

In the Wake of the Bomb

by John Campion

America remains the only nation to employ the ultimate weapon of the dream of reason. Why this should be so is not a subject open for serious discussion in polite society. Born in the cauldron of Nazi defeat in World War II, the bomb nevertheless bears witness to an enduring triumph of fascism. We have worshiped it like an idol, used it to justify our mistrust and wickedness towards others, to forego even the hope of a better future. We make our pleas with it in the inquisitorial courts of self-righteousness and insure the cult's longevity by propagandizing the children. Summed up, it holds our fears, and wrests from us the burden and prospects of liberty—something we have been all too eager to discharge.

Faced with the threat of immediate annihilation throughout the Cold War, the people were silenced into consent with fear. We embraced the inhuman philosophy of mutually assured destruction and gave implicit nod to the horrific national policies that gave succor to totalitarian regimes all over the globe. Translating our anxiety of planetary death from economic externality to tangible use was an easy turn: the bomb aimed at 'the other' was retargeted on us. But the transference of the mission from military to social required tighter control of the civilian population.

The eye of the bomb, like the eye of the warden in Foucault's Panopticon, was fixed upon us. Its wake has triangulated the argument that dissent is un-American. And in so doing, it spread a disciplining mechanism through every layer of the social order, from schoolhouse to university—winnowing the unmotivated, uncooperative, and unfit. Even so, the prisons are full, though we observe the strange and private lockups of Texas, the electrode intimacies offshore.

As a small child, I was repeatedly taken down into bomb shelters for a jolly school holiday of Duck and Cover. I sweated with night sweats over it. On missions of mercy, ambulance sirens sent me into the torments of hell. The Cuban Missile Crisis scared my family, and lots of others, out of central Dallas to the outskirts of the city. (The newspapers advertised the new suburbs' promise of "GOOD BOMB IMMUNITY.") No one listened to the children who warned, "we'll suffer worse than if we'd stayed in town". Now we validate our parents' pathologies in endless reproduction.

The failure of the Cold War project to keep this social control system running has not obliged us to confront again the universal responsibilities we ought to face: the profound labor of bringing human culture into a sustainable ecological niche (ecotropics), and the great collateral issues of world poverty, racism, health. The War on Terror has replaced its apparent inadequacy with the promise of irrevocable dread.

Coda. If you think I'm beating a dead horse or exaggerating the problem's scope, I offer General Lord's [sic] quote concerning "Rods from God" and other American Space Weapons from the NY Times (5/18/05): "Space Superiority is not our birthright, but it is our destiny. Space Superiority is our day-to-day mission. Space Supremacy is our vision for the future."

