

ERLING ENG

COUNTRY AND WORLD

*Warum willst du in die Ferne seweifen?
(Why do you want to wonder far away?)*
Goethe

To make sense out of the experiences of the war veterans I see every day, in terms of the relations between country and world, also requires effort on the part of the reader. This is my apology for the somewhat circular, meandering and discontinuous character of my presentation.

In an era when “world” is used indifferently for earth, globe, and planet, we need to be reminded of its temporal aspect, as in the medieval “world, flesh, and the devil” or in Shelley’s “O world! O life! O time!”. Indeed, the very word is an Anglo-Saxon compound, *wer-alt*, i.e. man-age or time of man.

My everyday work is on behalf of war veterans, most of Vietnam, whose sense of themselves and their world is fraught with memories of combat. These men are repeatedly beset by a military past which flares up in midlife, especially on the anniversary dates of losing a friend or being wounded. They are plagued with poor memory for recent events, episodes of amnesia, recurring nightmares, and “flashbacks” in which the present is overlaid by images more real than actual life¹. It is as if the ariadnic thread of their life had become broken in the labyrinth of war and they are wandering in search of the half that leads out.

Meanwhile the meaning of their life and their world remains suspended.

In the modern age, “world” tends to be viewed as either a conceptual notion of autonomous human subjects, or as a material entity, divorced from human reality. World as such has no reality. World as end no longer has any meaning. An expression of what world as end in antiquity meant occurs in Pliny:

«The world and this – whatever other name men have chosen to design-nate the sky whose valued roof encircles the universe, is fitly believed to be a deity, eternal, immeasurable, a being that never began to exist and never will perish. What is outside it does not concern men to explore and is not within the grasp of the human mind to guess. It is sacred, eternal, immeasurable, wholly within the whole, finite and resembling the infinite, certain of all things and resembling the uncertain, holding in its embrace all things that are without and within, at once the work of nature and nature itself»².

In contrast, world today has become far less visible, antinomically dissolved on the one hand in the abstract particles of physics, on the other in the constructs of neuropsychology. The sense of the senses has become lost within the recesses of a skull from whose brain the world has become a ghostly emanation.

As if guarding against this state of affairs, Pliny cautioned: .

¹ It will be remembered that “Surrealism” emerges from the experience of soldiers in the Great War.

² Pliny *Natural History* Harvard, Cambridge, 1965, I, p. 171.

«It is madness, downright madness, to go out of that world and to investigate what lies outside it just as if the whole of what is within it were already clearly known; as though, forsooth, the measure of anything could be taken by him that knows not the measure of himself, or as if the mind of man could see things that the world itself does not contain»³.

Yet that is the course to which we have since become committed, as the researches of Hans Blumenberg into the history of theoretical curiosity show. In a certain way however Pliny's warning against *hybris* is relevant to the present plight of my daily interlocutors. Both an individual and collective disregard for human limitation in the war to which they were committed continues to exact its price.

The American soldiers who were sent to Vietnam saw themselves as going out into the world, perhaps even to save it. It was only years later, after having "gone back to the real world" as they put it, that they began to suffer the consequences, not yet identified as such, of not having returned. When they were in Vietnam, they said they were "in country"; leaving, they said they were "going back to the real world". Because those with whom I daily converse have not "arrived back", it has given me much to ponder. This essay is a fruit of things we have talked about, as they pertain to the changing meanings of "country" and "world" today.

Let us consider some of the raw contrasts of these two terms.

"Country" is wild, dense, entangled, primitive; it guards the approach to the archaic. "World" is opened and expansive, civilized and illumined. Getting on with one's life is getting on in the world and with the world. Country, conversely, like the landscape, is that which is over against one. It may be the country of one's birth or one's death, or a foreign country. To be "in country", *in* the landscape, is to be possessed.

The connection between being "in country" and "going back to the world" may be understood in either a genetic or dialectical fashion. Both ways will be used at different times to develop the implications of their connection.

Mother country. A magazine cover presents a collage of scenes from Vietnam within the outline of an American soldier's head. Here he is shown in the world while the country is pictured in him. But there he was "in country" and "out of the world". As an icon the cover portrays the veteran as lived collage of two different countries, both of which are now out of the world.

A different figure would be needed to show the soldier "in country" with the potential for realizing world within him. To go back to the world would then mean actualizing the world contained within while he is in country. Now there happens to be a remarkable mythic scene which conveys this metapsychological state of affairs.

«One day, when Krishna was still a little baby, some boys saw him eating mud. When his foster mother, Yasoda, learned of it, she asked the baby to open his mouth. Krishna opened his tiny mouth, and, wonder of wonders! Yasoda saw the whole universe – the earth, the heavens, the stars, the planets, the sun and the moon, and innumerable beings – within the mouth of Baby Krishna.»⁴ .

The infant contains the world for its mother, just as the mother is at once country and world for her baby. World here is present only as a *mise en abyme* of exchanges between infant and mother as lovers. All the world loves a lover, because it is the lover who, in her sacrifice, is a warranty of world. The combat soldier is doing the same, though this knowledge is obscured for him by mediating commitments.

Materially the world revealed within the infant Krishna is also a psychomythically ingested mother imago whose physical presence has been digested. She remains latent at the basis of the

³ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴ *Srimad Bhagavatam The wisdom of God* transl. by Swami Prabhavananda, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1943, p. 190.

world, ad Heraclitus' *physis*, "wont to conceal herself". The soldier in dying yields her up and as if beholding her once more in the moment of birth, cries "Mother!".

The psychomythic incorporation of the mother by the nursling creates a space of co-habitation out of the chaos of their mutual occupancy. The body endowed with maternal substance is an occupant of this space, while what we speak of as "house" is an expanded body, with its maternal quality.

The voracity of the baby in its devouring of the Mother implies a virtual violence within the constituted world, violence which is able to emerge eruptively or gradually. A common manifestation is the banalization described by Viktor Sklovsky: «Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war»⁵. Such "entropic" violence is intrinsic to the things it "devours".

Occupancy ("Cathexis"). The implicit violence of the constituted life world is referred to in Freud's founding notion of "*Besetzung*" violently rendered into Greco-English as "cathexis". His "cathexes" are literally occupancies, or investments, pictured as quasi-detachable pseudopodia by which self and other and their difference are sampled, tasted, and judged. A principal denotation of *Besetzung* is "military occupation", with its connotation of force. Oral cathexis is endowed with that quality, fiercely acquisitive as bodily ego. Freud's late interest in the "death instinct" (*Todestrieb*) is possibly connected with his growing appreciation of infant hunger, no less consuming than that death with which his cancerous jaw acquainted him.

The fury of life is never so nakedly revealed as in military combat, where the end of life seems to lie in indiscriminate destruction. In its perspective the reproduction of life seems to mirror its production of death. Stanislaw Lem has calculated that «every minute, 34.2 million men and women copulate (...) the combined ejaculate, at a volume of forty-five thousand liters a minute (...) forty-three tons of it, is 11.3 times more abundant than the boiling water produced at each eruption of the largest geyser in the world (at Yellowstone) and shoots without intermission»⁶. When Heraclitus speaks of war as the father of all things, he may also be referring to the violence with which sexual reproduction is humanly experienced.

Countries of war and peace. The recrudescing nostalgia of the combat veteran in middle and late life, shot through with anguished moments from tattered memory, has been awakened by his present experience of existence as struggle. In part it is evoked by current exigency, in part a reassuring souvenir of survival from the combat of youth. Obligatory for most everyone, most do not realize it with such unremitting intensity.

The soldier who was once "in country" and who now seems to have "gone back to the real world" seems to have been living for years in two different countries, one of war and one of peace. Their discord afflicts him, and his affliction invites medical attention. The medical gaze defines his difference from others in terms of symptoms, and characterizes his typical duster of symptoms as "post-traumatic stress disorder".

Later we shall turn to the history of this syndrome in psychiatric thought.

The contrast between the landscape of war and that of peace was noted by a future psychologist, the young Kurt Lewin, then a field artilleryman in the Great War. Their phenomenological differences are considered in his maiden publication, *War landscape*, in 1917. Lewin observes how the psychological landscape changes as one nears the front: «A boundary zone emerges, whose specific character increases in density as one approaches the enemy». He describes how anything within that zone assumes a military character: «Whatever lies in the combat zone belongs to the soldier as his rightful property, not by virtue of conquest – for the situation differs in the conquered rear areas – but because it is a combat configuration, a military thing, naturally given for the soldier. Even something as barbaric as the burning of floors, doors, and furniture is different from the same act in a house under peace. Even if these things have not lost all their peacetime meaning, their

⁵ Lemon L. T. and Reis M. J. *Russian Formalist Criticism* Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965, p. 12.

⁶ Lem Stanislaw *On Human Minute* Harcourt Brace, New York, 1986. p. 14.

character as war material is far more salient, requiring them to be subsumed under altogether different categories»⁷.

An American soldier who returned to Vietnam where he had fought ten years earlier describes the strange difference between the remembered landscape of war and the perceived one of peace:

«Everything had changed, and for a moment I thought I was in the wrong place. But when I bend in the river was as I remembered, and so were the mountains in the distance.

I looked for the familiar rice paddy, the tree line, and, beyond it, the hill with the old French fort on top. In the map of my memory they are vivid and immense, spread out across a vast expanse, a day's march from each other. But to my surprise the French fort rose up so much smaller, and so much closer together, than I had remembered. When I fought here Da Nang was a world away; today, the drive had taken fifteen minutes. The old French fort had seemed miles from the bridge; now it clearly was only a short walk, just across the paddies and along a tree line.

But then I realized why it had seemed so far. That paddy had meant booby traps and mines and being caught in the open, and that tree line had meant ambush and death. Who lives in war and dies is decided by inches: walking down a paddy dike, you step over a mine that killed the man behind you. And when inches are everything, the measures of distance goes out of whack. Then I measured with the yardstick of fear. But now the same scene was only a small, peaceful Asian landscape, a nice place to have a picnic. Then it had defined my entire world; now it was only a Chinese watercolor of river, paddies, and foothills in the shadow of the mountains – just another piece of Vietnam»⁸.

Having in the meantime gone back to the world, the visitor's one time world has reassuringly receded into the depths of memory, leaving on its surface a pastoral scene whose charm denies the menace it conceals.

The landscape of war has become hidden within the landscape of peace.

Should however that recessive scene with its own particular time once more secure dominance, even briefly, confusion and disturbance will result.

The picture that then presents itself to the psychiatric viewer is what is presently called "post-traumatic stress disorder".

*Post-traumatic stress disorder*⁹. The history of this diagnostic category dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. However it was only inserted into the American Manual of Psychiatric Diagnosis in 1980, in response to its high incidence of appearance among combat veterans of the Vietnam war. Although its characteristic cluster of symptoms is to be seen in survivors of death camps, in rape victims, in survivors of accidents and disasters, and in others, my detour through post-traumatic stress disorder bears on its tie with participation in war and the relation of country and world.

Characteristic of the syndrome, however variable individually, is an involuntary, everpresent readiness to remember, perceive, or enact images from an earlier unanticipated, extremely deadly, or otherwise overpowering threat to one's entire existence. The accompanying sensitivity, irritability, sense of helplessness and futile rage can, over an extended period of time, and particularly when alcohol is involved, result in homicidal explosiveness or suicidal implosiveness. Particularly striking is the chronic disorder of time experience, evidenced in poor memory for recent events, inability to concentrate, amnesias and "flashbacks". These inconsistencies of conscious identity account for the constant turmoil in which such sufferers find themselves.

⁷ Lewin Kurt "Kriegslandschaft" *Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie* 12, 1917,440-447.

⁸ Broyles Jr. Wm. *Brothers in Arms* Avon, New York, 1986, pp. 199-200.

⁹ The history of this psychiatric syndrome has been comprehensively and thoughtfully reviewed by Easter Fischer-Homberger in her book *Die traumatische Neurose* Huber, Bern, 1975.

Because it was thematized medically after the first railway accidents in the early nineteenth century, the syndrome was first seen as “railway spine”. A little later its etiology was redefined and it was called “railway brain”. In the last quarter of the century it became “traumatic neurosis”. In the Great War it was called “shellshock”, in the Second World War it became “combat fatigue”. The shifts of its nomenclature gives a hint of a certain ambiguity attaching to its diagnosis, because of different supposed etiologies and corresponding treatment approaches.

The early story of the syndrome has been dramatically presented by Wolfgang Schivelbusch¹⁰. The first railroads created great public excitement when they were built in the early nineteenth century. Contemporary accounts tell of the exhilarating sense of danger that accompanied the early train rides. Accidents were frequent. In addition to physical injuries and deaths, victims later complained of emotional instability, with disturbing images from the accident, resulting in nightmares, sleeplessness, and generalized irritability.

Interest in the syndrome, and the issue of where to place responsibility for the subsequent illness (the Greek *aitia* in “etiology” means “blame” as well as “cause”) stemmed from the public liability of the railroads. Consequently the growth of insurance companies paralleled the spread of railroads.

Let us consider how the disaster of such train passengers may be related to that of my veterans. The initial euphoria which these passengers experienced in being borne along at such new and unusual speeds rendered the shock of its unexpected termination all the more doom-laden. Their sense of omnipotence was shattered by a sudden reminder of one’s bodily frailty. Their participation in the movement of the train made the collision one which occurred at the same time in the space of their own bodies. A nice example of such dynamic indistinction, and of its possible consequences, occurs in Reg Saner’s account of his hike through the Grand Canyon:

«Turning westward to check the sun’s remaining minutes I notice a raven gliding in as if to alight. It skims along about twelve inches above the dust-puddled slab of this narrow plateau, then – as it continues out over suddenly nothing – I’m shot with adrenaline. Unconsciously, I’d become that raven, and when its level glide sailed out over the cliff edge, my safe inches of altitude turned to deep air – with me plummeting through it. An eight-hundred-foot drop isn’t bottomless but my surprise makes it so.

Twenty minutes later, watching the daredevil feeding of swifts, I notice a variant; how a smaller, incomparably nimbler empathy causes me to fall a long way through one microsecond of panic. You can become a swift, I discover, wholly unaware you’ve done so. Any number of times, without thinking, just blurring and wheeling, blithely feeding on gnats or what have you, my acrobatic gaze drops from the swift I’ve become down through the space between me and the Tonto Plateau: “But I can’t fly!”.

Anywhere else, even in mountains, birds passing nearby at eye level have at least the slope under them. Here the sheer drops from this floating platform of butt create an illusion that fools me with as little as a yucca moth, flying two inches above a pool of brown sand. The moment its cabbage-white flutter takes it out past the cliff edge, I startle»¹¹.

Through having delegated the heft of his own body to that of the bird, the watcher is imaginarily precipitated into the depths when he realizes his winglessness.

The possibility for psychological trauma is afforded by just such a conflation of one’s personal identity with that of another bodily entity. The obscurity of the difference within the imaginary confluence makes what happens to the other happen to one’s self. As if a graft, such a happening is included within the life of the self, whose life repeats it.

We are upborne or let down by whatever we commit ourselves, or have become committed to. We are already committed to the family into which we are born, in which we grow up, to the

¹⁰ Schivelbusch Wolfgang *The Railway Journey. The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* Berkeley, California, 1986.

¹¹ Saner Reg “The Ideal Particle and the Great Unconformity” *Georgia Review* 44 (3), 1990, 376-377.

society and culture in which we have lived and go on living. Unexpected discovery of the difference between what I believe myself committed to in the world, and what my country is committed to, can be shattering, an experience of betrayal. Therewith, at the same time, an oscillation between blaming one's self and blaming one's country is initiated.

Soldier and country. The distinction between primary and secondary gains in symptom formation is a conventional one in psychiatric thought. An example of secondary gain would be a symptom's value for securing attention, while its value in the psychic economy is primary gain. But in practice the distinction is difficult if not impossible. The award of a pension to a disturbed veteran may initiate a partial reconciliation with a society against which his rage for past and present losses has been directed. Collective acknowledgement of responsibility for his welfare may make him more ready to admit the responsibility still falling to him, be it merely as a constituent of the selfsame collective. The soldier who has gone to war for his country expects that his country will see to his welfare in turn. The American soldiers who went to Vietnam diverted the violence of their own country to Vietnam. On their return to America they expected recognition of their sacrifice. When the recognition was refused them, their angry feelings grew. Their unslaked anger made victims of those who were unable to contend with it in their personal lives. The lack of any necessity for the war that they could see meant to them that they had been victimized by the society that sent them.

The relationship between country and world is one that must be fulfilled in both directions if any sense of a meaningful journey is to be realized. It is always "in country" that the possibility of an end of the world is fought against, whenever a sense of world has become obscure within a particular limited world.

What is meant here by "end of the world"? In everyday usage the phrase refers to a collective belief like that of the Apocalypse. If it is lived as an absolute belief it is considered delusional. American soldiers were sent to "the end of the world" to fight the enemies of the American vision of the world. The failure of that project returned, and continues to return, home. Soldiers were employed to deal with the difference between the presumed American vision of the world, and the visions of other nations and countless individuals. The content of the veteran's trauma is just the travail, i.e. work, of the struggle to deal with the difference opened up between his country's vision and his experience of the war. Faithful to his own vision, he feels unfaithful to his country, faithful to his country he gives the lie to his own experience.

The notion of a collective psychology can be used abusively. Yet the public decisions and actions of collective representatives call for metapsychological appraisal.

Those figures are cast in roles of a collective theater. (Freud's key word *Besetzung* also means the cast of a play!) Their self-presentations, actions, and words articulate depths in the life of their country. Such figures mediate between the public sphere and private lives. Occupancies occur between collective and individual domains, enacting and exacting differences. (*Besetzung* also means filling a vacancy).

As if responding to the end of a millennium, the tensions between the meanings of "country" and "world" grow in importance. National sovereignty becomes increasingly problematical. Trauma becomes the experience of "country" as the meaning of "world" changes. The experience of the veterans with whom I work attests to their entanglement in this change.

It has been recognized that trauma begets trauma. A Spanish proverb says that "If you go to seek revenge, prepare two graves". Out of my work with veterans and my own historical memory it seems altogether likely that the violent, nationally traumatic death of President Kennedy provoked the escalation of military might in Vietnam two years later. Grief following the death of a loved one contains a component of rage. To deflect that rage from the one lost, it must be discharged elsewhere if it is not to be turned against the self. The memories of veterans contains many such unmanaged deaths. Whatever else contributed to this "tainted war", it is just such concealed rage –

rage averted from the image of the lost leader – which accounts for a great deal of what otherwise remains inexplicable about the escalation¹².

A witness of Lyndon Johnson's state of mind at a time when it was still possible to preserve a more temperate course suggests the panic depression in which he appears to have acted.

«On July 14 (1965), Johnson walked into a staff meeting, took a seat, listened a while, and then told us, “Don't let me interrupt. But there's one thing you ought to know.

*Vietnam is like being in a plane without a parachute, when all the engines go out. If you jump, you'll probably be killed, and if you stay in, you'll probably be killed. That's what it is. Then, without waiting for a response, the tall, slumped figure rose and left the room».*¹³

It was as if he realized the inevitability of failure in trying to export his country's helplessness and rage in this way, and a necessity for him as political leader to take a collectively aggressive and self-affirmative stand.

The film “JFK” directed by Oliver Stone, a Vietnam veteran, links the war to the slaying of the president. His view is that had Kennedy lived, he would not have promoted the war. While Stone is probably right, Kennedy's violent death gave an added impetus to, even while it cleared the way for a political decision already forming in a country torn with civil strife¹⁴. Collective helplessness and reactive rage ignited collective active discharge. Lyndon Johnson's response was to the brutal offense against both the office he now occupied and against the American people with whom and for whom he prided himself on being the spokesman.

The war was to continue for ten years. Because the country did not know why it had gotten into the war it did not know how to get out of it, even though its outcome had been evident at the end of 1968.

From theodicy to sociodicy. Within the shifting relationships between country and world, tasks of collective mourning set apart particular figures or incidents which epitomize past moments of suffered helplessness, at the same time distributing responsibility. The figure of the Vietnam veteran, an invisible man in presentday America, represents a still poorly mourned past. For the veterans I speak with that decade of the war remains “a dagger in the void”.

Man,
puppet of night,
stabs voids

But one day
a void in a rage
stabs him back

After that there is nothing
but a dagger in the void.
(Bo Carpelan)

¹² The observations of Michelle and Renato Rosaldo are relevant here. “Headhunting often follows deaths of leaders or close kin”, in: Rosaldo M. Z. *Knowledge and Passion* Cambridge, 1980, p. 228. “What these people say is that they need a place to carry their anger”, in: (Ed.) Hamerton-Kelly RG. *Violent Origins. Anthropological Commentary* by R Rosaldo, Stanford, 1987, p. 243.

¹³ Goodwin Richard N. *Remembering America* Little/Brown, New York, 1988, pp. 403-404.

¹⁴ Important evidence for Lyndon Johnson's reversal of the course taken by John Kennedy is given in two letters of the latter's advisors in the *London Times Literary Supplement* April 3, 1992, p. 15.

When the mutual investments that form a human relationship, whether individually or collectively, are suspended and assumed to be exclusive of one another, a situation of potential combat is constituted. Then the phantasm of “a dagger in the void” appears, pointing in opposite directions.

Such “a dagger in the void” depicts the internal contradiction of the divided self in traumatic experiencing. Trauma may be said to represent a negative discovery of the reality of self through failure of world taken as end to fully answer to it. World as end, and with it our claims of sovereign power, must finally be realized as inadequate, just because it (and they) cannot make good the promises our occupancies of it involve, occupancies which have sought for self in what seems to be missing from world. The possibility of mutuality between man and world, replacing covenant between God and world, has been understood as one requiring cultivation – hence “culture”. Where and when this fabric is torn or rent, a sense of trauma is experienced.

The idea of intentionality in Husserlian phenomenology is a project to recover a sense of self in a post-religious age. All its reductions however fail to realize a transcendental subject. Yet it is just in this failure of its analytics of intentionality which is also involved in our sense of the failure of world to serve as end. Now a transcendent subjectivity becomes evident. With this, “trauma” is no longer a riddle, but the very sphinx of individuality itself, attesting to the perennial human task of self-understanding.

In a world experienced as divine, what we think of as psychological trauma once served to challenge the extent of human understanding and ability to realize the intrinsic cosmic order. In the Stoic cosmody of Marcus Aurelius, a military leader as well as an emperor.

*«There are two reasons, then, why you should willingly accept what happens to you: first, because it happens to yourself, has been prescribed for yourself, and concerns yourself, being a strand in the tapestry of primordial causation; and secondly, because every individual dispensation is one of the causes of your prosperity, success, and even survival of That which administers the universe. To break off any particle, no matter how small, from the continuous concatenation – whether of causes or of any other elements – is to injure the whole».*¹⁵

Similarly, in Hebraic creation, what we see as psychological trauma was construed as a reminder of human failure to have observed the divine commandments within a divinely created, but humanly inscrutable world.

“Traumatic stress disorder” is an historical cultural construct which first emerged in the early nineteenth century. It represents an assertion of the primacy of human reason over that of a divinely ordered nature. This psychocentric understanding of disaster now calls for a sociocentric supplementation.

Participation in superordinate structures of commitment, rooted in numberless human lives, renders individuals susceptible to trauma, involving obsessive distrust of self and others. Embodied patterns of value and belief are taken for granted as long as they are not seriously challenged. But for the past two centuries, rapidly growing travel, means of communication and migration have weakened traditional loyalties and allegiances. Curtains, walls, and frontiers become leaking dykes, powerless against the transcultural ocean.

What we call “trauma” today invariably involves the collective in some way, be it only for the compassion it asks of us. By virtue of our vital participation, our responsibility extends to plants, animals, earth, air and water. Human inability to prevent or remove distress renders it, at the limit, “traumatic”. Its ubiquity becomes explicable when we consider the intersubjective character of the living and lived world. Each of us lives to and from others, real to ourselves and to one another through our offerings and responses. This includes what we naturally think of as the things of the world. It is not surprising that natural disasters should elicit evidence of compassion earlier

¹⁵ Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1964, p. 81.

unsuspected. Helping, we too begin to heal from what befalls us in having befallen them. «Situated in some nebulous distance I do what I do, so that the universal balance of which I am a part may remain a balance».¹⁶

In the presentday world it is just its insufficiency as end or purpose in enabling us to cope with human catastrophe which accounts for the mushrooming of “traumatic stress disorders”.

There is a way in which every war is also a displacement of a possible civil war, whether of class, religion, or region. In the unfocussed discontent of outraged war veterans, it is not impossible to see how, given another kind of history; a genocidal scheme like that of the Nazis or Khmer Rouge can incubate. A clonic spasm of country can cut us off from that world in which we breathe the air of freedom.

My encounters with veterans of an unaccountable war illumines the origin of psychoanalysis in the self-understanding of self-hatred. Through them it becomes clear why it was an Austrian Jew who discovered “sexual trauma” in his own and others’ lives, and who crowned his work with an indictment of the followers of Moses for his murder. The situation of my veterans is no less convoluted. What my veterans – and his patients – suffer from, he came to see through, no less self-insightfully. As a Jew, he had experienced how civil society can deny identity by denying a hearing. In giving his patients the hearing withheld from him, they discovered the figure of their lives as he discovered, through their discoveries, his own.

A country too can become governed by self-hatred, insofar as it becomes closed off from openness to world. It is manifested as civil strife. It is this self-hatred which my veterans suffer as representative individuals, whose guiltiness is further enhanced by their country’s attribution of its guilt to them. This self-hatred is realized only after the fact, in the wake of concrete expression, as in sabotaging a treatment set-up or, as in the case of some of my veterans, by a suicide attempt.

Collective traumata today arise from the dissolution of earlier difference between country and world. How can we discover possibilities of new meaning in the experiences of those who feel themselves victims?

Oikopsychology. The house (*oikos*) is a border we inhabit between country and world, as well as between birth and death. My veterans are haunted by images of hutches destroyed with their occupants. They live too with memories of their own shattered military shelters. When the house or home is destroyed, life and death become unbound radicals, no longer synergic.

The house extends into the depths of the country. In post-Civil War America, the beleaguered Plains Indians held Ghost Dances underground at night, invoking a return of their ancestors. In Vietnam, American forces eventually discovered the extent to which their positions had been undermined with tunnels. A Vietnamese poet praises his country’s earth for its protectiveness, repeating: «Your entrails, Mother, are unfathomable»¹⁷. While world is always open, its every boundary also an horizon, the vertical depth of country affords shelter and gives birth.

Country and world are polar perspectives, mediated by the economic order (*oikonomos*) of the household. When the *oikos* is broken into, the senses of country and world become confused, their usual understanding reversed.

Open horizons of world convert to constrictions. The countryside becomes forbidding, seductively empowered by the danger it conceals. World order becomes forbidding labyrinth. Infested with this disorder, an engine the veteran was once able to take apart and put back together now becomes an occasion for despair. Without shelter, he withdraws from public life, cares for homeless animals, and dreams of returning to Vietnam, to pay with his life for the lives taken. Without the surety of house and home, between fight and flight, he lives with the longing for and the fear of confrontation.

The ruined dwelling assumes manifold forms: one’s own wounded body, or that of a dead comrade, a blasted village, or a defoliated Jungle. Only within the promise of a restored house can

¹⁶ Porchia Antonio *Voices* Knopf, New York, 1988, p. 3.

¹⁷ Mangold T. and Penycate J. *The Tunnels of Cu Chi* Berkeley, New York, 1986.

the refugee and his witness-to-be meet, can the soldier's end of the world encounter come to be realized as already entailed in his initial sacrifice of self as infant to world as end in the presence of the mother. Only within such a house now can country and world be illumined in their endowment of one another with different meanings. Now too the limits of memory come to be realized, even though never entirely accepted.

The combat veteran is unable to give a coherent account of what he knows, since his knowledge is embodied. He seems to be known by what his body has remembered. Thus he seems to be torn at times between trying to forget and trying to remember. But neither will do. When I ask him: «If there were a magic medicine that would erase all your memories, would you take it?» the answer is never unqualified. If the answer is positive, it is given hurriedly, if is the negative, it is with hesitancy. Their reservations are revealing: «But then I wouldn't know how I lost my leg» or «But then I would forget my dead friends». Realizing the inseparability of all one's experience, inclusive of memory, with identity is of course the issue: «A man might rave against war; but war, from among its myriad faces, could always turn towards him one, which was his own»¹⁸.

Desire and necessity. While the veteran remains preoccupied with the difference between life and death, my preference is to remain with the fruitful distinction between desire and necessity. While the contrast between life and death is more expressive of our wish life, that between desire and necessity relates to reality. I may say to a veteran on this score: «At the same time the war you fought was necessary for you, it is now unacceptable to you. You cannot make it more acceptable to you now by denying its necessity then. Nor can you reduce its necessity for you then by stressing its inacceptability to you now. The veteran is condemned to struggle with the irreducible temporal difference between the vision of desire and the visage of necessity. This difference is experienced more sharply perhaps in war than in any other human enterprise. It was Freud's belief in the therapeutic value of a focus on this difference between the prospect of Eros and the retrospect of Ananke which led him to make the otherwise unaccountable claim "to have the whole human race as one's patient"»¹⁹.

Responsibility. The peripeteia which the veteran alternately seeks and avoids in our work is one which occurs in quantum increments. Slowly it dawns on him that our encounters will not restore him to some imagined previous state of affairs, and that he will never be able to forget what has happened. He senses he must somehow "learn to live with it". But he does not yet know what that involves. Little by little he learns to discover me extent to which his archaeology can be accommodated. In this a bit of reality becomes bared, no less necessary for having long been resisted as unacceptable. He may now be ready to consider the possibility that his distress was of value to him only as long as he did not try to impose some particular meaning on it. Focus by self or others on those manifest signs, the "symptoms", tends to be accompanied by an inability to believe the sufferer can learn anything far himself from his or her experience.

The intrication of "traumatic stress disorder" compels us, in our attempts to comprehend it, to acknowledge the intersubjective character of world experiencing. By intersubjective I mean that experience of myself as subject is inseparable from my sense of being a like subject for others. Superordinate collective identities demonstrate the same rule of mutuality, without ever losing the quality of nascent ego.

¹⁸ Manning Frederic *The Middle Parts of Fortune* Viking Penguin, New York, 1990, 182.

¹⁹ Freud Sigmund "The resistances to psychoanalysis" in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Hogarth, London, 1955, 19, p. 221. Cf. Marcus Aurelius: «Just as we say, "Aesculapius has prescribed horseback exercise, or cold baths, or going barefoot", so in the same way does the World-Nature prescribe disease, mutilation, loss, or some other disability (...) Let us accept such things then, as we accept the prescriptions of an Aesculapius» (V, 8).

Given this inherent but hidden intersubjectivity, traumata represent an implicit interrogation of existing structures of human understanding. When we contrast the self to the ego it is for the sake of evoking this latent ground of intersubjectivity inseparable from the ego as figure.

The susceptibility to war is increased by a loss of the tie of individuality with the societal and cultural structures through which it is nourished. Now it is the latter which are promoted in power and influence, or defended as if one's very life depended on them. The fury of religious wars – but don't all wars seek to become religious? – derives from the way in which human individuality is conceived as subordination to the will of God. With this any endangerment of an order understood as divinely ordained demands the sacrifice of human lives for its maintenance and repair.

A principal difficulty in my work with disaffected veterans arises from their difficulty in realizing – and hence to assume responsibility for – the way in which their own socially mediated desire led them to participate in human destruction they may have deplored then, but not as incisively as they do now. The familial and societal commitments through which they were drawn into that course of action have in part faded, making the one they were then culpable in the eyes of the one they are now trying to be. The soldier and the civilian are at odds in each one, and the consequence is self-hatred.

Trauma as re-source. That *mundus inversus* of America to which her soldiers were sent is capable of revealing a depth perpendicular to the horizons of desires, one of regeneration, relative to which the wounds remain extraneous. Such depth, beyond the reach of trauma, is realized at moments by those whose Desire has survived the disillusionment of their uninformed desires.

If Heraclitean “War is the Father of all things”, then the body that has depths beyond the reach of wounds is the Mother of all things. The life of the Mother, as figured in country with its “unfathomable entrails”, absorbs the violence of the Father, rendering it generative.

The experience of a combat veteran who was a “tunnel rat” in Vietnam illustrates how “out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety”. Recently while at home, and engaged in sharpening his knife, he sensed the presence of an enemy. He followed him into the basement of his house, and engaged him in mortal combat. With a feeling of satisfaction he felt his knife sink into his opponent. Not until later did he look down and see the blood pouring from his arm where he had cut an artery. He had to be helicoptered to the hospital. After he had recovered we talked about what had happened. He likened his action to the self-lacerations of Plains Indians (he was himself of Indian extraction) on the eve of battle, making themselves ready.

Still another visionary experience of the same veteran demonstrates the presence of the regenerative maternal moment for the soldier. In an exchange of fire underground he believed he had been fatally wounded. Dying, he lay in the arms of a young Indian woman. His vision manifested the mother's sheltering presence, just as his earlier struggle with an unseen adversary marked his contest and identification with the paternal rival. He was fond of saying, «Even in the darkest tunnel it is possible to see. I could see better in the dark».

Another soldier remembers the time when he brushed against an unseen figure in the darkness of a tunnel. When there was a little cry he silenced it with his knife. When he emerged from the tunnel he was too shaken to be able to tell what he had encountered there. When he went back to the world and was getting off the plane, his wife held out to him their infant both in his absence. He backed away, unable to take it, remembering the little cry he had silenced. In recent years, after his moral pain surfaced, he succeeded in killing himself. He had become engulfed in the Mother's “unfathomable entrails”. Indeed, his own mother was deranged and had beaten him as a child.

“Survivor guilt” suffuses the veterans' memories of their past life. «It should have been me instead of him». An inch or two, a second or two, is remembered as having made the difference between the other's death and one's own survival. The shared confrontation with the possibility of extinction makes all that happens to one important for the other. At the same time the gratuity of life becomes more sharply etched by the gratuitousness of the other's death. Either life or death can be taken as a gratuity, death or life as gratuitous. But there is asymmetry of giver and gift. Most of

all, I become the recipient of another's gift, his gift to me of my life. Now the other's absence charges me with the responsibility of maintaining his presence, keeping a vigil for him. The veteran left behind may spend his sleepless nights conversing with dead friends, as if he knew that only so long as he remembers them do they remain alive. When he does this he is also nourishing the vitality of his desire which makes him a participant in the world of life. His fidelity to his dead friends is also fidelity to world as end. Without it, existence were inane. At the same time, he has not yet discharged his obligation for the extra gift of life he has received. That gift is required to be passed on. It cannot be returned to those from whom we have received it, who have made it possible for us to realize our own life as gift.

War above all has a way of revealing the gratuitous quality of life. In the landscape of peace it is loss above all which tells us this. Mourning sometimes involves a contest between gratitude to the lost one for this realization, and a sense of guilt for feeling such gratitude. When veterans experience guilt for having been survivors, this is often enhanced by their feeling of having done so little with their subsequent lives. They may be able to deal with their troubled sense of an outstanding obligation by learning how to live their life with a sense of their life itself as sacrificial, absorbing sacrifices made for them. Sacrifice is discovered as the nexus of individuality and world. What I often observe is that the combat-specific sense of sacrifice experienced by the soldier resists his appreciation of its meaning in his postwar life, and particularly in his middle and late years.

Sacrifice and self-change. Sacrifice is required because the gift of life cannot be repaid; it can only be passed on. But to pass it on we must first make what has been given us our own. The gift of life endows us with world as that which is the promise and obligation of individuality, within which we both make what is given us our own and learn how to pass it on to others. Sacrifice is the name we give to the attitude in which we pass on to others what has been given to us by still others, and through which we have come into our own. It is always what has been given us and what we have made of it that we pass on to others. Realization of individuality is at once a passing on of what has been given us, as well as what we have made out of our digestion of that which we have been given. Digestion of ego by self is the price paid to life for the realization of individuality. What we experience as death is required in the tradition of the life world.

The veterans I talk with were only nineteen, fresh from high school, when they went into war, eager and hopeful of showing what they were capable as men. Once they took a life, or saw the violent death of a fellow soldier, they became alternately eager and fearful to die. Then it was more practical to be forward with death; having survived into their middle years they have become backward about death. Yet their wish now to find their name on the Vietnam memorial is to continue in the company of those men with whom their own lives were conjoined in combat.

There are other meanings also. To kill an enemy soldier is to use that life given by the Father to overcome the historical empirical father, to acquire his potency. This initiation does not take place in the world, but in the underworld, "in country". Inseparable from the ordeal is a wish to "go back to the world". But this wish remains tainted with the sign of regression, since world as much, world as end, is not to be "returned to". World in its sense as man-time is irreversible, since human time is marked with mortality. That is why the soldier can never forget the face of the first man he killed, which is also his own.

When the ex-soldier believes he has returned to "the real world", he is surprised by nocturnal oneiric souvenirs of that country where he partially and abortively, violently and fitfully, experienced world as end in the mode of end of the world. The bit of individuality developed there has not become independent of its settings; hence the "chronicity" of his flashbacks and nightmares.

There seems to me a peculiar kind of disservice that is rendered to such troubled veterans in encouraging them to take their involuntary memories to be an indication of psychiatric illness. To be sure, if military combat is an average expectable human activity, then we can consider difficulty in handling it as evidence of psychiatric illness. But if military combat itself is humanly exceptional, then we may expect exceptional individual responses to it.

The youth looked forward to going out into the world as a soldier. Becoming a soldier was inseparable from going out into the world. Then he discovered that he had become entrapped in another country, in the midst of their own civil war. The world now lay behind him. Later, when he thought to have returned to the world, it was still there behind him.

Thus it is that they are always turning around, and prefer to sit with their backs against the wall. They avoid public places where they cannot cover their backs. Preoccupied with another time and place, their reveries insulate and isolate them from any active engagement with those around them.

Now in their middle years, two decades after the debacle, some of them are able to realize that when they were in country, they were also in that of a comparable childhood. A veteran earlier mentioned recalled that when he was pinned down by enemy fire in Vietnam, he remembered how he had not given in when his deranged mother had beaten him as a child.

After seeing these men for years I have come to see their self-discord as also implicit in human experience. If “country” is the “contrary”, “world” with its sense of “man-time” tells of the self-same in discontinuity. The veteran still errs in the contrary. Only insofar as the veteran is not only able to remember what he has seen and done, but also to grasp his continuing vulnerability to flashbacks and nightmares as evidence of the sacrificial imperative at the basis of human life, will his waves of helplessness and rage yield to a sadness of mourning for the passage of the world. This is the sense of the world that is figured in the earlier words of Porchia.

The soldier who believed he was going out into the world arrived in another country, one which closed in around him. There, unbeknownst to him, he underwent a profane initiation. Returning to his native country, he carried the stigmata of his incompletely realized second birth, one that will remain abortive while his life goes on in expectancy of the earlier unachieved death. The possibility of his own death was fertilized by the violence he faced, ingested, and survived; now he is pregnant with it. He ignored it for years while the swelling continued. By midlife he is the only one who cannot see it.

He tries to abort it in every possible way: through substance abuse, overwork, dangerous activity, and suicidal scenarios – all to no avail. That death of which he is so enamoured cannot be delivered by any artificial means; there is no aborting it. It remains that one-time unique event constitutive of human identity. Bound up with it, as with every unborn, are the hopes, fears, and wishes of its bearer. Also embodied in this embryonic death are all the times one might have died, the faces of others who did, or who were left behind when the soldier went “back to the world”. This foetus of death is to be carried to term, save the veteran – unable to support its imaginary reality – elects to seek to destroy it, and in so doing once again destroys others along with himself.

Fears of and longing for this unfulfilled moment in the realization of individuality presuppose love to and from others. The figure of pregnancy is insufficient. What has been figured as a pregnancy of death also needs to be seen as un-lived life, an interruption of one’s movement within the world as openness. The interruption occurred in being overwhelmed. The unpredictable reanimation of unimaginable scenes, the “flashbacks”, attest to the indelible traces of times which were “out of the world”. While world largely remains open, the susceptibility to these repetitive experiences is evidence of closures within it.

Only when the veteran can speak with another with whom he feels safe does a possibility begin to exist for him of distinguishing the contributions of his own country from those of the foreign country, while coming to realize how both together have obscured the world as sheerly open. As this takes place, a discrimination of what happened from what was experienced also becomes possible. The country of one’s birth and the country that was viewed as the place of one’s death bleed into each other. The meaning of the opening of the wound is reversed into the meaning of an opening into world itself as open.

The “traumatic memory” of the former combat soldier does not simply represent a failure or refusal to adapt to the conditions of military life and death. It also stands for unresolved issues between him and his country with regard to their responsibilities to one another. The life or death situation of the soldier throws his responsibility into relief, by contrast to the uncertain locus of

responsibility in his country. Because of such questions of responsibility, war is followed by an intensive review of the performances of all who were involved.

There is a truth which is known only in the suffering of what is not understood, over and over again. The veterans I know have become their own flickering picture shows in which the frames do not cohere, portions are missing, and the projector breaks down and starts up without warning, inexplicably. Since what those scenes allude to was neither self-intended nor self-accepted, they have an alien life whose authority imposes itself as a hyperreality on the captive witness.

The veterans' reveries of return to Vietnam represent an effort to re-enter the labyrinth to recover the broken thread by which they may finally make their way out of it forever.

The ex-soldier with whom I am familiar is forever seeking some kind of truce between the memories of those he was with in country and the expectations of those around him now with whom he cannot share those memories because of their lack of his kind of experience. His association with other veterans may enable him to use and defuse otherwise unacceptable memories, so that their tendencies to intrude upon his present life through compelling re-enactments are weakened. But disappear they never will, whatever kind of arrangement with them he may reach. His irreversible loss of innocence may hopefully come to be converted into a lesson of reality. One lesson is that the self which survives all possible losses is that of the past future.

Another lesson of trauma, always to be a bit more deeply learned, is the obverse of the numbness under which it was earlier hidden: compassion. Compassion commemorates our co-natality in a common, shared world, realized as individuality.

Between country and world. Before the soldier ever realized he has his life from the world, world which includes every other person, he felt authorized by his country to take the lives of others. When one soldier in the night following found himself tracked by his "kill", he turned in his weapon. Others offered themselves to enemy fire. A soldier who inadvertently caught the gaze of the man he was killing stopped counting his kills after that. He had seen himself, and thus it is that veterans are never able to forget the face of the first man they killed. In that face is hidden the reflection of their own forlorn self, as the words of Manning above attest.

The countries of the world have become more than neighbors. Earth, air, water, and fire are ignorant of national sovereignty. The Chernobyl disaster was betrayed by the Swedish discovery of radioactivity three days later. What is happening to the Amazon rainforest is affecting us all. And so on.

The authority of "*pro patria mori*" is weakening today as the maternal aspect of world appeals for recognition. Hence the growing likelihood of the traumatic protest when war is invoked. It is traumatic because of the conflict between individual rejection of war and the individual's ideological acceptance of it. As member of a collective a person who becomes a soldier is likely to participate in a war which he is later on unable to justify to himself as an individual. He must now make his home in that irreparable temporal and ethical gap. His inner strife consists of the reliving of inconsolable scenes which perpetuate the fission between individuality and collective authority.

The "tainted" wars of Vietnam and Afghanistan illumine the changing relationships between countries and world today. The current multiplication of countries in the name of self-determination is a sign of this. Country can no longer resort to exporting its own conflict without soon discovering that it is also undermining its own welfare in a still more elementary way. This to be sure does not bring me processes required for the necessary shared responsibility within our reach. We are finding out how that is to be continually accomplished.

We have criss-crossed between country and world again and again. At the start I posed the query of Goethe: «Why do you want to wander far away?» His response to his rhetorical question was: «See how near the good is lying» («*Sieh, das Gute liegt so nah*»). Mine is that from birth on we are too near the good to be able to realize it as me ideality of that self which lies at the heart of individuality and its growing world. So we must "wander far away". In doing so we become

estranged from what is familiar so that we may become more familiar with that other depth of individuality we know as world.

Summary. My paracletic work with former combat soldiers disturbed by the apparent senselessness of their lives has spurred me to make sense out of their and my obduracy in pursuing meaning in the scenes to which they seem drawn back. Their lives testify that “While war is necessary, it is never acceptable”. It is necessary because of our inability to deal with domestic changes without foreign enemies. It is unacceptable because of the way we thereby also assail the world from which we and they draw our warranty.

World may be understood both as an economic order and as a sacrificial order. The world of actuality includes both the possibility of being “in country” and of “going back to the real world”. The world of actuality is a world to which we belong, not simply one whose subject or object we may be. In this context, “trauma” appears as an abortive struggle to make sense of events in the sphere of belonging, of the sacrificial order, in terms of the realm of possessions, the economic order.

Pliny’s vision of cosmos is what my veterans are seeking, with which they have become familiar through its negative counterpart. It is implicit in their observation that «when I die I’ll have to go to heaven, because I’ve already been in hell».

The soldiers I talk with are suffering the difference between being in country and being in the world. That uncomprehended difference is their “trauma”. Since Vietnam they have been set the task of realizing individuality out of the difference between country and world, as does the child from the difference between mother and father. The task of these veterans is also the task of our time. Country is always to be left behind, in order to discover a world already present from the beginning.

However, my veterans are still on their way back to the real world. Whether they will ever arrive, I do not know. A few have. I am beginning to believe that the suffering of the others has already been determined by their way of believing in “the real world” as something fixed.

It may have started with their notion as a child that somewhere beyond the charmed circle of their childhood there was a “real world” where they could one day truly be the person they were destined to become.

The tenacity with which they adhere to their memories (and their memories to them) is a measure of the inseparability of the “real world” and “real self”. The “symptoms” of my Vietnam combat veterans dramatize their vacillation between extremes of a belief in a “real world” and a “real self”, without regard for their implicate pairing as individuality and world.

Prof. Dr. Erling Eng
848, Summerville Drive
Lexington, KY 40504, U.S.A.