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## "America: Possibilities for Transformation"

Robert Jay Lifton

Portland State University

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"America: Possibilities for Transformation"

Robert Jay Lifton and Portland State University

January 31, 1973

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WILLIAM HAMILTON: This is the first of a series of three talks in the Winter Conference at Portland State. We're addressing the subject in each of these three evening sessions: "America 1984." And we've asked our speakers to address themselves from the area of their own expertise and experience to the question: What do you suspect, either for good or ill, the America of 1984 to look like?

Last fall, in the first of these series of discussions, we also raised a general question to three speakers, meeting together on the same platform and at the same time rather than in series. We asked: Is America possible? And rather to our surprise, we discovered each of our three speakers was unbelievably optimistic about the possibility and the hopes of America. Partly, I suppose, to overcome or possibly to neutralize this mood of almost incredible euphoria, we're somewhat reducing our expectations and asking our speakers to ask a more generalized and a more limited kind of question.

And so this Wednesday evening, followed by next Wednesday evening when Dr. Elisabeth Mann Borgese will speak, followed by the week after that when Mr. Carl Rowan, the journalist, will speak, will in general be addressing the same subject: speaking of the present and looking forward to the very immediate future, what are the prospects? I'm very pleased to be able to introduce to you, who will introduce the speaker of the evening, Dr. George Saslow, Chief of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Oregon Medical Center, and distinguished psychiatrist and researcher, and old friend of Dr. Lifton. It's a pleasure for me to introduce Dr. George Saslow.

[applause]

GEORGE SASLOW: I remembered when Dr. Hamilton invited me to introduce Dr. Lifton, a very pleasant conversation about 10 years ago, which an associate of mine of the National Institute of Mental Health and I had with him and his wife on a lawn in Kyoto when he was conducting his study on the survivors of Hiroshima. I'm going to say just a few words about him so that what he then wants to say will be prepared for and not diluted in any way.

After Dr. Robert J. Lifton finished his medical and psychiatric education, he was in the Air Force as a psychiatrist for about two years, and then spent approximately seven years in the Far East conducting various inquiries. He published some studies on the psychological patterns of Japanese young people; a book on what it was to be a survivor of the atomic bomb that we, the Americans, dropped on Hiroshima; and what thought reform in the People's Republic of China looked like when you could talk with people who had been through it and who had left.

At the present time, he's a professor of psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine, holding one of a very few precious and distinguished life professorships endowed by a private foundation called the Foundations Fund for Research in Psychiatry. For the past three years, he's been actively concerned with what has been going on in Vietnam. He has spent considerable time interacting with what is really a very small minority of the two and a half million young men that have been over there in our military forces. It's a small minority. It's a deviant and a significant minority: the Vietnam veterans against the war.

In addition to spending time with them and in relation to what he learned in working with them, he with others edited a book called *The Crimes of War* in relation to what we did there. He's been active over this recent period in protesting the Vietnam War for a number of years. He was one of the organizers of a professional group called Redress, which has carried on actions of nonviolent civil disobedience sanctioned in two ways. One, by the guarantee in the First Amendment to our Constitution that allows and legitimates citizens petitioning to the authorities for redress of grievances. And two, the obligation which we helped to find at the international tribunal at Nuremberg after World War II, the obligation to resist the war crimes of one's own government even when that government was at war.

Out of these recent activities, he's been developing some general perspectives that I think you will find of considerable interest. I will just mention two. One has to do with what it's like in inner experience, in thinking, in view of the world now and for the future, to be a survivor of an incomprehensible massive catastrophe which human beings inflict upon other human beings, like the atomic bomb or the war in Vietnam. The second has to do with a special approach to history, which he's been developing, in which he has tried to pay attention to more than just one dimension, such as "the great man in history" or the way events develop in history. He has tried to put together the way in which the psychology of living human beings in a given

historical period, the ethics, the politics, and the history fit. And he's called that psychohistory. I hope you'll say something about that.

A word now about the Vietnam veterans against the war. They seem to me, from what one has read about them and heard from them, not to separate the horrors of the war as such from the nature of the society, that is our society, which could create these horrors. They put these things together in a way many veterans of other wars have not. I believe that I see those who take this view, that is the Vietnam veterans against the war—at least those who take this view overtly and explicitly—as moving towards a position which, as it happens was stated some time ago by an American historian who hasn't been widely read. It was stated in 1907 in a book called *Sin and Society* by a historian named E.A. Ross. And he said: the most immoral acts are not committed by hardened criminals but by respected, powerful men at a great remove in time and space from the consequences of their acts. That's the way it seems to me the Vietnam veterans against the war... [applause] are moving. Now such men, as defined in Ross's sentence, elected or appointed, are the leaders that our society followed in putting into play our tremendous material power in Southeast Asia.

To the degree that this is true then, all of us bear part of the responsibility for understanding what happened in Vietnam and for making it unlikely that we at least will repeat our unacceptable behavior anywhere. Under the title which Dr. Lifton has chosen, "America: Possibilities for Transformation," he's going to present his experiences, conclusions, and hopes, which have come out of these recent intimate interactions with this small group of veterans of the war who have this rather special way of looking at things. Now, when he's finished, he will respond to questions which Dean Hamilton will invite you to present from the floor. You might be thinking about those as you go along. Dr. Lifton.

[applause]

ROBERT LIFTON: Thanks very much, Dr. Saslow. That introduction was more than any speaker could ask for or expect, and I'm deeply grateful for it, not only because of the kind things Dr. Saslow said about me, but even more so because of the spirit, the *committed* spirit with which it was made. In my work on Hiroshima, and even more in my recent work with anti-war veterans, I've come to question very profoundly the whole mythology of the neutrality of professionals, the notion of staying apart from events because one is conducting one's professional task and carrying through one's skill, and left with no responsibilities beyond it. And I think the quality of Dr. Saslow's words express exactly what I mean by the committed professional. The person who is not above battle, but rather brings his or her skills, doesn't disdain skills at all, but brings them to bear for purposes that are life-enhancing with personal commitment and I'm profoundly grateful for that introduction.

I am a little taken aback. I admit I don't know really whether I'll be talking about "Is America Possible" or "America 1984"? I'm not sure they're two different questions. In any case, I'm sure that Dean Hamilton has been around psychiatrists long enough to know that we don't easily make predictions. But I will try to talk about certain themes I see taking shape. And you will see the war will be very much with me, as indeed I believe it's very much with all of us, in some ways now more than ever.

There is one... I almost had the feeling from Dean Hamilton's introductory words that he was a little worried that his speakers were getting a bit too optimistic and he better bring a character like Lifton along, because you can be sure he's going to be talking about holocaust. Well, I will, but I want to talk about something else first. One thing that hasn't been mentioned that is a kind of passion of mine, and my particular way of staying sane—everybody needs his or her special way—is drawing bird cartoons. And actually, I have no talent at all as a cartoonist, but I can draw little birds and make them say certain things that I think can be said that way better than in my more ponderous works. And that kind of introduction, this sort of beginning of an evening, brings me back to one particular bird cartoon of mine which I call my existential bird cartoon, in which a young bird, very hopeful, looks up and said, "All of a sudden I had this wonderful feeling, *I am me*," And a more cynical, jaded older bird looks down and says, "You are wrong." [laughter] It's with that spirit that I start my address.

Dr. Saslow referred to the developing field of psychohistory, and I want to just say a very brief word as a kind of orienting principle about that. Psychohistory really means nothing more than an attempt to bring systematic psychological methods to the study of historical events. And as Dr. Saslow hinted, there are two different, roughly, ways to approach it. One is the "great man" approach, which has been pioneered by Eric Erikson, in which one studies the life of the great man to see the interplay or interface between his personal breakthrough and the significance of that breakthrough for his historical period. Erikson has done that in his two already classical psychobiographies of Luther and Gandhi. My own approach I call that of shared themes in which I've tried to work with, study the reactions of a particular group of people, a certain population caught up in or actively initiating, or as is usually the case, in some mixture of both, some important historical current. In my case, mostly events that are rather contemporary. So, in that way, I approached the survivors of Hiroshima, trying to understand what their responses were in a way that I knew had significance of a wider kind.

And it was with that same feeling that I approached veterans of Vietnam, and I chose to approach anti-war veterans on the findings on whom almost all my work is based on this war, because I saw, as again Dr. Saslow indicated, something very profound and something very important that they represented. I didn't try to do some systematic study of all veterans and try to find some exact norm or baseline or whatever, but rather to observe a certain pattern that I thought was enormously significant among anti-war veterans.

So, I would say as a kind of beginning also, we now have a ceasefire. The war is supposedly over. There's not much joy. I'm sure you've all noticed that. We still feel ourselves in a very dark time, and yet I find myself always referring to the words of Theodor Roethke: "In a dark time, the eye begins to see." There is that paradox when things are really dark and there are crises of very profound nature, as indeed we have now, some insights are possible; and again that pertains very much to this group of anti-war veterans that I'll be referring to.

I want to say a word about a group of anti-war veterans I know very well, some of them in New York and some in New Haven, and their responses to the ceasefire, which I think are very illuminating. And then I want to talk about the relationship of what was behind those responses to some larger trends in American society, because these men aren't reacting to the war in total isolation. They react to currents in American society and join certain other currents in American society; and at the end I want to come back to what they represent and say something more about the principle of honor.

I was quite impressed to see evidence, consistent evidence right after the ceasefire, among veterans, not of joy but of rage. It was very instructive to see as one educational channel, New York Channel 13 TV, in a very good sort of photographic story, juxtaposed two seeming scenes of celebration at ends of wars. First one was V-E Day in 1945, and there was a genuinely joyous scene in Times Square in New York shown on the TV from the film of that time. And that meant a lot to me, because I have happened to have been in that crowd and very joyous at that time. I was 19 years old and it meant a very great deal when World War II ended, and ended in victory against what we could define as an evil force. Juxtaposed to that was a scene in Times Square just the other day when the ceasefire was signed. And very significantly, there are a group of veterans—Times Square itself has deteriorated, as you know, it's a sort of a porno center and it's run down and there is all sorts of crime there and so on—but there are also a group of veterans around there and they weren't celebrating, they were angry. And there was one Black veteran who was especially memorable who said, "You can tell that bastard Nixon the war isn't over, the war's still on."

I also talked to people I've been rapping with over two years or so about their personal responses. And one man whom I've known very well said he found himself in some way he didn't understand, just enraged. As soon as he heard about the ceasefire, he threw something through a window and went riding off in his car, and was really afraid he would harm himself until he caught hold and controlled himself and came back. And he had dreams again about Vietnam, including dreams of buddies being killed in miserable ways, and of Vietnamese children and women being shot near his base. Dreams of events that actually occurred. And I talked to a group of veterans about why it was that he felt this way and why they felt similarly. And they said different things. One of them said rather softly, the feeling he had when the ceasefire was signed was, "Is this it? Is this all?" And he used the phrase, "There's no sense of

an ending.” He said an event should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but there's no sense of an ending here. Of course, he meant everything about the war. “Nothing is resolved” was the message. They say there's a ceasefire, but nothing is resolved. And another one said, “Well, Nixon speaks of peace with honor, but it's not peace and there's no honor.” And they talked about what would become of them. You know, can they still be anti-war veterans? What about their own sense of identity? And the man who had expressed himself as having been so enraged said, “Well, I'm gonna stay an anti-war veteran for the rest of my life.” Now he didn't mean exactly organizationally. He wasn't sure what happen organizationally, but he meant existentially. He would be that, and I believe that he will.

We talked about the returning prisoners of war, and I don't want to say much about them because I don't know much about them. I haven't worked with them, and I only see them from a distance. But what strikes me is the country's form of responding to them. As one of them said—one of the veterans said, “It is as if the country wants heroes.” It would seem there's been no glory, no heroes in this war, and somehow, again, under manipulated political leadership, the country reaches out for something that suggests a little bit of heroism; people who did really undergo ordeals in prison camps, and indeed their wives who underwent ordeals waiting for them, and their families. The country seems desperate for some sort of hero figures, some sort of honor, something that doesn't have the taint and the filth of the war, and of course would like to... and the leadership would of course like to distract the country from the more painful questions.

But it would seem that the issue of honor arises about all this. It was what the anti-war veterans talked about and is very much at stake. And one has to ask, what, psychologically speaking, is honor? It has something to do with integrity. And integrity means intactness, being held together. It can be even a physiological matter and extends over the course of the individual life cycle and, of course, the collective life cycle into an ethical matter, being held together ethically and being held together around social commitments that are virtuous rather than destructive. This is what we mean by integrity and the relationship of integrity to honor. And the integrity that the anti-war veterans have been seeking has to do with the experience of being survivors in Vietnam.

It's not usual to speak of war veterans as survivors, but they very much are that: a survivor just by definition. I began to think about this issue a great deal in regard to Hiroshima and extended it to other experiences. By definition, a survivor is one who has been immersed in death and countered death, either in direct concrete ways or in various symbolic representations, and has himself remained alive. And in Hiroshima, I found there were certain patterns that survivors experienced which were central to the survivor experience, and they extended not only to holocaust, but also to ordinary survivals of people that one loves who die, or simply touching death in almost any way. And briefly, that psychological constellation consisted of a certain

indelible image of death. One doesn't forget particularly those first deaths, either that one has seen, especially of one's buddies in war, but whatever those deaths are that one has encountered, and various forms of anxiety and imagery around those deaths.

Second, a form of death guilt, the question of why I survived and he or the others died, and the related kind of emotion that somehow my survival was purchased at the cost of his death. If he had survived, if I had died, he could have survived, that kind of imagery. There is also an issue of turning off one's feelings, or what I call psychic numbing, which at the beginning can be enormously useful just for the sake of staying sane—because one can't respond with appropriate emotions to these scenes of death—but the numbing sustaining itself beyond the death immersion into the period afterwards, and can relate itself to despair and depression or various forms of withdrawal.

The survivor also experiences enormous suspicion of the counterfeit in various relationships because of a situation that has destroyed his faith in the structure of existence. And finally, there's the overall quest of the survivor for some kind of significance to give form, to formulate the death immersion, and in that significance to relate the rest of his life to some form of meaning. Now, if you look at the anti-war veterans as opposed to traditional veterans around the survivor experience, I think something very important emerges. The traditional veteran in most countries, and certainly in this country, survives his war and seeks significance in his survival by joining veterans' organizations of a chauvinistic kind which glorify war, and therein he takes his significance. The anti-war survivors of Vietnam take an opposite form of survivor significance from their war. Instead of coming out glorifying or romanticizing war, they take as their survivor mission the source of their significance and meaning, telling the truth about the war, confronting the American public with what the war has been and what it has done to human beings, to themselves, as well as to the people that they injured or killed. And this is a rather historically unprecedented movement.

Of course, we have had anti-war survivors from other wars, notably from World War I, a generation of English poets and European writers, and a lot of individuals who had that kind of insight and survivor reaction. But it has never been a mass movement, a significant minority among the rank and file of the people who have fought a war. And in that sense, there's a historical significance to what the anti-war veterans are doing around survival, and its significance goes far beyond their numbers, because they also connect with many other veterans, many times their numbers, who have similar feelings but don't have the capacity or inclination to articulate them.

The issue of honor, then, is related to their... honor for them is related to telling the story and confronting the American public with the actuality of the story rather than romantic fiction. But honor also extends beyond the self. Honor always relates to past traditions, to commitments



beyond the self. And here, what the anti-war veterans and what any group of people who undergo significant change enter, is something to do with historical continuity, or what I call symbolic immortality or sense of immortality. And put in simple language, this means the avenues through which they seek significance beyond the self and on a continuing basis. And in thinking about this kind of continuity or symbolic immortality, I would see it as expressed in various forms. It can happen... it can be expressed through continuity in one's family, living on, a sense of living on in one's children or their children, through one's works. And here, the honor or the position of anti-war veterans is very much at issue through what one does in one's life and the influences one has upon other people that live on beyond the self.

It can be expressed in religious or spiritual ways, and in many ways the anti-war movement has a spirituality even if not that of any classical religion. Also, this mode of symbolic immortality can be expressed through natural means: that is, one's relationship to something we call eternal nature which all cultures give expression to—or simply to a psychic state in which by very intense feelings, by what I call experiential transcendence or in classical languages ecstasy—one feels so intense that the time and death disappear. There's some of that feeling of new discovery in anti-war veterans. This is a kind of grid or a dimension around which life and death issues, I think, are experienced for any culture.

Now, it would seem that in our time, because after all, the anti-war veterans—as we move now into the larger question of America and the future—the anti-war veterans come out of and come into a society undergoing enormous historical tribulations of many kinds that I can't begin to describe in detail tonight, quite beyond the Vietnam War. And I think we can say that if we take these modes of historical continuity that I've mentioned, or symbolic immortality, that the Vietnam War itself takes place at a time of profound doubt or impairment to this continuity, because if we consider our weaponry—especially nuclear and biological weapons, the ultimate weapons so-called, as well as our capacity to destroy our environment, the various pollutions we're capable of—who can be certain of living on in one's children or grandchildren, or in one's works, or through some sort of spiritual conquest of death, or through one's relationship to nature, which we know to be vulnerable to these? And I think it is these doubts about continuity that turn many people toward some state of intense psychic experience, or what I've called experiential transcendence.

So, there is a dislocation in the society, even prior to the Vietnam War, that the Vietnam War further intensifies and indeed poisons. These dislocations have to do with the threat of holocaust, as I've mentioned, but also with the speed of social change. Because social change itself and the changing relationships to technology undermine traditional symbols around which the life cycle and these issues of life and death had in the past been more or less oriented. In a way, that means that even without the Vietnam War, we have a sense of survival all through society. If you consider for a moment some of the words we speak of, some of the

words we use to talk about the kind of society we have: postmodern, post-industrial, post-historic, post-identity, post-economic, post-materialist, post-technocratic, and now indeed post-war. Well, everything is "post." We talk about ourselves now, not in terms of what we are or might become, but what we have just been. And that isn't a very good way to talk about ourselves, I think, and yet it does seem to indicate the depth of a sense of survival that we have in a cultural sense, as well as in relationship to holocausts that have occurred or holocausts that we anticipate.

What I want to suggest in all this is the coming together of imagery of holocausts with the whole postmodern cultural breakdown or historical dislocation that I've begun to suggest. So that our loss of faith is not so much in this symbol or that, but in the entire web of images, rituals, institutions, and material objects that make up any culture. We've lost faith in the whole structure of culture. And I think of a question asked to me by an inquiring student when he said, "Are 4,000 years of human experience merely adding up to the capacity to repair a deficiency in a spaceship several million light years from home?" Well, that's a kind of a theoretical, far-out question. But he's really asking, does it all mean anything besides this exquisite technological skill that we now have?

In connection with these dislocations and this feeling of being survivors that pervades our whole culture, I've evolved the concept of what I call protean style. And that's named after the Greek god Proteus, who, as you know, was a notorious shape-shifter and could shift his shape at will but had difficulty holding on to one form, his own, and carrying out his function, which was that of prophecy. And I think there's a kind of model here in which many psychological experiences of groups of our population, especially but not exclusively the young, find themselves in. And this is what the young sometimes call going through the changes, an interminable series of experiments and explorations of varying depth, sometimes very profound, sometimes more superficial, but each of which may be relatively easily abandoned in favor of still new psychological quests.

Now, there are many aspects to this style psychologically that we could talk about. This is the basic nature of it. And I think this style itself, incidentally, which is enormously important to anti-war veterans, because they must relate to these trends in American society as they come back and find a place to land in their anti-war stance. This style doesn't emerge from nowhere. It has, if one thinks psychohistorically, it must have historical sources. And I think it has to do with the extreme dislocation that I mentioned, as well as with something I haven't mentioned: the mass media revolution. Because with the mass media revolution, it's almost accurate to say that any image from anywhere in the world becomes available to anyone at any time. Now, it's slightly exaggerating, but not very much. All images of possibility are there for us, mostly through television or radio or newspapers, and in greater or lesser degree depending upon the

technology of a country, but to a degree that's certainly historically unprecedented. So, these possibilities for experience are multiplied manyfold.

Proteus, the Greek god, also had relations, at least symbolically, to earlier figures in pre-modern culture, shaman or tricksters, who could shift their shapes. And there are many psychological models for this kind of shape shifting. It's not totally new to our time, but it's certainly extremely intense and in many ways characterizes much of our time, at least in regard to the young. So, if you respond to a sense of holocaust and rapid change or dislocation of the kind that I've described, there's a tendency either to open up in this protean style that I've mentioned, or else to close down. And that brings about the seeming opposite of protean man and what I call constricted man or woman. In both cases, it's either man or woman. And in the constricted response, there's a struggle to hold off and block out all these attractive, confusing forces and images that bombard us all the time, and hold on to a mode of continuity or symbolic immortality in the language that I'm using that is fixed simply there, without change, without experiment. And that psychological style I would hold is reactive in many ways because the protean imagery is abroad, it's with us, but there's a temptation to embrace it and then resist that temptation, block it off and remain aloof from it, and then indeed seek a kind of purification or social purification from what our vice-president once called "social pollution," a term to keep one's eye on.

Constricted man feels himself a besieged defender of a way of life, ever more rigidly defined. And he must view protean man, or the protean camp, as made up of conspirators, rebels, radicals, rotten apples, bums, a refuge for the spoiled and effete products of permissiveness. And I'm quoting only from our leaders. [laughter] Constricted man, though, is himself a survivor. I want to really emphasize that the constricted pattern in this kind of response to this dislocation I'm talking about is not a relaxed one. It's also a response to these dislocations, but it's a covering-over response.

Well, these are extreme types I'm describing. Obviously, most people are somewhere in between, in which they make some sort of consolidation, a cultural consolidation, in which they learn some of the themes of the existing cultural patterns and some of its technology and form various skills and professions around it. But the question that arises, especially for the young, and that arises again with renewed force and poignancy for anti-war veterans is: in order to become an adult in this way, or professional adult, does one have to become desensitized or numb? Because so much of the modeling that one sees of an adult or of a professional adult as it relates to the technicized society in which we're in, and especially around the war in Vietnam, has seemed to be just that: desensitized and numb. The mix of the protean and the constricted styles remains problematic for all.

There is in this process I'm describing a kind of convergence of history and evolution. And here I know we're going far out, but with purpose. We've thought of history as having discrete periods of time, decades or maybe centuries, that one can at least imagine, within which man doesn't change terribly much, although events change. And we think of evolution as being over millennia, in which man can be seen to change. But now all this is mixed in, because we can see certain modes of man changing, whether it's through radical experiments and discoveries in medicine, or even in the capacity to extinguish himself with his weaponry. And the distinction between historical time and evolutionary time is somewhat lost. Then with our technology, we find that we can bring up artifacts or images from all periods of culture throughout human history and make them available to almost anyone at any time. And that's the situation we're in. And we do indeed see, in this protean style that I've described, young people particularly—but not only young people—combining things it hadn't been combined before, such as Gestalt or Freudian psychology, Eastern mysticism, jazz music... just any number of seemingly disparate elements that can be brought together because all images become available in some sort of form.

What much of the protean style is a reaction to is a machine-oriented culture or the model of man after the machine, rather than the reverse. Because as you know, the machine was created in imitation originally of the human body, and things got reversed somewhere along the line. But it's what might be called the living deadness that emerges both from holocaust, in the way that I've begun to suggest, from undigested social change, and from this sort of technobureaucracy around the machine model. And one only need think of—I keep referring to war examples, but they're particularly, I think, relevant here—one only need think of not so much the ground warfare—that was a certain form of psychic numbing, as I came to describe it—that had to take place among ground troops in order to do the killing that they were in a way required or almost forced to do by the situation, by being placed in what I called an atrocity-producing situation, in which the norm was killing civilians. And one had to be quote “abnormal.” One had to break out of that norm to avoid killing civilians. That took individual psychic numbing or desensitization that developed through various pressures around the war, and that are, in some degree, specific to a counterinsurgency war.

But there's also the whole pattern of what I call numbed warfare, the air war, in which, as one observer has described, the degree and manner in which one responds to what one is doing depends upon the altitude one is flying a plane from, so that those who fly the B-52s are aware of nothing and feel nothing, and focus mainly on performance and professional skill. Those who fly the fighter bombers have some sense of little figures out there they're killing or affecting in some way. And they have to, to some degree, explain to themselves and others what they're doing. And those who fly the helicopters, who see everything that goes on, the gunships, have all the conflicts that the ground troops have, along with some special ones of their own. Yet

now, with the electronic battlefield and with other arrangements that I needn't describe in detail, we have built into the technology the numbing. It doesn't require much psychological work if you're just at one place on a machine where you push a button somewhere and you don't see even victims. You see blips on a screen. And that is the structure of numbed warfare that really faces us in the future. And that's very much an issue for America and the world, 1984 and indeed 1973.

General Westmoreland describes in a passage that I won't read, but I'll give you the essence of, a kind of vision or dream. And I kind of compared it to Martin Luther King's famous dream. Westmoreland's dream is of battlefields totally electronically controlled, that can kill everything in that area without any loss of American life. And in comparing that dream that Westmoreland put out with so much seeming idealism and passion to Martin Luther King's dream, my comment is that Westmoreland's dream is more realistic and closer to realization. That may sound cynical, but that is the state of our society right now. And that is the living deadness I'm talking about that we are reacting to, and that the protean style very much reacts to.

A very important element of the protean style, although I'm not by any means describing all of them, has to do with what I call the style of mockery and the sense of absurdity. I don't know whether you've noticed, but in many so called counterculture patterns, and certainly among anti-war veterans, in my experience with them as they relate themselves to youth culture or counterculture, whatever you want to call it, mockery is all over, and mockery is a very serious matter. It relates to issues of life and death when they're out of joint, and it really is the disjointed relationship of life and death that is being mocked in the deepest sense. I've had experience with mockery in ways that have made profound impressions on me, and it is a very necessary kind of emotion because it kind of lightens and gives one a vision of something beyond the immediate, uh, deadly situation.

On a lighter plane, I can remember a couple of occasions where it's meant a lot to me in a personal way. One time, in going through a little ritual of civil disobedience that Dr. Saslow mentioned, a group of people and I were getting ready to go off to do this thing. We hadn't ever done it before. We're all virgins, as we put it, and that sort of thing. We determined to do it, but little bit frightened. And we had the good fortune to have invited Dick Gregory there, and he gave us a kind of "going off to get arrested" speech. And he looked at us and he said, "Oh, yes, I can see you're all a little bit scared, aren't you?" And we kind of nodded our heads. And he said, "Well, I'll tell you, the first time I did it, the first time I committed civil disobedience, I was terribly frightened. I was really scared. But you know what I did? I found me a couple of nuns and walked behind them." [laughter] We felt a lot better after that. We looked around for some nuns. The other thing he said to us was, you know, he said, "I don't want you to misunderstand me. Don't get me wrong. But I want to give some advice to you middle-class white folk. This is one time you can't call the police." [laughter] That helped also.

The other experience of mockery, the use of mockery in this way, occurred when I wrote an article about the Columbia uprising of 1968, which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. And I thought it was a fairly dignified article, which happened to have a few pages devoted to an analysis of the phrase “up against the wall, motherfucker,” and all the nuances of what that meant, because it was a very important phrase in that rebellion. And the article was seen by a teacher in Ipswich, Massachusetts, and assigned to his class. And he had the delicacy to say to his students, you know, “If you're offended by in the language, you needn't read it.” But one student took it home to his parents, and the parents saw it and got very upset, and took it into the office. And before anybody knew what had happened, the teacher had been dismissed. And one day, I was sitting at my home, and I got this letter from Boston, from a firm, one of these very Anglo-Saxon firms that can only exist in Boston. It was something like a law firm Witherspoon Witherspoon Witherspoon and Smith, or something like that. And it said, so-and-so, a teacher in Ipswich, has been suspended, as you may have heard, because of assignment of your article. And we'd appreciate any help you can give him in this case, and so on. And I wrote back. I was quite concerned by this and I gave further information about the importance of language. And I said I wanted to back him up in any way I could, and I would appear if necessary, and so on. And a few weeks later, I got another letter back, again in this very... this firm did some civil rights work, obviously, on the side. And I got a letter back saying, again, in very legalistic language, as you may or may not have heard, they weren't taking any chances. X has been reinstated and we consider this a victory for X, for the *Atlantic Monthly*, for Lifton, and for ourselves, and a defeat for the motherfuckers. [laughter] I was so delighted... [laughter] I was so delighted with that response that I sent him a book of bird cartoons. [laughter]

In any case, I think you can see why mockery and this special kind of humor is absolutely necessary to us. It isn't necessarily a casual matter. Historical change itself can be seen as changes in these modes of immortality that I've described, so that one can see, for instance, Darwinism during the 19th century, the latter part of the 19th century, as a shift from the center of gravity from the religious mode to something like the more biological and natural mode: a shift that's never completed but at least is taking place in some essential way. Similarly, in 20<sup>th</sup>-century China, one can see a shift from the family, a biological mode—because you must remember pre-modern China, traditional China, emphasized the family system of continuity more than any other known culture—a shift from the biological to what I call the revolutionary mode of immortality, in which one seeks one's symbolic continuity or immortality in that way through the continuing revolution, which has an unending kind of process as one sees one's relationship to it. And that relates to man's works and to all these other modes as well.

Now, what I want to suggest to you is that looking at this grid that I've laid out, which seems a little complicated until one starts to look at everyday events and see how they relate to it, one

can take a lot of experiments we see going on in this country. And here, perhaps I'll sound too optimistic for Dean Hamilton. I don't know. But it really is neither optimism nor pessimism, because as I say, I'm not going to make predictions. These are currents that are taking shape. My feeling is that in the 60s, especially the mid- and late 60s, where a lot of breakthroughs were occurring with wild rapidity, there was a kind of image of instant revolution. And a lot of young people felt it's really happening, something dramatic and definitive is happening over moments. And of course, the media did their damndest to either imply this was so or ridicule the process, with oversimplifications all around. But what I think that is a little more hopeful now is that those who've held on to some of these revolutionary or at least critical visions of breakthroughs, breakouts from our cultural arrangements now—that minority, again, that has held on to them—seem to me, from what I sense from students and some younger colleagues and friends and so on, to now be doing the more serious work that any kind of radical or critical, broadly speaking, critical thought must do: take the difficulties of change, individual or social or historical, seriously, and become much more studious, more committed, for more sustained involvement in this process of change. And that is happening along with some of the horrendous things we see taking shape in our political structure, where these things are precisely being resisted. It is as if the society is going along on these double planes, the two not unrelated to each other, but in many ways avoiding each other and taking their shapes with some independence from each other.

From this standpoint, if one looks again at the biological, really the biosocial mode, the sense of living on through family and then the society or the group that one forms; if you look at a lot of the communal experiments of the young, the sense of forming a new group, a new tribe, and new community in which there are experiments that get down to the root of biological experience, such things as food, the food one takes in, organic food; greater sexual freedom; or collective child rearing; or spontaneity of mental and physical expression of one kind or another. These are very basic experiments. Of course, most such experiments must have limited lives. These experiments being protean, they start and they stop and they begin again. But something enters into some sort of current of experience that isn't lost. And of great definition and of central importance to the anti-war veterans are all the definitions of manhood and womanhood taking shape, not only these experimental enclaves, but all through much of the society.

And I think now speaking ideally, but in a way of, I think, importance, within a single generation we've seen the virtually exclusive American male ideal, the tough, even brutal, tight-lipped, fist-ready, physically powerful, hard, anti-artistic, no-nonsense, highly competitive sexual conqueror... [laughter] give way, again ideally, to the gentle, open, non-combative, physically unimpressive, soft, aesthetic-minded, indirect, associative, non-competitive, sexually casual self-explorer. [laughter] With, of course, a variety of types in between. [a smatter of applause]

Similarly, one can say the feminine ideal of a soft, compliant, self-sacrificing, family-oriented helpmate has given way to that of the more aggressive, physically and psychologically strong, self-concerned, liberation-oriented feminist, ever alert to evidence always available of male chauvinism. [laughter] And I think much of the original hippie or youth culture and women's liberation movements can be seen as parallel tendencies. On the one hand, where men are involved, to expand, again with this protean idea, the definition of sex roles, of what it is to be a man without being accused of being unmasculine, a broader sense, in this case being permitted to be softer, more sensitive. And similarly, what it is or can be to be a woman in which one can be tougher or more assertive without being accused of being unfeminine. That, I think is what much of the more experimental and hopeful aspects of youth culture and women's liberation are about.

And for anti-war veterans, they would summarize this in a single phrase that was more talked about in the rap groups we had together over the past... have had over the past two years and are still going: the phrase being "the John Wayne thing." And that just sort of took it all in. That was the thing they were trying to kick, as they put it, because they knew was in them. And they knew that the John Wayne thing, this earlier definition of American manhood, maleness, was intimately bound up with war-making, with their original enlistment in many cases, and with the process one goes through in becoming a warrior. And indeed, that is central to the whole process of transformation that I see these men going through in a very powerful and important way.

Now, that all is the biological base to this protein experimentation. And it extends out to various forms of community formations, becomes biosocial. And what we call often community control is really community formation. And what we lack so far, but are beginning to think about, are the kinds of communities that have new biological elements, but also reach out communally in ways that can relate to some sort of centralized society, because we can't decentralize totally with the kind of high technology we have, and at the same time allow for local individual autonomy. That kind of dialectic. And I think people have hardly begun to think about the possibilities for that.

Now, a second mode, the theological mode that I mentioned before, the sense of in some way transcending death through spiritual attainment—which every religion has put forward as a mode of symbolic immortality, if not a more literalized version. This is going on in experiments all through youth culture—if one wants to use that phrase—usually more likely outside the proper churches and synagogues than inside them; but various spiritual experiments and combinations, whether sometimes seeming to take absurd directions with astrological charts and Books of Changes and tarot cards, but not so absurd when one starts to think about the very real and meaningful symbolization around these experiments and the efforts to evolve new forms of spirituality, that would again, relate to new modes of continuity on this grid of



symbolic immortality that I'm describing. And even a development like the Jesus freaks, which seems reactionary in some ways and seems as though it's an absolute closure around a narrow definition of Christianity, can be seen for many as a stage along many steps along the path of protean experimentation, because many people went from drug experiences to the Jesus freaks, and they're not necessarily finished. There may be other kinds of experiments there capable of having.

There's a very sensitive theologian who's from Notre Dame now at Yale. His name is John Dunne. He's not related, to best of my knowledge, to the other bearer of that name [John Donne]. But he calls a certain phenomenon of religious experience "passing over," from going over to one culture or one religion to another, and then coming back to the original religion or cultural involvement, broadened and reinforced by that kind of experience. He sees Gandhi as a kind of prototypical figure of that sort of thing. What I am suggesting for various religious experience now, it looks as though there's going to be constant passing over back and forth and creation and re-creation, rather than simply one experience of passing over and coming back, along with some creation of what's called the principle of permanence, or something enduring in that process of change.

Well, just to convey the spirit of this, because I don't have time to cover it completely, one can say similar things about the third mode I mentioned, a mode of symbolic immortality via man's works. Just look at the across-the-board institutional critique that's been mounted. Again, we heard more about it in the 60s, and it seems to have been muted. And yet, I know a lot of people who are working on it, writing on it, speaking on it. There's now a building, and in some ways, more substantial critique developing, sometimes in the so-called radical institutes that exist in a few cities, in some of the so-called radical caucuses, in some of the professions and learned societies, and in various other enclaves in which there's a profound effort to alter the existing arrangements of how man organizes his life and how one creates groups or institutions and relations of teaching and learning, which I think are enormously basic to this. And I see it is deepening rather than as having disappeared. One can see some of this in the whole problem of the relationship between work and works. And really, in the end, I think they have to be seen to be inseparable. The work that one does on an everyday basis and the rewarding quality that has or doesn't have, and the works, really what that work is connected with. I got a very powerful lesson about this when I began to look at some of the collusion of my colleagues of psychiatrists in the Vietnam War, in serving in a way that they thought they were doing decent psychiatric work as they seemingly were, but in terms of what their works were, what the effects and the larger project they were connected with, it involved helping people adapt to committing war crimes and lending the prestige of the profession, and in a sense, legitimacy to that process. So work and works become an inseparable issue for thoughtful people on these matters.

Again, the natural mode of immortality, the concern with nature is twofold, at least. One is that we're about to destroy it, and there's good reason to be concerned with it. And the other is that we recognize, with that threat, the enormous importance of nature for us psychologically, for our imagery of nature. When people go out and form a commune in New Mexico or Vermont or anywhere right now, it's not to be laughed off as an inappropriate or romantic solution for high technology. It can't be anything like that; rather, it's another one of these experiments with the self at a time where nature imagery, for many, has been all but lost.

And finally, the mode of experiential transcendence; in a way, what we call ecstasy or a seemingly unusual state becomes, in my judgment, a kind of baseline for them all. Because I think in even humble or modest ways, we all need something like an ecstatic experience. We think of this in relationship to certain kinds of activities, such as high spirituality or, for that matter, sexual experience; or the experience of beauty or any sort of creativity or whatever, but even in humble moments of realization where we feel ourselves whole men and women, I think we know moments something like ecstasy or experiential transcendence, and then we know we're connected in these other ways, and only then.

Well, if we return now from my closing remarks to where I began, and the relationship of these patterns to the question of honor, and to the questions that I see the anti-war veterans addressing themselves to. and some of the issues around their less-than-enthusiastic response to the so-called peace of the ceasefire. We have a sense in the society that the Vietnam ghosts are far from laid; that the Vietnam War is very much with us and in us, and that the achievement of honor for anti-war veterans meant confronting the war, which the society has shown itself increasingly unwilling to do, as if the ceasefire is a further step or a confirmation of this unwillingness rather than an end to the war, which, as we know, goes on, and indeed with, it appears, still considerable American involvement.

Let me read to you a little section that appeared in a recent book by a doctor who served in Japan during the Vietnam War and treated many people from Vietnam. This is what he quoted from military regulations: "Each body in its casket is to have at all times a body escort. An effort has been made to find an escort whose personal involvement with the deceased or presence with the family of the deceased will be of comfort and aid. Your mission as a body escort is as follows: to make sure the body is afforded at all times the respect to a fallen soldier of the United States Army. Specifically, this is as follows. One, to check the tags on the caskets at every point of departure. Two, to insist that the tags indicate the remains as non-viewable, that the relatives not view the body. Remember that non-viewable means exactly that, non-viewable." These are instructions to official body escorts in the military. And one could say, of course, that they want to have a certain delicacy in not confronting survivors, family people, wives, parents with mangled corpses of sons and husbands. But the larger symbolism of these instructions lies in the general collusion asked for by the military, demanded by our leaders,

acceded to by the larger society, in turning away from the actualities of war, in keeping our corpses and the Vietnamese corpses non-viewable. I can remember a veteran's skeptical comment as we were discussing some of the ways in which we get the American people to respond to what the war really was. And he said, "The only way Americans could begin to understand what this war is would be for them to have to see a few corpses right in front of them." Well, perhaps parading corpses is not the solution to a country's confrontation with war, but the symbolism about getting a country to understand what it has done in the way of victimizing and killing and destroying its own people and others, is around that issue of viewing or corpse viewing.

Finally, I want to say a word about the issue of amnesty, its relationship to the anti-war veterans, and its significance for the idea or the theme of honor. It's going to come up more and more frequently now, despite efforts of many to keep it down, and there are something like a hundred thousand people out there in various parts of the world, or in prisons, or in various places where they can't live out their lives, people who refused to fight the war, or who deserted from the military; and the whole issue of amnesty has special significance for this war, even though some form of amnesty has been traditional after most wars. It has significance, of course, for this war, because of the dishonor the war has immersed the whole country in. Now, just putting the matter very briefly, would seem that the opposition to amnesty has come from two sources where amnesty is perceived as forgetting... forgiving and forgetting. The people who have supported the war most actively, our leadership in this country, oppose amnesty, and they've made that all too clear. In fact, they've wanted to see people who had the courage to resist fighting the war as having been weak or non-masculine around really an almost perverted and exaggerated image of the John Wayne thing that I mentioned before. But also opposed to amnesty on those terms are the very people who ostensibly benefit from it. The resisters who are overseas said, "We don't wanna be forgiven by them. They can't forgive us." And of course, they're right.

But there's another dimension of amnesty. And that's why when people now propose amnesty, they call it safe return or repatriation. They mean that the honor of resisting the war be recognized. And that's a tremendously important matter for anti-war veterans, because... two reasons. One is that even though the tradition of amnesty is to give amnesty on the part of a government that feels itself secure to the rebels who have been defeated. In this case, the rebels who have been, in a sense, defeated, who are overseas, have won in a moral sense. They have moral leadership and moral hegemony, and therefore to invite them home, safe return, repatriation, amnesty in that spirit, is to recognize the honor that they've achieved by their resistance. For the anti-war veterans, to join that process as they have and to declare themselves for amnesty as they have is enormously important, because they have the capacity to say, when the country says, "Well, these people who went overseas didn't make the

sacrifices that the other boys who fought did, and therefore they should deserve to suffer, be punished or take the consequences,” the anti-war veterans can say. “We have. We’ve been there; we’ve suffered; we’ve witnessed deaths; and we know the only way to do justice to these men is to welcome them back.” They can speak with that credibility and with that experience of having been part of them. And they become central figures in that debate.

Now, should that succeed? And again, I speak now in ideal terms, not of prediction or expectation, but of an important current that one can't, in a sense, say what will happen or not happen. One has to try to relate oneself to in order to try to make happen, because we're not neutral or uninvolved, and the returns are not yet in. Were that kind of shift of consciousness to occur—a shift in the definition of honor—one could imagine a future moment in which a son would ask his father the perennial warrior-centered question: “Daddy, what did you do in the great Vietnam War?” And the father's answer, instead of being, “I fought bravely at Khe Sanh or in the Delta,” would be, “I opposed it.” Or “I took steps and went into exile to avoid fighting in it.” Or “I went to prison because I resisted it.” Or “I fought in it, rejected it, and then did my best to reveal the truth about it.”

Well, there are more than a few American fathers who can begin to talk in those terms. And that does represent a change in consciousness of a very important kind. And you know, it's not a surrender of the warrior ethos. There is an ethos of the warrior hero in its original idea that's been very eloquently put by [Joseph] Campbell, and that is really, in a sense, perverted by what I call the socialized warriors of nation states. Campbell said, “The mythological hero is the champion not of things become, but of things becoming. The dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo. Transformation, fluidity, not stubborn ponderosity is the characteristic of the living God.” What I'm describing then is a redefinition of heroism, perhaps to its more original and authentic terms. I would close by saying that this kind of transformation I've been talking about from war to peace...

[recording ends mid-sentence at 01:01:47]