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Engineering Ruins and Affect

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Has any nation-state invested as profoundly in ruins as Cold War America? Although many societies have experienced moments of self-doubt about the future, perhaps even contemplating the ruins that might be left behind as testament to their existence, it took American ingenuity to transform ruination into a form of nation-building. In this regard, the invention of the atomic bomb proved to be utterly transformative for the United States: it not only provided the inspiration for a new US geopolitical strategy—one that quickly enveloped the earth in advanced military technology and colonized everyday life with the minute-to-minute possibility of nuclear war. The bomb also provided officials with a new means of engaging and disciplining citizens in everyday life. For US policymakers, the Cold War arms race transformed the apocalypse into a technoscientific project and a geopolitical paradigm, but also a powerful new domestic political resource.

Put differently, a new kind of social contract was formed in the first decade of the nuclear age in the United States, one based not on the protection and improvement of everyday life but, rather, on the national contemplation of ruins. Known initially as “civil defense,” the project of building the bomb and communicating its power to the world turned engineering ruins into a form of (inter)national theater. Nuclear explosions matched with large-scale emergency response exercises became a means of developing the bomb as well as imagining nuclear warfare (see Glasstone and Dolan 1977; Kahn 1960; Vanderbilt 2002). This “test program” would ultimately transform the United States into the most nuclear-bombed country on earth, distributing its environmental, economic, and health effects to each and every US citizen (Masco 2006). By the mid-1950s it was no longer a perverse exercise to imagine one’s own home and city devastated, on fire, and in ruins; it was a formidable public ritual—a core act of governance, technoscientific practice, and democratic participation. Indeed, in the early Cold War United

States, it became a civic obligation to collectively imagine, and at times theatrically enact through “civil defense,” the physical destruction of the nation-state.

It is this specific nationalization of death that I wish to explore in this article, assessing not only the first collective formulations of nuclear fear in the United States but also the residues and legacies of that project for contemporary American society. For today, we live in a world populated with newly charred landscapes and a production of ruins that speaks directly to this foundational moment in US national culture (see Stoler with Bond 2006). The notions of preemption and emergency response that inform the George W. Bush administration’s “war on terror” derive meaning from the promises and institutions built by the Cold War security state. Indeed, the logics of nuclear fear informing that multigenerational state and nation-building enterprise exist now as a largely inchoate, but deeply embedded, set of assumptions about power and threat. How Americans have come to understand mass death at home and abroad, I argue, has much to do with the legacies of the Cold War nuclear project, and the peculiar psychosocial consequences of attempting to build the nation through the contemplation of nuclear ruins. [...]

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC on September 11, 2001, the affective coordinates of the Cold War arms race provided specific ideological resources to the state, which once again mobilized the image of a United States in nuclear ruins to enable war. Ultimately, this article follows Walter Benjamin’s (1969: 242) call to interrogate the aestheticized politics that enable increasing militarization and that allow citizens to experience their own destruction as an “aesthetic pleasure of the first order.”

BE AFRAID BUT DON'T PANIC!

Nuclear ruins are never the end of the story in the United States but, rather, always offer a new beginning. In the early Cold War period, ruins become the markers of a new kind of social intimacy grounded in highly detailed renderings of theatrically rehearsed mass violence. The intent of these public spectacles—nuclear detonations, city evacuations, and duck-and-cover drills—was not defense in the classic sense of avoiding violence or destruction but rather a psychological reprogramming of the US public for life in a nuclear age. The central project of the early nuclear state was to link US

institutions—military, industrial, legislative, and academic—for the production of the bomb, while calibrating public perceptions of the nuclear danger to enable that project. This effort to think through the disaster colonized everyday life as well as the future, while fundamentally missing the actual disaster (see Blanchot 1995). The scripting of disaster in the imagination has profound social effects: it defines the conditions of insecurity, renders other threats invisible, and articulates the terms of both value and loss. In the United States, civil defense was always a willful act of fabulation, an official fantasy designed to promote an image of nuclear war that would be, above all things, politically useful. It also installed an idea of an American community under total and unending threat, creating the terms for a new kind of nation-building that demanded an unprecedented level of militarism in everyday life as the minimum basis for “security.”

After the Soviets’ first nuclear detonation in 1949, US policymakers committed to a new geopolitical strategy that would ultimately dominate US foreign policy for the remainder of the twentieth century. The policy of “containment,” as formalized in National Security Council 68 (known as NSC 68), proposed, in response to the Soviet bomb, a total mobilization of American society based on the experience of World War II. National Security Council 68 articulates the terms of a permanent wartime posture funded by an ever-expanding domestic economy, transforming consumerism into the engine of a new kind of militarized geopolitics. National Security Council 68 identifies internal dissent as perhaps the greatest threat to the project of “Cold War” and calls for a new campaign to discipline citizens for life under the constant shadow of nuclear war. Thus, in Washington, DC, nuclear fear was immediately understood not only to be the basis of US military power, but also a means of installing a new normative reality within the United States, one that could consolidate political power at the federal level. The nuclear danger became a complex new political ideology, both mobilizing the global project of Cold War (fought increasingly on covert terms) and installing a powerful means of controlling domestic political debates over the terms of security. By focusing Americans on an imminent end of the nation-state, federal authorities mobilized the bomb to create the “Cold War consensus” of anticommunism, capitalism, and military expansion. [...]

A long “Cold War” consequently required not only a new geopolitics powered by nuclear weapons but also new forms of psychological discipline at home. Indeed, one of the earliest and

most profound projects of the Cold War state was thus to deploy the bomb as a mechanism for accessing and controlling the emotions of citizens (see Orr 2006).

As Guy Oakes has documented (1994: 47), the civil defense programs of the early Cold War were designed to “emotionally manage” US citizens through nuclear fear. The formal goal of this state program was to transform “nuclear terror,” which was interpreted by US officials as a paralyzing emotion, into “nuclear fear,” an affective state that would allow citizens to function in a time of crisis (see Associated Universities 1952, as well as Oakes 1994: 62–63). By militarizing everyday life through nuclear fear, the Cold War state sought to both normalize and politically deploy an image of catastrophic risk. Rather than offering citizens an image of safety or of a war that could end in victory, the early Cold War state sought instead to calibrate everyday American life to the minute-to-minute possibility of nuclear warfare. In addition to turning the domestic space of the home into the front line of the Cold War, civil defense argued that citizens should be prepared every second of the day to deal with a potential nuclear attack. In doing so, the Civil Defense Program shifted responsibility for nuclear war from the state to its citizens by making public panic the enemy, not nuclear war itself. It was, in other words, up to citizens to take responsibility for their own survival in the nuclear age. As Val Peterson, the first head of the US Civil Defense Administration, argued in 1953:

Ninety per cent of all emergency measures after an atomic blast will depend on the prevention of panic among the survivors in the first 90 seconds. Like the A-bomb, panic is fissionable. It can produce a chain reaction more deeply destructive than any explosive known. If there is an ultimate weapon, it may well be mass panic—not the A-bomb. (Peterson 1953)

Panic is fissionable. This idea that emotional self-regulation was the single most important issue during a nuclear attack (not to mention the 90-second window on success or failure), sought quite formally to turn all Americans into docile bodies that would automatically support the goals of the security state. Civil defense planners sought ultimately to saturate the public space with a specific idea about nuclear war, one that would nationalize mass death and transform postnuclear ruins into a new American frontier, simply another arena for citizens to assert their civic spirit and ingenuity. At the heart of the project was an effort to install psychological defenses against

the exploding bomb, as well as a belief in the possibility of national unity in a postnuclear environment—all via the contemplation of nuclear ruins.

Indeed, as the Eisenhower administration promoted an idea of “Atoms for Peace” around the world to emphasize the benefits of nuclear energy and provide a positive face to atomic science, it pursued an opposite emotional management strategy within the United States (Craig 1998; Hewlett and Holl 1989; Osgood 2006). The domestic solution to the Soviet nuclear arsenal was a new kind of social-engineering project, pursued with help from the advertising industry, to teach citizens a specific kind of nuclear fear while normalizing the nuclear crisis. The goal, as a top-secret study on the “human effects of nuclear weapons development” put it in 1956, was an “emotional adaptation” of the citizenry to nuclear crisis, a program of “psychological defense” aimed at “feelings” that would unify the nation in the face of apocalyptic everyday threat (Panel on The Human Effects of Nuclear Weapons Development 1956). This took the form of the largest domestic propaganda campaign to date in US history (Garrison 2006: 36). Designed to mobilize all Americans for a long Cold War, the civil defense effort involved town meetings and education programs in every public school; it also sought to take full advantage of mass media—television, radio, and, particularly, film. By the mid-1950s, the Federal Civil Defense Agency (FCDA) saturated newspapers and magazines with nuclear war planning advertisements and could claim that its radio broadcasts reached an estimated audience of 175 million Americans per year.

As the campaign evolved, the Federal Civil Defense Agency turned increasingly to film, creating a library of short subjects on nuclear destruction and civil defense that was shown across the country in schools, churches, community halls, and movie theaters. The Federal Civil Defense Agency concluded in 1955 that “each picture will be seen by a minimum of 20,000,000 persons, giving an anticipated aggregate audience of more than half a billion for the civil defense film program of 1955” (1956: 78). A key to winning the Cold War was producing the bomb not only for military use but also in cinematic form for the American public. It is important to recognize that the circulation of these images relied on a simultaneous censorship of images from the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. US authorities made available images of destroyed buildings from Japan but withheld the detailed effects of the atomic bomb on the human body, as well as some firsthand

accounts of the aftermath. An immediate project of the nuclear state was thus to calibrate the image of atomic warfare for the American public through the mass circulation of certain images of the bomb and the censorship of all others. In this way, officials sought to mobilize the power of mass media to transform nuclear attack from an unthinkable apocalypse into an opportunity for psychological self-management, civic responsibility, and ultimately, governance. Civil defense ultimately sought to produce an “atomic bomb-proof” society in which nuclear conflict was normalized along side all other threats, making public support for the Cold War sustainable.

Civil defense theorists argued that citizens could only achieve this contradictory state of productive fear (simultaneously mobilized and normalized) by gaining intimacy with nuclear warfare itself, by becoming familiar with language of nuclear effects from blast, heat, and fire to radioactive fallout. As the RAND analyst I. I. Janis put it, the goal of civil defense was ultimately an “emotional inoculation” of the US public (1951: 220). This inoculation, he cautioned, needed to be finely calibrated: the simulated nuclear destruction in civil defense exercises, as well as the atomic test film footage released to the public, had to be formidable enough to mobilize citizens but not so terrifying as to invalidate the concept of defense altogether (a distinct challenge in an age of increasingly powerful thermonuclear weapons which offered no hope of survival to most urban residents). A central project of civil defense was thus to produce fear but not terror, anxiety but not panic, to inform about nuclear science but not fully educate about nuclear war. The microregulation of a national community at the emotional level was the goal. Put differently, alongside the invention of a new security state grounded in nuclear weapons came a new public culture of insecurity in the United States: figuring the United States as global nuclear superpower was coterminous with a domestic campaign to reveal the United States as completely vulnerable, creating a citizen–state relationship increasingly mediated by forms of inchoate but everpresent nuclear fear.

Indeed, one of the first US civil defense projects of the Cold War was to make every US city a target, and every US citizen a potential victim of nuclear attack. The Federal Civil Defense Agency circulated increasingly detailed maps of the likely targets of a Soviet nuclear attack through the 1950s, listing the cities in order of population and ranking them as potential targets. In one 1955 map, the top 70 Soviet targets include major population centers as well as military bases in the United States—revealing not only the vulnerability of

large cities to the bomb but also the increasingly wide distribution of military industrial sites across the continental United States. As the size of US and Soviet bombs, and the means of delivery, grew (from bombers to intercontinental ballistic missiles [ICBMs]), so too did the highly publicized target lists. Thomas J. Martin and Donald C. Latham's 1963 civil defense textbook, *Strategy for Survival*, for example, presented a case for 303 ground zeros in the United States in case of nuclear war. Designating 303 US cities and towns that would be likely targets of nuclear attack, they concluded that:

No one can predict that any one or combination of these cities would be attacked in any future war. Thus, it might appear that we are trying to know the unknowable, to predict the unpredictable, to impose a logical rationale upon war which is, itself, illogical and irrational. But such an inference is incorrect. It was shown in Chapter 5 that there are good reasons to believe that a large fraction of these cities would be attacked in a future war—but what specific cities would be included in this fraction? Because there is no precise answer to this question, civil defense planning must assume that all could be potential targets. Any other approach is thermonuclear Russian Roulette played with 100 million American lives. (Martin and Latham 1963: 182)

Thermonuclear Russian roulette. Marking every population center with over 50,000 people a likely target, Martin and Latham saw no “safe” area in the United States. From New York to Topeka, from Los Angeles to Waco, from Albuquerque to Anchorage—each community could increasingly argue that it was a “first strike” target of Soviet attack. Indeed, citizens were informed from multiple media sources that their community—indeed, their very living room—was the literal front line of the Cold War, with Soviet thermonuclear warheads poised to attack.

From 1953 to 1961, the yearly centerpiece of the civil defense program was a simulated nuclear attack on the United States directed by federal authorities. Cities were designated as victims of nuclear warfare, allowing civic leaders and politicians to lead theatrical evacuations of the city for television cameras, followed by media discussions of blast damage versus fire damage versus fallout, and the expected casualty rates if the attack had been “real.” In 1955, for example, the “Operation Alert” scenario involved 60 cities hit by a variety of atomic and hydrogen bombs, producing over eight million instant deaths and another eight million radiation victims

over the coming weeks. It imagined 25 million homeless and fallout covering some 63,000 square miles of the United States (FCDA 1956; see also Krugler 2006: 126). Each year Americans acted out their own incineration in this manner, with public officials cheerfully evacuating cities and evaluating emergency planning, while nuclear detonations in Nevada and the South Pacific provided new images of fireballs and mushroom clouds to reinforce the concept of imminent nuclear threat. The early Cold War state sought to install a specific idea of the bomb in the American imagination through these public spectacles, creating a new psychosocial space caught between the utopian promise of US technoscience and the minute-to-minute threat of thermonuclear incineration. It sought to make mass death an intimate psychological experience while simultaneously claiming that thermonuclear war could be planned for alongside tornados, floods, and traffic accidents. Civil defense ultimately sought to make nuclear war a space of nation-building, and thereby bring this new form of death under the control of the state.

Here is how one of the most widely circulated US Civil Defense films of the

1950s, *Let's Face It*, described the problem posed by nuclear warfare:

The tremendous effects of heat and blast on modern structures raise important questions concerning their durability and safety. Likewise, the amount of damage done to our industrial potential will have a serious effect upon our ability to recover from an atomic attack. Transportation facilities are vital to a modern city. The nation's lifeblood could be cut if its traffic arteries were severed. These questions are of great interest not only to citizens in metropolitan centers but also to those in rural areas who may be in a danger zone because of radioactive fallout from today's larger weapons. We could get many of the answers to these questions by constructing a complete city at our Nevada Proving Ground and then exploding a nuclear bomb over it. We could study the effects of damage over a wide area, under all conditions, and plan civil defense activities accordingly. But such a gigantic undertaking is not feasible.

The problem voiced here is ultimately one of scientific detail: how can the security state prepare to survive a nuclear attack if it does not know precisely how every aspect of American life would respond to both the effects of the bomb and the resulting social confusion?

But after denying the possibility of building an entire city in Nevada simply to destroy it, the narrator of *Let's Face It* reveals that the nuclear state has, in fact, done just that:

Instead we build representative units of a test city. With steel and stone and brick and mortar, with precision and skill—as though it were to last a thousand years. But it is a weird, fantastic city. A creation right out of science fiction. A city like no other on the face of the earth. Homes, neat and clean and completely furnished, that will never be occupied. Bridges, massive girders of steel spanning the empty desert. Railway tracks that lead to nowhere, for this is the end of the line. But every element of these tests is carefully planned in these tests as to its design and location in the area. A variety of materials and building techniques are often represented in a single structure. Every brick, beam, and board will have its story to tell. When pieced together these will give some of the answers, and some of the information we need to survive in the nuclear age.

A weird, fantastic city. This test city was also an idealized model of the contemporary American suburb, and by publicizing its atomic destruction the state was involved in an explicit act of psychological manipulation. As we shall see, the Nevada Test Site was the location of nuclear war “simulations” involving real nuclear explosions, and model American cities destroyed in real time for a national audience. Each ruin in these national melodramas—each element of bombed US material culture—was presented as a key to solving the “problem” of nuclear warfare, a means of cracking the code for survival in nuclear conflict. But in this effort to control a specific idea of death, the civil defense strategy also forced citizens to confront the logics of the nuclear state, allowing many to reclaim and reinvest these same ruins with a counternarrative and critique. Thus, real and imagined nuclear ruins became the foundation for competing ideas of national community, producing resistance to, as well as normalization of, a militarized society. But, although the early Cold War effort to produce an “atomic bomb-proof” society may have failed, as we shall see, the psychosocial legacies of this moment continue to haunt and inform US national culture. In the remainder of this article, I offer a history of nuclear ruins in the United States as a means both of recovering the affective coordinates of the nuclear security state, and exploring the lasting impacts of the Cold War “emotional management” strategy on American society.

“CUE FOR SURVIVAL”

On May 5, 1955, 100 million Americans watched live on television a “typical” suburban community blown to bits by an atomic bomb (see FCDA 1955, 1956). Many watched from homes and apartments that were the explicit models for the test city, and saw mannequin families posed in casual everyday moments (at the kitchen table, on the couch, in bed—or watching TV) experience the atomic blast. “Operation Cue” was the largest of the civil defense spectacles staged at the Nevada Test Site: it promised not only to demonstrate the power of the exploding bomb but also to show citizens exactly what a postnuclear American city would look like. In addition to the live television coverage, film footage was widely distributed in the years after the test, with versions shown in movie theaters and replayed on television. Some of the most powerful and enduring US images of atomic destruction were crafted during Operation Cue and remain in circulation to this day. Thus, in important ways, the broken buildings and charred rubble produced in Operation Cue continue to structure contemporary US perceptions of postnuclear ruins, constituting a kind of *ur*-text for the nuclear age.

As an experiment, Operation Cue was designed to test residences, shelter designs, utilities, mobile housing, vehicles, warning systems, as well as a variety of domestic items, under atomic blast. Linked to each of these objects was a specific test program and research team drawn from Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Federal Civil Defense Agency. A variety of Federal Civil Defense Agency exercises were conducted in the aftermath of the explosion as well, including rescue operations, fire control, aircraft evacuations, communication and sanitation efforts, and mass feeding. The test city was designed as a “representative” American community, and was made up of a variety of current building styles (ramblers, two-story brick houses, as well as trailers and mobile homes), a variety of utilities (from electronic towers to propane systems), numerous bomb shelter designs, as well as efforts to protect records (such as a variety of office safes). Over 150 industrial associations participated in the test, insuring that the very latest consumer items from cars to furniture, clothing to dishware, televisions to radio, were installed in the brand-new houses. Hundreds of civilian participants were invited to inhabit not the pristine pre-test city but the post-test atomic ruins: civilians were simultaneously witnesses and test subjects, serving as representative “Americans” and individuals to be tested by viewing the blast

and participating in mass feeding and emergency operations. The formal inhabitants of *Operation Cue* were the mannequin families, dressed and theatrically posed to suggest everyday life activities, communicating through their posture and dress that the bombing was an unexpected intrusion into an intimate home space.

Operation Cue was designed to appeal to a domestic audience, and particularly to women. Unlike previous civil defense films, *Operation Cue* (FCDA 1955, 15 minutes) has a female narrator—Joan Collins—who promises to see the test “through my own eyes and the eye of the average citizen.” In its effort to produce a “bomb-proof” society, the Federal Civil Defense Agency was concerned with documenting the effects of the bomb against every detail of middle-class, white, suburban life. The media strategy involved recalibrating domestic life by turning the nuclear family into a nuclearized family, preprogrammed for life before, during, and after a nuclear war. Gender roles were reinforced by dividing up responsibility for food and security in a time of nuclear crisis between women and men. Similarly, the civil defense campaigns in public schools were designed to deploy children to educate their parents about civil defense. Normative gender roles were used to reinforce the idea that nuclear crisis was not an exceptional condition but one that could be incorporated into everyday life with minor changes in household technique and a “can do” American spirit.

Of particular concern in *Operation Cue*, for example, were food tests and mass feeding programs. In each of the model homes, the pantries and refrigerators were stocked with food. In her film voiceover, Collins underscores *Operation Cue*'s address to women, announcing: “As a mother and housewife, I was particularly interested in the food test program, a test that included canned and packaged food.” Additionally, food in various forms of packaging was buried along the desert test site, to expose it to radiation, and some of the mannequin families were posed to be involved in food preparation at the time of the detonation. Conceptually, the argument was that at any moment of the day—while enjoying one's breakfast for example—the bomb could drop. The Federal Civil Defense Agency sought, as McEnaney argues (2000: 109), to create a “paramilitary housewife,” emotionally and materially in control of her home and thinking about postnuclear social life. Formally, the Federal Civil Defense Agency was interested in whether or not food would be too contaminated in the immediate aftermath of a blast to eat, and also what kinds of techniques would be needed to feed large groups of homeless, injured, and traumatized people.

Within this scheme of crisis management, food was positioned as a primary means of calming individual anxieties and establishing social authority (McEnaney 2000: 111). Informally, the goal was to saturate the domestic space of the home with nuclear logics and civic obligations, to militarize men, women, and children to withstand either a very long nuclear confrontation or a very short nuclear war. [...]

Indeed, documenting evidence of material survival after the atomic blast was ultimately the point of Operation Cue. The mass feeding project, for example, pulled equipment from the wreckage after the test, as well as the food from refrigerators and buried canned goods, and served them to assembled participants: this emergency meal consisted of roast beef, tomato juice, baked beans, and coffee (FDCA 1955: 67). The destruction of a model American community thus became the occasion of a giant picnic, with each item of food marked as having survived the atomic bomb, and each witness positioned as a postnuclear survivor. Additionally, the emergency rescue group pulled damaged mannequins from out of the rubble and practiced medical and evacuation techniques on them, eventually flying several charred and broken dummies to offsite hospitals by charter plane. The formal message of Operation Cue was that the postnuclear environment would be only as chaotic as citizens allowed, that resources (food, shelter, and medical) would still be present, and that society—if not the nation-state—would continue. Nuclear war was ultimately presented as a state of mind that could be incorporated into one's normative reality—it was simply a matter of emotional preparation and mental discipline.

The mannequin families that were intact after the explosion were soon on a national tour, complete with tattered and scorched clothing. J. C. Penney's department stores, which provided the garments, displayed these postnuclear families in its stores around the country with a sign declaring "this could be you!" Inverting a standard advertising appeal, it was not the blue suit or polkadot dress that was to be the focal point of viewers' identification. Rather, it was the mannequin as survivor, whose very existence seemed to illustrate that you could indeed "beat the a-bomb", as one civil defense film of the era promised. Invited to contemplate life within a postnuclear ruin as the docile mannequins of civil defense, the national audience for Operation Cue was caught in a sea of mixed messages about the power of the state to control the bomb. This kind of ritual enactment did not resolve the problem of the bomb but, rather, focused citizens on emotional self-discipline through

nuclear fear. It asked them to live on the knife's edge of a psychotic contradiction—an everyday life founded simultaneously in total threat and absolute normality—with the stakes being nothing less than survival itself.

Indeed, although Operation Cue was billed as a test of “the things we use in everyday life,” the full intent of the test was to nationalize nuclear fear and install a new civic understanding via the contemplation of mass destruction and death. Consider the narrative of Mr Arthur F. Landstreet (the general manager of the Hotel King Cotton in Memphis, Tennessee) who volunteered to crouch down in a trench at the Nevada Test Site about 10,000 feet from ground zero and experience the nuclear detonation in Operation Cue. After the explosion, he explained why it was important for ordinary citizens to be tested on the front line of a nuclear detonation:

Apparently the reason for stationing civilians at Position Baker was to find out what the actual reaction from citizens who were not schooled in the atomic field would be, and to get some idea of what the ordinary citizen might be able to endure under similar conditions. This idea was part of the total pattern to condition civilians for what they might be expected to experience in case of atomic attack. ... Every step of the bomb burst was explained over and over from the moment of the first flash of light until the devastating blast. We were asked to make time tests from the trench to our jeeps. We did this time after time, endeavoring to create more speed and less loss of motion. We were told that this was necessary because, if the bomb exploded directly over us with practically no wind, the fallout would drop immediately downward, and we would be alerted to get out of the territory. We would have about 5 minutes to get at least 2.5 to 3 miles distant, so it was necessary that we learn every move perfectly. (FCDA 1955: 75)

The total pattern to condition civilians. Physical reactions to the nuclear explosion are privileged in Mr Landstreet's account, but a corollary project is also revealed, that of training the participants not to think in a case of emergency but simply to act. If the first project was an emotional management effort to familiarize citizens with the exploding bomb—to psychologically inoculate them against their own apocalyptic imagination—the later effort sought simply to control those same bodies, to train and time their response to official commands. The atomic bomb extended the docility of the

citizen-subject to new levels, as civil defense sought to absorb the everyday within a new normative reality imbued with the potential for an imminent and total destruction.

This short-circuiting of the brain, and willingness to take orders under the sign of nuclear emergency, reveals the broader scope of the civil defense project: anesthetizing as well as protecting, producing docility as well as agency. This effort to document the potentialities of life in a postnuclear environment met with almost immediate resistance. In addition to the mounting scientific challenges to the claims of civil defense, a “mothers against the bomb” movement started in 1959 when two young mothers in New York refused to participate in Operation Alert by simply taking their children to Central Park rather than the fallout shelter (Garrison 2006: 93–95). The widely publicized effects of radioactive fallout in the 1950s as well as the move from atomic to thermonuclear weapons provided ample evidence that Operation Cue was not, in the end, a “realistic” portrait of nuclear warfare. [...]

Thus, as a scientific test of “everyday objects,” Operation Cue had less value over time, as the effects of blast and radiation in increasingly powerful weapons rendered civil defense almost immediately obsolete as a security concept. In Cold War ideology, however, the promise of nuclear ruins was deployed by the state to secure the possibility of a postnuclear remainder, and with it, the inevitable reconstitution of social order. The discourse of “obliteration” here, however, reveals the technoscientific limitations of that ideological project, as the destructive reality of thermonuclear warfare radically limits the possibility of a postnuclear United States.

After the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, the visual effects of the bomb were eliminated as atomic testing went underground. The elimination of aboveground tests had two immediate effects: (1) it changed the terms of the public discourse about the bomb, as the state no longer had to rationalize the constant production of mushroom clouds and the related health concerns over radioactive fallout to US citizens, and (2) it locked in place the visual record of the bomb. Thus, the visual record of the 1945–63 aboveground test program, with its deep implication in manipulating public opinions and emotions, remains the visual record of the bomb to this day. As science, Operation Cue was always questionable, but as national theater it remains a much more productive enterprise: it created an idealized consumer dream space and fused it with the bomb, creating the very vocabulary for thinking about the nuclear emergency that continues to inform US politics. Thus, the motto of

Operation Cue “Survival Is Your Business” is not an ironic moment of atomic kitsch, but rather reveals the formal project of the nuclear state, underscoring the link between the production of threat, its militarized response, and the Cold War economic program. As an emotional management campaign, civil defense proved extraordinarily influential, installing within American national culture a set of ideas, images, and assumptions about nuclear weapons that continued to inform Cold War politics, and that remain powerful to this day. [...]

EPILOGUE

Reclaiming the emotional history of the atomic bomb is crucial today, as nuclear fear has been amplified to enable a variety of political projects at precisely the moment American memory of the bomb has become impossibly blurred. In the United States, nuclear fear has recently been used to justify preemptive war and unlimited domestic surveillance, a worldwide system of secret prisons, and the practices of rendition, torture, and assassination. But what today do Americans actually know or remember about the bomb? We live not in the ruins produced by Soviet ICBMs but, rather, in the emotional ruins of the Cold War as an intellectual and social project. The half-century-long project to install and articulate the nation through contemplating its violent end has colonized the present. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC in 2001 may have produced a political consensus that “the Cold War is over” and a formal declaration of a counterterrorism project. But American reactions to those attacks were structured by a multigenerational state project to harness the fear of mass death to divergent political and military industrial agendas. [...]

US citizens live today in the emotional residues of the Cold War nuclear arms race, which can only address them as fearful docile bodies. Thus, even in the twenty-first century, Americans remain caught between terror and fear, trapped in the psychosocial space defined by the once and future promise of nuclear ruins.

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