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***Question***

***Write a comprensive essay on the term "Nuclear weapons"***

In a conference held at Cornell University in April 1984, these scholars assembled to develop a uniquely nuclear criticism, one that would "demonstrate how the forms of the current nuclear discussion are being shaped by literary or critical assumptions whose implications are often, perhaps systematically, distorted" ("Proposal," 1984, p. 2). In his keynote address, Derrida (1984) delivered a mixed prognosis for the project from the vantage of deconstruction. The good news, he offered, was that since nuclear war had not (yet) happened and yet was the hotly-contested object of simulations (such as computer war-games), its ontological status was "fabulously textual"-- and thus uniquely suited for criticism. The bad news was that--for the very same reasons-critics had no more authority to make definitive claims about the nuclear "referent" than the speakers they were critiquing. This condition meant that critics could "speak" to nuclear "power"--but not with certainty of unproblematic "Truth" (see Ruthven, 1993).

Confounded at launch, nuclear criticism fractured but still ignited. As a method for confronting the limits of knowledge, deconstruction seemed uniquely suited for the imagined catastrophe of nuclear war, which threatened to destroy the very grounds of speech--self, world, and other. In turn, the high stakes of this project offered to redeem deconstruction's alleged relativism (Chaloupka, 1992). Two genres of scholarship emerged in subsequent studies of public-policy, media journalism, and popular-cultural texts. One genre was metatheoretical, and embraced Derridean textualism to critique the possibilities of valid nuclear-critical discourse. The other was more pragmatic, and analyzed texts with the goal of ethical intervention in public deliberation. Generally, scholars of both genres agreed that "nuclearism"([n1](http://web3.epnet.com/DeliveryPrintSave.asp?tb=1&_ug=dbs+ufh+sid+44A1CA7B-6C5A-400B-83BD-EC470F84E6DE@sessionmgr5+A8CC&_us=dstb+ES+fh+0+hd+0+hs+0+or+Date+ri+KAAACBXA00063657+sl+-1+sm+ES+ss+SO+7299&_uso=db%5B0+-ufh+hd+0+op%5B0+-+st%5B0+-AR++%22Taylor%2C++Bryan++C.%22+tg%5B0+-+3D50&del=S&dt=a&ev=CA&bk=C&fi=ufh_1244780_AN&save=Save&df=d&ft=on#bib1#bib1)) was intertextually configured by potent cultural discourses such as militarism, nationalism, bureaucracy, and technical-rationality. This hybrid discourse, they argued, suppressed its contingencies, normalized the presence and use of nuclear weapons, deferred the accountability of nuclear professionals, and inhibited ethical reflection about the risks and consequences of nuclear war (Aubrey, 1985; Chilton, 1986; Cohn, 1987). Beyond this initial spate of activity, however, scholarly interest in nuclear criticism per se proved temporary.

Ten years after the Cornell conference, one observer paused to wonder "Whatever happened to nuclear criticism?" (Norris, 1994, p. 130). His post-mortem offered several explanations for the movement's transience. Whether due to affinity or contamination, nuclear criticism had internalized problematic elements of Cold War discourse, including a presumption of permanent crisis that offered little sense of hope, cycles, or tactics. Some critics displayed a pompous theoretical abstraction. Caputi (1995) criticized the project's Eurocentric reliance on White, male philosophers to the exclusion of organic and inductive critical wisdom developed by feminists and indigenous peoples. Perhaps most egregiously, Derrida's assertion of "fabulous textuality" ignored the reality of nuclear weapons for the wartime residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their descendents. It further ignored the global populations affected by radioactive contamination from nuclear weapons production and testing. These omissions had important consequences for Derrida's claim about the alleged crisis faced by critics attempting to resolve the "undecidability" of thermonuclear war. Through contrast, these neglected topics indicated that the narratively-shaped prospects of superpower conflict were not the only valid object of' nuclear criticism. The historical development of nuclear weapons, alternatively, has had enormous consequences which, while highly contested, are not necessarily undecidable--at least not equally, not permanently, and not all in the same way. To these reasons, finally, we might add the daunting technical complexity, mind-bending paradoxes, and despair-inducing quality of nuclear discourse to explain why scholars during this period may have balked at joining the project;. Seemingly wedded to crisis, nuclear criticism began to dissolve in the late 1980's along with the apparatus that had produced that crisis. Publication of the group's newsletter ceased. Its members moved on to other interests.

Recent attempts to rejuvenate nuclear criticism have emphasized its relevance for the post-Cold War environment. With characteristic wordplay, Luckhurst (1993) argues that the seeming anachronism of nuclear criticism can be redeemed by engaging the geographical displacement -- or anachorism--of nuclear weapons caused by the implosion of the former Soviet Union. This proliferation has confounded the binary, ethnocentric geographies of the Cold War that viewed the world primarily in 'terms of East and West. In a vivid analogy, Ruthven (1993) urges nuclear criticism to adapt to the evolving conditions of risk:

What [has been] bequeathed to us ... is not the 'end' of nuclearism but rather a displacement of it. best imagined in terms of what geomorphologists call... an 'avulsion' ... the sudden abandonment of a substantial length of river channel for a new course somewhere else on the flood plain the process of nuclear catastrophe is merely deferred in [this] process of dispersal; sooner or later a flood-plain is going to flood, no matter' where the main channel happens to be.

Other scholars (Mann, 1996; Sproule, 1997) suggest that nuclear criticism may yet be subsumed by an emerging, interdisciplinary field. of "war studies" inspired by the technological spectacle of the Gulf War. In its real-time conflation of war-event and media-story, that conflict displayed several elements traditionally associated with the nuclear condition speed, disembodiment, hyper-reality, panoptical surveillance, and relentless devastation caused by cybernetic munitions.

Whatever its future, the legacy of nuclear criticism includes its sophisticated and comprehensive attack on the general illogic of "deterrence" strategy (in which the reason for nuclear weapons is nuclear weapons, and all murders are also suicides). This attack emphasized a unique paradox in deterrence discourse, in which the genres of constative and performative speech acts are hopelessly fused (Norris, 1994). This discursive condition emerges from an imperative in which nuclear opponents seek valid knowledge about, each others' capabilities, motives, and intentions as a means of gaining strategic advantage, while simultaneously seeking to deny this advantage to the other. Secrecy and the threat of deception, however, make this information virtually impossible to obtain and verify. As a result, each side gazes intensively and suspiciously at the other, and acts knowing that it is gazed upon. Under this mutual scrutiny, all aspects of opponents' societies are potentially semiotic and are harnessed to their logics of national (in)security. These logics constrain officials from authentically representing nuclear conditions because they cannot control the appropriation of these statements within economies of espionage, paranoia, and aggression, or prevent--once launched--their potential consequences. This desperate struggle between the felt need for control and feared loss of control encourages strategic distortion and heated dispute

The corrosive effects of this distortion on nuclear democracy are richly captured in an exchange (Rubin & Cummings, 1989, p. 53) between a television news reporter and the commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Command. When the reporter suggests that--contrary to official doctrine -- actual U.S. nuclear targeting policy is likely to incite and escalate Soviet attack, the commander is curtly dismissive: "Your words." What is important about this utterance, for our purposes, is its pejorative marginalization of oppositional discourse as discourse--that is, as-if merely 'semantic.' In this twilight of logic, it is apparently not necessary to reflectively engage contradictions. Instead, through the logic encoded in the commander's dismissal, the relationship between official policy and targeting operations (the referent of his words) -- and by extension, nuclear weapons themselves--is located prior to and beyond discourse. That relationship is mystified, and the weapons are reified as if 'natural' conditions. In this way, the discourse-defying quality of nuclear weapons is appropriated by the State as a hegemonic means of suppressing resistance. Under this paradox, historically, public dissent has been further constrained as cultural subjects internalized official fear of its expression as potentially signifying a lack of resolve to annihilate one's enemy that would--presumably--invite attack. As a result of this paradox, nuclear hegemony seals itself through the willful misreading of popular self-silencing as active endorsement.