

Week 9 — Cohn *Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals*

- From a woman's perspective
- Defense intellectuals are men who create the theory that informs and legitimates American nuclear strategic practice
 - Why do they think this way?
- Technostrategic: the language of nuclear strategy

State 1: Listening

1. Clean bombs and clean language
 - They used abstraction and euphemisms to mask the weight of the nuclear holocaust topic
 - EX: Clean bombs which are largely fusion bombs
 - EX: The Peacekeeper/Damage limitation weapon = MX missing with 10 warheads on it
2. White men in ties discussing missile size
 - If disarmament is emasculation, how could any real man even consider it?
 - Lots of sexual imagery when referencing nuclear topics 693
 - The idea of “patting” such a nuclear weapon as to make it one's own through intimacy
 - Not just in a sexual manner, but we pat things that are smaller than us, cute, or harmless
 - “Pat it and it's lethality disappears” 696
 - “It's a pissing contest”
 - This is a competition for manhood that is dangerous but at the same time is nothing but an act of boyish mischief
3. Fathers, sons, and virgins
 - Initiation into the nuclear world associated with deflowering
 - Aggressive acts for deterrence
 - Dad saying if his son turns on TV he'll break his arm
 - In this case, two powers are not equal
 - Stronger force uses it to coerce, not to protect
 - “The United States frequently appeared in discussions about international politics as “father,” sometimes coercive, sometimes benevolent, but always knowing best.” 697
 - Parents need to set limits for their children
4. Domestic bliss
 - Comparing the nuclear weapons to domestic terms
 - “These words may also serve to domesticate, to *tame* the wild and uncontrollable forces of nuclear destruction.” 698
 - A way to gain mastery over the unmasterable
5. Male birth and creation
 - On the hydrogen bomb:
 - “They claimed Stanislaw Ulam was the real father; he had the all important idea and inseminated Teller with it. Teller only ‘carried it’ after that.” 700
 - Trinity test, said that it was a boy and not a girl which is a dud
6. God and the nuclear priesthood
 - Members of the defense intellectuals refer to themselves as the nuclear priesthood

Stage 2: Learning to speak the language

- Acronyms and nick names
 - Speaking about these nuclear topics with that edge of derision is exactly what allows it to be spoken about and seriously discussed at all
 - Making fun of a concept that makes it possible to work with it rather than reject it outright 703
- *Talking about nuclear stuff is **fun*** with these acronyms and nick names
- Program was dominantly white folks with young black women who would clean up after them

- “The more conversations I participated in using this language, the less frightened I was of nuclear war.” 704
- “... The process of learning the language is itself a part of what removes you from the reality of nuclear war.” 704
- Speaking the technostrategic language offers distance, a feeling on control, an alternative focus for one’s energies, and a feeling of escape (escape from thinking of oneself as a victim of nuclear war)
 - Removes them from the position of victim and puts them in the position of the planner, the user, the actor

Stage 3: Dialogue

- If she spoke in English and not in technostrategic language, the men responded as if she were ignorant, simpleminded, or both
- She could not express her own opinions with the technostrategic language
 - Its construct did not allow for her to ask her own questions or express certain values
- Deterrence theory and other abstract systems made to “think about the unthinkable”
- *Is the psychology behind these abstract systems and the technostrategic language the same as why comedy works? That it allows us to think and imagine the unthinkable*
- Subject of technostrategic language is the bomb itself
- Human death = collateral damage

Stage 4: The terror

Conclusion

- *Do you find yourself using such a techostrategic language, and if so, what are your experiences with it?*
- *Does techostrategic terminology still apply today or has it shifted more toward an English form?*
- “The dominant voice of militarized masculinity and decontextualized rationality speaks so loudly in our culture, it will remain difficult for any other voices to be heard until that voice loses some of its power to define what we hear and how we name the world—until that voice is delegitimated.” 717-718