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A DISARMED WORLD: PROBLEMS IN IMAGING THE FUTURE

by Elise Boulding

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One of the major handicaps to scholars, activists and would-be policy makers associated with the post-World War II peace research and peace action movements has been the inability to construct coherent and believable images of a post-military-industrial United States society. Even at the height of the economics of disarmament studies in the 1960s the most that economists could demonstrate was that disarmament could take place without severe economic dislocations, and that resources released from arms could be used for improving the global standard of living. The new peace research movement was also producing books in the sixties showing that it was possible to replace a technology of warmaking with a technology of peacemaking, but what the new society would look like, no one could spell out. A week-long seminar on Images of a Disarmed World held in Denmark in the summer of 1963 generated a great deal of analysis by the socialist and nonsocialist economists participating, but not one word about what the future would look like. This was typical of such seminars in that decade.

If any intellectual discipline today could contribute to imaging a disarmed world one would expect that the new field of future studies would do this. Yet futurists as a group, with two important exceptions, have to date failed signally to come up with such images. The exceptions are the World Order Models Project of the Institute of World Order, which includes disarmament as one of the values to be incorporated in its models of preferred future worlds and the futurists associated with the international peace research movement. These scholars represent a specialized branch, however, rather than the mainstream, of futurists. The general failure of futurists to deal with disarmament is to a considerable extent because their techniques involve projections based on past trends in a select class of variables, from which disarmament is excluded. When futurists whose expertise is in weaponry provide insight into future handling of world security systems, the tendency is to predict weapons breakthroughs rather than disarmament proposals.

It is ironic that public debate on two major policy issues in the United States today: (1) whether to aim for a no-growth economy and (2) whether to go all-out in the development of nuclear power sources, hardly touches on one major U.S. energy constraint: military commandeering of fuel sources. The energy that goes into protesting civilian nuclear energy seems disproportionate to the paucity of protest over nuclear weapons. Only when hitherto non-nuclear states want nuclear plants is concern expressed over military uses of nuclear energy.

Given the general lack of discussion of arms policy, public debate on alternative futures for the year 2010 seems woefully incomplete. The resolution proposed recently at the June 1976 national mayor's conference suggesting that national arms expenditures be reduced and the resulting savings be channeled as aid to U.S. cities...
as a better investment in national security than weaponry, may foreshadow more realistic imaging of alternative futures on the part of policy makers in the future. On the whole, however, since technological futurists can only visualize a future world based on a power structure substantially similar to that of today, they leave armament levels carefully to one side.

In a sense, American society is trapped by its own rhetoric at this point in history, since we have dealt with the pain of the numerous contemporary social upheavals by talking a great deal about alternative futures. In practice, few persons can imagine anything between the present way of life and catastrophe. The "alternative futures" explored turn out to be elaborations of present ways of life based on a series of miraculously appearing technological breakthroughs. The other type of alternative future, involving recycling, the simple life and a back-to-the-land movement, certainly has some serious exponents, but more people like to read about it than do it. A well-thought out concept of disarmament, either as a process or as a social condition, does not accompany any of these alternative future images.

Does it matter whether we can create mental constructs of a disarmed world or not? Is it not enough that we develop some sense of being in touch with ameliorative processes and then work ahead realistically with one-year, two-year and five-year plans? Is not this the way social "evolution" actually works? The answer to this question depends on one's reading of history.

The reading of history given by the Dutch sociologist Fred Polak, one of the first major twentieth century futurists, tells us that over the millennia those societies have flourished that have generated visions of something quite different than the immediately experienced reality. These visions have historically been subject to a process of social selection that leaves the field to certain images having a powerful capacity for social resonance. These images act as generators of social energy and actually draw societies toward their realization. In the macrohistorical Image of the Future, Polak shows how each great civilization of the past has been shaped by resonating images of the future that preceded it. In bringing us to the twentieth century, Polak pictures a decline in the West of that imaging capacity through the very realization of the potent images of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Planning, the socialist world's gift to this century, has squeezed out the visioning process and we are left with moment-ridden societies. It is nevertheless not too late, says Polak, to regain the visioning capacity by recognizing what we have lost and consciously cultivating it again.

We might well ask, why bother to reconstitute the visioning capacity if it is only to lead us anew to where Enlightenment visions have already brought us? A critique of past imaging indicates that the bulk of past images seem to present themselves in the language of conquest: conquest of nature, of territories, of people, of ideas. We have experienced a great deal of conquest imagery, in our learning of history, in the sequence of conquest empires rising in the lands bordering the Mediterranean and in Asian lands over the last five millennia, and more recently in Europe and the Americas. Any history book provides a wealth of materia
on kings and kingdoms, of wars of expansion, of technologies of resource utilization that accompanied them, and technologies of social organization that made the administration of new territories possible.

What if the last wave of conquest imaging that led to the industrial revolution should turn out to be an evolutionary dead end? Are all images of the future conquest images, or only some of them? Pessimists would say that we have two alternative dead ends ahead: destruction or decay. Hazel Henderson writes of the danger that the end-game of industrialism might be the condition of the entropy state, a society at the stage when complexity and interdependence have reached such unmanageable proportions that the transaction costs which are generated equal or exceed its productive capabilities. In a manner analogous to physical systems, the society winds down of its own weight and the proportion of its gross national product that must be spent in mediating conflicts, controlling crime, underwriting the social costs generated by the "externalities" of production and consumption, providing ever more comprehensive bureaucratic coordination, and generally trying to maintain "social homeostasis," begins to grow exponentially.10

Such a society must eventually peter out from exhaustion of all social and physical resources. Most of the ameliorative technologies produced to deal with contemporary American problems are thought likely to hasten the entropy state.

Yet many of us will intuitively reject the notion that industrialized societies are at a dead end. This intuitive rejection of the entropy state concept is based on something more profound than a denial of the problem of running out of fossil fuels. We have lived with concepts of progress and development and the power of specialization and differentiation for so long--they can't be simply erased. The intuition that there are human continuities that carry us through drastic changes is sound, and forms an important part of the critique of "futures thinking." It may be that the historical record can provide us with other sets of images of the future besides the conquest images, constructs that have retained some kind of cultural viability through the centuries of conquest and might provide a resource for visualizing futures that minimize violence, are more conserving of the planet, and offer higher levels of human welfare.

It is obviously impossible to provide a complete survey of non-conquest images of the future contained in the historical record in this paper. However, even a cursory glance at materials from antiquity reveals recurring images of human beings living peacefully together "in a garden." In this garden there is abundance, there is sharing, there is joy. The nomads of the Middle Eastern deserts, the Greeks who farmed the stony soil of Attica, and the Norse who farmed even stonier soil by the North Sea, all knew the image of the abundant and peaceful garden. Both nomads and settled folk had the image. Sometimes these images
are of a golden age in the past, sometimes they represent visions of a coming age or an after-life. What is interesting is that they all have in common an idea of human togetherness and sharing; fighting to kill or take captive is eliminated from the scene. One might label these legends cultural potentials for peaceableness. They are in various ways reflected in the ideal social order of each imaging society, in its laws, and in its treaties with other nations after wars. The fact that such images come from well-known warrior societies makes them all the more interesting. It is noteworthy that these images are describing warriors who have become androgynous beings, embodying the nurturant and the assertive traits of humanity.

Sacred Images of the Peaceable Garden

Spencer gives us the dream of universal peace of the ancient Romans in the passage "all loved virtue, no man was afraid of force...no war was known...peace universal reigned amongst men and beasts...." Before the Romans, the Greeks posited a place to which warriors sometimes found their way. Meneleaus, returning from the Trojan Wars, was told that the gods would take him to the Elysian fields where a "fresh singing breeze blows from the sea and renews the spirits of men." Aeneas, actually taken to these groves, "saw the founders of the Trojan State...and gazed with admiration on the war chariots and glittering arms now reposing in disuse...." The Norse knew of such a place, to be found at the center of the universe in the Plains of Ida. From its great hall, Valhalla, Odin sent women who had been earthly heroines to bring in fallen heroes from earth to a paradise of alternate feasting and fighting which represented a compromise scenario for the peaceable kingdom.

In Hindu mythology, replete with many warriors and battle scenes, Vishnu appears as Kalki at the end of the present age of the world to destroy all vice and wickedness, and restore mankind to virtue and purity. The theme of restoration of goodness on the earth is also the theme of ancient Jewish prophecies, "and they shall beat their swords into plowshares...." The Christian vision of the good place in Revelations centers around the river of life whose fruit and leaves were for the feeding and healing of nations. In the Islamic vision, God has recompensed his people with a garden. The delights of fountains, shade trees, soft breezes and abundant food change behavior such that "should an ugly word fall from someone's lips...the answer from the other shall be nought but 'peace, peace.'" The fact that all these images of the good place appear as gifts of the gods in diverse traditions, takes nothing from the significance of the fact that a non-militaristic welfare state was conceived as desirable in the intellectual imagination of antiquity.

Images of Peace in Statecraft

However, images of a just and peaceful social order are not confined to the religious domain, to the utterances of prophets and priests. In every age, there have been rulers and advisers to rulers who have seen as their secular task the creation of an envisioned social order in their own domains and beyond,
through the creation of just and peaceful relationships with the peoples around them. Less celebrated than the practitioners of Realpolitik throughout history, they have nevertheless made their mark on every century.

King Hammurabi, who ruled in Babylon from 1730 to 1685 B.C., issued a Code of Laws which stands as one of our earliest evidences of the responsibility of governments for a beneficent social order. Hammurabi described himself as one who caused "righteousness to appear in the land, . . . that the strong harm not the weak." King Hammurabi, who ruled in Babylon from 1730 to 1685 B.C., issued a Code of Laws which stands as one of our earliest evidences of the responsibility of governments for a beneficent social order. Hammurabi described himself as one who caused "righteousness to appear in the land, . . . that the strong harm not the weak." 19

Iknahton and Nephretite, who rules Egypt from 1375-7 to 1358-7 B.C., made the decision to withdraw their troops from their conquered lands, leaving only ambassadors to represent them. All the lands were given autonomy, Iknahton and Nephretite retaining only advisory control in a structure that was essentially a federation. The federation lasted until Iknahton's death. 20 From 776 to 168 B.C. the Greek City States made one effort after another to form leagues to control their own militarism, though they had little success.

Yet those struggles bore many fruits. Many centuries later, Aristotle purportedly conceptualized the world as a garden in which justice rules this world. 21 King Darius, who rules Persia from 522 to 486 B.C., had inscribed on his tombstone that "it is not my desire that the weak man should have wrong done to him by the mighty; nor. . . that the mighty should have wrong done to him by the weak." While the Greek City States sought to create order among themselves, and Darius sought to create order by conquest, China was undergoing a similar struggle. Out of the Chinese struggles came the writing of four great ancients: Lao-Tzu, Confucius, Mencius, and Mo-tsu, each of whom questioned the need or validity of violence and warfare. They looked beyond a simple acceptance of human conflict to theoretical principles and actual behaviors that would lead to a just and peaceful social order with shared abundance. Lao-Tzu in the sixth century B.C. warned against war as an instrument of social policy. 23 Mo-tsu in the fifth century B.C., recommended love as a political principle. 24

India also struggled with acute problems of social disorder in these centuries, and by the third century B.C. Emperor Asoka foreshowed the sword as an instrument for implementing the right. In his edicts he announced that all men were as his children, and he wished for all peoples the good and the happiness that he wished for his children; he valued neither gifts nor honor so much as "the promotion of spiritual strength among men of all religions." In abjuring conquest after his earlier military exploits, he announced that "conquest can be regarded as having been really no conquest at all because it was characterized by killing, death, or the captivity of the people." 26

The image of the world as a family, and of the relationships between states as ultimately resting on the mutual acceptance of familial responsibility among all human beings, is never totally absent from formulations about the human polity from the sixth century B.C. on. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius expressed it this way during his reign, from 121 to 80 B.C.:

-660-
If our intellectual part is common, the reason also, in respect of which we are rational beings, is common: if this is so, common also is the reason which commands us what to do, and what not to do; if this is so, there is a common law also; ... if this is so we are members of some political community; if this is so, the world is in a manner a state. For of what other common political community will any one say that the whole human race are members.

With the coming of Christianity the struggle to affirm world community and peaceableness in a world habituated to violence did not lessen. Many advocates of necessary violence and the just war have been found in both non-Christian and Christian societies from the very beginning of the new era up to this present time. By the second century Tertullian was sending men who would not serve in the army. By the fourth century St. Augustine's acceptance of "God's wars," and the "just war" based on analogies from the Old Testament set the pattern for the holy wars of the crusades, yet the voice of nonviolence was never wholly absent in the Christian church.

Islam, sharing the same holy book, the Old Testament, with the Jews and the Christians, experienced the same division over the role of war in establishing a just social order. The doctrine of the Jihad, the holy war, must be seen over against the many injunctions in the Koran to prefer for one's brother whatever one prefers for oneself; and to do good, not evil. The crusades brought out all the unresolved conflicts in the religious teachings of both Christianity and Islam, and showed the difficulty both of understanding visions embedded in other cultural formats, and of translating utopian images into human strategies.

Women, who in every society have had a special part to play in bridging the gap between ideal and reality in their role as childbearers and nurturers of families are rarely mentioned in chronicles of war. There were women's voices lifted among Moslems and Christians alike during the Crusades, however. The often hidden role of women during and after war can be discerned by the seeker of images of peace in the history of the queens of ancient Babylon and the royal women of the Holy Roman Empire. In Europe's Dark Ages, Christian queens tamed warlike kings and built a network of monastic centers of learning and healing that were to contribute substantially to the great cultural flowering of the later Middle Ages. Great peace queens arose in small European principalities during the religious wars that tore Europe apart in the sixteenth century. In North America in 1457, the Council of Matrons of the Iroquois accepted the task of nominating the Civil Chief of the newly founded Peace Confederacy of the Iroquois. The Constitution of the Five Nations committed the tribal leaders to casting their "weapons of strife" into the "depths of the earth," thus establishing peace among a united people. Each political effort to create a peaceful social order beyond the borders of the nation state floundered on the incapacity of existing institutions to produce the order visualized. Yet the concept of a new warless social order continued to evolve.
The images of peace in the ancient world were images generated within one culture, and based on that culture. Even the gentlest and most nonviolent of the images assumed the acceptance of a certain world view. And when the ancients used the term world, they knew very little of what they meant. They knew very little of the world in its geographic and cultural immensity. Even Cruce and Grotius who by the seventeenth century had begun to use the new information coming in from the increased contact with the Americas, Asia, and Africa, in their work of mentally constructing a peaceful world order, still visualized a world based on the model of the Christian nations of Western Europe.33

Europe was the center of the new "world club," and would simply invite all other nations into the club. The charter for that club was being built up gradually out of such major social achievements as the English Bill of Rights in 1689, the Virginia Bill of Rights in the new world in 1776, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789. It was constructed out of the various efforts to end the slave trade by the great powers from 1776 until 1890, at which time a sixteen-nation multilateral agreement to end slave trade was signed. The charter was built by way of interventions and treaties to protect minorities that evolved during various minority persecutions in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and by conventions about the treatment of the wounded beginning in 1864. Other nations were admitted to the public law of Europe, but it was still Europe's law.

The first major breach in the all-European character of the world club (by then including both Eastern and Western Europe) came in 1899 at the First Hague Peace Conference, with the participation of the ancient Asian states of China, Japan, Persia and Siam. At the Second Hague Peace Conference in 1907 Latin American republics began to play a part. With the founding of the League of Nations in 1919, Middle Eastern nations became active, including particularly Egypt and Iraq. At this point socialist images of the future began taking political shape in Eastern Europe, making visible long-ignored differentiations of economic-based class interests, as well as already acknowledged differentiation of cultural and religious interests. The next major breach came with the founding of the United Nations in 1945, which now has 219 units relating to the world organization as members or territories.

What has this brief historical survey demonstrated? That side by side with the conquest tradition, which in its western industrialized form has brought us face to face with the alternative possibilities of nuclear destruction or a petered-out entropy state, there is another set of traditions about the peaceable welfare state. Those traditions are in two forms: (1) sacred images of the good society and (2) political experiments on the part of visionary statesmen and stateswomen. The richness of both the visions and the experiments makes it
possible to utilize them as a resource in revitalizing the lagging creativity of our own futures—imagining in relation to a more peaceful and just society.

Social Welfare Professionals as Creators of Peaceable Futures

Demilitarization of an advanced technological society in a tightly interdependent militarized world presents problems at many different systems levels and cannot be separated from the demilitarization of the world as a whole. Yet the pressing need to decentralize, and to localize human production, distribution, support services and social defense, requires that we learn to think locally and globally at one and the same time. One of the most promising images of a peaceful future world to come out of the twentieth century, dealing directly with the challenge of global localism, is David Mitrany's Working Peace System. Parts of this vision of a series of functional global networks to provide for humanity's health, education and welfare needs were published as far back as the 1930s. His vision of service-oriented networks providing so effectively for human needs that states will wither away has always been treated as very naive politically. Nevertheless, we have witnessed in this century a tremendous growth in transnational nongovernmental networks, all of them providing human services and cultural enrichment of one kind or another. There are now roughly 3000 of these transnational networks where in 1900 there were only a couple of hundred of them.

At the national level, resource crunches will continue for all first world countries including the U.S., and some federally administered services may well begin to collapse in the next decade. Social workers will be in a unique position because of their rootedness in local communities and their membership in a large number of transnational nongovernmental networks, to begin experiments now with developing nonhierarchical communication channels inside these networks. Nongovernmental institutional structures are fairly rudimentary in the 1970s. To the extent that they are formalized they often tend, by default, to be traditional in organizational format. They are linked with the UN but are not administered by its agencies. Compared to governments, they have few vested interests to protect. Innovation now, while they are still fluid, will be more possible than later. As they come to be more heavily used they will become more heavily institutionalized. Local centers of these service networks will be able to link with local, cultural and ethnic separatist groups which are increasingly on all continents showing their desire to be disassociated from the nation state systems into which they have been more or less forcibly assimilated in recent centuries. Where terrorism and violence has not yet erupted, these support networks may provide alternative and nonviolent ways to accommodate desires for autonomy of these separatist groups. This will be true in much of Europe and the Americas, and parts of Africa and Asia. Where violence is already tearing apart an unwillingly "integrated" society, these networks offer the possibility of rebuilding local community independently of governmental assistance in the future.
Disarmament is not likely to be adopted as national policy by any major power in the near future. Increasing unwieldiness and ineffectiveness in both military and civilian governmental structures can be anticipated. Given the insecurity, fears, and economic uncertainties of both major and minor powers today, the U.S. included, the time is very ripe for the creation of a variety of images of a post-nationalist world based on a variety of nonviolent solutions to the problems of economic productivity, social defense and human welfare. The Mitrany image represents one possible future. The world order models of the Institute of World Order, using various combinations of Mitranian functionalist networks, transnational associations, UN agencies and other organizational innovations, provide others. They all have in common an emphasis on nonviolence and local autonomy.

The rate of social innovation in the late twentieth century is extraordinarily high, and has been little recorded as a macrophenomenon. Most of these innovations are byproducts of other problem-solving efforts, but may take on increasing importance in the twenty-first century. Take for example the peace-keeping forces of the UN, created on an ad hoc basis from crisis to crisis over the past twenty years, which now stand revealed through Charles Moskos' research as having produced a constabulary ethic and a nonviolent behavioral repertoire in a group of soldiers all trained for combat. The new behavior was produced in the field, independently of prior training, national, cultural or class background, or any other differentiating social variable. It is out of such discoveries that we will forge the less violent society of the twenty-first century.

The work of imaging new institutions and new futures must accompany experimentation with the possibilities of existing nongovernmental and intergovernmental networks, and the creation—where necessary—if new ones. These are the types of transition activities that will overcome the feelings of helplessness and social paralysis that are bound to accompany the decline in quality of governmental functioning for the rest of this century. These same activities will help to bring about new types of social order more suited to human needs and world resources in the twenty-first century.

Footnotes


3International Study Seminar sponsored by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and supported by UNESCO.


7A reading of the Ecologist, an English journal representing these same movements in a far more resource-depleted society than the United States, reveals the same lack of attention to the specifics of a disarmed world.

For a further discussion of this see Elise Boulding, "Futuristics and the Imaging Capacity of the West," in Human Futuristics ed. by Magoroh Maruyama and James A. Dator (Honolulu: Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawaii, 1971), pp. 29-53.


Macpherson, Four Stages of Man, p. 123.


Micah 5.


UNESCO, Birthright of Man, p. 115.

UNESCO, Birthright of Man, p. 27.


A study of the most recent *Yearbook of International Organizations* (Brussels: Union of International Associations, 1974) will give an idea of the scope of activities and services undertaken by these networks.
A very partial and incomplete listing of world separatist groups, collected as part of a long-term project to study separatist movements in all world regions, indicates 80 separatist organizations in 37 countries that have stayed nonviolent, and 56 separatist groups in 28 countries that now use terrorism (Elise Boulding, research in progress, 1976). Many of these groups span a number of national borders, and many have support networks around the world of non-ethnics who contribute financially to their work.