The Solace of Bad Form: Tim O'Brien's Postmodernist Revisions of Vietnam in "Speaking of Courage"

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Lyotard asserts that the postmodern "denies itself the solace of good forms" (81). Perhaps not surprisingly, Hemingway, the premier modernist writer of war, made a fetish of good form in both fiction and in ethics, a good form grounded in the search for the "one true sentence" that would clearly convey the truths beneath the surface of his fiction and his sense of correct behavior (Moveable Feast 12). He based both his aesthetics and his ethics on an individual integrity that was independent of society's interests and could sustain itself in the face of war and society. Even in his earlier writings, O'Brien rejects Hemingway's ethics, forswearing the separate peace that Frederic Henry achieves in A Farewell to Arms-first, explicitly, in If I Die in a Combat Zone and then implicitly in Going after Cacciato, in which O'Brien returns Paul Berlin from his dream of desertion to the reality of war. In these earlier works, O'Brien finds a modernist morality based solely on an individual's desires untenable, however comforting it may be. Although he rejects Hemingway's implied definition of ethics, O'Brien clings to the solace of the Hemingway aesthetic in his earlier fiction. In Going after Cacciato, Paul Berlin's destabilizing dream of escape is contained within the realistic fiction of a reverie during his watch duty. The line between subjective reality and objective reality blurs at times but ultimately is easily defined. All resolves finally into a grounding reality that O'Brien hopes can be captured in the "one true sentence." However, by the time O'Brien writes The Things They Carried even this good form dissolves. O'Brien denies himself, and his readers, the solace of good forms in favor of the imprecisions and contingent truths of postmodernism. Critics, and O'Brien himself, balk at designating his work as postmodern, claiming that the subject matter of The Things They Carried and O'Brien's presentation have "none of the glamour or play that characterizes postmodernism" (Chen 78). "It's not a game," O'Brien's narrator insists. "It's a form" (The Things They Carried 203; hereafter cited as TTC). Although it is true that O'Brien is not interested in the aesthetics of his work solely for its formal qualities, his rejection of postmodernism does not bar his work from inclusion in the postmodern. He may not belong in the same category as high postmodernists such as Donald Barthelme and William Gass, but he fits neatly with the historiographic metafictions of Don DeLillo, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Robert Coover. This bad form, finally, is the only form that holds true.

Previous critical commentaries on The Things They Carried comment on the shifting reality in the book. Some see it as expressing essential uncertainty about the Vietnam War, as a meditation on the process of writing and an exploration of the possibilities of fiction. These views describe aspects of The Things They Carried but suggest that the focus of the novel is aesthetic—that O'Brien's difficulty is essentially an artistic one. Such views overlook the way in which O'Brien's aesthetic struggle intertwines with his moral struggle. In Going after Cacciato, he was satisfied with finding an answer to his aesthetic problem—how to represent coherently the confusion of Vietnam; in The Things They Carried he finds the neat aesthetic form he found in Cacciato not only distorting—but also wrong. In Cacciato, Paul Berlin grapples with trying to understand Vietnam and his place in it; in the process, he creates an orderly fiction—in the form of his imagined quest to retrieve Cacciato—that contains the disorder of his experience. His attempt to create this orderly interpretation of events sounds similar to Elisabeth Wesseling's description of the modernist view of history, which "focuses on problems of interpretation in historical inquiry" (117). For the "Tim O'Brien" who narrates The Things They Carried, the problem is more intractable. He struggles not only with the question of how to interpret events but
also how to determine what those events were—or if they happened at all. Like the other postmodernist authors of historical fiction, *The Things They Carried* "flaunts alternate histories" (117).

The form of *Going after Cacciato* fits more closely the modernist model created by Hemingway, whose classic modernist form privileges a spare, clear structure composed of direct declarative sentences with the fewest number of words. It is stripped as much as possible of authorial commentary, making the work seem to exist on its own. The author betrays as little overt connection as possible to the work, remaining at a distance, "paring his nails." When Hemingway mythified his compositional practice in *A Moveable Feast*, he insisted that one need only "write one true sentence, and then go on from there. It was easy then because there was always one true sentence that I knew or had seen or had heard someone say" (12). These one true sentences underwrite his fiction. Once one has the one true sentence one need not "speak directly" but can instead imply that more exists below the surface words of the story and allow the reader's imagination to fill in the real dimensions. Hemingway's famous "iceberg" method of composition assumes that if a writer crafts his story well enough, even those things that were left out would still have an effect and "make people feel something more than they understood" (*Moveable Feast* 75). Such a method leaves the reader to interpret the characters and their motivations from the surface events of the story.

Similarly, in *Cacciato*, O'Brien leaves the reader to sort out the three strands of memory, imagination, and experience. As with Hemingway, readers must find an explanation for Paul Berlin's reverie and interpret it accordingly. By the end of the road to Paris, readers are likely to assume that Berlin may have different experiences than O'Brien had but expresses similar views. They can see through the confusing events of Paul's imagined journey to the events that prompted them. They realize, for instance, that Berlin's nervous fire and subsequent humiliation, when he wets his pants during the ambush of the AWOL Cacciato, prompts the narrator's imagined night-long journey (Herzog 94). In *The Things They Carried* the confusion is irresolvable and nothing certain can be read from the experience—only the brute fact of its existence. When Henry Dobbins questions Mitchell Sanders about the moral he sees in the dead Viet Cong boy's body, Sanders can only point:"There it is, man" (TTC 14, emphasis in original).

The movement away from the comforting good form of modernism to the bad form of postmodernism shows most tellingly in O'Brien's revisions of the story "Speaking of Courage." As the narrator "O'Brien" explains, Tim O'Brien began writing "Speaking of Courage" in 1975 as an episode in *Going after Cacciato*. The narrator named "O'Brien" further states that he started the story at the prompting of a former comrade, Norman Bowker, who enjoined him to write a story about a guy who feels like he got zapped over in that shithole. A guy who can't get his act together and just drives around town all day and can't think of any damn place to go and doesn't know how to get there anyway. [...] Write something about the field that night. The way Kiowa just disappeared in the crud. (*TTC* 179)

In "O'Brien's" account, when O'Brien tried to transpose Bowker's tale onto Paul Berlin's, it did not fit the neat form of *Going after Cacciato*; O'Brien was forced to replace the death of Kiowa and the night in the shit field with "events that better fit the book's narrative" (TTC 180). O'Brien decided that it did not fit because *Cacciato* was a war story and "Courage" a postwar story—"two different time periods, two different sets of issues. He had no choice but to remove the chapter entirely" (*JTC* 181). Aesthetics dictated first that the story Bowker wanted told be reshaped and then suppressed almost entirely. Later, O'Brien proudly sends Bowker a copy of the prize-winning story (a 1978 *Henry Prize*), but Bowker ignores the accomplished craft of the work and only wonders why O'Brien "left out Vietnam. Where's Kiowa? Where's the shit?" (*TTC* 181).

In the first published version of "Speaking of Courage," published in the *Massachusetts Review*, we hear a more generalized version of an unnamed war that
"nobody believed [...] was really a war." In it, Frenchie Tucker (the equivalent Kiowa figure in the first version) is crawling down into the "foul tunnel" where he loses his life (165). In the later version published in *The Things They Carried*, we are given details of the climate and terrain, of a "slow flat muddy river," "the Song Tra Bong," and "how during the dry season it was exactly like any other river [...] but how in October the monsoons began [...] and the land turned into a deep, thick muck. [...] Like quick sand, almost, except the stink was incredible" (*TTC* 161). In the later version, O'Brien turns (or more accurately re-turns) the "foul tunnel" into a shit field.7

In its first shape "Courage" emulates the modernist form that Hemingway created. Readers are never told the exact nature of Bowker's problem but must glean it from the events of the story. O'Brien does not go as far as Hemingway does with Nick Adams's war experiences in "Big Two-Hearted River" and entirely leave out Bowker's experiences altogether, but neither does he comment on them. He actually does something worse: he merely writes a fiction: He leaves out Norman Bowker and attributes the events to a fictional character, Paul Berlin; he leaves out the shit field, fictionalizing Bowker into Berlin and the shit field into a tunnel. Readers are left to piece together the story of how he did not win the Silver Star after Frenchie Tucker was pulled from the tunnel. Bowker more closely resembles Krebs in "Soldier's Home," although in Hemingway's story we hear very little specifically about Krebs's experiences. We know that Krebs sensationalizes his war stories to enthrall his jaded listeners, who expect thrilling propagandistic accounts of "German women found chained to machine guns in the Argonne forest" (*In Our Time* 70, hereafter cited as *IOT*). We never learn the exact nature of his exaggerations nor ever hear any of Krebs's stories, but we assume that Krebs must compromise his sense of self to provide the version of reality they prefer. We are the only ones who hear Berlin's story—for he has only himself for an audience.

That is the tragedy of the first version of "Courage": no one listens—not even the author/narrator "O'Brien," who is ostensibly telling Bowker's story.8 His failure to tell fully the story of the shit field in the first published version is a failure to tell Bowker's story. The first version is a generalized story, swept clean of the specificities of place and Norman Bowker. The second version offers the details of location—the Song Tra Bong, the shit field, and Norman Bowker. However, we only learn of this earlier repressed history of the story in the "Notes" section that follows "Speaking of Courage" in *The Things They Carried*. "Speaking of Courage" in its first version told only part of the story. This open admission of guilt and of "O'Brien's" possible connection with the story betray the good form created by Hemingway and move *Things* toward the bad form of postmodernism.

9 The first version of "Courage" has a neat self-enclosed structure; it stands alone and is seemingly self-explanatory. The fictional character and situation of Paul Berlin, the main character of *Cacciato*, completely subsume Norman Bowker's story. The later versions of "Courage" (published in *Granta* and then *Things*) acquire the explanation and context of the following stories—"Notes," "In the Field," "Good Form," and "Field Trip"—to tell and explain a more complicated story. O'Brien realizes that Hemingway's "one true sentence" is no longer sufficient to tell Bowker's story. Such a sentence, he realizes, closes off other possibilities, silences other views: most significant, it silences Norman Bowker. The spare shape of the first—reminiscent of the "good form" of modernism—now becomes encumbered with an explanatory apparatus, first of "Notes" and then the later additions in the sequence published in *Things*. Moreover, O'Brien's admission of his personal connection to Bowker's story further sullies the purity of form. Even though the incident is still officially attached to another character, in removing the modernist distance of the Paul Berlin character and interjecting an author surrogate ("O'Brien"), who experiences the same incident that night with Bowker, O'Brien exposes himself to the same complicity
he has always claimed his characters experienced in enduring such events. He denies himself the safety of modernist detachment. The "O'Brien" of Things writes that "something about the story had frightened me-I was afraid to speak directly, afraid to remember-and in the end the piece had been ruined by a failure to tell the full and exact truth about our night in the shit field" (TTC 181). The truth he must tell here will not fit into Hemingway's one true sentence; further, it is not a single truth. He must risk the messiness of many sentences-some true, some perhaps not true-to tell the story more fully. He knows that "a thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth" (TTC 89). He must admit to his part in the night's events (even if those events did not actually occur in the way he feels that they occurred)—Bowker's experiences become for O'Brien "our night in the shit field" (TTC 181, emphasis added). The narrator "O'Brien" suggests that the story of Kiowa and the guilt about his part in Kiowa's death keep him from telling more, but the suicide of Norman Bowker that he reveals in "Notes" implies that what frightens the author O'Brien about the story in "Speaking of Courage" is not the story itself but what he initially did as an author in creating it. O'Brien's devotion to good form initially silences Norman Bowker's only hope to tell his story. That modernist good form, in effect, may have cost Bowker his life. In rewriting the story in the Things version, O'Brien rejects Hemingway's aesthetic morality in favor of his responsibility to his comrades. "Notes" rectifies in some part that earlier omission and shows O'Brien's realization of his obligation to them over his art. He must get at the significance of his experience in Vietnam, tell stories that will mean something to his comrades even if it spoils the symmetry of good form.

O'Brien breaks with Hemingway's modernist code of authorial detachment and silence and risks his form by further explaining the story and his part in it. This contrasts with Hemingway's "craft of omission" that worked to leave out not only elements that could be suggested rather than detailed but also to omit the author's connection with his subject. In "Out of Season" Hemingway himself demonstrates the limitation of this method. He famously miscalculated when he left out the Italian guide's suicide, which should appear at the end of the story, claiming that he "was writing the In Our Time chapters and wanted to write a tragic story without violence." Besides, he added, he "didn't think the story needed it" (Hemingway, Letters 180-81). The form alone, he felt, would convey the sense of despair if not suicide through its unspoken significance. Obviously, he was wrong. The form does not convey it. More important, Hemingway's method also allowed him to omit his possible part in the guide's suicide. In a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald describing the background of the story, Hemingway offhandedly admitted "I reported him [the guide] to the hotel owner [... ] and [he] hanged himself in the stable" (Letters 180). For Hemingway, the only point of the story is an aesthetic one; his part in the man's suicide seems irrelevant, although in the story he is careful to conceal his personal connection along with the suicide itself. Without the commentary of "O'Brien" in "Notes," "Speaking of Courage" would be like "Out of Season"—implying only the depth of Bowker's despair. Further, and more significant, it would leave out "O'Brien" as a participant in the events and in the fiction.

For O'Brien, aesthetic good form collapses at this point. For Hemingway, the only allegiance was to his art. Violating good form—not living up to the exacting modernist credo—was the artist's ultimate sin. Although one might not literally die from it, the loss of honor entailed in such bad faith leaves an artist as good as dead—as Krebs learns when he "attribut[es] to himself things other men had seen, or done or heard of, and stat[es] as fact certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers" (IOT 70). Krebs's ruined life provides an object lesson in literary bad faith. He disregards the tenets of good modernist form and pays for it. His embroidery of the simple truths of his experiences spoils their "cool, valuable quality" (IOT 69).

The "cool, valuable quality" of the experiences suggests, however, that Krebs
maintains an exemplary modernist detachment toward them. O'Brien's exemplary storyteller, Rat Kiley (Bowker, unlike Krebs, cannot even relate falsified versions of his life), has no truck with such detachment. Kiley "heatt[s] up the truth, to make it burn so hot that you would feel exactly what he felt. For Rat Kiley, I think, facts were formed by sensation, not the other way around" (TFC 101). Rather than stick to the simple facts, as Hemingway believes Krebs should do, O'Brien's narrator does the opposite. Kiley "has a reputation for exaggeration and overstatement, a compulsion to rev up the facts, and for most of us it was normal procedure to discount sixty or seventy percent of anything he had to say" (TTC 101).

The authorial practice of Krebs that contributes to his ruined life sounds much like Kiley's and O'Brien's. The "O'Brien" of the book, like Kiley, insists that a "true war story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe" (TTC 84). Like O'Brien's narrator, Hemingway wanted "to get the feeling of the actual life across-not to just depict life-or to criticize it-but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing" (Hemingway, Letters 135). However, he insisted that to achieve the true feeling of any experience a writer must remain detached from the work to observe it truly. O'Brien departs from the modernist fetish of the one truth in favor of the postmodernist multiple truths. Likewise, O'Brien's method implies the author's involvement with the story, countering Hemingway's modernist insistence on detachment. What ruins Krebs's life might have saved Norman Bowker's and is the only way for O'Brien to get at the truth of his experiences in Vietnam.

The disaffection that Krebs contends with is borne of surfeit-too many war stories-whereas Bowker contends with a grim denial and the suppression of the stories that he needs to tell. Norman's war story is one of those true war stories that are "beyond telling" (TTC 79). Unlike Krebs, who spoils his true war stories with too many tellings and retellings, Norman Bowker realizes his story of the Silver Star that he almost won cannot be told because "it was not a war for war stories, nor for talk of valor, and nobody in town wanted to know about the terrible stink. They wanted good intentions and good deeds" (TTC 169). O'Brien makes it clear, however, that the fault is not Norman's but is in his audience. Similarly, Hemingway blames Krebs's audience for their sensationalistic desires, but ultimately he faults Krebs for pandering to those desires. O'Brien stress that Norman's story cannot be told because no one can or will hear it. Like the soldiers' stares at the "fatass colonel" in Kiley's ghost music story, Norman's stare "says everything you can't say. It says, man, you got wax in your ears. It says, poor bastard, you'll never know-wrong frequency-you don't even want to hear this" (TTC 82-83, emphasis in original). The audience, including O'Brien (as author and the fictional "O'Brien" narrator), must share some of the blame for the "failure" of Norman's story.

For O'Brien, the quest for the absolute truth beneath any experience is not only impossible, it is undesirable-and ultimately false. A true war story "represents the hard exact truth as it seemed" (TTC 78, emphasis in original). In other words, one individual's perception of a moment's "hard exact truth" as it seems to him at the time. The sharp, spare, modernist form that Hemingway perfected closes off recognition of other possibilities. Once the flesh has been pared away to reveal the bone all you have is a bone. Gleaming and white to be sure, but still only a bone. For O'Brien such remains only tell part of the story. O'Brien asserts that "you can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end. Not then, not ever" (TTC 83). Hemingway contrasts Krebs's storytelling with the few bones of truth that Krebs carried away with him from war, which "make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them; the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else" (IOT 69-70). Bowker has no such hard truths to take back with him-only the stink of the soft muck that sucked in Kiowa. The only truth is the act of telling and retelling itself, the act of pointing and saying, "There it is, man" (TTC 14, emphasis in original). The experience cannot be reduced to a truth-it only is what it is. It must be returned to again.
and again, an inevitable mystery.
O'Brien once tried to describe his role, this act of pointing the way, in "The Magic Show," his essay on writing. In it, he compared his role to that of a Kiowa shaman, who "enters the trance of his own dream, partly as a way of inducing the dream of his tribe, partly to serve as a guide into and through the other, fictional world" ("Magic Show" 179). Through the story of Kiowa and O'Brien's "admission" of responsibility for Kiowa's death, O'Brien assumes that shaman's role and leaves behind Hemingway's modernist distance and the authorial distance found in the first version of "Courage" and in Cacciato. O'Brien's mistake, his true failure of nerve, in the writing of Cacciato was his attempt to create an orderly form that would explain Vietnam. He did not yet practice in his writing what he realized in his life ("I was a coward. I went to the war" [TTC 63]). The ironies of Vietnam are such that going to war—even just an aesthetic war for good form—can be an act of cowardice rather than bravery. In If I Die in a Combat Zone, he claimed to be suspicious of modernist ethical truths, such as Hemingway's claim that courage was simply grace under pressure. O'Brien found such grace "too easy to affect" and "too hard to see through" (Combat Zone 146). Even then he claimed to see in simply "coming through embarrassingly alive" and promising "to do better next time" "a kind of courage" (Combat Zone 147).

Norman Bowker similarly believes that his medals for "common valor," "the routine daily stuff" were "worth something," especially "the Combat Infantryman's Badge, because it meant he had been there as a real soldier and had done all the things soldiers do, and therefore it wasn't such a big deal that he could not bring himself to be uncommonly brave" (TTC 161). One need not be "heroic and original"; the ordinary suffices. In his art, however, O'Brien still believed in the virtue of maintaining an aesthetic grace under pressure, in maintaining a modernist purity of form and not embellishing like the false matadors who lean into the bull in The Sun Also Rises. He believed finally in those "one true sentences" that could keep his fiction grounded and clear. Such devotion to art succeeded in creating a good form but somehow "left out," as Norman Bowker says, "Vietnam," lost again the lost lives of those nameless faces that he was writing the story for in the first place (TTC 181).

The admission of narrator "O'Brien" that he and not Norman Bowker "experience[d] a failure of nerve that night" (TTC 182), that he was the one who let Kiowa sink into the muck, derives from author O'Brien's sense of responsibility to the "tribe," to Kiowa and Bowker and his fears that they and their nightmarish muck might soil his clean, well-lighted artistic form. That there may never have been a Kiowa or that Norman Bowker may not have killed himself from not having that particular story told does not change anything.12 "A true war story does not depend upon that kind of truth. Absolute occurrence is irrelevant" (TTC 89). As in "The Man I Killed," he is guilty, in Things, merely for being present, for being in Vietnam and not telling the full story—his "presence was guilt enough" (TTC 203).13 That he can say "honestly" to his readers, as he does to his daughter in Things, both that he did and did not kill anybody—whether that anybody is the nameless enemy in "The Man I Killed," Kiowa, or Norman Bowker serves to make him feel more guilty rather than exonerated. It makes him feel more responsible for telling the story, for guiding us into the dream of his fellow veterans who are guilty merely because they were there.

Consequently, O'Brien is careful to distinguish his bad form from the literary ambiguity and metafictional play that has come to be associated with other postmodernist writers: "It's not a game. It's a form" (TTC 203). In doing so, however, O'Brien misunderstands his fellow writers. The shifting realities in DeLillo, Coover, and Marquez show the turn the bad form of postmodernism has taken.14 This bad form, the good form of postmodernism that "flaunts its alternative histories" in which a man may or may not have killed a man who may or may not have been there, is the only form that allows O'Brien to tell the full story and still be able to look in their faces, to look at things he was afraid to look at, to accept all the "faceless responsibility and faceless grief" because he was there (TTC 203).

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NOTES
1. Linda Hutcheon employs the term historiographic metafiction in The Poetics of Postmodernism.
2. Steven Kaplan finds the uncertainty in Things an expression of the veteran's experience of Vietnam, and Catherine Calloway views it as an examination of the process of writing. Maria Bonn sees in Things a shift in O'Brien's views on the efficacy of fiction but does not fully relate this to the larger shift from modernism to postmodernism. Milton Bates shows O'Brien's interest in moral philosophy but examines its expression in the novels up to Going after Cacciato and never relates it to his style or form, a relation that was much less apparent in those earlier works. 3. See Herzog, who makes a similar point.
4. O'Brien's remark in an interview with Terry Gross suggests his awareness of the shift that the form of his writing took in Things as well as the neater form of Cacciato. "Cacciato," he says, "[...] feels to me a little cerebral. [...] the form of the book [...] has an intellectual feel to it, like artifice" (quoted in Griffith 30).
5. Paul Smith discusses Hemingway's "discovery" of his method and points out that Hemingway, for the most part, simply renames what most would call implication. Smith feels Hemingway's comment reveals, however, aspects of his process of composition and revision. My interest in the term does not rely so much on whether it really exists or not, but on the fact that it has by now taken on the status of fact as both Hemingway's method and a basic modernist mode. In other words, if O'Brien accepts this view of Hemingway and of modernism, the status of the method itself becomes moot.
6. As Catherine Calloway points out, vestiges of the story eventually show up in Going after Cacciato as chapter 14, "Upon Almost Winning the Silver Star" (251).
7. The copyright page in the permissions section of Things rehearses the somewhat complicated publication history of "Speaking of Courage" as a short story "first [...] in The Massachusetts Review, then later, in a revised version, in Granta" before O'Brien included it in The Things They Carried. The later version of "Speaking of Courage" that O'Brien eventually incorporated into Things appeared in Granta 29 (Winter 1989): 135-54, along with what became the "Notes" section.
8. Although I agree with many of her other observations about the gendered nature of O'Brien's work, Lorrie Smith's remark that O'Brien aligns himself completely with his narrator and against "uninitiated (implied female) readers" who do not listen is only partially true because he himself is also shown to be one of those who does not hear the veterans' stories. O'Brien shows through his narrator that even having the same experience does not guarantee one will listen and be able to understand.
9. I realize the complications of discovering the exact nature of O'Brien's connection to Bowker's experience, as I show below, but I think simply openly admitting a connection marks a departure from modernist method and from O'Brien's earlier practice.
10. Few would disagree with Carlos Baker's remark about Hemingway's "iceberg" method that "if it worked at all, it worked badly" (109).
11. I have borrowed Venturi, Brown, and Izenour's terms for modernist architecture as "heroic and original" and postmodernist architecture as "ordinary and ugly" from Learning from Las Vegas. See especially 93-100.
12. O'Brien recounts that "Norman Bowker, [was] a real guy, who committed suicide after I received his letter. He was talking to me in the letter about how he just couldn't adjust to coming home. It wasn't bad memories; it was that he couldn't talk to anybody about it. He didn't know what to say; he felt inarticulate. All he could do was drive around and around in his hometown in Iowa, around this lake. In the letter he asked me to write a story about it, and I did. This was after I published If I Die" (Naparsteck 7).
13. One might suggest that his "participation" is the obverse of Hemingway's omission. O'Brien invents the story of Kiowa's death and his part in it and offers it as "fact"; Hemingway fictionalizes an actual account of an out-of-season charter. O'Brien explained in an interview that "the Tim [O'Brien] character is made up entirely and then the Tim is transformed again into another guy, another character in The Things They Carried named Norman Bowker" (Naparsteck 7).
14. For his suspicion of his contemporaries see LeClair and McCaffery, 269-70. He does not name names but clearly feels uncomfortable with writers such as Coover and DeLillo whom he perceives...
as being focused more narrowly on language and style.

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