or by the novel's tragic flaw, its inability to fully imagine its cast of supporting characters, both women and the Vietnamese. So far as women go, the novel dissects American imperialism but agrees to a backdoor barter, using manhood as a claim check for some of the prerogatives and privileges of American citizenship. The women of the novel enable better writing and better fighting for men, serving the purpose they always do in crotch-grabbing versions of cultural nationalism. And as for the Vietnamese, Bacho repeats the basic myth about Americans in Viet Nam. The war is a fratricidal nightmare of American violence upon other Americans, with Divina killing his own best friend in an act of friendly fire.<sup>5</sup> The Vietnamese are hapless extras wandering in the fog of war, who, beyond being victims of Divina's butchery, only appear a couple more times in the novel, briefly. This effacement of the Vietnamese, par for the course in American literature, film, history, journalism, scholarship, and political discourse, is striking in Bacho's novel, given his careful preparation of a countermemory for Native Americans and Filipinos. Bacho shows their common bondage, subjugated by American imperialism, but turning to the Vietnamese, he casts them as spectators in their own country, in their own war.

What am I asking from Bacho? Not to depict Vietnamese faces for the sake of Vietnamese faces, and not to say Vietnamese names for the sake of Vietnamese names. Narita's performance shows the inadequacy of simply manipulating these faces and names as puppets in revolutionary drama. But whereas Bacho grasps so well the ethical concept of acknowledging the harm inflicted by the wretched of the earth, he does not fully grasp the ethical need for recognizing the other. His ethical vision is highly focused and yet shortsighted. It is insufficient to populate a story with cardboard characters seen from a distance, even if the point is to dramatize the warped vision of a monstrous protagonist. Bacho need not be measured against some universal aesthetic or ethical standard in this regard. Look instead to other works inhabiting similar geographies where monsters roam. In *An*

*Obedient Father*, we see New Delhi through Akhil Sharma's rapacious, pedophilic, corrupt bureaucrat, but his victims, enablers, and cronies speak back, their features etched into our imagination with the precision of Sharma's writing, his eye for the right detail of character. We shudder in Toni Morrison's haunted world of *Beloved*, but Paul D's wounded masculinity is given due stage time, even if the novel's spotlight focuses on women. And even Schoolteacher, someone who might be caricatured as a Simon Legree-type white racist in a run-of-the-mill novel about slavery, is shown as someone who might live next door to us. As a result, he is more terrifying. Sharma and Morrison set high ethical, political, and aesthetic standards for the writing of postcolonial and minority discourse. One key reason why is their artistic sense of how to depict both evil characters and minor characters as fully human. We recognize some element of ourselves in all of them. Bacho is not so much interested in the wide range of his cast of characters as he is in smashing the wall of glass separating the reader from the world of gothic terror where the wretched of the earth live. This tactic is sometimes useful and admirable, but it may be hard to see even a glint of our reflection in shattered glass. Sometimes what the revolutionary needs is not the hammer but the mirror.

#### NAMELESS FACES, FACELESS NAMES

If writers and artists must meet ethical standards, so, too, do critics and teachers as they pass judgment on the value of works of art and pass that judgment on. But in doing so, we need what Tina Chen (2005) calls "an ethics of knowledge," a self-awareness of our sense of taste and its history. An ethics of knowledge for minority discourse can be used to critique what Chen argues are three dominant values for assessing a work of art's success: whether a work compels us to identify or to empathize with it, whether it is sufficiently complex and yet inviting so we can master its mystery, and whether it provides us with a cathartic resolution. Minority works of art are often judged failures at one or more of these criteria. Given how the humanity of minorities is often measured by their art, the minority artist's task is urgent. So is the task of the minority critic, who must both defend

the artist and also question dominant aesthetic criteria and unexamined notions of the aesthetic good.

At the same time, an ethics of knowledge demands an assessment of the minority artist. An aesthetic judgment must be rendered rather than suspended, on the condition that we know how inextricably politics is tied into any definition of the aesthetic. The majority is allowed the luxury of separating, falsely, the aesthetic from questions of ethics and politics, but the minority is not. Failing to pass judgment, we may praise a work for doing good rather than being good; this is the critic's ethical failure and the critic's version of identity politics. Both Bacho's novel and Narita's performance do well, in their own ways, and Bacho's novel does better by embracing the monstrous. But with Bacho's novel and Narita's performance, we have two extremes of representing the other: effacement and ennoblement. These ethical and political failures are also aesthetic shortcomings. Here the ethical is measured by the degree to which we can recognize an other and fulfill our obligations to that other. From an ethical point of view, the horizon of our vision must be expansive, precisely because minorities have rarely been recognized, except as objects of horror or fascination.<sup>6</sup> The ethical recognition of an other thus has a direct consequence for the aesthetics of narrative, through characterization. Faulty, inadequate, or stereotypical characterization rarely make for enduring narratives in literature, drama, or film, outside of their deliberate deployment in satire, not only because they are flaws in technique but also because they are failures to recognize and hence represent the other.

Effacement and ennoblement are failures of recognition riddling both minority and majority discourse when they come to narrate stories, memories, and counter-memories about the war in Viet Nam, and about the Vietnamese. Effacement is the more usual course of action, as in Hollywood films where the Vietnamese are just nameless faces. Sometimes they are not even granted that much in other forms of visual culture not dependent on narrative, as in Maya Lin's otherwise majestic Vietnam Veterans Memorial. On the wall of the memorial, the names of the American dead are commemorated in a way that amounts to an "insurrection of the dead" (Tatum 2003, 9). But Vietnamese names are passed over. The effect of neutrality



and contemplation for the memorial's visitors is only possible by not naming the Vietnamese, and in so doing, erasing Vietnamese presences, Vietnamese ghosts, and Vietnamese histories. But the completely opposite reaction to Lin's strategy, Chris Burden's *The Other Vietnam Memorial* (1991), tells us that simply naming the Vietnamese may not be enough of a compensation for their erasure. Burden's *Memorial* is composed of twelve massive copper sheets hinged on a central pole, allowing them to be turned like pages. Three million Vietnamese names are imprinted on those sheets, in an obvious gesture at Maya Lin's memorial (although they are not three million unique names; Burden took four thousand Vietnamese names and repeated them). For James Tatum (2003), "the aim is to exhaust the very idea of an American Vietnam War memorial" (23).

Both Burden and his critics think of the work as a "clear failure," in Arthur Danto's (1992) words. Danto calls Burden's piece "defective as art, in the first instance, and . . . defective because it ought to have been good if it was done at all. . . . It touches no emotions, not least of all because the names are generic Vietnamese names, designating anyone and no one. . . . It shows disrespect for the very persons it was meant to represent by putting an abstract screen of name-like marks between them and us. No one is moved to touch this memorial." Not having seen the work in person, I cannot say if this is true. But the idea of Burden's work affected me, for it seemed to do what his curator Robert Storr (1991) says, "partially" retrieving Vietnamese names from their double disappearance, first in war, then in memorialization, leading them to become the "displaced persons of the American conscience" (28). Burden, an artist interested in the "gray areas" (27), would later come to see his work as too propagandistic in its tone, too clear in the response it's meant to conjure, and too identifiable in its politics.<sup>7</sup> None of these things bother me, since there is a time and a place for outrage and clarity, for the hammer. But what is worrisome about Burden's reconsideration of his work is his confession that his real desire was to comment on the war in Iraq being waged at the time. *The Other Vietnam Memorial* is his oblique antiwar statement about Iraq, a war too volatile to approach. In light of this, Danto's earlier estimation of Burden's work proves prescient: Burden uses Vietnamese names for purposes other than paying respect to the dead.

Americans of all kinds are still haunted by the war, if not by the Vietnamese, haunted by the question of what to do with all those dead and missing people, the millions in whose name the war was ostensibly fought. Like most Vietnamese American artists and writers, Dinh Q. Lê seeks to answer this question, and in so doing, to redress the absences in both American and Asian American memories and stories. Much of Dinh's work aims squarely at the existence of the Vietnamese in these memories and stories as they hover phantasmatically between being faceless names or nameless faces. A refugee himself, he recounts his rage at taking one of the first college classes in the United States on the war in Viet Nam, at the University of California at Santa Barbara in the eighties, where the professor spent only two days out of ten weeks on Vietnamese experiences.<sup>8</sup> He dealt with his anger at the American obsession over the 58,000 American deaths by designing and distributing postcards reminding Americans of the three million Vietnamese who died. But whereas Burden attempted to name these dead, a task that cannot be accomplished, Dinh works with rather than against their essential historical feature, their namelessness and the fact that they are uncounted, their obliteration as individuals in our collective history and memory. In so doing, he suggests that one ethical way for the artist to confront the political and personal turmoil of the war and its legacies is to rendezvous with the dead on their own terms.

His merger of the historical with the aesthetic is achieved through weaving, the metaphor and technique marking his best-known body of work, the series titled "From Vietnam to Hollywood." Photographs, not threads, are woven together. Dinh learned how to weave as a child from his aunt, who practiced traditional grass mat weaving. Dinh's process involves scanning photographs or visual images, enhancing them digitally, printing them, cutting them into strips, and then weaving them before burning the edges of his compositions to give them a border.<sup>9</sup> His "wayward archive" of images ranges from American war movies to iconic photographs of the war in Viet Nam to, most strikingly, photographs purchased in Vietnamese second-hand stores.<sup>10</sup> Dinh purchased these photographs of unknown individuals in batches rather than selecting them for individual qualities, hoping to create the impression of a collective memory undetermined by

the artist's selection. In so doing, Dinh seizes upon the elemental core of popular Vietnamese visual memory of the twentieth century: the portrait photograph, whether it be of an individual, a couple, or a family. "Viet Nam, we've all been there" can also be the refrain for the Vietnamese when they see these photographs, recognizing in them people who could be long-lost, far-flung relatives in their vast networks of blood kin, neighborhood clans, imagined communities.

Dinh weaves these portraits of anonymous Vietnamese civilians into famous images that constitute the funhouse of mirrors that is the American memory of Viet Nam: Martin Sheen's character of Captain Willard from *Apocalypse Now*, or Tom Cruise's version of Ron Kovic from *Born on the Fourth of July*, or the infamous bullet-in-the-head execution of a Viet Cong guerilla by a South Vietnamese colonel in Eddie Adams' photograph. Fusing the mass culture of the anonymous with the pop culture of Hollywood, Dinh weaves together the personal with the historical, the anonymous with the iconic, Vietnamese with American, creating in the process an optical and psychological "shimmer" which compels the viewer to consider his own place in relationship to the work (Miles 2003).

The shimmering overlay of images and memories, the semiotic tug-of-war between foreground and background, results from a process Dinh discusses explicitly when he says his series

is drawn from the merging of my personal memories, media-influenced memories, and Hollywood-fabricated memories to create a surreal landscape memory that is neither fact nor fiction. At the same time I want the series to talk about the struggle for control of meaning and memories of the Vietnam War between these three different sources of memories. I think my concepts of what constitutes memory have changed over the years, from thinking of memory as something concrete to something so malleable. But the one concept I still hold on to is that, because Hollywood and the US media are constantly trying to displace and destroy our memories about the Vietnam War to replace it with their versions, I must keep fighting to keep the meanings of these memories alive. (Miles 2003, 20)

Dinh points to the unstable nature of memory, the way one's personal recall is inevitably woven through with threads of others' memories, stitched with other images. For Vietnamese Americans, this instability means that their individual memories, and the collective memory of their families or their communities, are literally shot through with American memories of the war as a violent spectacle, a bloodbath of epic proportions and staggering body counts.

Whether Vietnamese Americans want to or not, they, too, must see through the sniper's telescope of American vision about the war, so vivid and narrow. Vietnamese Americans have the unnerving experience of seeing themselves in those crosshairs of American solipsism and American memory. Defending his work against the charge of being too American-centric, Dinh argues that he, too, is an American. The way Hollywood represents the war is his cultural property also. He learned English partially through watching these movies in order to understand why other American children teased him about being Vietnamese. Dinh's method of reclaiming Hollywood fantasy by populating it with Vietnamese ghosts forces Americans to encounter the Vietnamese presence once more. He jams what Viet Le calls a "splintered trace" into the mind's eye (25). In Dinh's work, the Vietnamese interrupt American screen memories from which they have been erased, or relegated to the background. As splintered traces, they destroy the image in the same way Dinh tears apart photos in order to reconstruct them. They remind viewers of the presence of the Vietnamese in a war and a country that was, after all, their own.

In contrasting ways, two compositions exemplify his strategy: *Personal Memories* and *Destruction of Memory*.<sup>11</sup> In *Personal Memories* (Fig. 1), one layer of the composition consists of a collage of black-and-white photographs of the war, many taken by some of the war's most famous photographers. These photographs deal with the typical subjects of the war's photography, namely American soldiers, Vietnamese civilians, and Viet Cong guerillas. Their actions are centered on the war: on fighting, on dying, on survival, and most crucially and most powerfully, on the expectation of things tragic yet to come. The other layer of the composition is a black-and-white photograph on the left of an anonymous young Vietnamese woman,

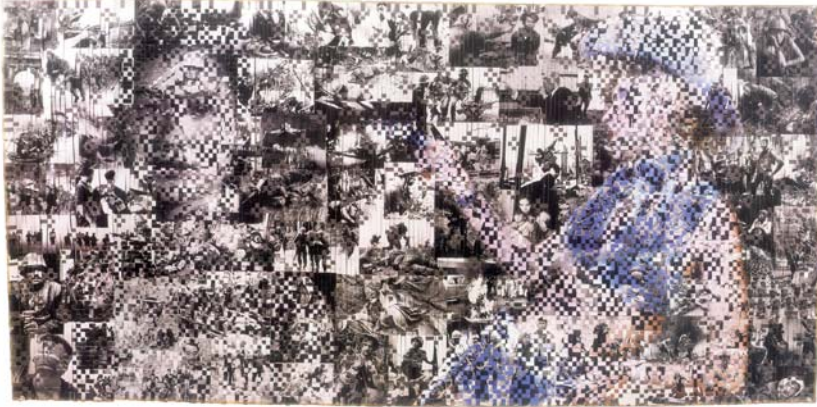


Figure 1. *Personal Memories*, 2003, 33½ × 67½ in. Image courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery and the artist.

and on the right, in tones of blue and fleshy pink, a Playboy bunny in a cowboy outfit, holding a six-shooter, from the movie *Apocalypse Now*. All of these images presumably constitute the personal memories of the title, but the journalistic photographs suggest a kind of collective, shared, and public memory.

In contrast, the two other images of the anonymous woman and the Playboy bunny serve the purpose of disrupting this public memory with the subjective memories of the artist and the surreal memories of Hollywood. The jarring power of Hollywood memory is rendered in vivid color, while the imprecise and fictive quality of that memory is emphasized through its blurriness upon close inspection. The Playboy bunny and the anonymous Vietnamese woman, posed directly in the Playboy bunny's line of fire, are the gendered mirror image of another iconic image, the Eddie Adams photograph, placed at the upper left of the bunny's hat. If Eddie Adams is shooting the South Vietnamese colonel in the moment of shooting the Viet Cong guerilla in the head, what is the bunny executing? It is the subjective memory of the artist and presumably of all Vietnamese who hold images in their heads like the one of the anonymous woman (Fig. 2). Her image is submerged and emergent, erased and disruptive, a palimpsest, a text persisting stubbornly beyond erasure. Her presence haunts these

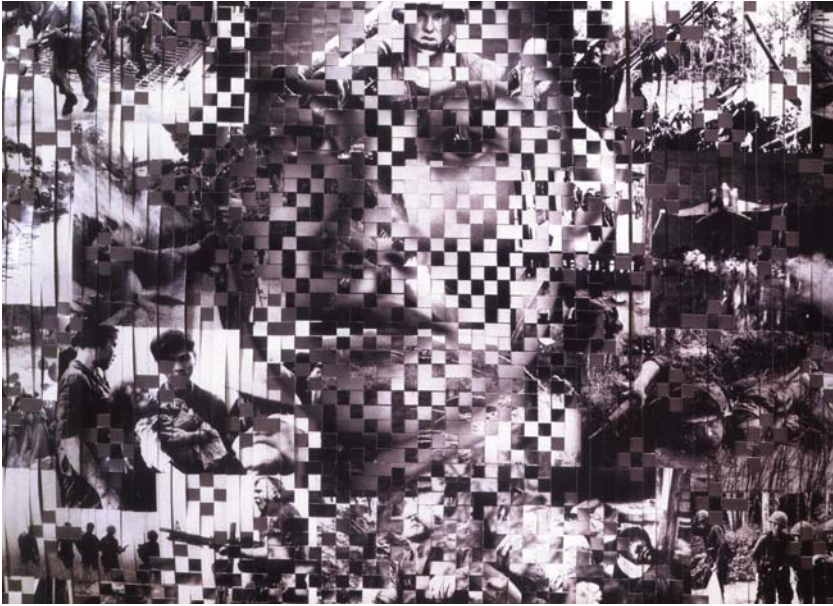


Figure 2. *Personal Memories*, detail. Image courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery and the artist.

other images. Her ghost can be denied, but it returns. Her power comes not from her name but her anonymity.

Upon closer examination, we are also forced to consider how the images of the anonymous woman and the Playboy bunny suggest the inevitable limit of the photographic or visually recorded image. The closer we draw to a photographic image, the more its inherent graininess or pixelation becomes evident. As Antonioni's film *Blow Up* suggests, we can only look so closely at an image before we lose sense of its meaning, before we understand that the image only approximates reality even as it suggests that it can copy reality faithfully, or substitute for it. Likewise, the most famous images of the war, such as the execution of the Viet Cong guerilla, circulate so often that they demand, at one extreme, that we accept them without seeing them, and at the other extreme, that we stare at them for so long and for so often we no longer may be certain of what they mean. This holds true for the iconic images of collective memory, but it is also true for the intimate images of our personal collections, or for the faces of those we hold dear.



Figure 3. *Destruction of Memory*, 2003, 33½ × 67½ in. Image courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery and the artist.

*Destruction of Memory* (Fig. 3) implies this paradoxical quality of the visual image as being both certain and ambiguous. In this work, the Playboy bunny reappears, her image in this case woven into and destroying a collage of black-and-white photographic portraits of anonymous Vietnamese. This is the mutual destruction of memory at work. The anonymous Vietnamese silently rebuke *Apocalypse Now*, making it impossible for us to see the Playboy Bunny as the film desires, as an embodiment of the craziness and surrealism and sexual energy of the war. Next to the solemnity, anonymity, mystery, and even tragedy of the anonymous Vietnamese, the bunny's iconic status is absurd, even obscene, the beautiful pinup turned into the ugly American. But the Playboy bunny also destroys the memories we may have of these Vietnamese, stealing their place in our minds when we think back to Viet Nam. The set of memories clash, and neither is necessarily truer nor more false than the other. In such a situation, the viewer is left unsure of her or his grounding in history, caught, if only for a moment, in the in between days of the refugee, who, dislocated in both space and time, always asks "Where am I? Where am I going?"

The Vietnamese refugee is caught in between Viet Nam and the host country, but also in between capitalism and communism, war and peace, tradition and modernity, memory and history, representation and reality.



Figure 4. *Mot Coi Di Ve*, installation at Montgomery Gallery, Pomona College, Claremont, California, March 4–April 9, 2000. Image courtesy of Shoshana Wayne Gallery and the artist.

Dinh's weaving brings together the warp and woof of these oppositions and binaries, and, hence, is formally a perfect method for representing this dimension of refugee experience. The writer Le Ly Hayslip uses the metaphor of heaven and earth changing places to suggest the profound vertigo of the refugee, both the kind who was displaced inside of Viet Nam during the war and the kind who fled Viet Nam for the West. In both cases, the dislocation was not only geographical but also temporal. The peasant refugee fleeing from country to city was caught in between tradition and modernity, even more so than the urban refugee who fled from Viet Nam to a western host country. In these moves across time and space, memory itself is shaped and affected by the change from tradition to modernity. In Vietnamese tradition, memory is transmitted orally, especially family and folk memory. In modernity, whether in the metropolitan city of one's own country or in the world-out-there of the Diaspora, oral transmission is often disrupted. Younger generations not fluent in the language of their fathers and mothers, or hindered by other generational problems, lose touch with the memories of the older generation. In oral memory's place come visual



memories, each set as puzzling as the other. Even if one knows the authorship of Hollywood images, one also knows they do not tell the whole story, because the whole story is impossible to discern. And in these anonymous black-and-white photos, the war's subterranean history is being suggested, but the knowledge of who these people are remains underground.

In his largest project, *Mot Coi Di Ve* (Spending One's Life Trying to Find One's Way Home; Fig. 4), Le literally pieces together all of these elements of memory, excluding Hollywood's. *Mot Coi Di Ve* consists of 2000 found black-and-white photographs strung together by thread and linen tape, measuring 10 by 20 feet. Attached to the photographs are papers with text, bearing quotations from two sources. One is *The Tale of Kieu*, Viet Nam's most famous narrative poem, which up until the recent past has been memorized, in parts, by even ordinary Vietnamese citizens. Another is *Hearts of Sorrow*, a collection of oral histories of Vietnamese refugees in America. *Mot Coi Di Ve* is a collage without an individual subject, unlike the photographs themselves. *Mot Coi Di Ve* suggests the collective nature of Vietnamese refugees' desire to return home, sometimes literally, but most often at least in memory. Like memory itself, *Mot Coi Di Ve* is not singular, whole, and linear. The design of it suggests memory in fragments, strung together randomly, shot through with gaps and holes even when not infected with mass media images. The ethical challenge for the artist working with and among refugees cast out of their homeland is to suggest memory's incompleteness, especially in the presence of furious desire, the contradictory yearning to imagine one's memory as whole or to forget altogether, as is too often the case in any nationalist imagination. In place of stars and stripes or three red bars upon a yellow field, the banner being waved through this work is memory's tattered flag, the one symbol followed by all far-flung refugees.

#### THE PAIN OF OTHERS

The ethical questions for artists concerned with their obligations to others and to the dead have no exact, correct answers. The political is a punctuation mark to these questions as well, because even in the realms of

photography or art or the dead, the weak are less powerful than the strong. The weak are more prone to have their likeness stolen and dispatched into the world, ghost-like, doomed to wander far from the body itself. Susan Sontag (2003) comments on this when she observes that “the more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying” (70). So one must respect the dead and respect the weak, even if one must evoke their ghosts in the service of one’s own memories. American nationalism, Asian American and minority discourse, and Vietnamese nationalism fight over these ghosts, seeking to reclaim them for their own brands of justice. Vietnamese refugees find themselves at the crossroads of these competing versions of memory. Absent or misrepresented in all three, refugees are just as likely to stage their own competing memory.

But the artists and writers among them are also more likely, as a result of existing under historical erasure, to be aware of the ethical demands of writing, representation, and memory, as in Dinh Q. Lê’s work. His work contests the claim made by Sontag (2003): “[A] portrait that declines to name its subject becomes complicit, if inadvertently, in the cult of celebrity that has fueled an insatiable appetite for the opposite sort of photograph: to grant only the famous their names demotes the rest to representative instances of their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights” (79). But the anonymous photograph, the name already stripped from its subject by history’s centrifuge, exists in the world to represent nothing but its forgotten subject. Photographs without captions and faces without names are other ways to describe ghosts. These wandering souls represent not the plight of a minority but the fate awaiting all of us. Dinh’s work neither glorifies nor dehumanizes its ghostly subjects. The work recognizes the uniqueness of each one of the other’s many faces, but it also resists the impulse to name those without names. The work accepts their anonymity as the very condition of their meaning for us. Their anonymity is both their tragedy and their humanity. Recognizing this paradoxical dimension of anonymity, the work refuses the urge to represent those who cannot be represented because—dead, missing, lost, or forgotten—they have passed beneath history’s wake.

Speaking of Viet Nam, speaking of the dead, it is ethical awareness, combined with sophistication of technique and a certain political sensibility, that elevates Dinh's work above Bacho's novel, Narita's performance, and Burden's memorial. The problem of ethnic authenticity certainly may return in Dinh's status as a Vietnamese artist speaking of Vietnamese issues, but without the complex interplay of ethics, aesthetics, and politics, the work would not have the power it does to force us to look at it more than once. But the ethical awareness found in Dinh's work should not leave us with the impression that Vietnamese refugee memory is exceptional or should be privileged. It is exceptional and privileged only in relationship to how we should deal with the haunting absence of the Vietnamese in American and Asian American memory and with the haunting presence of the dead and the lost in Vietnamese refugee memory. Upon closer inspection, what we find in Vietnamese refugee memory is that it presents its own narrative of memory and amnesia, of insight and blindness, of ethical responsibility and ethical failure. This narrative occurs even as Vietnamese refugees may seek to do justice to the ghosts of their past.<sup>12</sup>

In telling these ghost stories, Vietnamese refugees also follow the example of other versions of minority discourse, Asian American and otherwise. In the United States, minority discourse is mostly about self-representation in both politics and culture. What supposedly will follow is self-empowerment, a word with not only political but also therapeutic connotations. In telling our stories about our own people, we can recover our history, and we can recover from history. In so doing, we become owners of our stories and our experiences. We become reluctant to infringe upon the rights of others to tell their own stories or to speak up for themselves. We worry about others poaching on our own territory, grave-robbing our traumatic pasts. While minority discourse is far from being only about victimization, a significant element of it exists and persists. The danger it poses, according to Sontag (2003), is that "victims are interested in the representation of their own sufferings. But they want the suffering to be seen as unique" (112). The temptation for Vietnamese refugees is to repeat, with a difference, the story already told by other minorities in their struggles for self-representation, a story usually premised upon the uniqueness of each

minority group's historical experience and victimization. And yet this narrative of self-representation for Vietnamese refugees, this claim to visibility on the American landscape, is shadowed by a ghostly past. In the American afterlife for Vietnamese refugees, what is often forgotten and overlooked are the others who were their neighbors, Cambodians, Laotians, and the various ethnicities of the mountain highlands. The war was waged in their homes as well, something easy to forget with Viet Nam occupying center stage. In its own corner of the world, Viet Nam is a minor imperial power, both before and during Communism, exerting power and influence over its neighbors. Consequently, in the West, the Vietnamese overshadow other Southeast Asian refugees. So in considering Vietnamese refugee memory and the way it serves the interests of the Vietnamese Diaspora, we should be skeptical of how the so-called "Vietnam War" is retold as a story in which the Vietnamese are the victims but not the victimizers. The very name "The Vietnam War" is a misnomer, not only because Viet Nam is a noun and not an adjective, a country and not a war; it's a misnomer because in the very naming, in the way Viet Nam burns in memory, other Southeast Asians are erased, other names displaced.

As Sontag (2003) goes on to say, "it is intolerable to have one's own suffering twinned with anybody else's" (113). But as she suggests, this is precisely what must be tolerated, the recognition that our pain is not unique, a recognition implying its opposite: that we, too, can inflict pain, since we have no special claim upon suffering. Minority discourse's version of the aesthetic must be one that cultivates in us "the appreciation of traumas other than one's own," in Rajini Srikanth's (2004) words (28). So far as minority discourse can have an ethics, this is it: the claim to suffering and pain as signs of historical injustice must be met immediately with the recognition of the other that one has surely wronged. So far as minority discourse's right to existence is based upon the idea of doing justice, a right granted to it by the damage inflicted upon minorities by the majority, then minority discourse's aesthetics and politics must be guided by this ethical concern.

It is an ethics haunted by the dead, the forgotten, the missing. As we have to learn how to talk to the living, so do we have to learn how to speak with,

and of, the dead. This is a habit the traditional Vietnamese know well, living as they do with ghosts and ancestors. When I visited my homeland, compelled by the desire to return home in more than just the imagination, I tried to learn the habit. The homeland is not simply the country of origin for the Vietnamese. Home is where one's father was born, and traditionally one's father would hope to die there also. I doubt that will be the case for my father, as it will not be the case for me. But my father's father died in the province where he was born, a hardscrabble region famous for nurturing devout Catholics and hardcore revolutionaries. Thirty minutes from Ho Chi Minh's birthplace was my grandparents' mausoleum. I went there to pay my respects, only to discover that my father's father was not buried there.

The mausoleum, near the compound built by my father's father and where my uncles and most of my cousins still live, was in a state of disrepair, smudged by soil and the smoke of incense, its foundation besieged by weeds. The date of my grandfather's death was inscribed at the peak of the mausoleum, and beneath it, side by side, were two tombs. My aunt and the wives of my uncles pulled weeds, swept away the dust, and lit incense. The tomb of my father's mother featured a black-and-white photograph of a sad face I remember peering at me from above my parents' mantel. Her name and dates were inscribed above her tomb also. But next to her, the tomb of my grandfather was empty. No name was above it, no body rested inside, no stone slab sealed it. Full of earth and rocks, the tomb, its base cracked by the work of time on shoddy material, was a bed of weeds. What remained of my father's father was buried elsewhere, kilometers away, far from the living, in a muddy field near the railroad tracks, laid to rest twelve years ago.

I know this man only by his title, "my father's father." I would never be expected to call him by his name even if I had known him. So it was that I lit incense at his tomb and later witnessed the same deed being done by my uncles in their father's compound, in front of his photograph. Only when I was home in California did it strike me that I did not know the name of my father's father. But I remember his face vividly from the photograph above my parents' mantel. Soon, his image will be placed next to that of his wife, above his tomb. What will happen is this. The Vietnamese believe a person should be buried twice. The first time, in a field removed from the home

and the village, the earth is allowed to eat the flesh. The second time, the survivors must disinter what remains. They will wash the bones with their own hands, and then they will bury the bones once more, this time closer to the living.



## NOTES

This essay has benefited greatly from the comments of James Kyung-jin Lee and the questions of audiences at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Erlangen. Viet Le provided invaluable assistance with the reproduction of Dinh Q. Lê's images, and the artist was gracious in granting permission to use his work. All errors are my own.

1. For more on the Asian American movement, see Wei (1993); and Louie and Omatsu (2001).
2. Performed at Highways Performance Space (Los Angeles), January 4 and 5, and 11 and 12, 2002.
3. Quotations in this paragraph come from <http://www.judenarita.com/playsynopsis.html>, February 20, 2006.
4. "Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it" is commonly attributed to Bertolt Brecht, but was originally coined by Vladimir Mayakovsky, poet of the Russian revolution (1893–1930).
5. See Kinney (2000) for an analysis of the trope of friendly fire.
6. Charles Taylor (1994) elaborates upon the idea of recognition as being central to multiculturalism.
7. See Storr (1991) for Burden's sentiments about his work at the time of its exhibition in 1991–1992. See Burden and Wrange for his later reassessment of his work.
8. During a recent visit to the Santa Barbara campus, I was informed that nothing has changed regarding that course. Dinh's autobiographical comments come from the Miles and Roth (2003) volume.
9. See Le's article and Miles's introduction for details on Dinh's work process.
10. This splendid phrase, "wayward archive," comes from Viet Le's (2005) article.
11. All images of Dinh's work come from the catalogue edited by Miles and Roth (2003).
12. I elaborate upon this critique of Vietnamese memory in my article "What is the Political?" (Nguyen 2005). There I also discuss Maya Lin's memorial in greater detail.

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