

Recall This Book 178
Elisa Tamarkin's Vietnam, Done in a Day (JP)
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John Plotz

Hello and welcome to Recall This Book, where we invite scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems, and events. I am John Plotz of Brandeis, as usual, and today we travel back to April 1975 and the fall of Saigon with--how do I do brief justice to my beloved Berkeley English Department buddy Elisa Tamarkin? It can't be done, but I will start by telling you inadequately of her many prizes for teaching, and I will tell you she received her Ph.D. in English from Stanford, and that her prior books include *Anglophilia: deference, devotion, and antebellum America*, (Chicago 2008) and *Apropos of Something: A History of irrelevance and relevance*, (Chicago 2022) which is a meditation on the logic and the idea of relevance. I will also say, and this is very exciting, she's now writing *Melville's Vision*. She is co-chair of the editorial board of *Representations*. She is chair of her department, though we don't have to talk about that. So, Elisa, thank you so much for coming. Welcome.

Elisa Tamarkin

Thank you, John.

John Plotz

Yeah. So most of all, you are here today, and you're going to say more about this, because your latest book out this year and already praised by Luke Menand in the *New Yorker* is *Done in a Day: Telex from the Fall of Saigon*, again from University of Chicago. That is, as your press says, I thought this was a wonderful description, a reflection on the last day of the Vietnam War, set against the imminent disappearance of war coverage in the nation's city newspapers and the disappearance of newspapers themselves. So, listen, dude, I have so many questions here about your own involvement in the story, about your sense of Vietnam War era and the kind of writing and reportage it produced, parallels to today, and also with our own underreported forever wars. But before we get there, I want to ask you to indulge in the usual recall this book tradition, which is that we just invite you to tell us your own way of framing the book, the intervention you imagine it making...however, you want to just introduce it to our listeners.

Elisa Tamarkin

Okay, John, thank you so much for having me here. It's always so great to talk with you.

John Plotz

Ditto.

Elisa Tamarkin

So the book focuses on the last day of the fall of Saigon, the last day of a war that arguably lasted 30 years. I'm focused on this last day, which lasted the 24 hours from April 20-nine th to April 30, 1975. What interests me about the last day was the fact that it was such a debacle, the fact that it was such a surprise. How could the scramble to evacuate, the scramble to end this war, have only happened in a single day? Given that we knew everything we needed to know about how the war would end, certainly since the beginning of 1975 arguably since the Paris peace talks, in which the war was supposed to have ended in 1973, arguably going back 30 years before. All of the information that needed to be known about the fact that the North Vietnamese would finally unify the country, that the American war would end in defeat, had been known for years going in, certainly since the Pentagon Papers, but again well before that. So the question is, how were we not prepared for the way the war ended?

John Plotz

That's such a great framing, but I want to understand a little bit more of the we who should or shouldn't understand. And this is, you know, that I have this sort of Arendtian fixation on like "lying in politics" and the problem, like of the Pentagon Papers, the knowledge that was disseminated, and the distinction that Arendt makes--which I think we're going to probably come back to because it's about bubbles of misinformation or bubbles of delusion--is between the things that were known or not known within the Pentagon or within the corridors of power, versus what we as a country knew, and so can I ask how you think about the relationship between those things? How do you think about that we?

Elisa Tamarkin

So Arendt actually wrote an essay about the evacuation, the final evacuation of Vietnam. It's called "Home to Roost." It came out in 1976, and about that image of the last helicopter. One of the points that she is making is that not only did the government know what it needed to know--that the war for the U.S. had ended in defeat and that the country would be reunified, liberated by the North from the U.S.

presence-but her idea was that actually all the information that needed to be known had been out in the press already. That there had been intelligence leaks that the CIA had fed to the press. CIA leaks had fed to the press everything that needed to be known. That there was no intelligence actually that was left to be known. Part of that has to do with the Pentagon Papers, which she also had written about. The Pentagon Papers were was a 3000 page narrative with 4000 pages of appended documents.

There were 250 million words that were basically that were about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam since World War II that basically predicted the end exactly as it occurred on that day in April. The problem with the Pentagon Papers is that no one read them. No one read them, even when they were presented, even when they were excerpted in the news, even when they went viral as a story in the news. Somehow the news was out there, the information was out there, but it didn't register. The documentation was there, and either because of the superabundance of the information-too much information to sort through-that you couldn't make any sense of it, or because somehow the war had fallen out of consciousness in such a way that people were bored of it. It had been ending for too long. It had been endlessly ending the ongoingness of the war, somehow meant that the facts didn't register, and so for Arendt and for others, it becomes a question of not so much producing information or producing the facts, but having the public believe the facts that are out there or read already, and then the work of the press, the work of writers and intellectuals, becomes the work of trying to raise consciousness. People were simply bored of the war, and and its ongoingness meant that it no longer really made the news.

Part of what interests me in covering that last day is the fact that the foreign press had essentially left Vietnam by the time the ending happened. They all had to fly in for the end days before the end as these kind of parachute reporters to cover the story that should have happened years before. I think the crucial question is being able to recognize that the war would end, rather than a war that was endlessly ending. Vietnam turned into a tragedy in many ways because it was a crisis of perpetually ending. This is how Frank Kermode, in his book *"The Sense of an Ending"* defines a tragedy, a kind of crisis of perpetually ending but still continuing in the hands of its exhausted survivors. The war was always ending. Kissinger knew it would end in defeat. But the sense that it was ending now on April 30, 1970-five should have itself been known. But they also, in 1975, knew that the war would end exactly when it did. There were intelligence leaks in January of 1975 that were fed to the press that the press reported about the fact that the spring campaign of the People's Army, the spring campaign would actually make it to Saigon and liberate Saigon on almost the exact day that it did. So at least for the five months before, the

news had reported, the press had reported, it had gone out over the wire services, but it was also reported in all the national newspapers that the war would end exactly on the day it did, and so the sense then of why it was still a surprise is what people like Arendt are trying to come to terms with.

John Plotz

I promised you that I was not going to make this always about the present, but just to illuminate the differences that you see is that is that a distinction between the media ecosystem of the '70s and nowadays? Like you would think, on the one hand, nowadays we have all this information. Everybody knows. You can go on Twitter. You can look at live feeds. We can hear what Iranian civilians, with some difficulty, you can hear what Iranian civilians are saying about the experience of the war there...Do we have a comparable level of veracity now that we just choose to ignore, or are we actually so befuddled by fake news, by the zigzags of our government, by the lies of our government, or the propaganda that we don't have that sort of clarity that they had in the 70s?

Elisa Tamarkin

I don't think they had clarity in the 70s. I think Arndt is saying that what is at stake is the common factual reality itself. That again, the facts. I think that in the. I think maybe the difference is that in the 70s, the facts were in fact out there, right? There was a kind of surplus of information that was coming in from all of the press coverage. That was coming in also from all of the writers and poets and artists and activists who had flown themselves to Vietnam and were reporting back independently. Every news outlet had a bureau in Vietnam. Right, many had large resident bureaus in Vietnam, but also Ms. Magazine had reporters in Vietnam, and Playboy had reporters in Vietnam, and very famously, Rolling Stone had reporters.

John Plotz

They didn't have clarity, but they had information.

Elisa Tamarkin

They didn't have clarity, but they had information. I would say that now we don't even have the information. Nor do we have clarity, right? But the problem in the 70s was that there was almost too much information, but there was no way of making sense of it. There was no way of processing it. There was somehow problems in perceiving it. And so again, the problem there is a problem of perception, a problem of consciousness, and also I think for all of them, a problem of belief. One of the things that's really important to the book is this idea of defeating

belief and how you come to defeat belief in a cause, in a value, in a national purpose or national mission.

The philosopher John Pollock published a book called *Knowledge and Justification* in 1975, which is a book of logic. And the question that he's asking in it is, what kind of logic does it take? What kind of knowledge or information does it take, in order to defeat belief, in order to defeat some understanding that we have, some idea that we have, that that somehow would allow us to think differently? What does it take? Does it take new forms of knowledge? Does it take information? Does it take a different kind of logic? How do you actually defeat belief in America's purpose abroad? Defeat belief in the value. What he's interested in is something that amounts to a kind of epistemic change. How do we move from a belief in one thing to a belief in another? It doesn't matter in that sense, if it's the belief in one kind of religion to the belief in another kind of religion, or a kind of faith in one's government, a lack of faith in one's government. So

John Plotz

it's sort of Kuhnian, then? it's like a paradigm shift?

Elisa Tamarkin

It's a paradigm shift. It's a paradigm shift that focuses on what it actually takes to create a paradigm shift logically, and it's about for him the word is "defeasibility", coming from defeat. How do you actually defeat a belief? But it's but it's also to a certain extent about admitting defeat, right? That what we had held on to for so long, we can no longer hold on to, and how difficult it is to move on from that, right, and to face the idea of a defeat of something that we had believed in enough to simply shift course. It's about coming to terms with again what Arendt calls the common factual reality. And how hard that is to actually face the facts, not deny them, to face the information that we have.

John Plotz

So that's great. I really think we should talk about the way in which this book arrives for you, not just as an abstract story of Vietnam, but a specific story about Vietnam, about your relationship to your family and your stake, but before we get there, I just want to pursue that last point to ask: Do you know this Jamie Cohen Cole book, *The Open Mind* from 2013? It's very Berkeley-centered book, I bet you would like it. But it's an argument about the waning of the belief in the open mind as a paradigm, and their notion is that basically there was this paradigmatic virtue of the university from World War II, from World War II to basically the free speech movement, which was that it was a site of disinterested, objective investigation.

That begins to wane in the '60s, both from the right and the left, people begin to believe that the university is partisan, that it's interested, that it has its own kind of naked belief structure. Some of the things that Adorno and Horkheimer had been saying all along, but both the left and the right come to lose faith in it.

And the thing they replace it with is, I suppose, if you're Kissinger, you replace it with realpolitik, but you might say that you replace it with belief. You replace it with a notion of passionate investment, And so I guess the question would be: Is there a story here about the waning of the model of the open mind, like the waning of a belief in a shared national mission or a shared intellectual undertaking, to be replaced sometime in the 60s?

Elisa Tamarkin

I think that they want to keep minds open.

John Plotz

But a hearts and minds doctrine does not is not predicated on open minds. If I say I want to win hearts and minds, I do not mean I want to open them. I want them. I want to reorient them to my belief from somebody else's belief.

Elisa Tamarkin

The problem with the Vietnam War was that people were unwilling to see the limits of what was defined as a limited war, which was another way of not understanding that the end was here, and the inability to see limits, to see ends, to see the end, even though the end was happening all around, was in many ways a kind of denial of the present. One of the figures I bring up is this guy Fred Bromfman, who worked at one of the founders of the Indochina Resource Center. He covered the secret air war that Nixon and Kissinger, the bombing of Laos, and wrote a very famous book about the bombing of Laos. And he was considered to have been the first one to expose these bombings, this secret air war. T

he ambassador actually blamed Bromfman for everything that went on, that went wrong in Vietnam. But right after the war ended, Bromfman started this movement that he called death awareness. He converted from Orthodox Judaism to Buddhism, and he drew on this other book that came out in 1973 called *The Denial of Death* by an anthropologist, Ernest Becker. So the person who exposed the violence, the harms of this imperial project in Southeast Asia, actually ended up dedicating his life to insisting that we come to terms with our own end, our own demise. That if we can only face death and face ending, we can, in a sort of existentialist way, be truly alive, more alive in the present, In ways that are ethical, right? We attend to the task in front of us. We have affirmative obligations in this life

before it's over. He credits Vietnam activists like Noam Chomsky with death awareness. So it becomes about recognizing limits and seeing the end as openness, right? As a form of open mind.

John Plotz

That's a wonderful irony. And I wonder how strongly you draw the irony. Is it a full like if Mark Twain is telling that story, the way Mark Twain tells that story is pious, oblivious religious people telling you deep truths while ignoring, while keeping their hand in the till, while ignoring the fact that they're not wearing any pants. Or in other words, is that the story of overlooking actuality? I can imagine a kind of compassionate account of that. I've just been reading a lot of John Le Carre lately, and John Le Carre is very compassionate in general. But whenever the Americans come onto the scene, he says the same thing Graham Greene does, which is that the Americans are delusional. They have this kind of ridiculous, idealistic account of what they're doing, but it's pure hypocrisy because they just have their hand in the cookie jar, but they want to pretend they're doing something else.

Elisa Tamarkin

So it depends who you're talking about. And in the book there are these two figures who are in constant correspondence at the end of the war. One is Graham Martin, the U.S. ambassador to Saigon, and the other is Henry Kissinger. Graham Martin delayed the evacuation. Graham Martin, as U.S. ambassador, truly believed that the North Vietnamese would settle, that Hanoi would settle according to the terms of the Paris Peace Accords from 1973 all the way up until that last day. He thought that even if they took Saigon, they would want the Americans there.

Even if they took Saigon, there would be some kind of coalition government that was formed, that the Americans would play a role in, and because of this, he refused to start any of the evacuation proceedings. Even though there were an estimated 1 million people who needed to be evacuated for safety. Many of them became refugees all the way up through 1979. So he refused not only to make plans for the evacuation, but to show any signs of unease, any signs that he would be leaving. Insisted that his wife Dorothy was not packing.

He didn't ship anything out, including, and he refused to have any of the confidential documents destroyed. So part of the frenzy of the last day was Graham Martin's absolute unwillingness to face the facts on the ground. He actually thought that he was working against all of the bureaucrats, against people like Daniel Ellsberg and the others who had produced the Pentagon Papers, who produced all of this information, he called them "the bureaucratic mice" compiling their record in ways that did not take account of what he saw as the underlying reality, which is

that there was no rush to this at all. That the Vietnamese simply either didn't want to reunify the country or didn't have the means, or especially the will, to do any of this quickly?

John Plotz

Doesn't that vindicate the Arendtian account of lying in politics, which is that in order to lie to other people effectively, you have to lie to yourself first. If you haven't figured out a way to lie to yourself, you're not going to be a very good liar.

Elisa Tamarkin

Yes. So for someone like Graham Martin, who thought he was second to Ford, second to the president, and was this kind of autocrat in Saigon. Never has an ambassador had that much power, but at the same time, he is a government functionary who truly believes in this mission. And the denial that he had, the denial of the end, again meant that in that last day they had to burn. They ended up burning \$5 million in U.S. cash in paper money. They had to burn hundreds of thousands of tons of documents in these furnaces on the top of the embassy that were producing smoke that interfered with the helicopters.

John Plotz

That's a deep metaphor of the fogs of war, isn't it?

Elisa Tamarkin

And then the documents were shredded. They were put in paper bags, but the paper bags from the wind broke open. There are confidential documents scattered all over the embassy. By the time the People's Army arrives and codes could be put back together, anyway. So the ambassador was this sort of great figure of what Graham Greene would call, what Herman Melville earlier would call, American innocence, right? And holding on to his innocence in this whole project of Vietnam, which is of course evil and insidious. Kissinger, on the other hand, knew what he was doing. He knew that this was the end.

He was never under any kind of delusion about that, but is staging the suspension of the end, the kind of ongoingness of the end. What he called a decent interval, or what he wanted to be a decent interval between the sense of ending and the true ending, and in that decent interval, we would do diplomacy. It would be a kind of display of power. Kissinger was not innocent, and in order to exercise the power, in order to maintain the balance of power, he wanted to hold things in abeyance in Vietnam, and thought that the state, the work of the statesman, his work in government was to hold things in an abeyance, even as he recognized these limits,

and so it's much more cynical with Kissinger. He recognized those limits, but actually believed in the sort of creative will, the ability in the face of limits to fly in the face of limits and to give shape to the present, to fly in the face of facts. He acknowledged that the facts were there, but also ignored them.

John Plotz

Thank you so much for indulging me in this sort of Arendtian circling of this question of the actuality, the clarity, the availability of the information, the availability inside the corridors of Power, outside the corridors of Power, and the distinction between people who believe their own press releases versus people who create press releases in order for believe them.

Elisa Tamarkin

There are the people who deny reality. Yeah, and then there are people like Kissinger who believe you create your own reality.

John Plotz

And the other breadcrumb that I hoped we were going to put down here. You know that I'm obsessed with where rent is in the '70s, but I'm also obsessed with where Ursula Le Guin is at this period. Who's writing fiction. She's writing pure speculative fantasy, but what runs through her writing is this insistence on facing reality, because basically you can see how everything is fictional all the way down. It's fictional: the difference is that fantasy gives you a way to face it. And it's interesting to me. That's what... she found her voice between '68 and '74. That's when all her great books were written, and it's so interesting to me that a fantasy writer would be...At a moment when America desperately needed actuality. She was like, "This is how I'm going to make you face reality. She's the anti-Kissinger, I would say.

Elisa Tamarkin

Yeah, the anti Kissinger, or else someone who can simply acknowledge at this moment the power of fantasy to pass itself off as reality, right? And what it takes, what kind of thinking it takes, what kind of writing we could say it takes, in order to see how fantasy is at work everywhere. That the ordinary experiences of the world are themselves fantastical because we're not actually facing the facts as they are, or there are these figures like Nixon, like Kissinger, who are creating fantasies that are passing themselves off as reality. It raises that same question we were talking about just a little bit earlier. How do we come to recognize that that there is a fantasy at work here, simply telling us? Simply putting out the knowledge or putting out the

information doesn't work to reveal fantasy as fantasy to reveal what is being created as something that is a kind of fiction, and I think your work on Le Guin shows us so beautifully how the work of fantasy helps us see what we hadn't seen before in the real world, right?

John Plotz

I think you formulated the problem of what Nixon and I almost said Metternich, but Nixon and Kissinger are up to together, which is that it's funny that Le Guin calls President Nixon, who's president for life in the Lathe of Heaven, President Merdle, and his image-the image with Merdle is this steaming pile of dog shit, and it's there's something about it. Not he's not covering over the truth. He's actually literally shitting on top of it. She's not usually that vulgar. That's oddly vulgar for Le Guin, but it's clearly deeply felt.

Elisa Tamarkin

Yeah, I was actually thinking about Le Guin as I was thinking about talking to you today, in part because there is a little bit of speculative fiction that appears in the book, which is that there is this science fiction but fantasy/speculative-fiction writer R.E. Lafferty who appears at one point. He appears because I guess this is how we can maybe pivot to the personal side of this. But my father was there, of course, reporting on the war, and one of the things he reports in his story of the war, and I can back up and tell you again the my personal angle on this, is the fact that as he's waiting to leave on the last helicopter, he sees a marine put the book *The Fall of Rome* in his knapsack, and I was trying to figure out what book that could be. It certainly wasn't Edward Gibbon's **Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire** but of course, the sort of symbolism of reading **The Fall of Rome** during the fall of Saigon seemed so overdetermined. I thought it had to be fake, and I realized that the book actually wasn't Gibbon's **The Fall of Rome** but it was this work by this writer R. A. Lafferty called **The Fall of Rome** and R. A. Lafferty is he writes these histories, but also these short stories that are histories that are tinged with speculative fiction and fantasy. So he retells the story of the fall of Rome fantastically, and he also has these short stories that are also fantasy, and so it's fascinating to me that fiction actually appears in the embassy during the fall.

John Plotz

Yeah, that's amazing. So....I would love for you to make the connection in your own words. And I heard you there refer. This is you refer to him as your father, is that right? I heard him referred to as your stepfather sometimes, or your father. But yeah, yeah.

Elisa Tamarkin

Bob Tamarkin was my stepfather. It's important he was my stepfather, though not so much passing as my father, but playing the role of my father in the same way that what was taken to be the last helicopter was not the last helicopter. My stepfather Bob Tamarkin was the foreign correspondent, the Chicago bureau chief, the Saigon bureau chief for the Chicago Daily News, and he went to Saigon in January of 1975 to cover the end. When he arrived in Saigon again, because the war was meant to be over and the story was elsewhere. In many ways, the biggest story in 1975, the first months of 1975, was the Middle East. The story was no longer Southeast Asia, even though the war was still very much in progress. When he arrived there, he was the only member of the Saigon bureau of the Chicago Daily News, and there were only 16 accredited U.S. correspondents in Saigon. Back in '68, '69, after the Tet Offensive, there were 600 accredited correspondents in Vietnam. So the press, the foreign service, had left Saigon, and that's just when my dad went in to cover the war. I followed a couple months later.

So my mother and I moved to Saigon. My mother was—they were dating. He wasn't even my stepfather at the time. She had divorced my father, my actual father, in Chicago, and followed Bob Tamarkin, my her boyfriend, to Vietnam, and we moved there. So part of what I'm trying to come to terms with in this sense of denial is that my father's first story that he reported from Saigon was this story in January of 1975 that showed that the war would end exactly when it did in April. It was the start of what is called the Spring Campaign, where the People's Army under General Deng started in the north and moved through city by city, each city was falling one after another, and the final city to fall was Saigon.

I arrived in Vietnam on the day that the old imperial capital of Hue fell, which was a few days before Danang fell, which very much predicted in its chaos, people refugees clamoring on boats, people being left behind, very much predicted what would happen in Saigon days later. The question of how I could have arrived in Saigon--I started going to nursery school there. We moved in as if it were Graham Greene's Saigon, French colonial Saigon, let alone U.S. colonial Saigon, with its health clubs and everyone living in the hotels in the middle of the end. And my father knew it was the middle of the end, but somehow didn't know it enough not to have a four-year-old come in join him. All to say that he ended up being the last U.S. correspondent, the last U.S. journalist to evacuate on that last day, and he was on the last helicopter, as it's depicted in that Vanessa photograph. Except that photograph isn't actually the photograph of the last helicopter. He reported the last helicopter leaving from the embassy on April 30th in the early morning, and all of the people it left behind. And he sent this story by Telex to the Chicago Daily News. It was

published as a diary of the last day, a sort of hour-by-hour account of those last hours all the way up through the leaving of the last helicopter from the rooftop, built into a story about the denial of the end was the absurdity. Again, a kind of fantastical absurd element in this story.

John Plotz

How do you parse the absurdity? Do you parse the absurdity as the typical cluelessness of untouchability of Western people, do you parse it as something specific to your mom's or your dad's decision, or your stepdad's (Bob's) decision making? How do you understand it?

Elisa Tamarkin

I understand it as being of a piece with all of the absurdities of that ending, that make it make the ending of Vietnam Le Guin-like in the sense of the absurdities of reality that couldn't possibly happen. I think it is of a piece with the denial of the endings, a kind of tragic denial of the realities that he was nonetheless registering and reporting in the news, he knew again he had all the information. He was in fact responsible for reporting the information that said that it would be ending at exactly the moment I arrived. And yet I arrived to move there to move in. My family was moving to Saigon. He brought all of his belongings with him. Yeah. So I see it as being of a piece with all the ways in which certain things somehow had trouble coming to consciousness. We had trouble perceiving the danger of certain things, the implausibility of certain things, despite the knowledge, right? Despite the information.

John Plotz

So this is a huge question, but we grew up under the influence of the Me Generation. There we were in the 70s. All my teachers were like really into Est, like that kind of thing.

Elisa Tamarkin

Absolutely, yeah.

John Plotz

I have heard the Me generation described as oh the liberation of the 60s was turned into individual self consciousness and individual growth and I get that and I also see in the back to the land movement. People I know people in the 70s who went off to Vermont or to Northern California and in a LeGuinian way they did something solidaristic and mutual 80, but there just feels like you're telling the story

also of an awful lot of, I won't say flat out selfishness, but I don't know self delusion. There's a self delusion of the 70s, right? Not just for your parents, to everybody. I I hear you saying, and I maybe I hear you saying more strongly here than even I heard you saying in the book that you think of this as a kind of at least of a piece with, but maybe an aftereffect of the delusive quality with which the war ended in Vietnam. An ability to just pull the blanket up. The I'm okay, you're okay is being like I'm going to pull the blanket over my head now.

Elisa Tamarkin

Yeah, even as you have Branfman trying to make us aware of our own demise, trying to face reality, you have Thomas Harris's best-selling book, "I'm Okay, You're Okay" which is this pop psychological self-help book. It's called "transactional analysis" that basically says that we can rewrite our past, we can create our own stories. That we all suffer from baggage, trauma. These are what Harris calls tapes. But we can press stop on those tapes, rather than replaying them again and again, and we can choose to create our own realities. It becomes the kind of pop psychological version of what Kissinger, as a kind of Superman, imagined that he was an artist and could do. We can decide to be okay. I link in the book Harris's "I'm okay, you're okay" to President Ford's declaration on April 23 a week before the end, that the war is finished as far as America is concerned. He called it over before any evacuation at all. He called it over before the end. We can create our own reality, create our own life scripts. We have control of our own story, and I think that....

John Plotz

That I would connect to Trump and Iran. Trump and Iran. It's like he's in a kind of schizoid vibration that is a desire to just write that reality....

Elisa Tamarkin

To write that reality and to say that your sense of reality is not my reality, right? To have my own sense of reality that determines we have control over our life scripts, right? It is a Me generation state of mind, right?

John Plotz

Fascinating. Listen, this conversation could go on and on, but tragically, to wrap it up, so can I ask you if you're willing to indulge....is the recallable book, meaning a book that if you really, if our audience really likes the conversation, what's a book you would point them to that you think they would also enjoy?

Elisa Tamarkin

Since we have almost no time left, we could ask people to turn to Thomas Anthony Harris's 1969 "I'm okay, you're okay." as a book that is a kind of great expression of this moment that coincided with Vietnam, and in fact, he talks about Vietnam in the war, so that would definitely be one place to turn, one place to look. I always like to return to Frank Kermode's sense of an ending. He started as Vietnam was escalating in 1965, and was a later edition printed with a new preface in 2000, in which he reflects back on the sense of an ending as a Vietnam era book. What does it mean to have something, a sense of something that's endlessly ending or ongoing, without narrative closure, without a definitive sense of an end? So I would point to both of those. Adam Phillips's on giving up is also great. Oh, on not giving up, that's recent. It just came out a couple years ago.

John Plotz

Okay.

Elisa Tamarkin

So I would also refer people to Adam Phillips on giving up. Sounds great,

John Plotz

and I'll round this out. I mean, we talked about it already by adding that the Quiet American. I think always Graham Greene's always rewards rereading, even though he wrote it so far, as has often been said, even before the first U.S. boots had landed on the ground. They were just military advisors in those days, but he tells the story of the beginning, and you can see the end in the beginning.

Elisa Tamarkin

And Graham Greene wrote the Quad American in the Continental Hotel, which is where my family was living in 1975.

John Plotz

Elisa, thank you so much. This has been a great conversation. It went directions I didn't know it was going to go, but everybody should read the book. It's "Done in a Day." It's terrific, and I hope to see you back for your next book too. This is great.

Elisa Tamarkin

Thank you, John. Yeah, we could keep on going. We could keep going. Ongoing.

John Plotz

To recognize actuality and yet ongoing. So, okay, take care. So, for all of us out there, thank you so much for listening.