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‘NO GO’: Artists, Trespass and the Aftermath of Occupation

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Abstract: This paper considers the relationship between site, memory and fine art practices, as viewed from the perspectives of a practitioner informed by the discourses of commemoration and the aftermath of conflict. Through an exploration of art works derived from encounters with displaced spaces, peripheries and edgelands, Gough situates his practice – and that of several selected artists – as a conversation between “place”, “space” and the geopolitical. Artists have long employed the notions of ambiguity, transition and the hybrid in their work. Framed within the discourses of liminality and aftershock, practitioners have explored various strategies to address rites of in-betweenness to evoke a sensation of transition and displacement. To explore these ideas, Gough posits a number of his artworks as ‘provocations’, and draws attention to other contemporary artists and practitioners similarly drawn to the aftermath of constructed places and re-constructed histories. The paper draws upon two suites of Gough’s work each addressing aspects of the aftermath, and each to a degree addressing issues of transgression. The first is a series of site-specific photographs take on the decrepit and abandoned British army bases in former West Germany where Gough’s family was garrisoned during the Cold War. They speak of an abjectness and blankness tempered by the depth of familial association. The second suite of practice use *frottage*, rubbings and photographic collage, to assemble a cycle of triptych forms drawn from prolonged site visits to the sites of twentieth century battle in Turkey, France, Belgium and Macedonia: locations richly associated with transgressive military intervention and now comprised of preserved terrain, military cemeteries and rhetorical topography that has long informed Gough’s practice.

Keywords: remembrance, edgeland, memoryscape, militarised landscapes, emptiness, aftermath

1 Introduction: From the Far-Flung to the Forensic

Scottish arts collective, Boyle Family, relied on a most unusual methodology to generate new locations for their practice. Firstly, using a dart thrown at a map by a

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blindfolded family member, they identified a variety of global locations to which they subsequently travelled. Once on site they conducted fingertip searches of the terrain to record and gather material, which they then meticulously re-created in their studio with painted resins, fibreglass, collage, and mixed media. The resulting images, *Earth Studies*, were highly accurate metre square facsimiles of ground that was randomly selected by their loosely aimed metal-topped arrowhead.[1]

From the far-flung to the forensic, the Boyle Family created dozens, possibly hundreds, of these exacting renditions of foreign soil. Their work was exhibited internationally, including at the British Pavilion at the XXXIX Venice Biennale in 1978, and the Hayward Gallery, London in 1986, under the title *Beyond Image*.

If outwardly their work addresses issues of ownership and the appropriation of others' land, it also interrogates the language of reportage and mapping. However novel their methodology, the Boyles were following in the footsteps (quite literally) of those nineteenth-century gentlemen explorers, invariably drawn from the military officer class, who had surveyed the farthest reaches of empires, creating exacting records of the unknown and the previously unknowable. Surveying and mapping were augmented by reconnaissance sketches and drawn panoramas that laid out a meticulous record of terrain. In the British army, primarily amongst the engineers and artillery officers, these military drawings were intended to amass accurate, objective information which reduced natural forms to datum points and guaranteed future control over areas of desired jurisdiction.[2]

These concerns, as W.J.T. Mitchell has observed, are the essential discourses of imperialism. Empires, he asserts, move outward in space "as a way of moving outward in time, the 'prospect' that opens up is not just a spatial scene, but a projected future of 'development' and exploitation."[3] The promise of control and occupation permeates every level of military drawing, just as the exacting records wrought by Boyle Family promise verisimilitude and the mastery of the craft of faithful reproduction.

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1 "In the case of the *World Series*, 1000 sites were chosen at random by visitors to the artists' studio and the (1968) ICA exhibition. Participants were blindfolded and either threw a dart or fired an air rifle at an unseen wall-sized map of the world, which now forms part of the work itself." https://www.boylefamily.co.uk/boyle/about/.

2 Paul Gough, "'Calculating the Future' – Panoramic Sketching, Reconnaissance Drawing and the Material Trace of War," in *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War*, eds. Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (London: Routledge, 2009): 237–251.

3 W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002): 5–34, 16–17.

As a painter of place and a writer fascinated by the diction of military topographies, I have been drawn to those 'memoryscapes'[4] that combine the aftermath of empire and the archaeology of occupation by foreign armies. The images that augment the following narratives in this paper are intended as visual provocations that might invite personal, professional and familial recollections. A number of the visual provocations are arranged in triptych format, as episodic arrangements of figurative and familial flotsam gathered from very specific sites of memory. Other images are drawn from illicit visits across ambiguous places in northern Europe, former militarised zones that are now cut-off, protected and patrolled, where a liminal, in-betweenness prevails and military law still holds (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Paul Gough, Aftermath of occupation (Trenchard Road, and unoccupied married quarters, Rheindahlen) April 2019.

4 On the concept of 'memoryscape', see Kay Rogage, David Kirk, James Charlton, Claire Nally, Jon Swords and Richard Watson "Memoryscapes: Designing Situated Narratives of Place through Heritage Collections," *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction* 37.11 (2021): 1028–1048.

2 Aftermath of an Occupation: BAOR

Rheindahlen is a small village, part of the city borough of Mönchengladbach on the most Western edge of Germany. Between 1954 and 2013 it functioned as the main headquarters for British Forces based in North Rhine-Westphalia in what was then termed 'West Germany'. It was the NATO base for the Northern Army Group (NORTHAG), the Second Allied Tactical Air Force and the Royal Air Force Germany. Within weeks of its creation in the early 1950s, over 12,000 military personnel moved in to create a 'town within a town', and over the next two decades it became a substantial centre for military occupation and their families.

By the late 1960s, the facilities in the 470-hectare military complex included a NAAFI superstore,[5] a smaller NAAFI at Buschof alongside German-run shops, a petrol station, two banks, two post offices, a YWCA bookshop, libraries and cafes. Along with recreational and support facilities, there were medical and dental centres, five British primary schools and one secondary school, Queen's Upper and Lower Houses, which later recombined as Windsor School.[6]

My father was based nearby, serving with the 68 Squadron Royal Corps of Transport, as part of the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR). Our family lived in army quarters, along streets with British names that were physically separated, usually by many miles, from German homes and places of work. Civilian residencies were like enclaves, socially and architecturally distinct, territorially and psychologically separated from the host country, which was occupied by other overseas forces – the French, Canadians, Americans – in addition to the British.

In December 2013, the Rheindahlen military complex was handed back to German federal authorities.[7] Since then, the entire site has remained unused. The living quarters are still standing, as are the communal buildings – the supermarkets, schools, officers' (and other ranks') mess blocks. Road markings are clearly painted, pavements regularly swept of fallen leaves, verges are kept cropped, weeds eradicated and gardens maintained in a basic functional state. For acre upon acre the urban infrastructure is intact, only the street signs – Trenchard Avenue, Beresford Road – reveal that this was once a British enclave, every edge accurately earmarked and designated as Crown Property.[8]

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5 Navy, Army and Air Force Institute (NAAFI), created by the British government in 1920 to provide recreational services for the armed services and to run clubs, bars, shops, supermarkets and other such facilities.

6 "Grattan, Col Henry (1903-1997)," Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. King's College London. Retrieved 14 November 2013.

7 "Joint Headquarters Rheindahlen Begins to Say Goodbye," 15 July 2013, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-headquarters-rheindahlen-begins-to-say-goodbye.

8 For familial context see: https://broadsidesdotme.wordpress.com/2017/07/08/a-child-of-the-army-of-the-rhine/.

A proposal in July 2015 by overseas investors wishing to develop the site as a leisure park came to nothing, but later that year utility services were reconnected from the main Hardt-Rheindahlen road to facilitate temporary use of the site as a refugee reception centre with a suite of offices and temporary billets. Civilian security guards patrol the perimeter of the site, which is marked off by wires, fencing and brightly-coloured concrete blocks.[9]

In April 2019, as part of fieldwork essential to an Australian Research Council grant, and armed with camera and notebook, I roamed freely around the Rheindahlen military complex, but without permission.[10] My aim was to gather material for a suite of artworks based on sites of personal and familial history, places and spaces that might be regarded as 'memoryscapes'.

My act of trespass into the ghost town did not go unchallenged, but after an initial encounter with security guards I was allowed to wander unchecked, to remain outside the law but tolerated in this minor act of territorial transgression (Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Barriers to entry: red-white striped concrete blocks, Rheindahlen,* April 2019.

9 For images of the base see: https://rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/moenchengladbach/das-jhq-wird-zur-fluechtlingsunterkunft_bid-9541015.

10 Australian Research Council Discovery Project Grant, 2017-2019, "World Pictures: Pathfinding across a Century of Wars, 1917–2017" (ARC DP170101912).

3 Trespass and Transgression

Trespass is an area of criminal law, or tort law, that can be divided broadly into three groups: trespass to the person, to chattels, and to land. The word trespass covers a wider range of infringements than is commonly understood, but in habitual usage it is understood as trespass to land, of "wrongful interference with one's possessory rights" by illegally entering another person's property.[11]

In English law, trespass is not of itself a criminal offence. However, there are some offences in which trespass is an essential element and the guidance provided by the UK Crown Prosecution Service sets out the commonly encountered examples of such offences.[12]

Contrary to the widely held belief that most public space is freely available for open access, nearly all land in the UK is owned by someone and entering land without the owner's permission is an act of trespass. More recently, the vexed topic of privately-owned public spaces (POPS) has further revealed the differences in interpreting open access.[13] The debate about the accessibility of hyper-developed urban spaces, such as Canary Wharf or London's South Bank, has intensified in recent years. One British commentator warned in 2017 of "the insidious creep of pseudo-public space in London."[14] Such private-public spaces in cities, it has been asserted, are becoming commercialised, securitised, homogenised and exclusionary because they are shaped by the narrow interests of the few (the developers) instead of the many (society as a whole).[15] "These arguments," suggests Matthew Carmona from the Bartlett School of Planning, "even extend to those public spaces that are owned by the public sector, on the basis that they are subject to similar pressures because of the way their management is increasingly contracted out or unduly influenced by the private sector."[16]

Such niceties over the legal limits of private and public spatial jurisdiction rarely prevail in militarised or ex-military landscapes, especially those on foreign soil that are largely governed by legislation of Crown Territories. Geographer

11 Laurent Sacharoff, "Trespass and Deception," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2015.2 (2016): 359–412, 378.

12 See CPS "Trespass and Nuisance on Land," from *The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994: Table of Offences involving Trespass* https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/trespass-and-nuisance-land.

13 "Privately Owned Public Space: Does It Matter?" RICS, online, 25 February 2019.

14 Jack Shenker, "Revealed: The Insidious Creep of Pseudo-Public Space in London," *The Guardian*, 24 July 2017.

15 See Clare Dowdy, The Public Space Issue of Modus magazine (February 2019).

16 Matthew Carmona, Bartlett School of Planning, quoted in Shenker, "Revealed."

Rachel Woodward recalls one particularly challenging period of fieldwork in the opening paragraphs of "Military Geographies are Everywhere":

> I stood at the fence and looked in through the wire. On the other side lay a broad strip of grass. A little further on and to the left, sat red-and white-painted wooden baffle boards, mounted with lights. Further on from that, the dull, grey strip of runway stretched off into the distance. At the far end huddled a collection of structures and objects in shades of green, grey and black, unidentifiable from this distance. Occasional pops from rifle fire, perhaps, competed with the traffic noise from the road beside me. Crows hopped around on the empty runway. I poured a cup of coffee from my vacuum flask, watched and waited. Engine noise grew louder and then a dark blue pick-up truck with US-style police lights and a foreign number-plate came driving swiftly up the service road alongside the runway, slowing as it rounded the end, and then halting, to my right. I'd been seen, a coffee-toting speck beyond the perimeter fence at the bottom of the runway. The pick-up drove right to left in front of me, 30 m distant, two beret-topped heads swivelled in my direction, watching me as I watched them. The truck drove on to the baffle boards, executed a quick three-point turn and came back, left to right. It paused, watching. Another three-point turn, another traverse in front of me, another pause, engine running…
>
> My focus swam with the effort of switching, from watching wire 30 cm from my nose and buildings 3 km distant. I refilled my cup, balancing it on the final post of a smaller fence perpendicular to the wire barrier ('MoD Keep Out') mindful of the sign on the larger fence ('Ministry of Defence (Air) Anyone Attempting to Enter will be Detained and Arrested'). My movements sparked activity; the truck did another sweep, left to right, three-point turn, right to left, pause, engine idling, watching me as I watched them, drinking my coffee. They watched, I watched, and I realized that this was a stand-off; they were waiting for me to do something. This is their job; waiting for people do to (sic) things. Well, this is my job. I watched back as I finished my coffee, capped flask with cup, turned and walked back to my car, feeling their eyes on my back.[17]

Woodward's confrontation took place at one of the perimeter borders of RAF Lakenheath, some 25 miles (80 km) north-east of Cambridge, which was at that time home of the United States Air Force 48th Fighter Wing, a base for F-15 fighter jets, and for the 4500 US military personnel and 1000 US and British civilians who service and support them.[18]

Woodward's experience resonates with my own forays into privatised public space and specifically across sites of former occupation – the perimeter fence of Greenham Common US airbase in Berkshire, UK, for example, or the privately-managed copses and woodlands, fiercely protected by gamekeepers, on the former Somme battlefields in north-west France. Collecting visual material, detritus and

17 Rachel Woodward, *Military Geographies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1–2.

18 48th Fighter Wing Fact Sheet: https://www.lakenheath.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/48th-Fighter-Wing-Fact-sheet/.

drawn rubbings and *frottage*, on such sites and in such circumstances adds a *frisson* that is not usual in most creative projects.

As a consequence of the difficulties of working *en plein air,* of being under constant surveillance by patrolling guards or gamekeepers, artists (and in particular 'street' artists) have become ever more furtive, considering themselves as transgressors into privatised public spaces, interlopers in the spatial aftermath. Working practices become hurried, evidence is gathered spontaneously, measure is forsaken, and renditions are retrofitted. The collages reproduced here are presented in the triptych format as fragmented, post-hoc assemblages arranged as episodes of illicit activity (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Triptych, Garage Door: Union Jack, former BAOR military barracks, near Krefeld, April 2019.

4 Unauthorised Access into the 'Marginalia' of the Urban Domain

Trespassing, it is argued in a recent book about unauthorised un-commissioned art in the urban sphere, is an act and a word that underlies the very *modus operandi* of tagging, graffiti and street art. Most street 'writers' (as many prefer to be termed) must trespass on to private property or scribe on walls that are owned by private individuals or civil authorities in order to tag, mark or paint a clean, flat surface.

'Getting it up', to use the highly gendered terminology of the graffitist, is an act of transgression but it is also an act of supreme daring and unmonitored risk. As a

signal of their painterly prowess, the hooded urban calligraphers try to reach the most obscure location, the tallest chimney, the most precarious perch to make their mark. Stepping over a designated boundary and transgressing another's space and property is the ethos of the street artist's creed. Eschewing the white walls of the gallery or the salesroom, the graffitist opts for the public wall rather than the paywall, marking the city's dark edges, brick perimeters and alleys, what one might describe as the *marginalia* of urban terrain: a term also adopted in legal parlance, meaning handwritten, printed, or other types of notations added to a document, but excluding underlining and highlighting.[19]

In a special issue of *Law and Humanities* from 2017, Daniel Matthews and Marco Wan observed that in some political regimes and in many communities on the edges of society where freedoms were restricted, scholars and commentators embed their criticism in endnotes and footnotes, on the perimeter of the main narratives, such that their core arguments might be discerned only by the margins of the text.[20] They further suggested that the collection of narratives:

> probes more fundamental issues about the definition, formation, perpetuation and appropriation of the margin. It addresses the margin not so much as a fixed demarcation in the law, but as a concept which lies at the intersection of history, genre, identity and the philosophy of law.[21]

In the urban domain, as criminologist Alison Young has pointed out, the dangerous labour of the marginal gangs of street writers who mark the city is quickly decried, destroyed and obliterated as a form of defacement that undermines civic identity and pride. Perversely, although some civic authorities – such as Melbourne – celebrate the cultural vitality brought about by 'art of the street', most illicit forms of graffiti, and in particular the unintelligible calligraphy of 'tagging', is criminalised, kept hidden, and distinctly marginalized. What is striking, asserts Young:

> is the apparent hypocrisy of a government willing to deny fundamental legal principles in order to enhance the ability of the police to stop, search and arrest young people engaging in a popular cultural activity, at the same time as the fruits of that cultural activity are utilised by the government in its tourism advertisements.[22]

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19 Peter Auger, "Printed Marginalia, Extractive Reading," in *Modern Philology*, 113. 1 (2015): 66–87, 72.

20 See Daniel Matthews & Marco Wan, "Introduction: Legal Marginalia," *Law and Humanities* 11.1 (2017): 3–6, 3.

21 Matthews & Wan, "Legal Marginalia," 3.

22 Alison Young, "Do Governments Know What to do with Street Art?" *The Conversation*, 1 April 2011. See: https://theconversation.com/do-governments-know-what-to-do-with-street-art-1.

As a genre, graffiti has morphed into 'street art' and, ever since the art market began to realise its value, has mutated again into 'urban art', a more gentrified fusion of pop art, graphic design and popular iconography that still has the potency to disrupt and astonish. Banksy's ability to create entertaining but edgy icons is borne out of the fusion of visual forms that might be regarded as ironic 'brandalism' and wilful 'subvertising'.

Street art (in all its typological guises) is a deliberately ephemeral art form created by artists and writers 'on the run', leaving as little trace as possible other than the tag, the 'piece' or the stencil. It is also wilfully criminal. When Frank Shepard Fairey pasted thousands of his posters across US cities or when Banksy liberally littered designs across New York city for 31 days in October 2013 they knowingly operated outside the law. Running the risk of arrest was compensated by the notoriety of having their work and name in public view and in huge demand: the act of free speech fuelled their drive.

Although the pristine whitewashed walls of the British partition of Rheindahlen were surprisingly free of tagging, each residence in the extensive township was marked by a distinctive circle of red paint sprayed cursorily either side of the front door, the circle marked with a cross to denote that the utilities within – electricity, gas, water – had been isolated and cut off. The plate glass windows of the supermarket were marked less cryptically – 'NO GO' – with its uncomfortable resonance of the highly dangerous and unpoliced nationalist and loyalist no-go areas in Belfast and Londonderry during the early years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.[23] Such iconography represented the marginalia of the former military base, the scribbled demotic of the occupation's aftermath (Figure 4).

5 Edward Chell and Transgressive 'Uncommon' Ground

> They are empty, very empty. They're very odd places to put people, that's true. You can't stop on the motorway, you can't have a picnic, you can't camp on the hard shoulder. You'll be picked up in five minutes and arrested. It's just impossible. So they're very bollarded in that sense. They preclude any form of occupation, unless you're trespassing. Which I do, I do have to trespass sometimes. But I've worked with subcontractors as well, to get access. I've gone to

23 See "No-go Areas and Operation Motorman," The Cabinet Papers, National Archive: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/no-go-areas-operation-motorman.htm.

Figure 4: 'NO GO', front doors of abandoned supermarket, Rheindahlen, April 2019.

> the foreman on site to take me to inaccessible areas where road works have been going on. But you do have to trespass too. I'm very careful about that though because I know it's a really, really dangerous place. Extremely dangerous.[24]

British painter Edward Chell has also been drawn to the marginal landscapes of the British peri-urban. In his suites of large-scale thematic paintings, he explores notions of consumption and waste through meticulous methods of picture-making that draw attention to the banal and the ordinary. By wandering unseen and uninvited into marginal places, he explores and records the dingy icons of the edgeland: weeds, wooden pallets, waste and washed-up paraphernalia of the *banlieue*. Hidden on the hard shoulder, his paintings, photographs and assemblages capture the uncomfortable tension between "the precious or revered with the overlooked or discarded, questioning how our ideas about taste are inherited."[25]

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24 Jos Smith, "Soft Estate: An Interview with Edward Chell," *The Clearing*, 21 March 2014: https://www.littletoller.co.uk/the-clearing/soft-estate-an-interview-with-edward-chell/.

25 Edward Chell, at Danielle Arnaud, information, http://www.daniellearnaud.com/exhibitions/exhibition-edward-chell-common-ground.html.

A suite of work under the rubric of 'Soft Estate' from 2012–14 extended Chell's interest in transgressive and marginal 'scapes'. The term is used by the UK Highways Agency to describe the natural habitats that have evolved alongside motorways that criss-cross the British landscape. In a series of essays, artworks and exhibitions, Chell and others[26] itemised the under-explored and forbidden marginal green spaces at the interstices of the UK road systems:

> People plant them, they employ biologists, specialists for different regions. When they do road development on the M25 or somewhere they'll always employ somebody to oversee the planting, make sure that things are right, or at least that things can get a good foothold. But they don't document them. And I just became aware of this kind of 'other space' and seeing it and experiencing it like this, I just thought I've got to do something about this.[27]

Invisible and yet also constantly visible, why, asks Michael Petry, have we turned such a blind eye to these non-spaces?[28] Why is it that artists such as Chell have turned to them, seeking out their curious layouts, crossing their illicit boundaries and rendering highly wrought paintings from their seeming nothing-ness? Chell has 'previous' in wandering across illicit edgelands. He has documented the slag heaps and mounds of industrial waste that still litter the potteries in central England. Further north, he has ventured onto the nuclear waste mounds around Sellafield, which are secretive, protected, and secured against the transgressive prying of the anti-tourist. In an inversion of the eighteenth-century gentleman's Grand Tour, Chell is one of many British artists who have displayed a dread fascination, a transgressive yearning to wander the margins, to experience bent forms, noisome conditions, and foul reek – the long aftermath of industrial might. Yet, these subversive ventures into the verges are driven by aesthetics. It is the vegetation that fascinates Chell, which in this interstitial domain allows close attention to incidental detail, fragmentation and the pixilation of light. The resultant paintings eschew documentary and mere reportage, they transcend the topographic, and do so through their very materiality. In certain prints he uses the actual road dust to form pigments, collecting and mixing it with binding agent, applying it with meticulous care to the substrate. The dust used in *Creeping buttercup Ranunculus repens: Dust A20 (M)* (2012), is a very

26 Edward Chell, *Soft Estate*, with contributions from Bryan Biggs, Sara-Jayne Parsons and Richard Mabey (Liverpool: Bluecoat, 2013).

27 Jos Smith, "Soft Estate: An Interview with Edward Chell." [unpaginated online interview].

28 Michael Petry, essay in *Common Ground*, Edward Chell, http://www.daniellearnaud.com/exhibitions/pdf/LeafletEdwardChellFinal.pdf. On 'non-spaces,' see Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

pale grey, the tone of degraded concrete dust, almost imperceptible on the surface. Other dusts are the colour of dried blood as in *Hairy bittercress Cardamine hirsute: Road Dust M20* (2013).

Chell is an artist of the interstice and the aftermath. Through his decorative, rather deadpan, documents he strays deliberately beyond the boundaries of the known and the secure, transgressing from hard shoulder to unmapped soft estate. Surfing the verge, he roams beyond the highway code into uncodified terrain, mapping its fauna in motes of dust and the near-imperceptible.

The flattening of the plants, their reduction to silhouette, is redolent of crime scene photographs, with their frank, objective gaze and their dispassionate treatment of appearance. His affair with the aftermath has inspired many others, including my own work, which thrives on foraging, often illicitly into privatised spaces, to gather odds, ends, objects and items that can later be re-constituted in the studio. These assemblages are not intended as conventional collections of objects: they are re-composed compositions often of decomposed detritus laid out episodically, in narrow triptychs, with a central square panel that refers to (and offers comment upon) the sub-narratives in the side panels (Figures 5 and 6).[29]

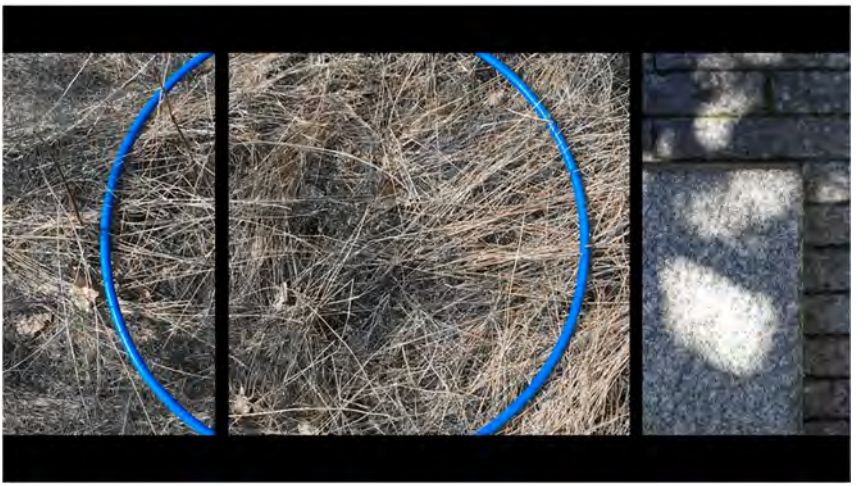

Figure 5: 'Homage to Chell': Plastic hoop and Roadway Rubbing, hard shoulder near Mönchengladbach, March 2019.

29 See Jos Smith, "Soft Estate: An Interview with Edward Chell." [unpaginated online interview].

Figure 6: 'Out of Bounds', cemetery fragments, former artillery piece and frottage drawing, near Ypres, Flanders, Belgium, May 2019.

6 Edgelands: Aftermath of Activities. Places Full of Emptiness

Whereas the French describe such studio arrangements of man-made and natural forms as '*nature morte*', the British refer to 'Still Life'. It is a telling distinction: the former speaking of a deadened natural order, the latter as objects suspended in time and place. A number of the triptychs reproduced in this paper comprise items gathered like evidence from very different memoryscapes and subsequently re-constituted and re-framed. For example, a long-forgotten child's plastic blue hoop from a back garden in Mönchengladbach is juxtaposed with chalk rubbings taken from a cemetery wall in Gallipoli; in another, the drawn circle of a memorial wreath abuts the metal calibration wheel from an artillery piece, photographed at a military museum in Flanders. Ceramic tiles from a village cemetery are presented alongside *frottage* taken from walls of an adjacent army barracks on the Somme. Using happenchance and pictorial serendipity, and by assuming the creative role of *bricoleur*, disparate objects, drawn from diverse places of militarised memory, have been re-constituted as images of aftermath.

Just as many of the places visited might be considered edgelands, so the objects gathered, photographed, drawn and abraded are the leftovers, the detritus damaged and discarded. This is deliberate. In this suite of images, I have turned my back on the high diction of formal and official commemoration, the monuments

and edifices that furnish the overcrowded memorial sites marking places of deep trauma – the obelisks on the Somme, cenotaphs at Anzac Beach or Zonnebeke, or stone markers strung along the ridges of north Macedonia. There are other paintings, prints and texts I have created which record and interpret those sites. Instead, here in what Chell might describe as the laybys and side-roads separated from the main routes, are the paths less well travelled, tracks protected by wire and blockade, paths patrolled by guards. The very manner of accumulating the items and objects that inform these images might be considered a form of deep mapping and a gathering of evidence of events unknown but associated with places of trauma.

Existing on the perimeter of known ground, these edges are understood by geographers, historians and archaeologists as peripheral and marginal, empty but also "full of emptiness."[30] However, as Burri argues, these notions must be used reservedly and with caution because the definitions of marginality are intrinsically fluid and rarely stable.[31] Cultural geographers might adopt the term rather more adventurously, recognising its relevance to our understanding and interpretation of borders and littoral zones, spaces that offer an unfixed and fluid relationship between one domain and another. Biggs, in his elaboration on deep mapping, speaks of how certain sites and places can coexist within a blurred genre to create "a new, hybrid third."[32] Citing the work of Pearson and Shanks,[33] he positions the distinctive overlaps between theatre, performance and archaeology as a way of interweaving disparate and tensioned strands of experience, knowledge positions, and narrative perspectives, as a means of enriching and deepening an artistic practice.

As evidenced here, in this narrative and through the accompanying images, transgression and trespass clearly have a performative element. This much is true of those urban artists who perform the complex wildstyle 'exhibition' graffiti in public arenas, as it is of those artists, crafts workers and protesters who adorned the fences around the US Airforce at Greenham Common in central England with colourful ribbons and picture placards. Greenham Common, as with many sites of

30 Paul Gough, "'Filling the Void': Artistic Interpretations of the Empty Battlefield," *Beyond Gallipoli: New Perspectives on ANZAC*, eds. Raelene Frances and Bruce Scates (Monash: Monash University Publishing, 2016): 120–138.

31 Sylvain Burri, "Reflections on the Concept of Marginal Landscape Through a Study of Late Medieval *incultum* in Provence (South-Eastern France)," *European Journal of Postclassical Archaeologies* 4 (2014): 7–38.

32 Iain Biggs, "Deep Mapping as an 'Essaying' of Place," Bartlett School of Architecture, 9th July, 2010, available at: http://www.iainbiggs.co.uk/text-deep-mapping-as-an-essaying-of-place/.

33 Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 131.

protest in Europe at the height of the Cold War, was eventually marked with a peace garden created to offset the intensity of militarised occupation. In discussing radical gardening, George McKay reflects on the immediate aftermath of that period, noting how the cultures of peace in the 1980s, in particular the illicit camps established spontaneously by the anarcho-punk movement, revolved "around the situatedness and contestation of land-use itself, via long- or short-term creative acts of reclamation."[34] Land squats and illegal festivals on trespassed land were the antithesis of the calm, reflective garden enclaves intended to promote the social ideal of peace. Artists, architects and designers were pivotal to the creation and sustenance of those designated places that were created to remind us of the horrors of nuclear war but also to survive long beyond the aftermath of the Cold War.

Most of the peace gardens dotted across Europe are officially 'sanctioned' (although many still arouse the ire of political opponents), existing within a framework of public spaces and designated as the locus of specific incidents or annualised events that reflect deeply on the long shadow of the aftermath of war.[35] In central London, and throughout the UK for example, most 'remembrance' events at British Peace Parks follow a calendar dictated by the Second World War – usually Hiroshima or Nagasaki Day, though such fixed dates are also activated by performative occasions. In north Camden, peace festivals – as distinct from 'ceremonies' – were held annually each August in the anti-nuclear campaign charged decade of the 1980s. Accompanied by Irish folk bands, jugglers, entertainers (and in 1985 by giant inflatable puppets of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan), the Camden Peace Park became a focus for a cluster of causes of dissent and protest, espousing diverse campaigns from "the scrapping of nuclear weapons to the scrapping of battery eggs".[36] In Camden – as elsewhere – a balance had to be sought between snake charmers, singers, and protesters, and solemn acts of commemoration. In 1985, a ceremony in north London held to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bombs saw wreathes being laid by ex-servicemen's CND branches, not at the foot of a cenotaph or memorial tablet, but beside a Japanese cherry tree planted a few years earlier. Conservative opposition was frequent and vocal, and the green spaces claimed by the peace campaigners were often contested and challenged by forces of the right.

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34 George McKay, *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011), 89–90.

35 Paul Gough, "Planting Peace: The Greater London Council and the Community Gardens of Central London," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 13.1 (2007): 22–41.

36 See Camden Council Minutes, Volume 20, 10a, 27th April 1983; and *St Pancras Chronicle,* 15th August 1986.

A number of the collages and montages posited here as pictorial provocations, reflect on the divided (and divisive) histories of English peace gardens, which in some eyes are a form of political edgeland, constantly under negotiation and threat, and – like the process of maintaining peace itself – requiring ceaseless vigilance and attention. My work was driven by creative curiosity, a fascination with the aftermath of the GLC campaigns, and shaped by a research council grant, which revealed a network of artists involved in direct action. Of particular interest here is the third of the figures relevant to our theme of art, law and aftermath, Australian artist and writer Gabriella Hirst (Figure 7).

Figure 7: 'Stoneology', rubbings and collage of garden walls, London and Berlin, including patched-up bullet holes, April 2019.

7 Gabriella Hirst and the Aftermath of Unwanted Histories

For over a decade, Gabriella Hirst has been creating works with flowers and plants that reflect, comment and critique sites and events of historical value. In 2015 she was engaged in research about flowers indelibly linked with the commemoration of battle. She explored the visual representation of the hardy conifer species that had been designed for the inhospitable ash fields on the deadened landscapes around Verdun, in northern France, and also created art pieces using the *Gallipoli Daffodil*. Thereafter, she worked on community garden arts projects on the site of

the former military airfield in central Berlin. Her practice on site was intended to neutralise sites of trauma and to offer up a dialogue about plants, protest and the arboreal diction of remembrance.

With an obvious undertow of political commentary, her interventions chime with contemporary transgressive agri-political acts that were then being performed on sensitive sites, many of which were timed for maximum impact. In central London in October 2019, as part of a global campaign instigated by *Extinction Rebellion* (XR), a fledging forest was created to sprout on the green island east of Westminster Square, the locus of British state power. Hundreds of trees were carried into the Old Palace Yard and laid out in the shape of the British Isles. There, an XR action group under the banner '1000 Trees/Reforesting Parliament' invited parliamentary members and Ministers to collect a tree labelled in their name. They were exhorted to plant the tree as part of their contribution to the many billions of trees that also needed to be planted to absorb the last 10 years of global carbon emissions. Offering up seeds, acorns, sapling and fully-grown trees to the political and establishment class is not novel: artist-activists from Joseph Beuys to John Lennon and Yoko Ono had created similar campaigns. However, the XR action was part of a sequence of massive co-ordinated global interventions that furthered environmental politics in a way that such historic activists as William Cobbett and Bertolt Brecht would have recognised. However, the latter's accusation that "famines do not occur, they are organised by the grain trade" would perhaps have found few sympathisers amongst the hundreds of MPs who happily carried their oak, elm or birch sapling back to their office. Indeed, few would have imagined that the mere garden could possibly be considered a form of attack, or a flower a critique, a trowel an agent of social change. But it has long been. In his cultural history of radical gardening, George McKay argues convincingly that notions of utopia, of community, of activism for progressive social change, of peace, of environmentalism, of identity politics, are practically worked through in the garden, in floriculture and through planting as a form of protest.[37]

Hirst maintained this form of floral challenge in 2021 when she was commissioned by the trustees of the Old Waterworks and Metal as part of the English Arts Council-funded *Estuary Festival* in Southend, Essex, eastern England. Her work, *An English Garden*, located in Gunners Park in the town of Shoeburyness, consisted of flowerbeds planted with *Rosa floribunda*, a rare breed of garden rose created in 1953, with the common name *Atom Bomb*, and irises called *Cliffs of Dover*. Arranged around the planting scheme were three park benches each inscribed with lengthy texts, which charted the development of the UK's first atomic bomb at a research facility on nearby Foulness Island in the early 1950s, which was

37 See McKay, *Radical Gardening*, 80–88.

subsequently tested off the northwest coast of Australia. Hirst's artworks, and in particular her floral and planted pieces, have often commented on the delicate political inter-relationship between Australia and England, the 'Mother Country'. Her art is an insightful critique of the British Empire's self-assumed authority to spread its arboreal impact and the unspoken strategies of 'gardening the world'.

The plaque also drew attention to recent UK government announcements of a 40% increase in operational nuclear missiles, and was unequivocal in drawing out uncomfortable truths about colonial pasts:

> This weaponry was tested not on British soil, but instead was sent to Australia where it was detonated on unceded indigenous land, causing enduring devastation and contamination. It is rumoured that these early devices were dispatched from Barge Pier here in Gunners Park.[38]

Intended to remain *in situ* until 31 August 2021, the work was summarily removed one night in mid-June after complaints from local Conservative councillors who, according to public statements, asserted that they would take legal action against the work, the artist and the commissioning body because the art pieces furthered a "direct far left-wing attack on our History, our People and our Democratically Elected Government".[39] The missive sent by Southend's Conservative group of councillors included a demand that the artist and the commissioning body, Metal, "alter the text contained in the plaque under supervision […] shifting the work's intentions and putting words into the artist's mouth."[40] In actuality, only one of the three councillors for the Shoeburyness Ward, where Gunners Park is located, objected to the work and moved for its exclusion. No letters or messages of complaint had been received from members of the public. In his personal 'verdict', the Councillor stated "the plaque on the bench was offensive and inappropriate in a council-owned site," and later intimated that the process of its censorship was "amicably resolved", although that view was not shared by Hirst or Metal, who issued a statement announcing that they had complied with the order so as:

> to protect the wellbeing and mental health of our small team of staff and volunteers in Southend from possible adverse effects that might arise from any 'action' taken against the work based on a distortion of the actual meaning of the work.[41]

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38 *The Art Newspaper*, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/cancel-culture-in-action-as-art-installation-removed-essex.

39 See "Tories Censor Artist's Anti-Nuclear Garden," *The Art Review*, 13 July 2021, accessed at https://artreview.com/tories-censor-artist-anti-nuclear-garden/.

40 Donna Ferguson, 'Not in this Town', *The Guardian*, 17 July 2021, accessed at: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/jul/17/not-in-this-town-artwork-about-britains-nuclear-colonialism-removed.

41 Ferguson, "Not in the Town."

The artist was left nonplussed and bereft. "What remains of An English Garden now," she said of the aftermath, "is a series of empty garden beds. Over the coming months, I'll be working with others in Southend and Australia to transform this void into a space for further dialogue."[42] Hirst continued the charged conversation through a colloquium in 2020 which again tested the taut relationship between art and the law. The forum focussed on two seemingly opposed topics: gardening and global armaments, and she invited artists, writers and theorists to share their insights into the nuclear and the botanical, with a specific focus on the after-effect and the aftermath of the siting of nuclear warheads on Indigenous and unceded land. Taking its title, the *Rose Garden Conference*, from the press gatherings held in the Washington White House of that year, contributors took as their starting point "the subtle and overt ways in which plants and gardens are inextricably involved in the theatre of political powerplay, as witnesses, players and tools."[43]

The clumsy rule of law that had been applied to her own artwork had in the artist's view not only removed a space of discourse, but raised an urgent need for open dialogue, for active remembering, and a closer reading of the legacies and aftermaths of British colonialism. "History," argued Hirst, "and particularly nuclear history, is not a set event, it continues to recur, to mutate into afterlives both physical, emotional and ideological."[44]

By exposing an invisible moment in national history, an artist's attempt to make the past palpable had again been rendered invisible. Ironically, Hirst's planting had been championed and resourced by a public-funded commissioning agency, it enjoyed the status not afforded to illicit, plant-and-run interventions performed by guerrilla gardeners. Yet, like the backlash afforded on several of the radical gardens, festivals and plantings of protest resourced by the Greater London Council in the mid-1980s, it faced opposition from those who contested the interpretation and reading of local and national history. In a rather innocuous urban park in Essex, art, law and aftermath of a contested past had collided. In this case, unlike Chell's illicit wanderings on soft motorway verges and my own transgressions into semi-militarised precincts, Gabriella Hirst had lost her art (although not necessarily her arguments) in the face of conservative opposition to her stating of history and the long nuclear shadow of its aftermath (Figure 8).

42 The artist quoted at *The Rose Garden Conference*, accessed at: https://htmab.cargo.site.

43 *The Rose Garden Conference*, as above.

44 The artist, cited on *The Rose Garden* conference website, as above.

Figure 8: 'Tribute to Hirst': post-occupation garden and tagged doorway, Rheindahlen, April 2019.

8 Reflection

Occupation has a circular nature. This paper began in a deserted British enclave in Germany created during the Cold War and ended in an English garden stripped of emblematic plants in a dispute over nuclear deterrence. Occupation is achieved through illicit behaviours, by trespass and transgression: in consequence, aftermath is messy, chaotic, and contested. Photography as a medium always documents an aftermath: it can only capture and condense what has already been. As aggregates of exploration, the collages, artefacts, and images gathered by the artists and evidenced in this paper act as para-rhymes to the text, offering a reflective space for context and commentary. In so doing, they offer a practitioner's take on temporal and tense terrain, much of which sits on the margins as a contested and peripheral 'edgeland'.

Bionote

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Paul Gough is Vice-Chancellor at Arts University Bournemouth, UK. A painter, broadcaster and author, he has exhibited internationally and is represented in the permanent collection of the Imperial War Museum, London, the Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, and the National War Memorial, Wellington. Along with leading roles in international higher education and global research assessment, his research into the representation of war and peace has been presented to audiences throughout the world. He has published nine books, including monographs on the British painter Stanley Spencer, Paul and John Nash, and several comprehensive studies of art from both world wars. He worked in television for ten years and is currently writing his second book about the street artist, Banksy.