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Three images by Angus Boulton



Figure 1. *Firing Range, Forst Zinna, 22.7.99.*



Figure 2. *Krampnitz I, 9.12.98.*

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Figure 3. *Bunker Entrance, Altes Lager, 10.4.03.*

As a source for all of the images under discussion, please visit: {www.angus-boulton.net}.

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Grounded

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Every year Berlin and its environs yield a thousand or so corpses from 1945, soldiers from the ferocious fighting on the Seelow Heights, in the city, and among the stands of pine to the south.[1] '[I]n a place like Berlin and its hinterland, where the marks of the history of twentieth-century violence are evident to anyone who has eyes to see, myths of progress lose all their credibility.'[2] Angus Boulton's photos are from another war, a so-called Cold War. The remains of bodies emerging from the ground and the haunting buildings decaying in Boulton's images serve as reminders that international relations, such as those termed 'war', happen *somewhere*, and that in happening they remake (and unmake) places and people. Yet theories of IR are curiously groundless, composed of concepts pitched into abstract space. Where exactly are we to *find* 'anarchy' or the 'security dilemma', for

* Thanks to Shane Brighton, Asli Calkivik, Martin Coward, Devon Curtis, Charles Jones and Debbie Lisle for comments and suggestions.

[1] Antony Beevor, *Berlin: The Downfall 1945* (Viking: London, 2002), p. 431.

[2] Hans Joas, *War and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 11.

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example, much less 'the international system' or even the 'Cold War'. This abstraction seeps from the rusted iron and broken floorboards of these Cold War installations, figures of something called deterrence, or the balance of forces in Europe. These concepts, or similar ones, participated in placing soldiers *there* in those spaces and buildings and others like them. It is worth reflecting for a moment on the curious relations between theory, practice, and the *ground* they remake in these two very different sorts of war layered in the earth around Berlin.

The intimacy with which soldiers know their ground is perhaps unrivalled. Construction crews, or lovers picnicking in a forest, happen upon the remains of men at one with the soil into which they bled out, clutching the muck in their death throes. These same men dug bunkers, weapons pits, trenches, and laid wire; dirt and sweat, soil and blood, not as nationalist metaphor but as gritty experience. Their implements of war transformed the landscape, from rolling barrages to tank treads, from air strikes to mine fields. And the landscape remembered. The bustle of a rebuilt city does not hide the neat arc of 20mm rounds that peppered a church or block of flats in some forgotten engagement, nor does a verdant carpet, lolling over old shell holes, veil what happened there, bodies torn and pierced, sinking into broken ground, returning metal and flesh to earth.

This one war, the Second World War, the 'good war' for American popular culture as for liberal international relations thinking, seems so real and vital to us, its traces everywhere; that other war, the Cold War, ethereal, not really a war at all. It's not just that Boulton captures 'ghost' installations, in the sense of no longer in use, ruins, but that even in their active lives they were only for show, for demonstration effect in a war that, seemingly, was not fought *anywhere*.

The route to abstraction, where we scholars live, is evident already among officers surveying ground on which they intend to fight. They interpret it in terms of lines of sight, reverse slopes, and fields of fire. Their calling requires translating sensuous experience into a theoretic system, an opaque shroud laid over the ground, where they see, for example, a contour line from a map rather than the irregular rise of a hill. Theory and its concepts *necessitate* taking as prior, as more real, some abstract system rather than that which is evident to the senses. Only then can abstractions come to guide thought and action, for infantry officers as for scholars, statespersons and their advisors.

So it is that in war, as in other dimensions of international relations, theory and practice remake the world and leave traces on the ground. Some years later, on that same ground that the Red Army and the *Wehrmacht* conducted their final vicious duel, ceaseless training for a war never fought – at least in Europe – would transform the ground once again, leaving behind these ghostly installations. For some, those images may evoke nostalgia, for a time when battle lines were clearly drawn, for a time when there were clear targets – like that Soviet bunker – even if they were only ever struck virtually in war games that happened elsewhere. Longing for simpler times is evident too in the discourse of IR, where the world and its histories are carved up in anodyne concepts like 'Cold War'. But Boulton's images remind us that this Cold War *happened*, and that it happened *somewhere*. But where? Was it on the inter-German border? On firing ranges used by Group Soviet Forces Germany or the *Nationale Volksarmee* (NPA)?[3] Or did it occur there, on that

[3] National People's Army, the armed forces of the German Democratic Republic.

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basketball court? The image of the Cold War in IR achieves an effortless clarity by obfuscating that which it refers to; Boulton's images disrupt this clarity and force a confrontation with the concrete histories we elide and evade in naming the conflict 'cold', the very histories which required an act of naming in the first place.

Walter Lippmann's oxymoronic label for an era was relentlessly Eurocentric, for just about the only places the conflict could be considered 'cold' were in Europe and the homelands of the superpowers. Everywhere else was on the boil, tens of millions perished violently, people and places unmade and made over by force. Death squads roamed through villages and universities, priests and advocates for the poor holed with twelve-gauge shot. Elsewhere they were thrown into the sea from helicopters, while others were tortured and the people massacred with advice and support. The United States Air Force unleashed its murderous flocks on Asian peasantries, cooking them with napalm, blasting them with high explosive, strafing them with cannon, and contaminating their unborn children and their lands with Agent Orange. Out at sea, great ships of war – one of them today resting gently on the Thames, a tourist attraction – hammered those same peasants with their big guns. Back in Boulton's installations, Red Army officers and other ranks returned from Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mozambique or Afghanistan, among other hot places, to enjoy a 'peacetime' garrison posting, while the many veterans of the *Wehrmacht* serving in the NPA would have had few illusions about the differences between hot and cold wars. Some of them fought on the Seelow heights, counting as comrades those in the ground around Berlin. Meanwhile, even where the guns stayed silent, in homelands East and West, waves of persecution surged through families and societies, shaping politics, ruining livelihoods and confining bodies and minds.

That nostalgia those of us of certain generations may feel for those times is an *abomination*, an abomination reproduced every instance – and there are so many – in which that term 'Cold War' is used, rolling off our lips in lecture theatres or tapped out on keyboards as here. The term conjures a war that *didn't* happen, not the many that happened under its auspices. A war that didn't happen also didn't happen anywhere in particular. If it is to be located anywhere, it is found in our textbooks, in archives of state, and in the minds of nuclear strategists and other advisors to the prince. Such abstraction regularly refracts our vision from *where* the Cold War happened, and to *whom* it happened.

Here, photographs inspired words intended to evoke images, provoking the question of IR's abstractions in relation to the concrete experiences and histories that make up the world it seeks to comprehend. These abstractions participate in the making of international relations, of that concrete experience so destructive for peoples and places.

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Allure and ambivalence

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The Kantian sublime is a peculiarly contradictory aesthetic category. Aesthetics denotes 'an effort to make sense of sense' by way of the cultivation and analysis of affect, passion, imagination, and perception, an effort in which 'taste' is at once 'corporeal *sense*' or sensation and 'aesthetic *judgment*'; the aesthetic, that is to say, is always already about *body-feeling-thinking* circuits.[1] The sublime, for Kant, marks a disturbing limit-experience: it refuses to give itself to the senses, *stunning* and numbing the body instead. It exceeds comprehension, and can only be recuperable through distance, the reimposition of rational control (which is precisely *not*, for Kant at least, bodily judgment).[2] But the strange and layered seduction of Angus Boulton's images of decaying Cold War military bases in the former German Democratic Republic lies not in the sublime but in the *spectral*. A darkly gentle aesthetic unfolds in these images, a kind of necro-erotic spectrality that takes as its very object the awesome machineries that were implicated in the production of the sublime violence and fear of the twentieth century, laying bits of those machineries before the spectator, bare, delicately exposed.

The allure of these images inheres, it strikes me, in the ways in which, in the exposition of some of the abandoned, not-yet-recolonised, detritus of the Cold War, the spectator can see and touch and sense and know more fully, precisely *as* dead, *as* detritus, than we ever could apprehend when the bases were alive. Through his lens, Boulton shapes a perspective whereby the spectator experiences the sensuousness of the visual, its tactility and broken, rotted floorboards, its tangibility and organic-metallic composites (almost like a child from a fairy tale, lost in the forest which always holds mysteries, dangers, allures; especially in 'Bunker Entrance, Altes Lager,10/04/03'). The images are not violent, but patient and thorough and redolent. Distance expands and contracts; but the sense of approaching something somehow forbidden is enhanced by a certain distance always being maintained. These images elicit a peculiar sense of transgression, as the vastness of the Cold War itself is elliptically given up for sense and senses to grapple with.

Dead places are often haunted. Imagination accompanies, affective loops rebound, and the resonances and echoes of the absent, what Boulton calls the 'trace of human presence,' tugs.[3] Approaching the firing range through the sand, gun-fire echoes, a sharp silence, intermittent, but persistent, affectively interrupts the surface of the image, (see 'Firing Range, Forst Zinna, 22.7.99'). Through the

* My thanks are due, as always, to my brother John McManus, whose keen insight always pushes me further; and to Debbie Lisle for her incisive comments, questions, and encouragement.

[1] Victoria Kahn and Neil Saccamano, 'Introduction', in Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano and Daniela Coli (eds), *Politics and The Passions, 1500–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) p. 4.

[2] For the Kantian sublime, see *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000). On the deployment of the sublime in international studies, see especially the Special Issue of *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 34:3 (2006): Between Fear and Wonder: International Politics, Representation, and 'the Sublime'.

[3] {http://www.angusboulton.net} accessed 17 February 2008.

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fracture: a negative exposure from imagination; mediated images flash, disappear, known from years of war movies (the crack, the twist, the jerk, the slow-motion fall of bodies). Approaching the bunker entrance, the gate appears suspended, a metallic aspect of the forest itself. Again, absence tugs, imagination imposes: would it have crackled with enough electricity to kill at a touch out of place? (And what's underneath, beyond the camera's perceptive apparatus?) But now (like the tree of iron that burns in the woods in Lantern Waste) the Bunker Entrance animates organic matter as a spectre that is at once at home, yet vividly out of joint.[4] What is dead and past *does* endure; the composition of images makes the superimposition of past and present tangible to perception, as one lives on in the other.

Affective allure also works through incongruity. Metal dissolves into the organic, the organic sharpens to metal; the firing range amidst the sandy dunes, where sparse trees offer meagre shade; and, inside the military installation that produced, and (not losing the specificity of the GDR) was itself produced by fear and violence, a basketball hoop – ('Krampnitz I, 9.12.98'). Perhaps this incongruity allows a different kind of spectre to crystallise; at the very least, the Gymnasia shifts tone, from *touching* the exposed, now dead, sublime, to *decoding* its composition. Behind the sublime is a machinery, and a basketball hoop (whether as a way of fighting the cold war by fighting boredom among soldiers, or as a way of fighting the cold war by maintaining fitness, or by fighting the cold war by, what, parodying, perhaps? the game of the enemy); a basketball hoop is a part of that machinery. Incongruity here reveals not opposition, but the contiguity of the sublime to the boring. How could the awesomely, powerfully, overwhelming be maintained without the inscription of the sublimely boring in the minutiae of everyday life?[5]

As I make an effort to make sense of these images, it strikes me that Boulton helps us refuse the moment of mastery so often associated with the sublime, especially as regards the representation of war, violence, and politics (the sublime 'invite[s] its own dissolution,' invites, that is, the attempt to yoke the stunning and incomprehensible back into the dominant categories of political order).[6] He does so by way of an absorbing expository strategy that turns back, confronts and surprises, its initial allure to *decode* the machineries that at once are the product of, and produce, circulations of violence; he resists mastery, that is, by the refusal

[4] The image of the lamp-post curiously planted in the woods, and happened upon by the inquisitive and brave little girl, Lucy, is from *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis. It is, as Jacques Derrida argues, temporal 'out of joint-ness' that makes it possible for spectres to emerge. See, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[5] Rather than thinking about the ways in which the sublime, the tragic and the epic are opposed to the everyday, the mundane and the banal, I am interested in figuring out the ways in which one is composed of, or inhabited by, the other. On this, see Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), especially on 'stuplimity': 'while the Kantian sublime stages a competition between opposing affects, in which one ['tranquility'] eventually supersedes and *replaces* the other [for example, fear] … stuplimity is a tension that holds opposing affects together,' p. 271. The micro-physics of power imagery here is obviously indebted to Michel Foucault.

[6] Roland Bleiker and Martin Leet, 'From the Sublime to the Subliminal: Fear, Awe and Wonder in International Politics', in, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 34:3 (2006), pp. 713–37, p. 714. I would argue that affective ambivalence can be pushed much further that suggested here.

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to inscribe, however obliquely, a newly ordered reality.[7] His images inhabit the disjunctive untimeliness that allows our vexed and violent present to touch and mutually inhabit a (differently?) violent past. And here, after allure, ambivalence.

Ambivalence: decoding the ostensible sublime, rendering it *sensible* (but does sensible as *sensate* mean sensible as *reasonable*, manageable)? These images evoke mixed temporalities in mixed times. As Atwood writes, 'I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time, but down through it, like water [. . .] Nothing goes away'.[8] What happens, what crystallises, in the conjuncture of Boulton's images? The conjuncture is of a specific Cold War moment and a Now that is also shaped by sublime fear: a counter/terror that stuns, and that refuses a recuperative moment in the form of a Kantian political solution – *Perpetual Peace* – to a Kantian aesthetic problem – the sublime. Counter/terror, that is to say, is also future-bearing, and is shaping a stratum of possibilities that cannot be contained or controlled by Kantian geopolitical architecture.[9]

Ghosts (like art) are ambivalent; both touch and seduce and disturb without control over the effect of their affect. But, as Walter Benjamin knew, spectral power fluctuates, wanes, and is manifest only in 'moments of danger' – those moments when the 'immanent reality crying out to be brought into being' is profoundly contested; moments like this one.[10] For utopians, even materialist, immanent ones such as Ernst Bloch, untimeliness is productive: 'unbecome future becomes visible in the past, avenged and inherited, mediated and fulfilled past in the future.'[11] But I'm not so sure, and neither, I think, are these images. I don't know, finally, what the ghosts said; were they co-opted, complicit, scared? Or, ideologues, utopians, subversives? What of today's military installations that seek to secure a global order that *Perpetual Peace* can no longer comprehend never mind apprehend? Whose ghosts will echo through Guantanamo? Whose echoes will resonate in detention and rendition sites throughout the globe? Who will be disturbed by those echoes? And who will patiently, thoroughly, and hauntingly mark their traces?

[7] In my interpretation, that is, Boulton, like Walter Benjamin, refuses both progress and regression in the interpretation of the present, 'post-cold-war' moment; the cold war prehistory has been neither rejected nor recuperated, but still needs careful analysis.

[8] Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eyes* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 3.

[9] The possibilities as well as the dangers come from the ways in which the emergent exceeds the categories by which geopolitics is conventionally understood: inside/outside, self/other, native/alien. Securitization, a global war for hegemony, as a response to 'sublime' terror is a recuperative moment that tries to assert mastery over the incomprehensibly other. What happens if one tries to think counter/terror without recourse to answers that can only be inadequate and violent? We have to learn to respond to ghosts.

[10] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992). Thesis VI continues: '*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.' The second quotation is from Raoul Vanegeim, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, translated by Donald Nicolson Smith (London: Rebel, 1983), p. 233. But see also Derrida's *Specters of Marx*: ghosts are not always the subversive ones; spectrality is more complicated than Vanegeim allows for. Finally, of course the texture and complexity of all historical moments shapes crisis points such as ours, averts or intensifies them.

[11] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* Vol. 1, translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 9.

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Weighing heavily in-between

ANGHARAD CLOSS STEPHENS

The three photographs selected here form part of Angus Boulton's study of abandoned Cold War sites in Berlin, and military bases relinquished after the fall of the Berlin wall and collapse of the GDR. Both the ВОИН and the 41 Gymnasia projects offer a series of reflections on the relationship between art and politics, presence and absence. On his website, Boulton notes that his work forms a 'visual representation of particular situations, spaces and locations': but if space is a product 'filled with ideologies', as Lefebvre put it, then Boulton shows us spaces with their ideologies extracted.[1] Boulton says that if there is a persistent theme in his photographs, it is 'the trace of human presence': people, human relationships, bodies and faces are all absent from these photographs, and yet, they somehow infuse them.

Walter Benjamin argued that the work of art takes on a new sense of meaning in the age of mechanical reproduction.[2] With the advent of photography, sound recording and film, when a photograph, piece of music or moving image is reproduced in massive quantities and at immediate speed, the idea of an authentic or original work of art is 'liquidated'. The work of art becomes disconnected from its 'aura' or original identity. In consequence, the task of the critic is not to look for the 'origin' of the work of art or to dissect its original meaning: it is rather to understand the work of art in its process of becoming. In the photograph, the 'original' moment is always already past. Boulton's photographs engage with this notion of the 'afterlife' that so captivated Benjamin.

Rather than try and capture a picture of power, a place or moment in time (if such a task is indeed possible), Boulton's photographs explore the trace of what has been. His photographs of the 'Bunker Entrance, at Altes Lager, 10.04.03' and the 'Firing Range, at Forst Zinna, 22.7.99' are not attempts to capture a political order that has passed. Similarly, the empty gymnasium seen in 'Krampnitz I, 9.12.98' is not offered as a nostalgic meditation on loss. Rather, these photographs carve open a space for reflecting on this relationship between what was and what now is, between what used to fill these spaces and how they could be filled again.

The dominant way of reading the relationship between art and politics continues to rely on a preoccupation with origins (and meaning).[3] In questioning

[1] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. David Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

[2] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Hannah Arendt (ed. and intro.) *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

[3] 'As a specific type of entity, images are the object of a twofold question: the question of their origin (and consequently their truth content) and the question of their end or purpose, the uses they are put to and the effects they result in.' Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 20. It was Michael J. Shapiro's article, 'The Sublime Today: Re-Partitioning the Global Sensible', in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Special Issue: Between Fear and Wonder: International Politics, Representation and 'the Sublime', 34:3 (2006), pp. 657–82. that led me to the engagement with Rancière. For interesting reflections on the practices of inclusion and exclusion in modern politics, discussed using Rancière's works, see Prem Kumar Rajaram, 'Locating Political Space Through Time' in C. Grundy-Warr & P Kumar Rajaram (eds),

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the origins or ends of a work of art, we already assume a particular relationship between art, politics, time and the community. This approach presupposes a particular community that provides, responds to or receives the work of art. The community can disparage or acclaim the origin (as the product of genius, or as in/authentic), or question the ends of the work of art (such as we find in the quagmire of elitist vs. public art debates). These approaches revolve around an endless return to origin, and as a result, are confined to a limited vocabulary for reflecting on the relationship between art and politics. However, Jacques Rancière writes that we can think of the relationship between art, politics, time and community differently. Rather than raise the question of the relationship between art and politics after our commonality has been established, once we've already agreed what we take politics to be, the question might be raised as an intervention in the politics of origins. I want to suggest that Boulton's photographs address this question of the politics of origins.

To understand the modality of this argument, we must first of all appreciate what Rancière means by politics. Rancière understands politics in relation to what he calls 'the distribution of the sensible'.[4] The distribution of the sensible refers to the establishment of some sense of commonality between members of the community and to the distribution of exclusive parts. Political community is based on the sum of its parts and this sharing out of parts involves an allocation of spaces, times and forms of activity 'that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.'[5] However, this distribution of the sensible is preceded by another form of distribution: the one that establishes who will get to decide what is common to the community. Rancière describes this prior determination as the 'aesthetics' at the 'core of the community'.[6] This aesthetics involves establishing the modes, terms and forms of participating in the common community:

> Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time.[7]

These modes, terms and forms are necessarily contingent and open to challenge. The task of establishing the community will therefore also involve marking its limits. These are the exclusions that precede the possibility of lending ourselves to participation.

What Rancière is saying then, I believe, is that we may raise the question of the relationship between art and politics at the foundational level of how we should build and organise a political community: at 'the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization.'[8] This is the site at which the question of the relationship between art

Borderscapes. Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). Borderlines Vol. 29.

[4] Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*.
[5] Ibid., p. 12.
[6] Ibid., p. 13.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid. p. 18.

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and politics becomes most interesting. Boulton's photographs engage this question of the 'aesthetics' at the core of community by circling the multiple 'properties of space and the possibilities of time'.

Boulton's photographs can be understood as interventions in the question of origins precisely because they dwell at the interface between absence and presence, death and community. Yet, crucially, the relationship between these categories is not understood according to the logic of longing or progress: there is no aim to get from one state to another along an arrow of time. Instead, these photographs weigh heavily in-between. In this, they disturb the 'homogenous empty time' that Walter Benjamin described as infusing the community of unity. They pose the possibility of other temporalities. They provoke questions about what other forms of community could have been possible and what alternative forms of organising political life might be uncovered in the trace of human presence.

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Remember the Cold War?

MAJA ZEHFUSS

Angus Boulton's photographs remind us of the Cold War by showing us a very particular set of its remnants: an abandoned bunker entrance; a firing range; and a gymnasium. These pictures are from a larger body of work: photos taken on abandoned military bases in Germany. Other photos show officers' cottages, a cinema, a kindergarten and so on. They show the military bases not primarily as explicit sites of violence, but as places of ordinary life. Yet in these pictures the bases are all abandoned. Derelict. There is paint peeling off the walls. What we are seeing are the ruins of the Cold War, the abandoned military installations that were closed to us – and therefore invisible – when people – the Soviet military – were still there, using them. These pictures throw an unusual light on the Cold War. They show us some of the remaining, decaying military geography of this conflict.

I come to these pictures from a particular angle. I know this landscape: this is the architecture that marked the division of the Germany of my youth. We in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) of course did not see the bases in Boulton's pictures then; they were located within the territory of the German Democratic Republic (GDR): off limits not just as military bases always are, but also on the other side of the closed border. Yet we certainly saw other aspects of the military geography: the border installations, the no-man's land, the watchtowers. We saw the signs in Berlin warning us where we were about to leave the American, British or French sector, those stark reminders of the FRG's incomplete sovereignty. We saw the Western Allies' military convoys on the Autobahnen. And we saw *their* barracks and bases. This military geography of the Cold War might have blended in because it was so much part of our lives then. We might actually have failed to really see it at the time, but it was never invisible. It was there, right in our face.

Boulton's pictures of these military bases are bleak. Perhaps this is because there are no people anywhere in them. Gymnasia should be full of people. Of

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course, at times no one might be free for a game of basketball, but in these pictures the military bases are entirely emptied of people. No one is practising at the firing range. The bunker entrance is really a gate in the woods that has no function any more. There is no one around. In these photos, the Cold War has been abandoned and with it its military installations, which are therefore falling apart. Decay is not exactly a pleasant sight, though it may at times have a strange beauty. But there is something else. The complete emptiness, the decay, the peeling wall paint in the gym: they seem to invoke the time when the paint was still intact and happy, healthy young people were using the basketball hoop, when children were playing in the kindergarten – and when the bunker was still in use. That is, the photos that picture the abandoned spaces of ordinary life seem to suggest the passing of a better time, a mourning, if you will, for a lost past. And this perhaps is the root of my unease when I look at these photographs. I cannot help the feeling that they express a nostalgia, a nostalgia for the time when there was life in these gyms and cinemas. But then there was also activity on the firing range and the bunker had a purpose. Boulton's pictures do not hide this function of the military base, and yet the absence of human life seems most noticeable in the spaces of ordinary life. It is their emptiness and decay that may make us not only imagine the time when they were in use but regret its passing.

This air of nostalgia makes me uneasy. It makes me recall the unease I remember feeling whenever I had to be in the GDR, whether on my way from my home in West Germany to West Berlin or on a tourist expedition to East Berlin. Some indeed do yearn for this past, for political reasons, but also, in some cases, because it is recalled as a time when daily life could simply be enjoyed, when it had not yet been complicated by the pressures of change. Yet this is a problematic memory. Boulton's photos, of course, also remind us of why this is so: it was a time of intense military conflict. The bases are its architectural remnants. Yet much of the effect of this conflict remains unseen. There are no people here. No people separated from the friends and relatives on the other side, unable, until 1971, to even phone them, able to visit them in the GDR only under restrictive conditions, and not really at all the other way. No people subject to the scrutiny of GDR authorities when transiting between the FRG and West Berlin by car or train. No people trying in various desperate ways to cross the border to leave the GDR. No people – like Chris Gueffroy in February 1989, the last person shot at the Berlin Wall – losing their lives attempting to do so.

In Boulton's pictures we see the bases now, but not the people who belonged to them or who were affected by them one way or another. Boulton shows us the remnants of the Cold War, and thereby reminds us of the gravity of that conflict, of the marks it left on a country that was at its centre. What he does not show us is the people affected, either then or now. Soviet troops may have enjoyed happy times in the gymnasium, but where have they gone now? What of the people who were affected by the presence of these troops in the first place? They are perhaps missing in an even stronger sense from these photographs which show the Cold War that was so important to their lives through the spaces from which they were excluded. We do not see in these pictures the impact that the Cold War had on people's lives. It is the extraordinariness of ordinary life that is missing from these pictures. The Cold War and Germany were not unusual in this sense. There have been and are many similar situations of divided societies, and many worse.

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It is ironic, of course, that I should now remember the Cold War as marked by the division of Germany; for I could not say that I felt my country to be divided at the time. It was not: my country was the FRG. Indeed, as a young German in whose lifetime there had then never been a Germany encompassing both FRG and GDR, I was puzzled by the desire for unification that other Germans clearly had in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I could not see how the people of the GDR and I somehow belonged together, as was suggested. Yet, looking back now, that old FRG – that FRG without the GDR – seems to have something missing. As someone who works on memory, I am acutely aware of the illusion of a past that never quite existed in the way we remember it now. What I remember now is affected by the present that had then not yet been. Do you remember the Cold War? – I do, and vividly – though it may of course not have been as I think it was.

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