

Introduction

The bomb first was our weapon. Then it became our diplomacy. Next it became our economy. Now it's become our culture. We've become the people of the bomb.

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NUCLEAR WEAPONS: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

In a context in which policy makers, international relations experts, nuclear weapons scientists, and antinuclear activists have sought to persuade us that there is only one way to understand the world and that they knew what it is, the contribution of anthropology is to disturb comfortable understandings of the world by showing the simultaneous plausibility and arbitrariness of multiple ways of understanding and living in it. George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986: 39), pleading for “anthropology as cultural critique,” argue that the power of anthropology lies in its ability to jar understanding by “relativizing . . . taken-for-granted concepts” and making fleetingly visible the constructedness of our cultural worlds. As Renato Rosaldo (1989: 39) puts it, “If ideology often makes social facts appear natural, social analysis attempts to reverse the process. It dismantles the ideological in order to reveal the cultural.” This is precisely my aim here: to take what has appeared to many to be common sense and reveal the cultural.¹

My starting point for the development of a cultural analysis of the nuclear arms race is the presumption, which is as much a cliché in some anthropological circles as it is an affront to the worldview of many policy makers and political scientists, that reality is a social construction. I do not mean to suggest that presidents, missiles, and mushroom clouds are figments of our imagination. Clearly they are not. But groups of people have to share and communicate about entities in the world—whether these are

physical entities such as nuclear missiles or abstract entities such as nuclear deterrence—through language and other mediating forms of representation, and in the process of representing the world, we construct it.

To take a simple example, there are many ways to see a missile: it can be a Peacekeeper or an MX, a token of security or of vulnerability, a technical diagram or an image in a nightmare, a small pointy dot seen from above or a massive metallic phallus seen from the side, a number in a chart or a reason for not having children. It is possible to represent anything in the world, from a missile to the notion of peace, in a number of different ways. Our often unthinking representations of the world are partial constructions of it. These partial constructions are not only produced by us; they also, as social entities that precede us, produce us as people.²

Take the example of risk. In *Risk and Culture*, Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky ask, “Can we know the risks we face, now or in the future?” Their answer: “No, we cannot; but yes, we must act as if we do” (1982: 1). According to Douglas and Wildavsky, although we know from experience that some things are dangerous, it is in the contingent nature of life that we cannot predict all the risks we face, and, despite the brave attempts of some mathematicians, it is hard to rank and compare different kinds of risks. When we do feel confident in our fears, this is not so much a sign that we have correctly divined the ontology of the world as it is a reflection of our embeddedness in particular social relationships of power, solidarity, and meaning. Whether we are antinuclear activists afraid of a nuclear holocaust, environmentalists afraid of the greenhouse effect, or conservative Republicans afraid of the decay of moral values at home, our perceptions of risk are always cognitively selective, always socially mediated, and always inextricably entangled with social relationships and with ideological systems of representation that shape our understanding of the world. Perceptions of risk, however much they present themselves as objective or unquestionable, are inherently social.

What is true of risk in general is particularly true of risk in regard to nuclear weapons. Not only do we not have any definitive, scientific way to compare the risks nuclear weapons create and the risks they alleviate—of knowing finally whether to see nuclear weapons as objects that protect us from the risk of conventional war or rather as themselves the risk from which we need to be protected—but also the very logic of nuclear deterrence is inherently, profoundly paradoxical and self-contradictory since it

is the essence of deterrence to prevent disaster by threatening it.³ In the ironic words of General Wilmer, a character in Arthur Kopit's play *End of the World with Symposium to Follow* (1984), "In order to *prevent* a nuclear war, you have to be able to *fight* a nuclear war at *all levels*, even though they're probably unwinnable and unfightable." Nuclear deterrence is premised on a paradoxical—to its opponents, Orwellian—logic whereby resolve and credibility are communicated by threats that, since they are almost certainly suicidal, are incredible. Nuclear deterrence creates a situation in which it may be rational to act a little crazy and crazy to be too rational. It can quite plausibly be argued—and equally plausibly disputed—that every technical innovation and change in strategic doctrine that makes it more feasible to fight a nuclear war thereby makes a nuclear war less likely. Michael May, a former director of the Livermore laboratory, caught this fundamental irony in the logic of nuclear deterrence in his assessment of the stabilizing and destabilizing effects of nuclear testing.

The changes in nuclear weapons and the nuclear tests that made submarine-launched nuclear missiles possible extended the arms race, but made deterrent forces far more survivable against attack. The changes and tests that made MIRVs⁴ possible made first strikes against fixed ICBMs⁵ more effective, but they also made ABM⁶ systems less effective and helped pave the way for the ABM Treaty of 1972. The changes and the nuclear tests that might make strategic defenses possible could be used to help deterrence, but they could also be used to help an aggressor. A tested, reliable stockpile can serve both deterrer and first-striker. (May 1986: 98)

As Debra Rosenthal (1990: 229) has written, "logic reaches a dead end with mutual assured destruction."

A number of postmodern theorists have written in recent years about the impossibility of achieving, as they put it, "totalizing discourses." These are accounts of the world that are undeniably true for all people-political narratives and ideological systems that can compose the contradictory heterogeneity of the world and of language itself without being internally inconsistent and vulnerable to deconstruction.⁷ For postmodernists, this shows the impossibility of the Enlightenment project of redemption through rationality. We might say that the situation created by nuclear weapons, in which logic has been left impaled on itself, represents a particularly piquant crisis of modernity, a hyper-postmodern situation in which the terror of the weapons lies not only in the damage they can do

to millions of human bodies but in the violence they have already inflicted on our sense of logic, rationality, and progress. They have brought into being a situation from which, apparently, no game theorist or scientist can satisfactorily rescue civilization.

In this tormented situation we have not so much a problem with a solution as a predicament. The nuclearist and antinuclear worldviews are both plausible constructions of the world that are unable to defeat one another. Neither can, in Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) terminology, transform itself from a mere local narrative into a global metanarrative—an account of the world that is compellingly true for all people. In this book I ask how, given this situation, people have arrived at different but deeply held convictions about nuclear weapons. How did some people come to believe, so completely that the fears and doubts of others genuinely puzzled them, that the development of nuclear weapons made both superpowers more secure? And how did others come to believe, so profoundly that they sometimes even accused those who disagreed with them of being mad, that the stockpiling of nuclear weapons by the superpowers was a terrifying act of lunacy?

This is the same question that Douglas and Wildavsky ask: How is it that particular social constructions of risk acquire compelling ideological and emotional force in people's lives? In answering this question, Douglas and Wildavsky focus on the issue of recruitment: Why are people from particular kinds of social settings drawn toward certain ideologies of risk? This is an important issue, and in later chapters I ask why members of certain religious denominations are likely to support or oppose the continued development of nuclear weapons, and why many women and members of the humanistic middle class have been attracted by the antinuclear movement. However, I believe that Douglas and Wildavsky err in focusing so heavily on recruitment and that we must look not only at the ways institutions recruit people but also at the ways they socialize them (Downey 1986). We cannot fully understand the hold on the heart of ideologies of risk without looking at the practices⁸ through which people are culturally re-produced by institutions and social movements so that they find particular ideologies meaningful. In this book I examine how weapons scientists are socialized by means of such practices as being interviewed for a job, learning the language of nuclear weapons science, being investigated for a security clearance, going to church, participating in nuclear tests,

reading laboratory publications, and telling jokes. In explaining how people become antinuclear activists and how their convictions deepen over time, I emphasize the importance of learning the language of fear and emotion, of being exposed to certain kinds of films, writings, and presentations, and of participating in demonstrations and, in some cases, civil disobedience.

It is my contention that an understanding of such practices is vital to the analysis of politics and power. Traditional forms of social and political analysis, which are mostly structuralist in derivation, tend to analyze political power in terms of institutions rather than practices. Looking at the structural relationships between institutions and individuals within institutions, they ask who is structurally located so as to have access to the levers of power. Thus many sociologists and political scientists have asked me why, if I was interested in understanding the arms race, I chose to study a nuclear weapons laboratory rather than, say, the Senate Armed Services Committee or senior officers at the Pentagon—groups of people who, as they see it, have had more power over nuclear weapons policy. Within the framework of the institutional analysis of politics, one possible response is that it is important to study Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory because it, along with the other American weapons laboratory, Los Alamos, is so positioned within the structural processes of the American defense establishment that its scientists and administrators are the ones who have *really* driven the arms race by lobbying for new weapons and using their influence to block certain arms control treaties—and indeed this has been argued quite plausibly, if also sometimes a little simplistically, by some (DeWitt 1986; McLean 1986: 37–41; Miall 1987: 11–28; Zuckerman 1983: 109–125).

Although it is irrefutable, in my view, that the Livermore laboratory has influenced American government decisions to procure new weapons, the arms race has been a complex process that cannot be reduced to a few key sites of origin or impetus. I have chosen to study the Livermore laboratory not so much because of its position, central or otherwise, as an institution in the national pyramid of power but because of the importance of looking at the production and contestation of power, knowledge, and belief at the local level in order to understand national and global political processes. This is because, to prosper, institutions do not just need material resources and structurally assured leverage over decision-making actors. They also

need legitimacy. Thus to understand the vigor, until recently at least, of the arms race, we must understand not only those central institutions and actors dominant in our society—presidents, political action committees, Senate committees, and defense contractors, for example—but also the importance of discourses and practices that permeate all corners of society and whose power may lie in their dispersed and routine ordinariness (Foucault 1980*b*).

My main focus in this book is on the ways “regimes of truth,” as the French political philosopher Michel Foucault calls them, are produced. This is not to say that government politics are unimportant, and I do pay attention in the account that follows to the evolution of government policy, the relationship of the laboratory to its local and national political environment, and the overarching context of U.S.–Soviet relations. However, I am more interested in the production of ideology than in the production of policy *per se*, and so I look at nuclear policy through the lens of a cultural analysis that investigates social power by following Clifford Geertz’s (1983: 69) admonition to practice a “continual dialectical tacking between the most local of local details and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view.”

My thinking about the cultural politics of nuclear weapons policy has taken shape in reaction to two other schools of thought: that of a group of political scientists and policy makers who have immodestly called themselves “realists” or “neorealists” and that of a group of psychologists who have depicted American nuclear weapons policy as a form of psychopathology. I find myself in substantial disagreement with both. To give some sense of the intellectual landscape within which this study is located and to sharpen the distinctiveness of my own approach, I give below a brief sketch of these perspectives, emphasizing areas of divergence from my own.

THE “REALIST” PERSPECTIVE

In the 1980s, as *détente* collapsed, discussions of defense policy in government, think tank, and university circles were largely dominated by international relations theorists known as “neorealists” and by nuclear weapons experts who were sometimes called “realists.” Although neorealism and nuclear realism are by no means the same thing, their proponents

share to some degree an underlying worldview. Hence, in my deliberately schematic discussion here, I lump both groups together for heuristic purposes under the umbrella term “realism.” The realist worldview has been articulated by a number of thinkers, but my account here draws strongly on Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979)—the locus classicus of neorealist thinking among international relations theorists—and on the various writings on nuclear weapons by members or associates of the Harvard Nuclear Study Group.⁹

There are four main components to what I am calling the realist point of view. First, realists assume that the international system is characterized by a “state of nature” or anarchy. Within the nation-state the disciplinary power of government prevents the strong from picking on the weak and keeps relationships orderly and relatively free from violent strife, but this is not the case in interstate relations. Here there is no international government to regulate and discipline the relations between states so that, in Waltz’s (1979: 102) words, “the state among states . . . conducts its affairs in the brooding shadow of violence. . . . Among states, the state of nature is a state of war.”

Second, since the international system is anarchic, realists assume that states must rely on self-help measures for their security. “States have to do whatever they think necessary for their own preservation, since no one can be relied on to do it for them. . . . Self-help is necessarily the principle of action in an anarchic order” (ibid., 109, 111). This means that states must rely for their security on military force and on alliances with other states against potential predator states. Some realists have argued that bipolar international systems, such as the one that arose during the cold war, are the most likely to assure peace—or, to use a word preferred by security specialists, stability.¹⁰ Others have maintained that multipolar systems, such as the one that existed in nineteenth-century Europe, are more stable.¹¹

Third, nuclear realists see nuclear weapons as the ultimate form of self-help. States that are able to threaten potential aggressors with nuclear retaliation greatly increase the costs of aggression against themselves and, hence, become more secure. If, as in the case of the two superpowers through the last two decades of the cold war, the nuclear arsenals of opposed states are balanced by one another so that neither dares attack the other, nuclear weapons can have a stabilizing effect on international

relations. Within the framework of realist thinking, nuclear weapons, although they are indisputably dangerous, are not so much the problem as the (at least temporary) solution. The real problem is the anarchic international system with its tendency to generate conventional wars.

Finally, realists have tended to presume that relatively little can be done to transform the fundamentally anarchic nature of the international system, at least in the near term—and it is the near term that largely preoccupies realists (Holt 1986). Realists may hope that the international system can gradually be transformed into a more cooperatively structured whole over the long term, but they tend to focus on what they see as the inescapable necessity of military self-help in the short term. Thus, in the words of Stanley Hoffmann (1986: 5), realists' support for the nuclear state "comes from their conviction that the very nature of international reality rules it [disarmament] out. . . . They see the contest between Washington and Moscow . . . [and] they believe that it . . . cannot be transcended . . . because it is the very essence of international politics that the two biggest actors must be rivals, that the growth of the power of one must cause fear in the other."

Consequently, unlike many in the antinuclear camp, realists have not expected too much from arms control treaties besides some agreements that help contain the costs of maintaining the nuclear arsenals and some measures that enhance crisis stability while diminishing the likelihood of accidental nuclear war.¹² Realists on the whole distrust appeals for disarmament. The Harvard Nuclear Study Group (1983: 255), for example, criticizes what it calls "atomic escapism," saying that "living with nuclear weapons is our only hope. . . . This challenge will be both demanding and unending."

The strengths of the realist perspective consist in its realization that nations together form a system with its own structural logic, in its ability to provide plausible explanations for many recent wars, and in its sensitivity to the dangers of disarmament. However, within the community of international relations theorists and defense specialists itself, recent years have seen the tentative emergence of a critique of the realist paradigm. This critique has focused in particular on the realists' presumption of anarchy in the international system and on their assumption that domestic politics is largely irrelevant in the analysis of international security issues. This book is in part intended to push that critique further.

Among international relations theorists, for example, some have begun to argue that the international system is not so completely anarchic as has been claimed. They suggest that the war of all against all in the international system is partly moderated by the existence of fragile incipient regimes of cooperation, particularly in regard to trade. These regimes consist, in Stephen Krasner's (1983a: 2) words, of "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations."¹³ Rephrasing this more anthropologically, we might say that, against the putative "state of nature" in the international sphere, an international society is in the process of being created with its own transnational culture—a shared set of norms and meanings that facilitate and constrain interactions across national boundaries.

A number of writers have also broken with the realists' assumption that national and international political systems are disarticulated from one another and that state behavior in the international system tends to be constrained by the structure of the state system itself much more than it is determined by the internal structure of individual states. Within political science circles, this argument has largely been phrased in terms of the importance of intrastate bureaucratic rivalries.¹⁴ Neo-Marxists, looking at the situation more in terms of dominant classes and interests, have drawn attention to the importance in decisions to design and build new weapons of what is popularly, if somewhat nebulously, known as the "military-industrial complex."¹⁵ Feminist writers have suggested that the three levels of political practice in neorealist thinking (international, national, and individual) are integrated by the masculine identity of the men who dominate at each level. They argue that to understand the international behavior of states and statesmen, we should look as much at the gender system within and across states as at the structure of the international system.¹⁶ Finally, poststructuralists have argued that war, balances of power, and nuclear deterrence are not forced responses to anarchy but elaborate social institutions produced by an international system that has evolved over many centuries and is sustained by complex, powerful, and deeply rooted discourses and practices. Where the realists claim to simply describe the world as it is, the poststructuralists accuse them of using the language of positivism to reify it and to legitimate the prevailing order.¹⁷

In this book, in line with these heterogeneous critiques of realism, I take it as axiomatic that the international security system is a cultural phenomenon and that national and international politics are deeply articulated with one another. I suggest, for example, that struggles within American society over class and gender relations produced movements that contested American nuclear weapons policy and, arguably, helped draw down the cold war, and I show how international relations can be profoundly interconnected with, for example, domestic marital relationships, church politics, and local real estate markets—all phenomena that lie far beyond the territory that interests most international relations scholars. My presumption is that, to paraphrase Tip O'Neill, international politics is, in part at least, local politics and that it is also cultural politics. Many realists, drawing on Hobbes and Machiavelli, sometimes speak of "power politics" as if there were some domain where the exercise of power exists in a pure form disconnected from ideas, norms, and ideologies. Power is, however, inextricably enmeshed with ideology: power is always sustained and constrained by it; power constantly generates and regenerates it; and the exercise of power is always interpreted and predicted in terms of it.

Such an approach will no doubt mark me out as, in some sense of that problematic term, a postmodernist. Realists have recently complained, not entirely without reason, that the postmodern critique of realism has taken the form of abstract argumentation about philosophy and social theory rather than empirical case studies. Stephen Walt (1991: 223), for example, complains that "post-modern approaches have yet to demonstrate much value for comprehending world politics. . . . [I]ssues of war and peace are too important to be diverted into a prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world." What, the realists have asked in exasperation, would an empirical postmodernist case study of international relations look like? This book is intended, in part, as an answer to their question.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the 1980s, within the American antinuclear community, folk and academic versions of a psychological critique of the arms race became highly influential. This critique was particularly identified with the writings of the humanistic psychologist Robert Jay Lifton. In its own way, it is as problematic as the realist perspective.

The psychological critique consists of three main claims. First, Lifton and the antinuclear psychologists have construed the nuclear relationship between the superpowers in terms of psychopathology. Where the realists saw nuclear weapons as potential instruments of stability and security, the psychologists saw them as manifestations of dementia. Lifton (1982*a*: ix–x, 18), for example, tells us that the arms race is “an objective social madness,” a “disease,” and “something on the order of a psychotic fantasy.” Another leading antinuclear psychologist, John Mack (1985: 292), says that “the nuclear arms competition fulfills the conditions of a severe collective psychiatric disorder in a formal, literal, or scientific sense” and “is quite literally psychotic.” Joel Kovel (1983: 84) calls the arms race “paranoid madness,” and Robert R. Holt (1984: 212) calls it “certifiably pathological.”

Second, antinuclear psychologists have argued that those who design nuclear weapons, or devise strategies that might involve their use, could not carry out such potentially genocidal work unless they were in a state of numbness or denial. Lifton repeatedly makes an analogy between working in a nuclear weapons laboratory and working in a Nazi death camp.¹⁸ Accusing weapons professionals of psychodynamic rigidity, he has also claimed to find among them a “fundamentalist” mode of thinking involving unquestioning faith in the protective power of nuclear weapons (Lifton 1982*a*, 1982*b*, 1983; Lifton and Markusen 1990).¹⁹

Third, Lifton and others have argued that the nuclear arms race is based on a distorted psychology of enmity—a stark demonization of “the Other,” polarizing the world between the American “we” who are good and the Soviet “they” who are evil. They argue that we have enemies at least partly because we need and create them. In this view, the psychology of enmity draws its energy from “disavowed elements of the self” (Stein 1985: 257) and from unresolved childhood conflicts and fears that unscrupulous national leaders are able to tap into and manipulate.²⁰

The psychological critique of the arms race is important. It reminds us that nuclear weapons are dangerous and potentially genocidal. It warns us that people can become numb in response to the overwhelming destructive force and apparent immovability of such weapons. And it tells us that we must pay attention to emotions and the unconscious mind as well as the rational calculations of the conscious mind when we discuss nuclear policy. In this context, however, I want to concentrate on gaps and problems in the psychologists’ arguments.²¹

To begin with, they often fail to take seriously what is important in the realist view of the world, namely, that, as Stanley Hoffmann (1986: 9) puts it, “enemies are not mere projections of negative identities; they are often quite real.” Given the way the world is currently organized, states do indeed have enemies and are sometimes attacked by them if they are weak. The psychologists are often so eager to find the pathology in the arms race that they do not take seriously enough nuclear professionals’ own rationales for their positions. For example, in his book *Minds at War*, Steven Kull, one of the more influential antinuclear psychologists, criticizes strategists’ scenarios for winnable nuclear wars as unrealistic and maladaptive—and therefore hunts down unconscious motives for them—without seriously addressing their rationale: they know nuclear wars should not be fought but must still somehow communicate to potential enemies the credibility and resolve that, they believe, deter aggression. Whether or not one agrees with the strategists’ solution, it is important to take account of the problem the strategists see themselves as trying to solve.²²

The psychological critique of the arms race also tends to confound psychological and social processes. Although some psychologists embroider their analyses with caveats that individual and collective processes are different, the incessant discussion of international relations in terms of individual pathology and the frequent comparisons of national politics and personal psychology encourage the reduction of national and international politics to individual psychology. However, the individual and the national are not only, as the jargon of political science would phrase it, different “levels of analysis”; they also involve different processes requiring different *kinds* of analysis. Understanding the psychology of Edward Teller, the “father of the hydrogen bomb,” may illuminate the arms race, but it does not explain it.²³ Although institutional processes are enmeshed with individual psychological processes, neither kind of process can be reduced to the other, and societies cannot be analyzed as if they were giant personalities. In this book, proceeding more in the spirit of Emile Durkheim than of Sigmund Freud, I show how institutions and processes of cultural production act on individuals to produce certain normative structures of feeling while at the same time I try to respect the partial autonomy of individual psychological processes.²⁴

Finally, the psychological critique, just like the realist position it attacks, uses the rhetoric of positivist science to contract the space for political

debate. If the realists invoke notions of the “realistic” and the “natural” to reduce our sense of the possible in international relations and to bolster their own expert authority, the psychologists achieve the same effect by labeling certain policies pathological. The rhetoric of psychopathology, although it is a useful weapon in the armory of critique, becomes a way of closing off debate and silencing opponents, who can then be accused of being “in denial” if they fight back. In this book, viewing the nuclear debate through the lens of relativism rather than psychopathology, I present the recent struggle over nuclear weapons policy in America as a struggle between different cultural values and political orders rather than in terms of a choice between sanity and insanity. Instead of presuming an Archimedean point from which people can be declared to be “in denial,” “paranoid,” and “psychotic”—labels that can, in any case, without too much effort of the imagination, be thrown back at the labelers—it is my presumption that such diagnoses are themselves stratagems of power and that a more self-aware approach might eschew normative labeling while exploring how different psychological states are made real for different people. If there is critique here, it takes the form of what Marcus and Fischer (1986) call cultural critique—the deconstruction of ideology—rather than psychiatric labeling.

CULTURAL CRITIQUE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC AUTHORITY

Since this is an exercise in “cultural critique,” I want to end this introductory chapter with a brief note bearing on the nature of cultural critique itself and on the question of ethnographic authority. I attempt to demonstrate here that the cultural worlds inhabited by nuclear weapons scientists and antinuclear activists are constructed and how this is so. It goes without saying, of course, that my own interpretation of their constructions is itself a construction. This does not mean that it is a fabrication: my argument is based on carefully researched facts subjected to the standard rules of logic and evidence. These facts are, however, interpreted from a point of view, filtered through my own preoccupations and theoretical presumptions. There is knowledge here, but it is what Donna Haraway (1991: 183–202) calls “situated knowledge,” shaped not only by the nature of the situation I studied but also by my own positional relationship with that situation. A different anthropologist, no more or less

competent than me, would doubtless have asked different questions, would have been struck by different facts, and, filtering them through a different theoretical framework perhaps, would have written a different book. If the people anthropologists study can construct the world in different ways, it should not surprise us that anthropologists can also.

One problem for the anthropologist studying his or her own society is, in Emily Martin's (1987: 11) words, "how solidly entrenched our own cultural presuppositions are and how difficult it is to dig them up for inspection." If the ethnographer of foreign cultures has the problem of making the strange familiar, the ethnographer's problem at home is how to make the familiar strange. Here I have tried to use the juxtaposition of two radically opposed groups within American society, showing how each looks from the estranged vantage point of the other, as a means of creating the relativizing effect that comes more easily in ethnographies of faraway peoples (see Clifford 1981).

That I have tried to make sense of the struggle between weapons scientists and antinuclear activists as one who was once an active partisan of one side in the struggle surely affects the interpretation offered here. It helps me to see some things just as, doubtless, it obstructs me from seeing others so clearly. Yet the reader might be surprised at what I had difficulty understanding. As one whose former activism was confined to that electorally oriented corner of the antinuclear movement known as the Nuclear Freeze Campaign, I found the attitudes and beliefs of many antinuclear activists, particularly those in the anarchist, religious, and New Age parts of the movement, just as unfamiliar as the attitudes and beliefs of the weapons scientists, and I often had to work just as hard to make sense of them. The study is informed by this attempt, which is the basis of ethnography, to simultaneously achieve empathy with and distance from the diverse people I set out to understand. If I have succeeded, I expect it to disturb the conventional wisdom of activists as well as weapons scientists.