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VIETNAM—SUPERFICTION

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“Thus an essential property of language is that it provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations. The grammar of a particular language, then, is to be supplemented by a universal grammar that accomodates the creative aspect of language use and expresses the deep-seated regularities which, being universal, are omitted from the grammar itself.”

—ASPECTS OF THE THEORY OF SYNTAX, Chomsky.

“The things we have seen and read during these horrible years surpass belief. I have in front of me now an Associated Press photo from the New York Times. . . I cannot describe the pathos of this scene, or the expression on the face of the wounded child. . .”

—AMERICAN POWER AND THE HEW MANDARINS,
Chomsky.



Associated Press.

VIETNAM PARLEY—Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu talk in Saigon Saturday.

July 6

I looked at their faces curiously. I feel a certain security, a freedom to speak, to interpret. I remember that luncheon with the journalists, almost two months ago. What is there between those faces, I wonder. I sense the comfort of the surroundings. The sofa, the textures. I know of course there is no more to describe here than outside. There are their titles: Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, and South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu. There is nothing in their faces; nothing I can see. I feel I must watch myself carefully, watch the words I use. I know the reality of this language is in their names. I come a little closer to watch

the expressions on their faces. There is a feeling of suspension in the room. I look at Secretary of State William P. Rogers; I realize there is nothing beyond naming him. I cannot see his eyes. Why is it, I wonder, that I feel at the same time a greater freedom and a lesser tension of the real. I am conscious of the blood and torn flesh involved in their talk. I wonder again what there is between them, I listen as they talk in low tones, I can hear no tension in their voices. I realize that the only relations are those which exist between their names, like pieces in a game. I am surprised by my readiness to interpret; I believe it is because of what lies in the background. I remember their screams and their eyes; they seem to be lost. I know there is nothing behind their names. They move here, and talk in Saigon Saturday, but I know it is the oscillation of their names. I would like to approach them, to touch one of them on the arm, to say something. I look more closely into the face of one of them, and I can make out nothing. I wonder if this language is wholly insubstantial. I think of the blood and pain I have seen on their faces. There's a stillness in this meeting, the words I use are too heavy, too loud. I realize this is the most silent scene I have witnessed, my words occupy the foreground. I mean the language has been drained from them, from their gestures, their talk, into their names. Their faces are masks. I remember the dying. I feel death in the air.



Associated Press.

SILHOUETTE IN CAMBODIA—A Cambodian Army soldier crouches in the shadow of a temple building at Krang Ponely, Cambodia, as his unit moves in on Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops who had occupied the Buddhist religious grounds. Several temple buildings were set afire and destroyed during the battle which followed.

July 7

I watch, crouching in the shadow; a Cambodian Army soldier crouches in the shadow of a temple. . . , his shape outlined against the glare of the sun. What else is possible for me, I think. I wonder for a moment who I am, what my role here is. I crouch in the shadow of a temple building. My god, I think to myself, I am absorbed, dominated by the language, and I only project my shadow. I reconsider the phrase: a Cambodian Army soldier crouches etc., and smile. I breathe the dusty air. I would like to touch the wall beside me, I would like to say something to one of my comrades; but I no longer have any use for this kind of refuge from being there. To be here is enough, I think; I

look about me, taking in the various circumstances. What freedom do I have? I have explored the confines of this context. I know the words I have about me. I know what verbs, what actions I can take, I know the nouns, the temple buildings, my body I suppose, why should I elaborate on these? The temple building is here, the dust, its stone walls. And my body, the intimate awareness, a shadow outlined against the brilliant background; a Cambodian Army soldier crouches. . .The words are soundless; I cannot hear them today. We are limited in time also, nothing is ours. Several temple buildings were set afire etc., I thought about the sentence, and knew I was caught in the past.