

Cold War Metaphysics

1

The United States, it has been argued, has known three revolutionary transformations in constitutional regime: the founding, the Reconstruction amendments, and the New Deal.¹ I would add a fourth: the post-World War II reorganization of government codified in the National Security Act of 1947, which coordinated military, intelligence, and economic planning in terms of the global struggle against communism. We are warranted in saying that this event marks a change in *constitutional* regime, first of all, because the act's implementation transformed the character of the executive branch by powerfully expanding the limited military authority granted the executive in the original Constitution. The president's status as commander of the armed forces is significantly altered when, as with the Cold War and its institutionalization through the National Security Act, the threats calling for military alertness and intervention tend to be continuous rather than episodic or extraordinary and when they predominantly involve subtle subversion rather than obviously demarcated lines of battle and engagement. More broadly, however, the Cold War was *constitutive* of American national identity. While it prevailed, its vocabulary shaped the nation's tasks, policies, and pursuits, forming a frame through which issues as different from one another as civil rights, dissent, culture, education, and the economy could be weighed together in terms of their significance for the nation's struggle with a worldwide communist movement.

If the Cold War was a fourth constitutional regime, however, it was certainly unlike the others in the extent to which, while it prevailed, policy, legislated or otherwise, was shaped by public fantasies and hysteria. To employ the title of one of Cold War novelist John Le Carré's novels, the Cold War was a "looking glass war" in which the enemy one fought was to an unusual degree an unverifiable creature of one's own imagination. The antagonists of the Cold War could never be certain that the enemy was not one of their own, reflected back to them in an uncanny register. Despite its limited focus on the world of spies and its British setting, *The Looking Glass War* provides, in fact, an excellent introduction to the fearful hermeneutics of ambiguity that structured the public discourse of the Cold War on both sides of the Atlantic. Fred Leiser, being prepared to enter communist East Germany by compatriots who heartlessly manipulate him, using him as a tool for purposes they themselves can hardly articulate, tells of the ambiguity of an earlier incident during World War II, as a morse code operator:

"They were following the message, you see; they wanted to know where the safety signal came. It was the ninth letter; a back shift of one. They let me finish the message and then they were on me, one hitting me, men all over the house.

"But *who*, Fred? Who's *they*?"

"You can't talk about it like that: you never know. It's never that easy."

"But for God's sake, whose fault was it? Who did it? Fred!"

"Anyone. You can never tell. You'll learn that." (P. 191)

In the world of the Cold War, loci of agency can never be fixed; the answer to "Who's *they*?" is endlessly deferred. Living in such a world is largely a matter of reconciling oneself to the aleatory amorality that governs it. One's superiors might at any time deem it necessary, in the interests of security—or even of the current political administration, or perhaps nothing more than the continued dominance of one's own intelligence service over the others—that one be sacrificed, as indeed happens to Le Carré's protagonist.

Leiser's training, and eventual sacrifice, are organized entirely around the vaguest of nervous speculations. Rumors, accompanied

by hazy and indistinct photographs, suggest—to an imagination inflamed by the Cuban Missile Crisis, to members of a secret service that has been marginalized and is on the lookout for ways of enhancing their influence within the state bureaucracy—that the Soviet Union has moved nuclear missiles into East Germany. The evidence, however, is uncertain; its significance must be clarified. Indeed Leiser's masters emphasize that in sending him over the border, they are not attempting to accomplish a specific task but are merely seeking to fix the meaning of ambiguous information:

Rumors, a guess, a hunch one follows up; it's easy to forget what intelligence consists of: luck, and speculation. Here and there a windfall, here and there a scoop. Sometimes you stumbled on a thing like this: it could be very big, it could be a shadow. It may have been from a peasant in Flensburg, or it may come from the Provost of King's, but you're left with a possibility you dare not discount. You get instructions: find a man, put him in. So we did. And many *didn't* come back. They were sent to resolve doubt, don't you see? We sent them because we didn't know. (P. 182)

Flushed with hopes for success, the spies who orchestrate Leiser's downfall dream of further operations: "I spoke to the Minister about it. A training center is what we need. He's keen on this kind of thing now, you know. They have a new phrase for it over there. They are speaking of ICOs—Immediate Clarification Operations.' " (P. 245)

The looking glass war, then, is driven by the need to resolve doubt, to sift through phantasms and shadows, to distinguish between the apparent and the real. The hermeneutics of espionage, as Le Carré presents it, is palpably humanistic: only by "putting a man in" can doubt be resolved. Le Carré's Cold Warriors are unmistakably Cartesian, tormented by fears of an evil demon capable of creating false images, but equally possessed of the conviction that doubt can be resolved, clarification achieved, immediacy regained. In fact, a double agent had faked photographs suggesting the delivery of Russian nuclear missiles to East Germany, knowing that the West would send a Leiser to investigate and hoping that he would be captured, to be put to domestic political use in a show trial. (This, at least, is the

explanation that appears likely toward the end of the novel, though conclusive proof is never found.) The Western agents are aware of the likelihood that they are being duped but hope to use the opportunity to increase their influence with sister intelligence agencies by demonstrating their efficiency at “clarification.” Leiser in fact travels to the scene, his efforts to resolve the doubt through direct observation leading only to more rumors and further uncertainties, the operation as a whole plunging him and his superiors into just the immorality, ruthlessness, and cunning they condemn in their enemy.

If the Cold War, as Le Carré suggests, is a looking glass war—organized around the fear of phantasms and the need to clarify them, but always vitiated by a mingling of the antagonists’ identities that insinuates itself into the very core of the conflict—there can be no better place to turn to for a theorization of this conundrum than “philosophy through the looking glass,” as the thought of Gilles Deleuze has been characterized.² In *Logic of Sense* and *Différence et répétition*, Deleuze makes the concept of the simulacrum or phantasm the centerpiece of Postplatonic philosophy. According to Deleuze, the project of “reversing Platonism” is to be achieved through a renewed appreciation for the distinctive qualities of simulacra and phantasmas—the realm of ideas, categories, and attributes that are thoroughly relational and relative, which cannot be measured according to an independent or objective standard.³ These are dangerous for Plato because they have no fixed identity or unchanging essence; or to put it differently, their identity can be expressed only in relative terms. The afternoon is warm compared with yesterday but cool compared with tomorrow; Alice is bigger than she was but smaller than she will be. Plato disparaged simulacra by claiming that good copies or icons bear an *inner* resemblance to the idea. They correspond not to outer appearances but to essential, unchanging, defining characteristics. A phantasm, in contrast, possesses a merely superficial resemblance. The real enemy for Plato, according to Deleuze, is the phantasm—for example, the Sophist, who superficially resembles a true lover of wisdom but, Plato insists, is not.

The task of modern philosophy, Deleuze argues, is to affirm what Plato demonizes: “to glorify the realm [*règne*] of simulacra and reflections.”⁴ This is done by affirming the unlimited, unfixable quality

of that which is merely relative, whose identity is determined solely through comparison with other reflections with no appeal to absolute standards. In that world, paradoxes abound because it seems possible to attribute anything to everything and everything to anything: things are at once warm and cool, near and far, up and down, familiar and strange, good and bad, all depending on one's ever-changing terms of comparison. As Deleuze forcefully argues, celebrating the reign of simulacra must ultimately call identity itself into question; for insofar as it is constituted in the realm of simulacra and phantasm, who, what, and how one is shifts with the winds of opinion and reflection. The Platonic philosopher, in contrast, faced with the fluidity of identity thus opened up, responds first by appealing to a privileged realm of fixed essences and then by singling out some simulacra as legitimate because they somehow participate in that realm.

If "all of Platonism," as Deleuze writes, "is constructed according to this will to track down phantasms or simulacra" (p. 166), then Le Carré's spies are master dialecticians. And if the metaphysics of American espionage and intelligence differs from Le Carré's interpretation, it does so primarily with respect to the global character of the American sphere of activities. As Gen. Maxwell Taylor put it, the United States "must partake of the many-eyed vigilance of Argus—constantly watching in all directions in anticipation of the emergence of forces inimical to our national purposes."⁵ Indeed, the metaphors of General Taylor's injunction, which are typical, are revealingly Platonic. Given the unique threat posed by the Cold War, American government must survey the *whole* world: its gaze must be comprehensive, all embracing, synoptic, and range "in all directions." Moreover, its gaze must *penetrate*: it does not simply inspect superficial events but identifies constants beneath the variety of global events, deeper forces expressive of broad historical tendencies or sweeping political projects. Finally, the American gaze is tied to the specific *purposes* of the subject who employs it: it is deployed by an agency that orders and ranks events in terms of their utility for a shared *telos*.

The Platonic discourse of the Cold War works to intensify and accelerate the general tendency to speak of government as, quoting William E. Connolly, "the ultimate agency of self-conscious politi-

cal action.”⁶ The state is figured as a *subject*, in particular, as an epistemological subject committed to guaranteeing the objectivity of the world. But this places us at once on the terrain of what Martin Heidegger characterizes as the ironic “end of philosophy”: the bitter fruit of Plato’s inauguration of the “humanization of truth”; the triumphant consolidation of the Cartesian subject, committed to “the unconditional rule of calculating reason” that is the will to power.⁷ If the planetary technological regime, ordering the world by constituting it as an object scrutinized in its entirety by the subject’s gaze, appears not to need philosophy, that is only because “philosophy is already its foundation”: no longer merely dreaming of encountering the world as a stable object of representation and calculation, modernity and its state, Heidegger observes, achieve this in actuality (p. 96).⁸ But that would mean that the paradoxes involved in conceiving of the world as the object of representation, and the subject as the willful orderer and shaper of the objective world so represented, invade the allegedly nonmetaphysical, mundane, “realistic” spheres of foreign policy, national identity, and security. In what follows, I explore some of the implications of that conclusion.

2

A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization.

—Herbert Marcuse

The integrity and vitality of our system is in greater jeopardy than ever before in our history.

—*National Security Council Memorandum No. 68*

The Demon is not the Other, the opposite pole of God . . . but rather something strange and unsettling that leaves one baffled and motionless: the Same, the perfect Likeness.

—Michel Foucault

Visitors at Alta Bates Hospital in the city of Berkeley are routinely handed a brochure, to be read during the elevator ride up to the

patient's room, that instructs in comforting the sick. "Act naturally," it advises, and elaborates: "Touching with a hug or a handshake, and having eye contact with the patient[,] will show that you care." The intent may simply be to inform and heal, but the advice would not be out of place in a briefing book for invaders from Mars or foreign agents on how to pass as Earthling or American. A generation ago, someone who had to be coached in such fundamentals might have seemed freakish, a candidate for therapy, perhaps; but pathology has become the norm and has extended to the culture at large. That passing on the rudiments of an acceptable bedside manner is now felt to be a responsibility of "health care providers" hints, with elegant banality, at the essence of postmodern theories of simulation or hyper-reality: social life is the reproduction of models, not the spontaneous origination or recovery of forms, and models must therefore be generously provided. We might nevertheless speculate on the patient's reaction, after having been soothed with appropriate touching by her or his loved ones, upon reading the instruction booklet. Would it not provoke some concern about the status of these signifiers of care and concern, and their bearers?

To what extent have such fears become generalized cultural topoi? According to an article that appeared on the front page of the the *New York Times*, single women have taken to employing private detective agencies to verify the claims, the representations, as it were, of potential partners.⁹ They suspect that the men in their lives are misrepresenting themselves, to put it charitably, and, the agencies say, they are usually right. Regularly, men hungry for commitment, men with advanced degrees, temporarily benched but well-paid football players, heterosexual men, turn out to be womanizers, uneducated, ex-cons, gay. The emergence of a profitable service industry dedicated to the task of separating genuine from false representations suggests that the very notion of "representation" has become a pervasive source of popular anxiety and concern, though not one that is beyond the ability of information brokers to remedy. (According to one detective quoted in the article, all that is needed to ascertain the validity of most claims is the appropriate social security number, which can be used to "access" the requisite information from computer files around the world.) In a similar fashion, other information

brokers—*Times* reporters, for example—make it their business to sift through the claims of contenders for political power, whose representations regularly turn out to be, not false, but insincere, designed to appeal to narrowly targeted, “uncommitted” sectors of the electorate. We might ask of the latter the question we put to the patient at Alta Bates: Shouldn’t the news that politicians are being scripted by pollsters generate doubts as to their authenticity and the significance of their claims?

If contemporary experiences of healing, courtship, and politics generate such anxieties, it is because they occur under conditions that degrade what we might call the semiotics of morality: the imperative that outer, public appearances faithfully mime inner, private realities.¹⁰ The most influential political formulation of this theme is surely Niccolò Machiavelli’s description of the dissembling prince, the man of power who lives in a world of deceivers and so must master the arts of deception and the organization of appearances in order to survive. But anxiety over the breakdown of a reliable semiotics of morality receives its classic formulation in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s first *Discourse*, where he imagines an earthly paradise where men see into one another’s hearts and no appearance intervenes between the self and the world, a vision that stands in stark contrast to the fallen world in which mediation, and hence dissembling, insinuates itself into human experience and makes a mockery of human pretensions to freedom and fidelity.¹¹

Although Rousseau’s vision of a purified social compact that allows for the transcendence of particularity (and hence plurality) and the expression of the “general will” has not become the political model of modern liberal societies, his articulation of the suspicion of a disjunction between the inner and outer is securely embedded in their moral cultures. From the perspective of this moral semiotics, it is a contradiction in terms to suggest that a trained handshake, for example, will “show” that one “cares,” because, if people are to be *trained* in “natural” gestures, such actions will show only the training itself. The fear of simulation, then, is a concern that the outward appearances do not correspond to inner essences, and it generates strategies to distinguish the apparent from the genuine, simulations from representations. Taken to an extreme, it is a fear that no judg-

ment, no distinction, is any longer possible; a fear, as Jean Baudrillard has expressed it, that there is no God:

The transition from signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing marks the decisive turn [toward a culture of pure simulation]. The first implies a theology of truth and secrecy (to which ideology still belongs). The second inaugurates an era of simulacra and simulation, where there is no longer any God to recognize His own, nor any Last Judgment to separate true from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, because everything is already dead and resuscitated in advance.¹²

Baudrillard is misleading, however, when he suggests that the “era of simulation” *comes after* and *supersedes* the “era of representation”; rather, representation and simulation would appear to enjoy a symbiotic relationship. As he goes on to argue, the technology of simulation has indeed largely been devoted to simulating the real and, in this way, obscures the epochal transition Baudrillard wishes to mark.

In Cold War America, ideologists of representation simultaneously stimulate the fear that representation is at risk from simulation and reassure us that the recovery of representation, the equation of sign and thing, of public and private, is still possible—just as the Manhattan detective agencies cited in the *Times* must maintain both that men are becoming better liars and that detectives possess the technology that will reveal the truth. Representation, in this sense, thrives on generally available experiences of unintelligibility and ambiguity, which ideologists can presume to resolve. It is in this broad cultural context that claims for the “subversive” character of contemporary strategies of reading and interpretation must be scrutinized. Paul de Man, for example, argues that “literariness” is subversive because it undermines the authority of texts and discourses, which rely upon the fiction of reference to an extralinguistic meaning or truth that is undone by the close reading of self-deconstructing texts.¹³ It is by no means clear, however, that the gesture of undermining authority is in itself necessarily subversive. As one powerful critique of modernity argues, the destruction of believable sources of legitimate authority may well generate in the wildest, most uncontrolled manner the need for ideological fictions.¹⁴

In fact, the symbiosis of simulation and representation is central to postwar American political culture and, more specifically, to the Cold War—as distinguished from Soviet-American conflict, which it promises to outlive. The Cold War may have been declared at an end, but the culture it has yielded to the belligerents through forty terrifying and confusing years is not as easily dispatched by diplomatic communiqués. What is this culture? It is commonly characterized in terms of an anxiety, expressed in literature, cinema, journalism, and political discourse as a pervasive sense of impending catastrophe. Any survey of Cold War discourse yields ample evidence of what Freud, in 1917, described as the characteristics of a generalized neurotic anxiety: “a general apprehensiveness, a kind of freely floating anxiety which is ready to attach itself to any idea that is in any way suitable, which influences judgment, and lies in wait for any opportunity that will allow it to justify itself. People who are tormented by this kind of anxiety always foresee the most frightful of all possibilities, interpret every chance event as a premonition of evil and exploit every uncertainty in a bad sense.”¹⁵

So much for the experience; what is the object of this fear? Freud’s answer is not readily paraphrased, but in the simplest terms, he claims that the neurotic is afraid of oneself, of one’s own desires. Initially, Freud saw anxiety as the ego’s attempt to defend itself against an impulse that has earlier been repressed but now threatens to come to the fore. In this sense, anxiety alerted the ego to the need for redoubled efforts at repression. Later, reversing himself, Freud came to see repression as the effect, rather than the cause, of anxiety. Fear of castration during the oedipal phase, he speculated, represented fear of the consequences of oedipal desire, which was resolved by the repression of this desire. Whatever the causal direction, however, anxiety is symptomatic of a repressed wish, an index of something the subject wishes but cannot acknowledge as its own desire. In the most general terms, then, one might say that neurotic anxiety is a fear of oneself, of one’s integrity or identity (or the integrity *of* one’s identity). That fear is experienced as a fear of some external threat to that identity—as in projection, for example, where the unacknowledged desire is attributed to an alien Other who must be suppressed.

In this last sense, the Cold War may be said to satisfy Freud’s

definition of a neurotic symptom: fears of the communist threat mask a deeper anxiety over the development of American political life. Critics of Cold War cinema, for example, have frequently interpreted the repugnance for impersonal communist collectivization as the projection of concerns about the power of an increasingly statist, bureaucratic, and conformist postwar America. Such diagnoses, however, often eschew political theory for the eroticized formulations of psychoanalysis, miming the very displacement of politics that they expose. Is it possible to read the anxiety of Cold War culture in a more concretely political manner?

We can begin to do so, I think, by distinguishing between two typical narratives in Cold War cinema, both relying on the theme of invasion. In such early Cold War films as *Them! The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Blob*, *The Thing*, *Godzilla*, and *The Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman*, a community—usually, if not invariably, small-town America and its values of family life, privacy, and self-reliance—faces a threat to its integrity. Sometimes the threat is of extraterrestrial origin, sometimes the result of science gone awry; but it is always a localized, definite, and in some sense, intelligible hazard. Typically, the central issue is to discover how to kill the alien. Often, as in *Them! Godzilla*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, this demands the coordination of scientific knowledge and military muscle, and the plot frequently turns on whether scientists and warriors can overcome their mutual suspicion and work together. Such films allegorize one of the central achievements of Cold War culture: a union of the scientific and military establishments under the rubric of “national security.”

In a second class of film, also revolving around invasion, the invader is difficult to locate or identify because it operates through a strategy of simulation or replication. In one classic example, *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), pods from space duplicate the bodies of small-town Americans, replacing the originals with externally identical but deindividuated replicants. Similarly, in “The Hundred Days of the Dragon” (an *Outer Limits* television episode broadcast in 1963), Chinese secret agents plot to replace powerful leaders of American politics, journalism, and business with externally perfect “substitutes.” And in *Invaders from Mars* (1953), to take yet another example, extraterrestrials surgically alter the brains of

parents, teachers, and children, destroying their individuality and transforming them into impersonal agents of planetary conquest. In each instance, the duplicates are accurate enough to convince all but close family members, and even they are unable to articulate precisely what is “wrong” with their loved ones. Rather, the problem is thematized as an inexplicable lack of feeling, of inner conviction, which the alienated relatives mark in terms of *their* inability to feel love for the duplicate.

The question raised by this kind of film is not How do we kill the monster? but How do we know who is real and who a mere simulation? Real Americans are independent and self-reliant, but the victims in these films have been subordinated to higher powers and are individuals in appearance only. This fear of simulation—the fear of not being able to tell the difference between independent individuals and agents of larger powers—is also detectable in the logic that governs the most important legal instrument of the Cold War, the National Security Act of 1947. In setting up new institutions deemed necessary for countering postwar communism—a threat not anticipated by the authors of the Federal Constitution—the act supplements the powers available to the president by putting under his control an elaborate apparatus for the coordination and projection of military, political, and economic power, all largely removed from congressional and public control.

Behind the act lies the assumption that U.S. security was threatened by Soviet attempts at *subversion*, not by military attack. (The idea that conflict between modern states relies on subversion as much as on direct military engagement was an important issue in official U.S. discussions of Nazi Germany, which prepared for its military attacks against Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland by sending secret agents to infiltrate, disrupt, and demoralize. This was a staple of wartime propaganda, as in Frank Capra’s contributions to the World War II documentary series *Why We Fight*, for example; after the German defeat, the Soviets assumed the role played by the Nazis.) According to George F. Kennan, whose “Long Telegram” from Moscow in 1946 established the terms in which subsequent U.S. strategy would be discussed, the Soviets were too weak militarily and economically to engage the West directly and could

therefore be expected to resort to indirect means. Because the communist “system can handle only individuals who have been brought into complete dependence on higher power,” Kennan telegraphed, “in foreign countries Communists will, as a rule, work toward destruction of all forms of personal independence, economic, political or moral.”¹⁶ The “underground operating directorate of world communism,” according to Kennan, will achieve this by infiltrating and bending to its purposes legitimate groups and organizations, such as “labor unions, youth leagues, women’s organizations, racial societies, religious societies, social organizations, cultural groups, liberal magazines, [and] publishing houses” (p. 58). It is important to understand what Kennan is asserting here *politically*. The “groups,” “clubs,” and “organizations” to which he refers amount to nothing less than the manifold voluntary associations that constitute a liberal democratic society, whose spontaneous activity a liberal democratic constitution is designed to protect from interference by the state. The political significance of these groups is rendered fatally ambiguous in Kennan’s Cold War discourse, because it is no longer certain that their activities *are* spontaneous and independent. A liberal magazine, a social organization, a women’s club, a publishing house—do they embody the latitude given to individual action and association in American democracy, or are they fronts—substitutes, replicants, pods—dedicated to reducing Americans to dependence on higher powers by undermining their confidence in their society? Within the terms of Kennan’s discourse, there is no way to know. We cannot even tell by evaluating the sincerity of the members of these organizations, who, Kennan stresses, will be “genuinely innocent of conspiratorial connection with foreign states” (p. 58).

The Cold War casts a terrible ambiguity on the institutions American government is established to preserve: Are they vital emblems of freedom, or illusions concealing a deeper work of corruption? When we look at our labor unions, our free press, our political and civic clubs, do we see spontaneous associational life, or a deadly replication of such spontaneity, something that appears alive but really is not? That the difference between the American and the un-American is encoded as the difference between life and death, vitality and morbidity, is a reflection of deep-seated assumptions of liberal political

thought, which relies on the idea of a “natural” individual whose powers and capacities preexist the derivative constructs of society and polity. Put most starkly, the liberty protected by the liberal state is the capacity to act at will; essentially, *to live*. Liberty, as Locke expresses it, “is the . . . power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind.”¹⁷ To be sure, liberty is a dangerous power: liberty of thought can lead to incorrect and improper ideas and inferences and, by extension, to a rejection of God’s law and to eternal damnation (secs. 56, 70 *passim*). But this does not vitiate the metaphysical equation of liberty with life. For Hobbes too, despite his radically different view of the scope and character of the state, political power is dedicated to ensuring a vitality associated with life: the sovereign is to maintain “felicity,” that is, “continuall prospering” or “Motion,” which is equivalent to “Life it selfe.”¹⁸ If liberal government is designed to minimize state restrictions and controls, this is legitimated not simply by a particular community with a concrete history but by life *as* life, in its growth, continuity, and spontaneity. And in America, therefore, as the best-realized liberal polity, human activity is least obstructed and individuals are most alive. Accordingly, threats to America are not so much threats to a “way of life” as to life itself, in its purest and least mediated or corrupted form.

The ambiguity of the Cold War polity is further complicated by the fact that, in order to respond to Soviet subversion, the United States itself must be transformed: *democracy* emerges as one of the many impediments to a full-scale mobilization against Soviet subversion. As Paul Nitze put it in National Security Council Memorandum No. 68 (NSC 68, the blueprint for global planning during the 1950s), “dissent among us” is a major threat to the containment of Soviet subversion, since the latter requires the full mobilization of the population, which “will be asked to give up some of the benefits which they have come to associate with their freedoms.”¹⁹ Accomplishing this task, Nitze emphasizes, will require that agencies of the executive branch engage in propaganda campaigns to persuade the public to make the necessary sacrifices: “Information,” he writes, must be “made publicly available so that an intelligent popular opinion may be formed”; and “the initiative in this process lies

with the Government" (p. 403). Kennan had argued along the same lines: "We must see that our public is educated. . . . Press cannot do this alone. It must be done mainly by Government" (p. 62). Again, it is important to stress the *political* meaning of these recommendations: the government, and, in particular, the executive branch, is to shape public opinion directly so as to recruit the electorate for "containment."

Nothing could be farther from the idea of a liberal democracy, where the state is viewed as an instrument of public will, rather than as its manager. It is not simply that citizens have no way of knowing whether they are looking at the exuberance of American freedom or a communist plot. Given the requirement that the state intervene in the formation of public opinion, it is always possible that such "freedom" may reflect the protocols of the CIA, NSA, or FBI as much as of the KGB. Films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Invaders from Mars*, then, evoke a very specific political anxiety, namely, the fear that we are no longer in a position to know whether American life is American or un-American. They articulate the problem of identifying "real Americans" who have independent existence and vitality and distinguishing them from nefarious imitations under the control of alien powers.

The argument of these films hearkens back to Puritan anxieties over the relationship between the visible and invisible churches; indeed, under Cold War political theory, America appears to have much more in common with the Puritan ecclesiastical polity than a constitutionally limited representative democracy. The "visible church," built by men on earth, was never identical, the Puritans feared, to the true spiritual church, which embraced those singled out by God for eternal life. Only God could infallibly sort out the apparently regenerate from the truly damned, though the elders did their best to exclude the unregenerate from the church, if not from its authority. This led to the institutionalization of elaborate practices of public avowals, confessions, and tests of sincerity by which members proved faith to the congregation. Max Weber has stressed the importance of Protestant uncertainty to the strong sense of private, individual fatality necessary to the emergence of a capitalist culture, but a consequence of even greater importance for us works

in the opposite direction, making of the self something representable, arguable; a kind of rhetorical self.²⁰ In just this manner, postwar culture has relied on public tests for signs of the authentic American: naming names, and the loyalty oaths of the 1950s; and today, drug testing (reported to be favored by a majority), the loyalty oath of the 1990s. More generally, these films could be said to represent a secular version of the Puritan anxiety over the meaning of prosperity in the New World. Just as the Puritans could never be certain whether material success was a gift of the covenant or the consequence of forsaking the covenant for the pursuit of worldly goods, so postwar citizens can never know whether dissent, contestation, and difference are signs of vitality or of the beginning of the end.

From the early 1950s, increasingly efficient mass media delivered seductive and alluring images of American life—representations of increasingly doubtful authenticity, whose unverifiability led inexorably to greater and greater hysteria over the question of how to differentiate between the real and the simulated. Miles Orvell has tracked the emergence of this sense of urgency about losing or maintaining contact with “reality” and “authenticity,” as opposed to derivative imitations, in American culture before World War II; the need for an original *American* culture that did not rely on European precedents was, of course, a central Transcendentalist theme.²¹ The Cold War preoccupation with whether American life is real or artificial, however, is powerful enough to cut across, or absorb, ideological differences. The right-wing articulation of simulation as fear of communism, and the left-wing articulation of simulation as fear of consumer capitalism, are equally workable (or unworkable) attempts to think, judge, and protest the transition to a society of sheer artifice, where the model, as in Baudrillard’s influential formulation, not the original, is the only source of authority.

Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*, published in 1964, articulates precisely the fear of simulation we find in Nitze, Kennan, and other Cold Warriors. According to Marcuse, what appears to be a society with minimal state coercion is in fact a closed world of programmed needs, of elections that do not need to be rigged; but, as he emphasizes, what is *truly* terrifying about advanced industrial society is that even the critical theorist cannot say with conviction

that it is either free or unfree. It is both “unfree” and “reasonable”: unfree because its members are subject to higher powers (for Marcuse, the media and the corporations); reasonable because this dependency provides for their needs as they experience and articulate them. Although this appears as a *choice* and is therefore legitimate—an instance, however corrupted, of freedom, a “token of . . . progress,” as Marcuse puts it—the substance of this choice calls into question the validity, the reality, of the freedom it allegedly expresses, calling forth explanations in terms of the shadowy, impersonal manipulations of “the establishment” and its ability to offer *substitute* freedoms in the form of “institutionalized” or “controlled” desublimation:

Technical progress and more comfortable living permit the systematic inclusion of libidinal components into the realm of commodity production and exchange. But no matter how controlled the mobilization of instinctual energy may be (it sometimes amounts to a scientific management of libido), no matter how much it may serve as a prop for the status quo—it is also gratifying to the managed individuals, just as racing the outboard motor, pushing the power lawn mower, and speeding the automobile are fun.²²

Marcuse’s vision of a consumer capitalism that renders revolution irrational because opposition to the regime is no longer based in concrete, widely experienced needs is ably realized in John Carpenter’s film *They Live* (1988), whose fidelity to the narrative structures of 1950s cinema demonstrates how few thematic adjustments are necessary to effect the change from right to left criticism of simulation. The protagonist, rendered jobless by plant closings in Colorado, migrates to Los Angeles to find work as a day laborer on a construction site. He obtains, from some ill-fated scientists who have stumbled onto an alien plot to take over the world, specially treated sunglasses that enable him to see that what appear as the exuberant signifiers of Reaganite prosperity are in fact instruments of control and domination. Advertisements for Caribbean vacations and computers, he finds, are really urging the reader to “Marry and Reproduce” and “Obey,” and books and magazines convey messages to “Consume,” “Watch TV,” and above all, “Stay Asleep.” Eventually penetrating

the nerve center of the alien enterprise, which is located, appropriately, in the bowels of a television studio, the protagonist learns that the aliens are here because “they’re free enterprisers . . . the earth is just another developing planet, their Third World.” Like American imperialists, the aliens achieve their goals by placing in power a comprador class, easily recruited from among the swollen oligarchy of the Reagan years. “Our projections,” an alien tells an assembly of collaborators, “show that by the year 2025, not only America, but the entire planet, will be under the protection and the dominion of this power alliance. The gains have been substantial, both for ourselves, and for you—the human power elite.”

The sunglasses of *They Live* enable their wearers to distinguish the aliens among the apparently real humans; those who appear to be privileged, model citizens leading the good life seem corpselike, machinelike—dead. Marcuse, too, fears that the dazzling consumerism of Cold War culture masks a deeper attraction to death and destruction:

Assuming that the Destruction Instinct (in the last analysis: the Death Instinct) is a large component of the energy which feeds the technical conquest of man and nature, it seems that society’s growing capacity to manipulate technical progress also increases its *capacity to manipulate this instinct*, i.e. to satisfy it “productively.” Then social cohesion would be strengthened at its deepest instinctual roots. The supreme risk, and even the fact of war would meet, not only with helpless acceptance, but also with instinctual approval on the part of the victims. (P. 79)

Thanatos, as Freud teaches, is essentially a drive for stasis, for rest and stillness, for the nonorganic. Stanley Kubrick, in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), depicts this face of postwar anxiety. In the film, the astronauts embody the human consequences of the development of technological society. The latter is shown to have required extraterrestrial inspiration, as a result of which prehuman ape-men learned to use bones as weapons to survive. After successfully killing his enemy, the most cunning ape-man hurls his weapon into the air, where it dissolves into a spacecraft high above the Earth. The dissolve implies that there is nothing to say about the intervening history: humanity was simply working out the consequences of technologi-

cal mastery, which enabled it to survive—but nothing more. This apparently Nietzschean theme (underscored in the film by Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*) is finally ironic, however, considering that taking the step beyond survival requires further alien intervention. What appears as a spontaneous quest for knowledge and mastery (the exploration of space) turns out to be a desperate struggle to regain proximity to—dependence upon—higher powers.

It is in the interior Jupiter mission scenes of 2001, however, that the postwar death instinct is most relentlessly portrayed. Astronauts Bowman and Poole occupy an environment constructed entirely out of security concerns, exhaustively designed to enhance survivability in hostile Outer Space, and exquisitely responsive to its inhabitants' needs and requests. The astronauts do almost nothing except stare silently at the blinking lights of the control panels and video display terminals, on which we occasionally catch reflections more vibrant and alive than the men themselves. (In contrast with their monotonous and functional conversation, the ship's computer, HAL, is animated and sincere, interesting, and even believable, despite its somewhat breathless enthusiasm. When Bowman and Poole are roused to act, it is in response to HAL's initiatives.) In this sense, 2001 continues the Gothic tradition exemplified by E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, in which Nathaniel (owing to confusions engendered by his possession of a telescope that—unlike the sunglasses of *They Live*—reverses the truth) mistakes Olympia, an automaton, for a real woman. Caught in illusion, immobilized by the contemplation of her apparent beauty and vitality, Nathaniel becomes still and infirm himself. Hoffmann's story supplies the essential trope of Cold War political culture from Nitze to Marcuse to Kubrick: that gazing at the mere *image* of democracy is turning postwar citizens into deadened observers rather than vital participants.

The emergence of postmodern ideologies can be seen, in this context, as an attempt to execute an end run around the fear of simulation by claiming that the anxiety is futile because the distinction between the real and the artificial is itself an artifact of a necessarily *constructed* experience, that the real was an illusion all along. Indeed, the success of postmodern ideologies suggests that the fear of simulation has become routinized, ritualized, and trivialized through

repetition over the period from the mid-1940s through the 1970s, which may help to explain why the United States and the Soviet Union announced, at the close of the decade of the 1970s, the end of the Cold War. Soviet leaders, recognizing, presumably, that oppressing Eastern Europe with tanks, nuclear weapons, and secret police did little to advance research into the particle beams, information technologies, and general digitization of reality that now drive the global economy, declared that political regime obsolete. The United States, for its part, bankrupted by the costs of maintaining the global military occupation called for in NSC 68, also stood to gain from a formal declaration that the Cold War was over.

But the maneuver was probably a feint; the end of the Cold War need not mean the end of Cold War metaphysics. The carefully nurtured ambiguity characteristic of postwar culture does not simply disappear; it is articulated in new ways. Thus, shortly after the official end of the Cold War, Arizona's Republican senator John McCain thematized the post-Cold War world as one in which the United States faces a swarm of small but irritating pests. According to McCain, "We need to recognize that our future military priorities lie . . . in projecting power to deal with a constant series of small crises in the developing world."²³ The appropriate military technology for the new world order, according to McCain, is the aircraft carrier, which "has proved to be the ideal political instrument in a world where fixed bases present steadily greater political uncertainties, in contingencies where we need to work in partnership with friendly states but when the deployment of combat units on their territory presents political problems, and in those cases where we need to establish a convincing military presence without taking sides" (p. 47). Using the very liminality of the seas to guarantee an American "presence," the aircraft carrier is the appropriate post-modern politicomilitary weapon because it can operate freely in a world bereft of clear and distinct borders, territories, and legitimacy; it is, indeed, the twentieth-century successor to the *Arbella*. Summing up such considerations, William H. Webster, onetime director of Central Intelligence, notes, "As the hard edges of the world recede, the threats we face have become more numerous, more diffuse, and more difficult to define. Intelligence is critical as policy makers

determine what course to follow in a world which may well become more dangerous because less predictable.”²⁴ In grasping that U.S. security is driven by the postmodern political world’s *refusal* to yield a clearly defined and marked threat, Webster reveals a shrewd practical understanding of postwar culture and its capacity for ideological invention. That culture depends, not on a *Soviet* threat, but, in Oliver North’s pithy phrase, on a “dangerous world” whose institutions and public modes of representation resist any reliable interpretation or assigned meaning.

Cold War metaphysics appropriates “literariness,” in de Man’s sense, for wholly unexpected ends, foregrounding the semantic productivity of representational language to exploit the instability of the world as an object represented by the subject. Securing a reliable, objective world yields to the anxiety that the world’s objectivity reflects nothing more than the subject’s will to order, uniformity, and routine, and thence to the conclusion that objectivity itself is altogether unfounded and contingent, a simulation dependent upon highly variable and unreliable capacities of artifice and fabrication. If we ask who is the political theorist par excellence of the world brought into being and maintained by the artificial polity, the theorist who most resolutely and with the greatest drama articulates the political implications of the *fragility* of such artificial and fabricated bodies politic, the answer is surely Thomas Hobbes. At the very birth of modernity, he imagined with unequaled vivacity the political costs attendant upon telling the truth, once the truth was defined as uniformity and consistency in the use of words. Hobbes, however, is arguably an odd figure with which to conjure in exploring the sources of an American political metaphysic, inasmuch as, in America’s own mythical self-understanding, the theory of legitimacy authorizing American government is the *refutation* of Hobbes found, we are assured, in John Locke’s political philosophy. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Cold War discourses in America are more fully illuminated by Hobbes than by Locke.

Thus Satan, talking to his nearest mate,
 With head uplift above the wave and eyes
 That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides
 Prone on the flood, extended long and large,
 Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
 As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
 Titanian or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
 Briareos or Typhon, whom the den
 By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
 Leviathan, which God of all his works
 Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream.
 Him, haply slumbering on the Norway foam,
 The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff
 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
 With fixéd anchor in his scaly rind,
 Moors by his side under the lee, while night
 Invests the sea, and wishéd morn delays.

—Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1

Paradise Lost, completed little more than a decade after the publication of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), reasserts the sea-beast's sinful deceptiveness. For Hobbes, the dissolution of the metaphysical underpinnings of rule by divine right occasioned the construction of an "artificiall man . . . of greater stature and strength than the original" (p. 81). Although the breakup of the ancien régime appeared to cast man out of his religiously guaranteed order and into a world bereft of sure moorings, "man" might build a landing of his own were he to rid himself of the scholastic fantasies that kept him ignorant of his powers as a God-like artificer. *Leviathan* performs this task in part by ironically inverting the story of Genesis: far from Edenic, humanity's original abode, in Hobbes's origins story, is the harsh and unruly state of nature, from which to be cast out is a blessing; and "that sea-beast / Leviathan," classic symbol of Satan, becomes man's true and only savior. In Milton's epic, the shifting, unreliable leviathan is mistaken for an "island" to which a sailor adrift might anchor himself, escaping the turbulent winds and the dangers of the night. Man's

attempt to anchor himself in the ground—that is, in matter rather than spirit—binds him intimately, Milton suggests, to Satan’s revolt against God and so, in effect, to a perpetual de-anchoring or falling, a permanent confusion of the profane with the sacred. Hobbes aims, however, to show that the Satanic revolt was well considered; for what man left behind when dismissed from paradise was none other than God’s “natural” world, nature being, for Hobbes, “the Art whereby God hath made and governes the world” (p. 81). In nature, however, as Hobbes teaches us, man’s life was in fact solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. The state—man’s artificially created ground—is the truly limitless power, greater, potentially, than God’s Nature.

The leviathan-state cannot simply *replace* the anchor of God, however, because Hobbes’s attempt to *invent* a new anchor and a new ground relies on the privileging of capacities that are adrift owing to qualities inherent in the ground-creating, world-interpreting being, Hobbes’s “natural” individual. With the same gesture that liberates this individual’s creativity, Hobbes constrains it by insisting on total obedience to his self-created state, reinvesting in the notion of sin and the baleful consequences of revolt—not against God, now, but against the state. Despite their chronological order, *Leviathan* might profitably be read as an inversion of *Paradise Lost* (it does, in fact, invert the biblical mythology Milton was reinventing), a kind of black mass in which the punishment for disobedience is being cast out of the paradise of the well-ordered society and into God’s stateless, indeed hellish, Nature. With the grounding of the only possible paradise in the deceptive sea-beast of human art, the ground is permanently unsettled. Like Milton’s Satan, man with his artificial leviathan has been driven into the deep, into the “darkly chopping sea” of Dionysian uncertainty:²⁵ the covenants out of which human societies are made will respond to the constant seductions of man’s own nature, or what Hobbes calls his “passions.” Because the artificer that makes the leviathan can always undo it, obedience to state authority emerges as both absolutely necessary and absolutely impossible to guarantee. Hobbes’s solution to this politicometaphysical problem is an elaborate and delicately balanced network of disciplines, constraints, and controls as the paradoxical condition of man’s “freedom” and “power.”

This Hobbesian conundrum is clearly at work in the final and most bizarre episode of the Cold War: the Iran-Contra affair, in which the executive branch used funds from nominally private arms sales to Iran to support efforts to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. In their attempts to explain and justify their actions, President Ronald Reagan, Lt. Col. Oliver L. North and his cabal, and anonymous Pentagon strategists succeeded in building a discursive bridge leading back behind Locke to Hobbes. They did not, however, fix the groundless ground that haunts Hobbes's project. Instead, they pushed to the limit the American anxiety over our schizophrenic coupling of radical freedom with subjection to Nature. For the most striking aspect of the congressional debates surrounding the Iran-Contra affair was their enigmatic incoherency. Faced with Congress's passionate defense of the public's right to scrutinize the government's actions, coupled with scrupulous avoidance of any leads suggesting improper actions by the Central Intelligence Agency, it is difficult not to conclude that most members of the investigating committees sensed that their world no longer reflected the theory of constitutionally limited representative democracy they all-too-hesitantly invoked. It was as if the vocabulary of democracy itself had been placed under erasure: the committee members could not *not* speak of democracy, but neither could they fully convince themselves of the contemporary relevance of democratic principles. The Iran-Contra affair staged a revealing political identity crisis: Is America a Lockean or an Hobbesian society?

Hobbes's approach to the problem of politics is well known: will-full, self-regarding, and mutually suspicious individuals are to be regulated by the absolute law of a sovereign power constructed, in the absence of a transcendental authority, by themselves alone. The difficulty with Hobbes's "solution" is that though it is introduced to forestall an anarchic war of each against all, the system of concepts organized by the sovereign's laws is itself a source of chaos. Hobbes's sovereign performs its duties by the "making, and executing of good Lawes," but laws, of course, may be misunderstood. The need to interpret the sovereign power's commands is another source of inconstancy, threatening the commonwealth. Neither brevity nor

verbosity are of any use; for “the written Lawes, if they be short, are easily mis-interpreted, from the divers significations of a word, or two: if long, they may be more obscure by the divers significations of many words” (p. 322). By multiplying the senses of a text, interpretation creates more problems than it resolves: “For Commentaries are commonly more subject to cavill, than the Text; and therefore need other Commentaries; and so there will be no end of such Interpretation” (p. 326).

Misunderstanding the sovereign’s commands can be mitigated, for Hobbes, only by insisting on the “literal” sense of the law: “That, which the Legislator intended, should by the letter of the Law be signified.” Disputes over the scope and meaning of the law are to be settled by the sovereign power alone. More than brute force, however, lies behind the sovereign’s authority over the meaning of its words. It is not simply the sheer power of sovereign intention that adjudicates disputes over interpretation but the “perfect understanding of the finall causes, for which the Law was made” (p. 322). The sovereign’s intentions, obscured by the “divers significations” of his words, can be saved, once more, only by a knowledge of politics that is “purged from ambiguity” and embodies a “perfect understanding.” The problem of interpreting the commonwealth’s laws, then, is referred to sovereign intention as the content of the law, while the problem of interpreting sovereign intention is referred to the “laws” of a new political science. The mainspring of civil order remains as fragile as the ever-threatened line between passion and delirium—no more, finally, than a “*Fiat*,” as Hobbes puts it in the Introduction to *Leviathan*.

Leviathan attempts to establish an unambiguous political vocabulary on the basis of figures whose multiple meanings necessarily thwart any such project. At each stage, the hoped-for “constancy”—whether political, psychological, or metaphysical—appears compromised by the resources of the figures in which Hobbes chooses to state it and thus must be guaranteed by supplementary measures. Political action is concentrated as much as possible into the sovereign’s law-making duties; law making, to circumnavigate the passions, must attain the status of a science; and finally, the imperative of guaranteeing a “felitious” sphere of individual action necessi-

tates a comprehensive education for obedience. This route, however, merely returns us to the passions and to Hobbes's recognition that the artificiality of the covenants that make up political order among natural individuals demands that these be enforced by the sword, by a power able to "keep them in awe."

That the indispensable unity of the sovereign rests on a delicate weave, easily unraveled, helps to explain Hobbes's hostile reaction to the suggestion that the sovereign be subject to law. This idea is "repugnant," he writes, because it would lead to an infinite chain of equivocation, "continually without end, to the Confusion, and Dissolution of the Commonwealth" (p. 367). Yet this Hobbesian repugnance toward subjecting executive power to the law was, during the Cold War, voiced with extreme shrillness in what at the same time commonly supposed itself to be the most authentically Lockean political culture, the United States. The conundrums following upon Hobbes's demand that individuals make an almost *unconditional* grant of authority to the state appear less problematic for a political theorist such as Locke, for whom political authorities hold the people's power conditionally, on trust. Hobbes's unholy coupling of human powers with the despotic state, as the discourse of liberal authority would have it, is nothing more than an expression of bourgeois pessimism which more reasonable thinkers, on whom we rely to articulate our political identity, saw through. But Lockean liberalism, as we have seen, encounters its own specifically political forms of undecidability. At the center of both Hobbesian and Lockean accounts is the contract, the promise—the individual's promise not to use his unlimited natural right to invade others so long as all other individuals make the same promise. Accordingly, the great fear of contractarian experience is that one or more of the parties to the contract will make a *lying promise*, a circumstance that pushes hermeneutics close to the center of political judgment: now, political life demands ways of discerning sincerity, and liberalism demands a political semiotic that can tabulate the reliable signs of the sincere promise.

Precisely this riddle of promising and keeping promises is stressed as central to the definition of semiotics as a discipline by Umberto Eco, who defines the field as "a theory of the lie."²⁶ Semiotics, which treats "sign-functions" abstracted away from their referential di-

mension, is the study of whatever can be used to *depart* from the real. Eco's paradoxical definition of a discipline devoted to telling the truth about lying captures the character of modern political theory as Hobbes sees it. For Hobbes, sheer human artifice could fashion a simulacrum of the "natural" order, but the cooperation on which this art depended relied in turn on promises that were likely to be overwhelmed by the passions. As promises are, ontologically speaking, so thin, the necessary partner of consent is state coercion, which at its roots is that which moors us to the deceptive sea-beast, leviathan, the only ground for which we may hope.

This dialectic of consent and coercion was analyzed by Nietzsche in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," where he emphasizes the will to conformity implied by the notion of a social contract. Individuals "by themselves," Nietzsche writes, will in the ordinary course of events rely on subterfuge, camouflage, and the lie for survival. Through "boredom and necessity," however, they might contract to live according to certain rules, that is, promises. The essence of the social contract is to tell the truth—with truth defined as conformity to the conventions of the group—to "lie according to fixed conventions."²⁷ Later, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche detailed the forms of discipline required to produce a creature—the modern, guilt-ridden, self-scrutinizing individual—with a memory capable of keeping promises. Like Hobbes, Nietzsche emphasizes the paradox of the promiser: the language of commitment, stability, and trust lends itself most easily to deception and ruses. Contractarian societies, therefore, encourage ambivalence toward the promise, alternately grounding it in a dangerously unmanageable human will and in a Nature that can overcome the hazards of the former. The founding document of the American polity, the Declaration of Independence, conforms to this pattern: it celebrates the capacity of individuals acting with others to alter, invent, and establish new forms of political association; but, consistent with a theory of the individual's right to go against and control nature, it is careful to ground these capacities in "the Laws of Nature" and "Nature's God."

The discourse of Ronald Reagan is perhaps the most vivid expression of liberal anxiety over the promise. Indeed, for Reagan, the enemies of the United States are precisely those who cannot

keep promises. Referring to the leaders of the Soviet Union, Reagan claims that “they reserved these rights to break a promise, to change their ways, to be dishonest, and so forth if it furthered the cause of socialism. . . . Promises are like pie crusts, made to be broken.”²⁸ Accordingly, Reagan’s objections to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua centered not on that government’s human rights violations but on the charge that the Sandinistas *broke a promise*: they, Reagan alleges, “literally made a contract” with the Organization of American States for support in return for “true democracy.”²⁹ In such statements, the stress is less on the absence of true democracy in Nicaragua, which is accorded the status of a mere symptom, than on the alleged fact that the Sandinistas broke a promise—that is, they violated a principle central to legitimate government as the discourse of liberal authority understands it.

But at the same time, the state over which this Lockean liberal presided for eight years relied overwhelmingly on what one of Reagan’s operatives called “great deceit”: “I think it is very important for the American people to understand that this is a dangerous world; that we live at risk and that this nation is at risk in a dangerous world. And that they ought not to be led to believe . . . that this nation cannot or should not conduct covert operations. By their very nature covert operations or special operations are a lie. There is great deceit, great deception practiced in the conduct of covert operations. They are at essence a lie.”³⁰ For Oliver North, it is imperative that Americans “believe” that their government can and should engage in “great deceit,” even though such a practice violates the ideas of legitimate government embodied in the U.S. Constitution. The “dangerous world” in which we live demands resort to “covert actions” or “special operations” that “are at essence a lie.” The covert action, however, possesses the epistemological and moral status of a *noble* lie, forced upon the liberal democracies by the difficult choice between “lives and lies” and by the fact that those, such as North, who possess an esoteric knowledge of the nature of the threat to American freedom are hampered by an unwieldy bureaucracy, a misinformed Congress, and an apathetic public.³¹

Still, taken by itself, North’s testimony leaves unclear the basis on which the citizen of a polity dedicated to open contracts and sin-

cere promises may instead devote himself to “great deceit.” Would not a more consistent strategy have simply alerted the public and its elected representatives to the danger? One of those hundreds of ignored government strategy documents, “Prospects for Containment of Nicaragua’s Communist Government,” dated May 1986 and issued by the U.S. Department of Defense, if read not as a prosaic planning study but as political allegory, suggests *why* the character of our “dangerous world” is such that liberal principles of legitimacy no longer apply. It provides the theory that North did not explicitly pronounce but upon which he acted.

Containment, as we have seen, referred broadly to the postwar commitment of the United States to prevent the spread of communism. In the debate over how to accomplish this goal, two camps quickly emerged. The document’s title obliquely refers to the debate between proponents of “rollback” and a less extreme variant that became known simply as “containment.” In this sense, containment envisaged a political deal in which the Soviet Union and the United States enjoyed tacitly recognized spheres of influence, and it necessarily assumed that both parties were capable of honoring treaties, that is, of making contracts and keeping promises. Proponents of rollback understood the Soviet Union as incapable of such fidelity; in Reagan’s terms, that nation reserves the right to lie, cheat, and steal in the pursuit of communist expansion. In addition, rollback, by its nature, involves military conflict because an adversary that does not recognize the sanctity of contracts cannot be a party to a political solution. In arguing that the prospects for merely *containing* Nicaragua’s communist government are bleak, the study is an implicit call for a military solution: rollback.

The document begins by noting differences of opinion in Congress over U.S. policy toward the Sandinista regime, differences that came to the fore in the wake of Reagan’s lurid speech in March 1986 accusing Nicaragua of providing a “safe haven” for terrorists from around the world: “The President’s request to Congress on aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance has led to an extensive debate in Congress. There is a difference in views as to how effective an agreement would be in providing the needed security for Central America.”³² The document first stresses the liberal, democratic con-

text of U.S. policymaking: there is a “difference in views.” But it goes on to insist that despite differences over policy, all parties to the debate agree that the Sandinista government is a threat to be combated and that though some in Congress “maintain that a greater effort should be made to secure a political agreement which would serve to contain Communism in Nicaragua,” “many . . . recall the failure of previous treaties and agreements with the Communists.” “Prospects for Containment,” then, will jog the necessarily short political memories of liberal subjects.

This task is accomplished in a section misleadingly entitled “Historical Perspective.” The title is misleading not because the accounts it presents are historically inaccurate (they are, in fact, grotesquely oversimplified) but because the study purports to deal with U.S. policy toward Nicaragua although not a word is devoted to relations between these two countries. Rather, “historical perspective” means reviewing situations in which the United States entered into political agreements with “the Communists,” who, in the vernacular of the document, constitute a kind of Jungian archetype that everywhere and always remains the same. As “the Communists” are always the same, the behavior of any one communist entity is entirely predictable. If the further assumption that the Sandinistas are communists is also accepted, no further inquiry is necessary into the historical peculiarities of U.S.-Nicaragua relations; for Sandinista policy is therefore determined by their being part of “the Communists,” not by their being Nicaraguans.

The discussion then turns to violations of treaties the United States has entered into with communists, which amount, of course, to communists’ having broken their promises, just as, according to Reagan, they affirm their right to do. In the case of Vietnam, for example, North Vietnam “began illegal subversive operations in South Vietnam immediately after signing the 1954 Geneva Accords,” although “Communist military violations of the Geneva Agreement began to escalate sharply only in the late 1950’s, when Hanoi started to infiltrate armed cadres and supplies into Vietnam.” The same is true, according to “Prospects for Containment,” of “Communist belligerents” in Korea, other Indochinese countries, and Cuba. True to form, the Nicaraguan communists violated their agreement with

the Organization of American States after assuming power in 1979. The communists, then, are *hoi barbaroi*, a group that cannot keep promises and hence is not fit to enter into the contractual arrangements familiar to Lockean liberals.

Not only do the communists fail to keep promises; they actively utilize the *rhetoric* of promising—likely to be seductive to members of liberal polities—to pursue the expansion of communist power. As Reagan has it, for communists, promises are made *in order to be broken*. Equally repugnant to liberal sensibilities is the fact that the communists *plan* to break their promises: the Nicaraguans “never intended to honor the[ir] pledge” to the Organization of American States, and the Vietnamese and Korean communists “were planning the infringements even as they were negotiating.” The mere fact that the communists do *plan* is a telling mark of their difference from us. Strictly speaking, a liberal polity cannot plan; it only establishes a framework of order which leaves individuals free to plan their own lives as they see fit. The communists, with their Five Year Plans and historical inevitabilities, even plan to break promises.

The communists, then, plan with no regard for past promises and use promises only as a rhetorical device with which to manipulate liberal polities. The Sandinistas, therefore, can be expected to violate any Central American peace treaty they enter into. The questions then become What would a Central American treaty call for? and What Sandinista violations are likely to occur? The key element of any such treaty, the Pentagon emphasizes, is the stipulation that the governments of the region refuse to allow foreign troops or military advisors on their soil and refrain from supporting insurgencies in neighboring countries. Under the circumstances, this would have entailed that Soviet and Cuban troops leave Nicaragua and that the United States discontinue its support for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. On the theory that the communists plan to break promises, there can be only one reason for the Sandinistas to agree to such an arrangement: to induce the United States to withdraw from the region while they secretly pursue a military buildup that would enable them to become masters of the region. As the Pentagon imagines it, “The Nicaraguan government would sign a Contadora agreement. . . . The Nicaraguans would circumvent and violate the

agreement in order to maintain or increase their military strength and to . . . support . . . Communist insurgencies throughout Central America. Nicaragua would seek to conceal its violations as long as possible. The U.S. and other Central American nations would fully abide by the agreement.”

Constrained by contractarian principles, the United States would abide by its promises while the Nicaraguans secretly break theirs, resulting ultimately in the communist conquest of Central America. What, under the circumstances, are the liberal authorities to do? The United States could not simply announce its refusal to abide by a treaty supported by the governments of the region. Yet to observe the agreement while the communists secretly subvert it is to accept communist rule of Central America, in the long run. Although the Pentagon stops short of drawing this consequence explicitly, the document encourages the conclusion that the United States must, like the communists, secretly violate the agreement by supporting what it calls the “Democratic Resistance Forces” (the Contras) covertly with the methods developed by North. Faced with an entity incapable of participating in contractarian life, the United States has no choice but to resort to “great deceit.”

The strategy North adopted in his testimony to the congressional committees investigating the Iran-Contra affair was to present the great deceit as natural, realistic, and self-evidently justified. Although the U.S. Constitution grants the executive branch limited powers in foreign affairs, North speaks as if it were self-evident that the president is “in charge” of foreign policy. Congress need not be informed of government action in that area, according to North, because the president is accountable directly to “the people.” North makes it clear that the great deceit is not limited to the communist enemy but includes all elements of the liberal polity (e.g., the press and Congress) that threaten the implementation of the covert policy: the deception was staged in part, he says, “to limit the political embarrassment.”³³ All of this is, by definition, legal, because it is done at the behest of the “commander in chief,” who, once again, acts in the interest of the nation as a whole and not the parochial interests represented in Congress.

The logic of containment, as expressed in North’s testimony

and in "Prospects for Containment," specifies the conditions under which the United States moves from Lockean commitments of limited, open government to a Hobbesian state of near-total authority and detailed administration of citizenship: for what were North's public lectures and slide shows—and indeed, his testimony—if not an exercise in "nurturing the habits of compliance"? Yet a nagging politicoepistemological question remains: If state policy must be secret, how can it be ratified by the people? Senator George Mitchell raised this issue in the course of his questioning of North: "If, by definition, covert action is secret and [the president] doesn't tell them about it, there's no way the American people can know about it to be able to vote him out of office" (p. 674). Covert action emerges as a vulgar Platonism in which a system of hierarchical, Hobbesian state authority is masked for the multitude by a display of images staged for the purpose of confirming the people's sense of living in a Lockean society of maximum individual freedom and government on trust. Thus the inescapable duplicity of North's presentations, emphasizing Soviet designs on Central America while at the same time implying that the United States was doing no more for the "Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance" than allowing them to die for their country. In public, North spoke as the citizen of a liberal polity, making arguments in favor a particular policy, while privately he was orchestrating a war his "intelligence" told him was necessary but toward which the public remained unsupportive.

Containment depicts a "dangerous world" in which liberal principles are put "at risk" to the precise extent that liberal polities adhere to them. Containment—in both its moderate and extreme versions—sees the postmodern political condition as demanding private, Hobbesian action coupled with public Lockean rhetoric. At the limit, containment even threatens to dissolve the distinction between public and private upon which liberal authority thrives. Many of North's associates, such as Richard V. Secord and Albert Hakim, were private individuals implementing state policy, while the state resorted to private funding and operatives because what it wanted to do was illegal. The implosion of the private into the public enabled all to deny responsibility: government officials could truthfully say that no appropriated funds were going to support the Contras, even

though the policy of support was worked out in the White House; citizens, violating the law at the behest of the executive branch, could plausibly say they were doing so as patriots coming to the aid of their president. Perhaps North, Secord, Hakim, and even Reagan are neither private nor public figures but an undecidable, postmodern amalgamation of these terms, figures capable of simulating the public and private according to necessity. In a complementary way, containment gives us a new American state that is neither Lockean nor Hobbesian but both in the sense that it is committed to staging itself in either mode according to the demands of state power. In the last analysis, the Iran-Contra affair is but a symptom of an American identity crisis, a crisis, precisely, *of* identity: the repressed Hobbesian identity of freedom and control, or again, of the uncertainty and unreliability of a world “governed,” rigorously, by a subject’s shifting passion for objectivity, order, and security.

4

No prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences now establishing themselves will soon be determined and guided by the new fundamental science which is called cybernetics.

—Martin Heidegger

The essential connection between control and communication—epitomized in the feedback process, and highlighted in Norbert Weiner’s term “cybernetics” for the study of the processes of steering and communication—has been . . . widely recognized among political scientists.

—Karl W. Deutsch

The dominant and most fertile intellectual innovation of our own age has been that of information feedback.

—David Easton

In “The Age of the World Picture,” Martin Heidegger questions a question dear to students of politics in mid-twentieth-century America: What is science? The “essence” of modern science, Heidegger says, is “research.” In scientific research, “knowing [*das Er-*

kennen] establishes itself as a procedure" (p. 118). Yet research for Heidegger is not, as this statement seems to imply, limited to following a method or rule. Rather, the fundamental accomplishment of science (an accomplishment that, despite the latter's ideological understanding of itself, links science to the completion of Western metaphysics) is the invention of a world to which methods and rules may appropriately be developed and applied. This world, once established, appears as "fixed," "sketch[e]d out in advance." This does not mean that much about it is *known* in advance but that the basic character of the world is predefined so as to make the scientific procedure used to approach it seem rigorously appropriate: there is a "binding adherence" [*Bindung*] between the object of inquiry and the practices of the inquiring subject (p. 119). These two moments of scientific procedure—the projection of a world that is available to be researched, and the measurement and calculation of that world—are inevitably collapsed. By "forgetting" the constitution of the "ground plan" upon which science rests, by ignoring the historicity of his or her discipline, the scientist can imagine charting a world that is somehow obligated to submit to scientific representation. In Heidegger's words,

Knowing, as research, calls whatever is to account with regard to the way in which and the extent to which it lets itself be put at the disposal of representation. Research has disposal over anything that is when . . . [n]ature and history become the objects of a representation that explains. Such representing counts on nature and takes account of history. Only that which becomes object in this way *is*—is considered to be in being. We first arrive at science as research when the Being of whatever is, is sought in such objectiveness. (P. 127)

Scientific discourse, then, must first constitute a world approachable by procedures of representation. How is this accomplished? By thinking of the world, Heidegger says, as a collection of objects on display; as a picture, or better, as something naturally complicit in the work of representation. Thus, "world picture," for Heidegger, "when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its en-

tirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth" (pp. 129–30). This task, according to Heidegger, is dedicated to getting a grip on the world by simplifying it, in the form of a clear and distinct representation that can be composed and handled according to codifiable and transmissible rules. Such a world, in other words, is under the sway of a *subject*: "That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming *subiectum* in the midst of that which is" (p. 132). By organizing for the subject a picture-world in terms that have been made familiar and which may therefore be manipulated with confidence, scientific discourse incites irresistible fantasies of power and control.

Heidegger's assessment of the age of the world picture, however, implies more than this: that the world is *valued* as something that allows itself to be pictured by and for a subject; that the world is cultivated and preserved as an object gratifying the subject's will to power. Science wants a disposable world: one disposed to be represented, and disposable *as* representation, granted existence only to the extent it meets the knower's need to order and explain and discarded when it ceases to do so. But despite the generally acknowledged status of the United States as the most advanced modern scientific civilization—to say nothing of its notoriety as *the* "disposable" society of waste and consumption—Heidegger insists that the study of "Americanism" can shed no light on the meaning of the gigantic—or perhaps, more plausibly, that the naïve criticism of gigantism as originating in an uninhibited and corrupting American commercial empire impedes our ability adequately to conceive of this phenomenon. Thus Heidegger stresses that "'Americanism' is something European" (p. 153). The essence of the desire to dispose of the world by putting it at the disposal of representation is deeper, Heidegger is certain, than anything suggested by the idle talk of American vulgarity. By now, however, I hope that the reader suspects that the topoi of "Americanism" which Heidegger wishes to exclude from the task of thinking might serve as exceptionally vivid symptoms of the history of metaphysics. In this section, I interrogate the significance, from the perspective of Heidegger's problematic, of the efforts of American political scien-

tists and journalists after World War II to recover, for the uses of the subject, an objective picture of the political real.

Textbook histories of American “empirically oriented” political science typically plot the emergence of a “behavioralist” approach to the study of political life, whose hegemony is later challenged by a generation of “postbehavioralists,” both impatient with what they regard as its empty formalism and anxious to confront more directly the social and political conflicts of the 1960s. The lure of a *science* of politics derived, of course, from complex historical, social, and disciplinary energies, and the postwar attraction of such procedures as systems analysis, game and decision-making theory, and cybernetics was overwhelming not only for students of politics but for anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and above all, national security think tanks at the RAND Corporation and the Pentagon, as well. David M. Ricci suggests that such “scientific” approaches seemed momentarily to accord with an optimism prevalent in American culture at large about the reasonableness or rationality of American democracy itself: “The mid-century liberal matrix . . . suggested that true understanding of democracy must rest upon an analogy between science and society, that is, between a scientific method for seeking the truth and a political method for making decisions, between a scientific community of scholars checking each other’s work and a political community of citizens assessing each other’s interests.”³⁴ “Assuming that the starting conception of science was correct,” he goes on, “occasional references to this analogy reinforced a conviction that political systems functioning along similar lines must be desirable,” an optimism that became less tenable as American society grew less governable over the course of the 1960s and as the scientific study of politics itself uncovered phenomena (uninformed and apathetic voters, for example) that seemed to undermine what democratic theory called for.

Readings such as these, while essential, rely on a figure commonly encountered in narratives of postwar America: a catastrophic interruption of routine; the crisis of an unanticipated encounter with a reality that shatters ideological complacency.³⁵ Critical intentions aside, the trope is, in a sense, kind to behavioralism, as it allows

for the re-interpretation of positivist vices as virtues: the political scientists' inability to predict the conflicts of those years secretly confirms their celebrated scientificity and the cool rationality demonstrated in their refusal to turn prematurely from the *Fundamental-ontologie* of theory building to the *Gerede* of political contestation and debate. But this refusal, as we shall see, was ironic. Struggling, during the Cold War of the 1950s, to free themselves from a tradition of political thought they experienced as arrogantly divorced from the real world, behavioralists agreed that political life could be understood more authentically if they constructed a neutral conceptual framework for the disinterested accumulation of reliable political knowledge. They succeeded, however, both in inventing a discourse of political surveillance more than adequate to the Cold War and in refurbishing such ideologemes as expertise, masculine tough-mindedness, and truth-as-representation. This result can be seen, I suggest, not only by studying how the optimism about science and society broke down but through the meaning of "the starting conception of science" itself, the need to dispose of the world by seeing it as disposed to be represented.

Behavioralism is in the Emersonian tradition of breaking with tradition, which is viewed as empty convention and dull habit. For Emerson, the "rotten diction" of middle-class society, with its stale routines of work, church, and family, obscured the more fundamental truth of the unity of nature disclosed through nature's *original* language. For the behavioralists, likewise, the persistence of a too respectable, academically enfranchised tradition of political thought implied that the student of politics was abandoned to ambiguous signs with deceptive and uncontrollable effects, necessitating the *recovery* of the authentic and original language of political life, the discovery of a "motivated" political sign through which reliable representation and politics would be linked. In his *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science* (1953), David Easton called on political scientists to turn away from textual prattle and scrutinize directly the laws of the real political "system." But like earlier (and later) epistemological escape projects, Easton's encounters an obstacle: the disclosure of political reality must take the form of an *interpretation* of the real. The burden of Easton's behavioralism,

then, will be the quest for a “conceptual framework” that can regulate the play of overdetermined political signs and ensure the steady convergence of knowledge upon its extratextual referent. Instead, in the name of “reliable knowledge,” Easton elaborates a *text*, in the de Manian sense: a *combinatoire* of tropes continually oscillating between literal and figurative senses, always just shy of the hoped-for univocal meaning.

The behaviorist moment in political science is long past, of course, and few would now defend the behaviorists’ ambitions and claims as they were originally formulated. But if behaviorism is now regarded as naïve political science, it remains a sign of sophistication in the mass media. Its *jargon*—a rhetoric in which particular political associations are treated as “systems” with varying degrees of “stability”—has become firmly entrenched in the metaphysical language of journalists and their counterparts in the national security bureaucracy, a reliable sign of the “objectiveness” of international affairs themselves. This is the language we heard during the 1960s in discussions of the “pacification” of Indochina, where “human factors” such as the “flow of refugees” were to be “systematize[d]” and the “will of the regime” was considered as a “target system,” and that is heard no less in the post-Cold War world of nameless and numberless threats to our “purposes,” as when Defense Department officials speak impersonally of “projecting power” into or “signaling” Iraq.³⁶ Although representative of the behaviorist movement in postwar political science, however, Easton cannot be considered typical. As Ricci shows, the behaviorists, despite their attraction to the science-society analogy, never achieved a consensus about what “science” was.³⁷ Nevertheless, the construction of a behaviorist vocabulary is staged most vividly in Easton’s work of the 1950s and early 1960s, and a re-examination of his behaviorism, therefore, offers a point of departure for a genealogy of an ideological language of international affairs which is shared by journalists and national security officials. The study of Easton’s rhetoric of rationality discloses a set of problems through which relationships among and between social theory, metaphysics, ideology, and international affairs become accessible.

Easton’s *The Political System* was one of many expressions of dis-

satisfaction by political scientists after World War II with unreliable theories orchestrated by a “voluminous and genteel tradition” that confronted the would-be student of politics with an unmanageable variety of vague concepts, ambiguous ideas, conflicting approaches and methods, and uncertain results. For Easton, “reliable knowledge”—the goal of political science—derives from systematic, empirically grounded theories that describe and explain the universal regularities of their objects. The possibility of such knowledge has lately come under suspicion, Easton acknowledges, but the reasons are spurious. What is needed is a “conceptual framework” to guide empirical investigation, one that would replace the battle of interpretation with a settled procedure for discovering the truth about politics. Equally necessary is a clearly defined *object* of empirical investigation. Coherently integrated, a generally accepted conceptual framework and a clear and distinct object of political analysis would enable the discipline to avoid the twin evils of fragmented fact collection, on the one hand, and utopian speculation on the other. A search through past theory yields the discovery that the distinctive and invariant subject matter of political science, and therefore the proper object of scientific investigation, is “the authoritative allocation of values in a society.” The conceptual framework is what Easton later called “the most fertile intellectual innovation of our own age”: cybernetics.³⁸

Such an investigation is concerned with what *is*, not with what *ought* to be. The scientist’s “values,” however, which derive from emotional reactions to factual states, may, unidentified, interfere with the search for the universal regularities of the political system. So the values must be “clarified” by the construction of an imaginary ideal polity, bringing barely perceptible subjective preferences to light and enabling the correction for bias necessary to the successful prosecution of the research program. This task was once the *raison d’être* of political theory, which has since declined into the transmission of *past* political theories (historicism, as represented, for Easton, with intentional irony, by the work of Leo Strauss). Recast in terms of the enlightened search for political knowledge and established on a sound empirical and theoretical footing, political science will rejuvenate political theory in the traditional sense, by enabling the latter’s

clarification of subjective preferences to correct for bias in empirical theory, as its ever-increasing stock of reliable knowledge gives substance to the perennial political debate over means and ends.

There is a lapsus in Easton's apparently seamless narrative: the discovery of empirical regularities is deferred in favor of, once again, a forced march through past theory. Because of the interpretative "overload" caused by the "fragmentary" and "heterogeneous" character of the discipline's disorderly language, the prevailing attitude in political science is not the measured application of scientific method but, rather, "emotion or faith and . . . tradition."³⁹ *The Political System*, then, will illuminate the path out of emotion, faith, and tradition toward the measured gaze of pure science. But how is the need for such a turn demonstrated? In arguing against the traditionalists for a scientific subject whose gaze is not obsessively turned toward beguiling linguistic entities, Easton, apparently unconcerned with his inconsistency, asserts in effect that scientific method possesses the warrant of *tradition*: "From the seventeenth to nearly the end of the nineteenth century, the western world became increasingly imbued with a faith in . . . scientific method to solve social problems, empirical and moral" (p. 7). He admits that *faith* in science is no guarantee of scientific results. By his reading, the "western world," having escaped tradition and convinced itself of the necessity of a scientific approach to politics, fell victim to another form of blindness: mistaking the rhetoric of scientific speech for the substance of scientific method. Because scientists presented their results as deductive systems, political theorists concluded that all that was necessary was to cast their imaginings about political order in suitably deductive form, as Hobbes did in *Leviathan*. A good part of Easton's analysis in *The Political System* is devoted to separating true science from its impostor. Although true science must be "theory-driven," however, its metaphysical center remains "original research spurred by the quest for experiential knowledge," with "the use of controlled, first-hand observation as the basis for understanding" (p. 10). The quest for direct knowledge reached its peak, by Easton's account, in the nineteenth century: Comte, Marx, and Spencer constitute a "torrent of rationality" along with which—just as with custom, tradition, or faith—converts are swept (p. 11).

The more Easton characterizes science as based on direct experience, the more he relies on the language of faith, emotion, and imagination to describe the enterprise. Rather than making an inductive argument for a science of politics, he presents science as a tradition, one of attention to the senses, of “special, painstaking application to the facts of experience—the positive data of experience as opposed to the negative or airy data of pure imagination” (p. 11). Behind the apparently univocal name “science,” then, lies an unacknowledged double usage. When it is a question of the hazards of tradition, “science” names the act of turning away from the habits of tradition toward direct, unmediated experience. But when it is time to describe the particulars of this turn, we are presented with accounts of conventions considered essential to inquiry: the principle of utility, the assumption of a rationally intelligible world, and techniques of controlled observation. Each, as Easton describes in detail, has a history and tradition of its own and is related to a larger framework of beliefs and practices characteristic of the “western world.”

Unable to control this ambiguity—science as a pure, desocialized gaze and science as a practice rooted in traditions and institutions—Easton resorts to terms and phrases that appear to bridge the gap. “Controlled observation” is one such phrase, suggesting a blend of mutual vigilance over the distorting prism of subjective preferences, and the uncoerced, observing individual. “Reliable knowledge” is another, which etymologically betrays the element of faith in Easton’s knowledge: to rely on something is precisely *not* to question but rather to trust. “Rely” once meant “to bind together” and was used to refer to the assembling or *rallying* of soldiers or followers. This sense is still active in Easton—and the behavioralist movement as a whole—whose program for a science of politics is imagined as a collective project involving many organized and coordinated researchers, as opposed to the idiosyncratic productions of “the single scholar in the library,” as Robert A. Dahl characterized the old-fashioned political theorist.⁴⁰ “Reliable knowledge,” the phrase Easton repeatedly uses to refer to the goal of political science, is, etymologically, knowledge produced by a *team*, under the direction, say, of a leading method. By comparison, the volumes of traditional political theory are too varied and inconsistent to be “rallied”

to a single project. The image of organization as the most productive mode of theoretical life is a persistent one in the behaviorist literature, and one of the most problematic aspects of traditional political theory for behaviorism was, perhaps, the resistance to organization posed by its texts and their traditions of interpretation.

Easton's most important hinge between unfettered observation and the canons of inquiry is "theory" itself, whose acquisition is an interpretative act—the result, as we shall see, of sensitively *reading* the history of political theory. Managed correctly, this reading justifies the reader in quitting reading to discover the empirical regularities of the real political world.

The essential condition of reasoned discourse, Easton (echoing Hobbes) emphasizes, is semantic stability. Concepts that organize a political theory, such as "dictatorship, class, [and] sovereignty," become problematic when "students . . . use them apparently with reference to the same social phenomena but in fact with reference to considerably different things." When this occurs, the concepts become "ambiguous" and "imprecise," with the consequence that "definitive confirmation or invalidation for any given time is impossible." This leads to a horrifying undecidability in political science: "One set of political scientists can argue that planning and dictatorship are unalterably associated; another can demonstrate the contrary. One can maintain that the separation of powers acts as a restraint on political power; another can prove that it really makes possible the capricious and irresponsible exercise of power. . . . For each principle supported by considerable evidence there is a contradictory one supported by evidence of equal weight."⁴¹

Nor has the attempt to discover a definite object of political analysis prevented the excess of signified over signifier that so appalls Easton: the definition of the field as "the science of the state," for example, "only succeeds in substituting one unknown for another"; there are, Easton reports, "over 145 separate definitions" (p. 107). The impedimenta to reliable knowledge, then, were the undisciplined signs of a discourse that had severed its ties with political reality. But recovering the real demanded first of all another act of interpretation; one more extended read. The object of political analysis, for Easton, could be located by surveying the history of political

thought and locating some stable, underlying property shared by attempts to define the political.

Easton's candidate, as I have noted, is "the authoritative allocation of values," but of more interest than the fruitfulness of this category are the problems it raises for Easton's strategy. Easton himself supplies us with the means to identify such difficulties. In his critique of nonstandardized discussion, he warns of the possibility that names can take on a variety of meanings (they can be used to "demonstrate the contrary"), so that on Easton's own assumptions, whether or not political theories coincide with the world they ostensibly refer to will be a matter of sheer chance. Yet he proposes to extract his concept of the political from the very literature he castigates as unreliable.

Easton gestures toward grounding this return to the text in observable fact. Social science was born, he tells us, when "investigators" began to "look at certain constellations or clusters of elements in the concrete world" and discovered "a special coherence or system" "In the concrete world of reality," he continues, some things are "more prominently associated" with politics than others. These things (Easton lists "government organizations," "pressure groups," "voting," "parties," "classes," and "regional groups") "show" a "marked political relevance" (pp. 97-98). Easton's resort here to a rhetoric of the senses—of political things that *show* themselves and that are *marked* with inscriptions we know how to decode—is odd, however, in that, as before, he elsewhere provides us with arguments against such evidence. We have no way of knowing, he later insists, from the "apperceptive mass of behavior" alone, what is and is not politically relevant.⁴² If this is so, Easton seems to rely for identification of the political upon the traditional bequest he elsewhere depicts as unreliable. Thus he concludes in spite of himself that the discovery of a common property shared by all the studies proffered by the tradition yields not only information about the adventures of a frequently duplicitous discourse but insight into the *nature* of politics "in the concrete world of reality."

This Janus-faced conception of the behavioralist enterprise—science as the elaboration of a conceptual framework derived from the logic of past political inquiry, and science as the reflection of an innocently observed "coherence" that is legible in the real world

of politics itself—leads Easton to waver between literal and figurative uses of the terms he chooses to describe political life. Despite his acute awareness of the dangers of ambiguity, he slips repeatedly from the stance of the reader to that of observer. “We are trying to find a convenient way of describing very roughly the limits of political research,” he writes of his reading of the literature of political science, but he continues, adopting the position of an observer of the “behaving system”: “trying to identify the major properties of the political aspects of social life.”⁴³ Similarly, Easton the reader concludes that “neither the concept of the state nor that of power in general offers a useful gross description of the central theme of political research,” while the observer immediately adds that we must therefore explore “suitable concepts for identifying in broad outline the major political variables” (p. 124).

Easton’s divided intentions are no less evident in one of his more emphatically theoretical works, briefly mentioned above, *A Framework for Political Analysis*. On the one hand, a “system” is a theoretical construct, “the most recent development in a long line of changing approaches to the understanding of society” (p. 22). On the other hand, the construct is especially applicable to politics because the latter somehow already *is* a system, albeit a peculiar one, necessitating that “we distinguish those interactions in society that we shall characterize as the components of a political system” (p. 48). On the one hand, a system is the merest metaphor: “It is always possible to borrow the conceptual apparatus of other disciplines and apply them analogically to the data of a different field” (p. 2). On the other hand, the political system is an actually existing thing, an “adaptive, self-regulating, and self-transforming system of behavior” (p. 26). Easton distinguishes between “empirical behavior we observe and characterize as political life” and the “set of symbols through which we hope to . . . explain the behavior,” insisting that “it is of the utmost importance to keep these two kinds of systems distinct” (p. 26). Yet this differentiation cannot succeed. By Easton’s own analysis, the “empirical political system” is *already* symbolic, composed of actions we have “*learned to call* political” (p. 68, emphasis added). Although a theoretical apparatus is so frail and arbitrary a construct that “we may arbitrarily decide to consider a duckbilled platypus and the ace

of spades as our political system,” we are blocked in this mad project by what the *tradition* establishes about the limits of the political system (p. 32).

Easton’s decision to regard *some* conventional ideas about politics as wisdom and insight rather than error or omission relies on an implicit theory of naming that departs strongly from his official suspicion of names as shifting, peripatetic, and unreliable. In this second, tacit theory, names are straightforward and honest, only picking out features of objects that are really there. As Easton puts it, there are “numerous organizations and institutions in which the quantity and saliency of political activities are so great that these structures are recognized as primarily political in nature. The fact that they are given political names identifies them as structures heavily freighted with political consequences for the society” (p. 42). In favoring, for some purposes, a realist theory of the political sign as the faithful representative of the referent it stands for, Easton neglects an alternative linguistic analogy. Consider, for example, Jacques Lacan’s theory of the sign, in which the signifier “stands” for the repression or absence of its signified content. What if the self-professed political *names* in which Easton places his trust conceal an *absence* of the political, as in the corporate usurpation of the “political parties, legislatures, and various kinds of interest groups” that Easton elsewhere takes to be obviously legible political “units”? Easton’s occasional indulgence in realism neglects the possibility that, in the technologically advanced countries of the late twentieth century, the political sign possesses a predominantly *ironic* or *parodic* quality.

Easton’s “framework for political analysis” is drawn from cybernetics: politics is a “self-regulating system” (more specifically, a “conversion process”) that maintains its “stability” by changing form to cope with “demands” (“inputs”) that it converts into “authoritative decisions” (“outputs”).⁴⁴ According to Georges Canguilhem, “cybernetics” as a term for the science of politics was first coined by André-Marie Ampère, who derived it from the Greek *kubernan* (to steer, guide, or govern). Ampère’s justification for introducing the term is that in the Greek language the word had already passed from strictly nautical or navigational usage to the political, as we know from Plato. In his *Essai sur la philosophie des sciences* (1834–

1843), Ampère distinguishes cybernetics and the “theory of power” as the two parts of “politics properly so called” (p. 139).⁴⁵ Whereas the theory of power deals with the causes of the various possible forms of political regime, cybernetics deals with “the *art of governing in general*” (p. 141). In Ampère’s usage, the art of government is devoted to the stability, safety, and security of the society as a whole. When Easton (along with other behavioralists) embraces cybernetics as the “latest conceptualization” in systems thinking, then, it is not without a certain irony, as the term had been attractive to positivist systematizers of knowledge one hundred years earlier.

The effect of the cybernetic vocabulary in political science is to re-code as “natural” what modern political theory since Hobbes had insisted was artificial, namely, the intentional invention, through compacts, of society and government seen as systems of rules and laws. That is, no doubt, the real accomplishment of the picture-world of cybernetic politics: it gives back to politics what the latter’s secularization had taken from it, lending to political activity a natural shape assumed before any particular empirical discoveries that might be made about it. In other words, it accomplishes what Heidegger asserts is the essential moment of science as research for a social science modeling itself on the “natural” sciences. Hannah Arendt comments that the discourse of cybernetics allows for “materialist” control fantasies as easily as idealism allowed for control fantasies: “Materialists play the game of speculation with the help of computers, cybernetics, and automation; their extrapolations produce, not ghosts like the game of the Idealists, but materializations like those of spiritualist séances. What is so very striking in these materialist games is that their results resemble the concepts of the Idealists. . . . Such notions are neither science nor philosophy, but science fiction.”⁴⁶

Accordingly, behavioralist political narrative replaces terms firmly rooted in the history of political discourse and expressive of its historical variability (“statesman,” “tyrant,” “sovereign,” “citizen”) with putative invariants that can be kept constant through narrative shifts of time and place (“demands,” “authorities,” “allocations”). The behavioralist political scientist is the author of a story whose subject is all possible polities. But the difficulties of naming the invariant elements of political life—difficulties recognized by Easton himself—

forces the scientist continually to remind himself that, although on the road to reliable knowledge, he has not yet arrived. All of Easton's assertions about the political system are provisional, and "further research" is inevitably called for in a fastidious discourse of qualification. In this respect, the attitude of the empirical political scientist resembles Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness. Convinced of the abstract possibility of attaining knowledge of the Unchangeable, but despairing of ever actually doing so, the Unhappy Consciousness (like the empirical political scientist) views any knowledge attained as partial, flawed, and transitional. In relation to the scientific ideal, work actually accomplished is of vanishing significance, so that "consciousness of . . . existence and activity . . . is only an agonizing over this existence and activity, for therein it is conscious . . . only of its own nothingness."⁴⁷

Taken together, these readings suggest that Easton's drive to escape the distortions of traditional texts and compose political life as a picture-world that satisfies the needs of the scientist-spectator is only superficially comprehensible as a demand for clarity and rationality in political discourse. The possession of an empirical theory empowers political scientist by enabling him to speak sensibly about politics; its perennial absence is a constant source of shame and powerlessness. If we reformulate Freud's question and ask "What do political scientists want?" the answer, of course, is an empirical theory. The question then becomes *What is* an empirical theory, such that it generates intensely ambivalent reactions of attraction and repulsion? Freud suggests an answer: an empirical theory is a fetish. Although the fetish, as Freud analyzes it in his 1927 essay "Fetishism," compensates for the fear of castration by denying the fact of sexual difference, it is also a constant unconscious reminder of the apparent reality of the threat of castration. The unacknowledged awareness of the artificiality of the fetish, Freud suggests, accounts for the ambivalent attitude of worship and hatred that the fetishist harbors for his fetish.⁴⁸

If the search for the highly prized object of an empirical theory lends itself to psychoanalytical explanation, the frequently expressed concern over the absence of a specialized, authoritative, expert political knowledge might serve as a clinical symptom. Easton's objections

to traditional political theory stem from a fear that ambiguous concepts, poorly integrated research programs, and contradictory but equally authoritative political judgments render political science impotent, incapable of the reliable achievement of knowledge. As any fetish must, behaviorist empirical theory both denies and asseverates this “castration”: on the one hand, it provides the only route out of the pseudoknowledge of tradition and toward reliable scientific knowledge; on the other hand, measured against his ideal of reliable knowledge, Easton’s scientist must continually stop himself from speaking on the grounds that no real science of politics has yet been achieved. The pursuit of a theory, then, endows the behaviorist with a reassuring identity as an expert authority on political affairs, but the fetish of theory constantly calls his identity into question.

How, under the circumstances, can the political scientist’s identity as an expert authority be upheld? By undercutting the claims to truth of *nonempirical* theory, so that the trope of authority becomes the scientist’s strategic *withdrawal* from discourse—as in the expert’s refusal to gratify his constituency’s desire for definitive assertions on the grounds, say, of inadequate data. The *refusal* to offer deep political knowledge becomes a sign that the expert operates on the terrain of the real, as opposed to that of desire and imagination in which anything and everything may be said. Examples of this perverse trope of authority can be found throughout Easton’s writings; for example, in the unhappy discourse of qualification just discussed. But it is most accessible, perhaps, in Easton’s style, which occasionally reaches for an excessively chopped, blunt, brittle mode of address, one drained of metaphor which, at times, is uncannily reminiscent of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *chosisme* in its attempt to expunge all emotional connotation.

We should note, finally, that in Freud’s account, the drama of the fetish is eminently iconographic. Its establishment turns upon unexpected sightings, feverish scrutiny, single-minded curiosity, suspicion about hidden truths, and a determination to bring out into the light of day the visible, observable object. Thus the stress as Easton relates his project on an observed and *seen* political system—one that has been caught in the act, as it were, and is no longer veiled by tradition. Once again, theory is caught in a double role: symbolic of the transparent rendering of the behaving political system; symptomatic

of an insatiable curiosity about a political truth that is always suspected of having been withheld.

The interpretation of theory as fetish in Easton's behavioralism allows us to identify the gender of the political scientist. A fetishist can only be a *man*, whose insecurity about the foundation of his own identity in the possession of a theory-fetish requires the ritual disparagement of the soft, easy, yielding folds of traditional political theory, in which anybody can say whatever he or she likes, in contrast to the manly mastery of rigorous methods that obey the strictures of the natural sciences. But the use of psychoanalytic concepts should not be taken to mean that behavioralism was a private affair; rather, viewing behaviorist theory as a fetish allows us to connect its discourse to the public language of the postwar national security state.

Easton castigates old-fashioned political science, which concentrated on particular institutions such as courts, legislatures, and pressure groups of particular countries, as local, parochial, and "culture-bound," calling instead for a science of the political system "in general." Old-fashioned political science is the natural accompaniment of a self-absorbed society caught up in a domestic economic crisis and undertaking sweeping reform, as was the United States before it entered World War II; Its discourse takes for granted the finality and closure of a nationalist narrative as "the most inclusive unit," in Easton's terms, for the interpretation of political action. The natural corollary for a science of politics "in general," on the other hand, is an outward-looking polity, caught up in the burgeoning affairs of an emerging international society. More specifically, I suggest, the ideological context of the demand for a vocabulary of the political system in general is the postwar international crisis, the Cold War. Such doctrines such as "rollback," "containment," and "counterinsurgency" might be read as sketches for a metaphysics of contemporary world history as a permanent crisis requiring constant supervision and, if necessary, intervention.⁴⁹

Easton registers this change in perspective as one demanded by good scientific practice. Prewar political science was "biased" in favor of particular institutions because it assumed a stable political environment without showing how this was possible. Such an approach is useless "where the system itself is threatened with de-

struction, as in highly unstable systems.”⁵⁰ Whereas the parochial approaches of “decision-making, coalition strategies, game theory, power, and group analysis” are “partial theories of allocation,” the systems approach throws into relief “allocation . . . in general” by *assuming the system to be in crisis* (pp. 474–76), thus building into the very center of political science the new discursive conditions of post-war international life. In a political rehearsal of Cartesian method, Easton resorts to hyperbolic doubt about the survivability of any system of authority.

Whatever else it may have been, the Cold War was an interpretative grille through which the U.S. leadership projected itself into history by defining the world as the scene of a network of emerging nations, politically unwieldy, and threatened with destructive internal conflict bound to be taken advantage of by a potential enemy. In this context, Louis Althusser’s influential theory of ideology, as the construction of a preordained harmony between qualities naturally possessed by a subject and the role established for it by the larger narratives through which relationships to others are disclosed, may be seen as an extension of Heidegger’s concept of *Bindung*, or binding adherence, between subject and world. The Cold War provided for just such a complicity between the nature of the agent and its tasks: unparalleled among the industrial powers in military and economic might, only the United States possessed the requisite treasure and political will to assume the role of manager of stability on a global scale. As then assistant secretary of state Dean Acheson, arguing in 1947 for U.S. assistance to the government of Greece, characterized the United States vis-à-vis its allies with respect to the task of countering Soviet power, “*We and we alone* were in a position to do so.”⁵¹

Once the U.S. government had assumed the role of “stabilizer” of an international “system” of order, all unanticipated change carried the charge of an implicit challenge or threat (Easton’s “stress” or “demand”); the role therefore required an effective discourse of surveillance and supervision, one that could take as its object the entire comity of nations (“allocation in general”). To repeat Maxwell Taylor’s phrase, U.S. leaders’ “attention must partake of the many-eyed vigilance of Argus—constantly watching in all directions in anticipation of the emergence of forces inimical to our national purposes.”⁵²

It is necessary, furthermore, to acquire some conceptual purchase on the field of nationalities, ideologies, and histories that U.S. leaders felt called to manage. As an abstract vocabulary that provides a set of terms through which political change under densely individuated circumstances may be coordinated, Easton's behavioralism provides a discourse in which one can seem to survey the totality of a world system. Setting as its goal "a unified theory of politics that embraces national, comparative, and international approaches," political science teaches that postwar history can be handled in economical and dispassionate terms: the international system is, after all, "just another type of system . . . comparable in all respects to any other."⁵³

The systems vocabulary posits a reassuring manageability to a world in permanent crisis, and the masculine resolve to face danger coolly comports well with the alienated masculine identity we discovered in behavioralism's fetish of empirical theory. Easton's political scientist fits well the peculiar character of the male "crisis manager" spawned by the national security state. As one witness describes the type, "Toughness is the most highly prized virtue, . . . and it is cultivated in hundreds of little ways. There is the style of talking[:] . . . fact-loaded, quantitative, gutsy[, with a] . . . machine-gun delivery. The man who could talk fast and loud often proved he was 'on top of the job.' Speed reading too became a kind of badge of prowess."⁵⁴ The male crisis manager's badge of toughness is his mastery of reified language, like the *chosisme* of Easton's behavioralism in which political action becomes "input" and "output." The crisis manager is not so much a man as an adolescent boy, whose tough talk is a fetish that screens him from fears of inadequacy to "project power."

The description just given refers to the "Kennedy operators," but their jargon of inauthenticity is shared by most operators of the national security state and their congressional and media interlocutors. In testifying before the congressional committees investigating the Iran-Contra affair, for example, arms broker Richard Secord characterized the interpretation of international affairs as "HUMINT" (for "human intelligence"), intelligence itself as a "product," and the supply of terrorist armies as an "enterprise." The state system must be protected, according to Secord, from con-

gressional investigations that rob the president of his “covert tool,” which must be veiled from scrutiny to protect him from “embarrassing” consequences. The Iran-Contra revelations, Secord lamented, by publicly exposing the inadequacies of the president’s “tool,” have ensured that “the whole world is laughing at us.”⁵⁵

Despite its role in revealing (but simultaneously, of course, *reveiling*) the presidential tool, the journalistic language of international affairs mimes that of the boyish crisis manager and the behaviorist political scientist. A *Newsweek* cover story of late 1985, for example, reports that the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos has become the most “*destabilizing* problem . . . on the Pacific rim.”⁵⁶ The cover describes the Philippines as “Another Iran”; the text itself predicts it will turn into “another Saigon” (p. 31). In news-speak, differences between three countries are immaterial; what matters is their common property as systems: the degree of stability. Like Secord’s story of his meeting with CIA director William Casey, in which one discussed Nicaragua and the other Iran, and each believed the other to be referring to the same country, Eastonian behaviorist discourse allows for the elision of differences to make way for a world of fictional manageability.

According to Heidegger, “the American interpretation of Americanism by means of pragmatism still remains outside the metaphysical realm.”⁵⁷ Yet the story of Easton’s behaviorism suggests the essence of metaphysics: *Verfallenheit*, or fallenness, whereby Dasein becomes completely identified with the simultaneously frozen and malleable discourses that structure its existence. In *Being and Time*, the immediate expression of *Verfallenheit* is the anonymous but “tranquilizing” language of *das Man*, which presupposes the prevailing universe of discourse and its horizon of interpretation. The discourse of *das Man* tranquilizes because it covers over the radical contingency of Dasein’s finitude with “idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity” that represent Dasein’s world as secured once and for all. It enables Dasein to indulge in curiosity about the world and to accept with equanimity the ambiguity of its knowledge, on the basis of a more fundamental acquiescence to the prevailing projection: in the Easton case, an ideological projection of a historical crisis

secured in advance (though never fully) by masculine expertise. For Easton himself, Heidegger's "gigantism," or the technological sublime, becomes virtually self-sufficient, utterly devoid of the need for the stoicism that Weber recommended as the only responsible attitude toward the modern will-to-truth's self-destruction of its own intellectual accomplishments. The political scientist celebrates his own self-destructive inability to calculate what the progress of calculation might yield, the inevitable disposal of his picture-world of politics at the hands of younger scientists with faster computers:

What we have now is a mere infant's step, a crude beginning in the way of mechanized facilities. New generations of successively more complex computers of almost unimaginable capabilities are already on the horizon. Their invention and perfection will take place at the hands of a new generation of young scholars who will be the first to talk machine language from their earliest exposure to arithmetic and mathematics in grade and secondary schools. Unlike their predecessors, it is they who will feel entirely at ease with and confident about their relationships to and mastery of the computer. The growth in the introduction and use of such machines for storing and processing information must indeed assume the shape of a steep exponential curve.⁵⁸

The chief irony here, of course, is the zeal with which those most aggressively putting themselves forward as concerned about "the concrete world of reality"—the claim common to national security operatives, journalists, and political scientists—should be so drawn to discourses devoted to transfiguring that world into a disposable picture for the pleasures of the subject. In its search for a language that might replace the battle of interpretation with the security of a foundation, Easton's behavioralism, and the broader Cold War discourse of which it is a part, ask to be read as an episode in the completion of metaphysics.