

THE THIRD WORLD WAR

BY D. ARMSTRONG

The Third World War
Is happening now
Don't you hear the steady din of violence
At the edges of our town
The silent abuse of poverty
Screaming to get out
A state of war
Is upon us
We see it in the streets
We live it in our home
It courses in our veins
It swells within our mind
It pains us in our groin
It haunts us all the time

The battle lines are instinctively drawn across the center of every stage -- our world, our nations, our cities, our families, our minds, our souls. Battalions of irregulars everywhere stand out against the shadows. Tiny bands of paranoid being loosely joined by the necessity of survival strut the night to an impossibly brash cadence... *You are on a dark city street stopped at a traffic light. Now look slowly over at the driver in the car next to you. Slowly. Don't let it show. What do you think about the teenager in that car? Is he carrying a gun? When he gives you the finger, do you ignore it? Or do you dare to shake a fist at his skinny ass? He might shoot you for less. Do you have a gun? Is your hat on backwards? Do tattoos hide your skin color. What race are you anyway? What side are you on? And for heaven's sake, don't take your time deciding...* Appreciate that the Third World War rages upon us now like an invisible fire. Christ, our Earth must blaze like the sun to all other by-standing consciousness. Suit up in camey when you hit the streets today. That's the name of the game. We're all double agents for the Nova Police now.

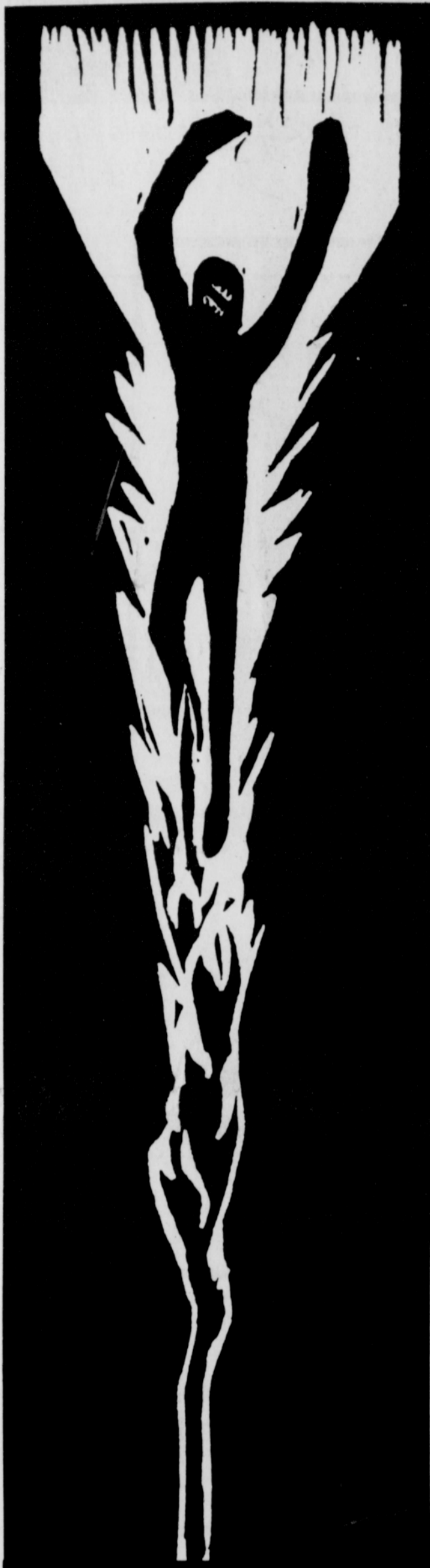
That's right. This is a different kind of war. It's disguised, and for the most part it's unrecognized and unlabeled. Still, the entire globe has been subjected to a chameleoned war-zone. Upon the fringe of monied culture everywhere, those with and those without are enemies. The violence is in the streets. Abuse in the home. Biocide. Racism. Sexism. Drugism. Terrorism. Informationalism. These are all part of this new kind of war. It eats at you from the inside out. It is waged in your very mind. It lives in you consciousness whether you know it or not. It is there. It is the paranoia and anger symptomatic of a society dangerously stratified economically and psychically. It is the image of poverty and death that the fortunate see in the news and the unfortunate live day to day. It is the necessity for such a concept as sexual preference. It is an inherent part of the modern mind. What side are you on? What gender? What race? Whose colors did you wear today?

Anywhere you are. No matter what you are doing. This war is ongoing. It could suddenly explode through your door this very moment or play on and on invisibly while you watch prime-time situation comedies on your television set. That's what it's become. A giant, cosmic situation comedy. The sirens. The music. The look. The darting eyes. The hip. The unhip. The battle simmers perpetually. Boils over periodically. And remains undefined, uncatalogued, and unknown. Denied. *Damn the torpedoes, mates. Keep your wits about you. Dive, dive, dive.*

The Third World War is a provision of awareness. It is the nature of our beast. Yes, it is a subtle and unobtrusive living thing. It bleeds in the streets and breeds in our minds. A cerebral herpes erupting time and time again when internal stresses cause overload, when anger and anxiety frustrate into bullets or bombs. It is a poison and antidote all in one. It is the whole in the piece. The holistic in parts. It is the individual's microbeing, mirroring the state of the macrocosm world. (What's that smell, O.J.?) WAR. WAR. WAR.

Information is the insulation and the shield for those that have. It is the weapon and the poison against those that don't. On one side of this invisible, partially perforated barrier is your living room bathed in the fine luminescence of a cathode ray tube. On the other side pulses the active, bleeding warzone. Here the peoples of Third World nations experience overpopulation, hunger and poverty unimaginable to those who bicker over the remote. The Third World has been systematically shackled to these conditions by the First World's program of indebtedness finance management. Uh, what's that? Making money with money. On a computer! Beautiful concept. Seems like the Nazis threw the moeychangers out of the temple a long time ago. Some act to follow. But don't worry, the balance plays out. There's no getting out of the warzone. The struggle wages in the streets of urban ghettos in every great city in the free world -- the boiling hotspots of poverty -- where the weapons and spoils for and against are the same -- where the toxins (crack, heroin, cocaine, amphetamines) leak back and forth across the graffiti-ed demilitarized zone through the exchange of guns, needles and lives. The children of those "that have" are held hostage by those "that haven't" who are held hostage by those "that have" for what they have. This is the way it is.

Do the ovens of Auschwitz compare at all with the sacrileges perpetrated against the Native Americans for the last five hundred years? Talk about holocaust. How many tribes and nations of entire peoples were wiped out? Traded like a handful of beads for this black invisible war. Whether committed by Cortez, Hitler or Custer -- in Watts, My Lai or Astoria -- these crimes against humankind live eternally in the societal mind. We become victim to our own victimizing. This is the way it is.



ANDY NELSON

We are killing ourselves. The war on drugs is really a war with drugs. An attack at the very interface of our culture. Invisible bars encircle the embattled Third World blemishes within the cities of the First World. Young blacks and latinos become enslaved to ghetto life by the alluring drug culture that tempts like a way out. Invisible prison cells spring up around whites born to opportunity. Suddenly they are prisoners of war. All free but bound.

Homosexuals live a secret war. They are the triple agents. Jekyll and Hyde and hide again. Then there are the heterosexuals entrapped by personal phobias and clandestine viruses. Gone neurotic about bodily secretions wrapped in latex to be dropped in canisters like radioactive waste. Social conflict smokes in the restaurants and lounges all around the world. Did he touch that? Did you spit on me? Can I sit on that? Is he or isn't she?

And what of the private horrors of strange codependencies? The psycho/chemical warfare of personalities -- abuser and abusee? This is also part of the Third World War. The incestual, the violent, the abusive twists of convoluted human dynamics. Psychic stratification and dismemberment.

Stir in the steady poisoning of Mother our Earth, the war of (hu)man against nature. The overloaded dumpsites. The barges of refuse shipped from port to port. The hot potato trainloads of atomic byproducts jockeyed back and forth around the world with no place to go but from one place to another. The chemicals in the food. The chemicals in the farmland. The chemicals in the wild animals. The chemicals in the trees, in the air, in the water. The carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide, the sulfates, the nitrates, the nonstop exhaust of a society on wheels. What happens when China finally goes to the maul? Can our atmosphere handle 200 million more BMWs? Who's going to tell the Chinese it's too late for them to have cars?

What about the molecular battle of organic versus inorganic versus the mutated? Here we have the bacterial outbreaks, the microorganisms straining to exist in the new toxic environments. The epidemics of diseases that no one heard of last year but have become household words today. AIDS, Ebola, ecoli, and viruses yet-unnamed carried around the world in a sneeze. This is part of the Third World War too!

And of course there are also the inevitable, visible wars. The action we recognize as wars, the firing of guns by uniformed peacekeepers against generic rebels, the strategic bombing, the

overhead scream of jets, the mysterious stealth bombers, black helicopters, and who knows what else we are yet to be deceived about. It's happening in Bosnia, Burma, Angola, Tibet, and probably scores of other places. And this doesn't even touch the darkest cancer of this infernal war. Random terrorism means the sky can fall anywhere at anytime. LOOK OUT! HERE COMES SOME NOW!

On one side of the information barrier are the semi-fortunate. Those living in the propagandized paradise of mis-information and distraction. Those that watch the Third World War on television every night and cannot name what it is. Those who actively engage in the warfare by buying products that have been strangled out of nations strapped to austerity programs and labor conditions we wouldn't press on a dog. Shoes that enable you to fly on one side of the information barrier are the anchors and bonds for yellow people impressed for life in a factory hot house on the other side.

Information. A superhighway to some. The clash of media bias to others. Mind control to others yet. But surely nothing less than the dazzling glitz of the computer age in full swing. ROM this, RAM that. The information net ensnares us with an imaginary need to know -- to know a lot of nothing. The labyrinth of chips and flashing pixels and sexy software turns information into cerebral pollution and screens the screams of the warzone horror going on all the time out there on the other side. The Third World War is information as entertainment while more than half the globe is illiterate. The business as usual is dumber up the masses like packs of drunken chimpanzees (no offense to the apes). The police shows -- live and dramatized. TV sleuthing. Game shows. Huckstering commercials. Video games. Junk, junk, and more junk to camouflage the quiet war of espionage shadowing our personal information. The intelligence community's banks of secret computer files. The telephone surveillance systems. The invasion of privacy through credit ratings, bank accounts, and health records. The ghostlike impinging of pseudo-realities upon pseudo-realities upon whatever reality might be.

WHATEVER REALITY MIGHT ACTUALLY BE! That is the question that dogs the semi-fortunate as the war erupts between his ears. Where on one side of the barrier the war is the empty plate or the son gunned down in the street or the dirty syringe on the sidewalk, on the other side it is the press of dangerous ideas, the invasion of alien awareness, the consciousness that all is not right at home-sweet-home. The paranoia for the children. The worries of guns and drugs in the schoolyard. The sudden explosive frustration of postal clerks. The telltale pendulum of time and the environment. The denial of concern. The denial of this crazy war. The psychic pollution pressing itself into the collective unconscious and resurrecting itself in twisted dreams of world peace and clean air and cheap sunglasses. WAKE UP!

The Third World War is a life and death struggle for those that don't have, and a struggle of the mind, a war against neurosis, for those that do. There is peace for no one today. A war inside and out rages like a global hurricane upon our earth. The war of humankind is wrapped by its own thorns. There is no sequestered island. There is no private sector. There is no financial freedom. There is no hiding from our own insidiously petty nature.

(For a moment I turn from this writing and look out the window at the falling day. The sun sets in the distance. The sky is deepening to azure with the press of night. Here and there are the brilliant oranges and somber purples of trailing clouds. Life is spectacular in its simplest act. And we seem bent on defiling it. What are we doing? What have we done? No, man cannot write a poem lovely as a tree. But he can build a jet to break the sound barrier and split the atom and print the Bible and ten thousand other titles on a microchip the size of a mustard seed. But he still hasn't got the sense to not piss in his own bed. Even a dog knows better than to shit in his own backyard!)

What curse has taken humankind? In our hands is the power of the ages. Some ten thousand years of man's civilization. We should have no trouble feeding, housing and caring for everyone on this planet. We could return this cinder to Paradise. Every conceivable grace of culture that we have acquired could be shared. The horn of plenty could download on each and every living being. We could live with complete compassion for animals, plants, insects and bacterial life forms we can't see without optical enhancement. Instead, resources are meted out from the select few monied land barons of this earth. We live in feudal times. Civilized man has always lived in this way. It is low. It is wrong by any values but those of greed. This changes not over the entire course of history from pyramids to rocket ships to computer chips. The dominant theme in human civilization is greed. Or at least, due to the nature of greed, greed always wins out. Victory in the Third World War has been reduced or uplifted to the individual's discovery of the thing within him. Living in the grace of the clear spirit needs become our acquired attitude. We are smart enough and aware enough to enact this as our willful choice upon ourselves. Yes, we are capable of complete spiritual transcendence...and still some feudal lord owns our planet and dares to control our minds.

(I look again out my window. Black night presides. A thousand stars flicker overhead. A thin crescent moon sits off to the west. The suggestion of profundity comforts me. A tear wells in each of my eyes for the struggle that humankind inflicts upon itself. Why must we live in a state of constant war?)

Dan Armstrong lives in Astoria. He writes, "The 3rd World War is intended as the third part in a trilogy, the first two parts that (the NCTE has) already used *Renting the Garment of Freedom*, June/July '95 & *When the Fringe Becomes the Center*, Aug/Sept '95). I don't really know what to make of this piece. It started out as a poem as I wrote it, but it wiggled its way into prose. In no other way can I describe it. Fact of fiction. I don't know."



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