



# INTRODUCTION: HOT AND COLD ROCKS

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David Humphrey's notes for this issue point out that Ike's amateur paintings – done to cool down after running the country – include “oddly rendered rocks” which return as disturbing blobs in Humphrey's artwork. We might think of the legacy of the Cold War in terms of such rocks, cold and hot. The former include the moon rocks, trophies of the space race doled out to Western museums by NASA; or alternatively the remnants of the Berlin Wall, tokens of reunification, scattered across thousands of German living rooms and garages and even traded (with certificates of authenticity) on eBay. “Cold rocks” speak of the end of the Cold War and its establishment as an area for historical investigation, safely located in the past, with its paradigms and tropes (containment; surveillance; paranoia). “Hot rocks,” on the other hand (the title is borrowed from one of the articles in this issue) include the thousands of bombs still in commission, or in vulnerable storage facilities where they threaten to spill out into new conflicts. Or the radioactive materials used to kill the former Soviet agent Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006, poisoning Anglo-Russian relations. Hot rocks suggest live issues, and the question of whether the Cold War has ever gone away.

That question has often, recently, been given a rapid answer: it has (it is said) returned, after a decade-and-a-half in which America declared itself the only superpower, with Putin enacting atavistic gestures for the press; with the extension of Russian state power overseas via energy policy and covert operations; with the return of notions of spheres of influence; and with a renewed cry for resistance to Russia from some sections of opinion in the West. It is a measure of the power of a historical mythology that despite obvious differences – the breakup of the Soviet Union and of Soviet satellite states, the “War on Terror,” energy shortages, China’s rise as a world power – recent events are nevertheless seen in terms of an attachment to the past, as in the Russian leadership’s alleged nostalgia for KGB-era certainties. The accusation of Cold War nostalgia has, earlier and in different ways, also been applied to the USA: to Bush’s search for an external enemy who would replace the old enemy, and the subsequent revitalization of the military-industrial complex through the “Homeland Security” industries and the global search for Al Qaeda. And, of course, in significant senses it *is* still with us in America’s actions – in its continuing military presence around the world and its actions against left-leaning regimes in Latin America, for example (see Johnson 2004).

All this suggests that our relation to the Cold War is, to say the least, complex and often confusing, offering a series of potentially dangerous mappings and moments of *déjà vu* rather than any firm sense of reenactment or return. If one question about the Cold War is when (among a number of possibilities) it “ended,” or whether it ended, then we are talking about the use of historical periodization *per se*; about our own sense of repetition and difference, and the way we see underlying historical continuities.

At such a moment, one might posit, the iconic texts of Cold War culture – texts we know almost too well, in some cases – risk a kind of blanching overexposure in which their postures edge toward self-parody. What do a *Strangelove*, a *Quiet American*, or protesters levitating the Pentagon (all discussed in this issue) offer the post-9/11 world in terms of critique? Do they speak of continuities of cultural experience, or mark differences we should note before we turn back to our own historical and cultural concerns, to *Falling Man* or *Syriana* or Agamben on states of exception? This issue of the journal returns to canonical texts of the Cold War in the hope of examining, if only in an oblique way, some of those questions.

One suggestion the work here provides is that we might know these texts again at a distance, seeing them both as part of particular histories and as, often, the product of an outsider’s perspective, whether British, Anglo-American, Catholic, Russo-American, or countercultural; and in one case (H.G. Wells) displaced in time, anticipating wars to come.<sup>1</sup> These are texts which ask us to address what the Cold War was in the first place: *realpolitik* or ideology? Fantasy or everyday practice? Systems in opposition or systems in

convergence, in the form of a state capitalism which increasingly dominates the world (not least in China, largely ignored in classic Cold War fiction)? The uncertainties embodied in these questions are reflected in the texts examined here. They share a sense of an imaginative landscape become uncertain and paradoxical, just as radioactivity – arguably the dominant figure of the period – rendered matter unstable: a landscape in which desire might be deadly and secret, history poisoned, cities shadowed by their status as targets, and the legacy of the past rendered absurd. As Andrew Gibson comments in his article in this issue, “Cold War politics reveals itself in the form of the Möbius strip, taint spreads everywhere.” But as his article suggests (and others confirm), what is involved in that taint is a convergence (“implosion” is his term) which answers one of the questions above, in which the apparent antinomies of East and West increasingly cohere.

Recent criticism on the literature and culture of the Cold War has stressed its variety and reach: its global status as, for many, a “hot” war; the way it penetrated a huge range of popular culture; the way it fostered a self-critical rhetoric in the West; and the way it was responsible for paradoxical effects, including the birth of a rebellious youth culture in America, and even (via the “new liberalism”) the rise of identity politics in the 1970s (see Shannon 2000; Hendershot 2003; Medovoi 2005; Belletto 2007). The declassification of archival materials has yielded not just political studies like Peter Hennessy’s *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (2003), but also more literary works like Claire Culleton’s *Joyce and the G-Men* (2004) and Hugh Wilford’s *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (2008) – Culleton’s a study of the interaction between the FBI and literary modernism which reveals Hoover’s tendrils of suspicion, directed at what he saw as a decadent and threatening movement, reaching out to encompass its authors and publishers, even outside the USA.

The question of the multiple spatial coordinates of the Cold War is particularly important, not least because of the anxieties generated by the notion of ideologies-in-contestation; by the question of where the ideological can be made visible; where the target can be found. In a study of recent American fiction, Patrick O’Donnell sees Cold War paranoia as “internalized, scattered, localized and reiterated at a multitude of sites” (2000: 12). His point is about the lack of an organizing figure (a singular “Them”) in post-1989 culture, but in addition one has to see the way in which that dispersal and localization also operated in tandem with a desire to locate and specify – to target – in Cold War texts. In the essays in this issue, the sites of Cold War thinking range from Lolita’s body to a VW campervan in Kansas; from the bars of Saigon to an England in which missile attack is likely to be total and without warning; from everyday life in suburbia to a butterfly-collecting expedition in Colorado. Attempts to pin the Cold War to specific locations and

manage its anxieties often failed – as Daniel Cordle’s essay in this volume suggests, even the home had leaky boundaries – but what is suggested again and again in these essays is a desire to register its reach: the metaphor of *penetration*, one might say, is as important as that of “containment” suggested by Alan Nadel in his well-known study; or even the “projection” described in this issue by Ryan Bishop and John Phillips. Even *Dr. Strangelove*’s pursuit of what Steven Morrison here calls “comedy’s anarchic and centrifugal urges all the way to the end of everything” seems to suggest nothing but the ability of nuclear fantasy to enter every part of culture, even those which might seem an antidote.

If the desire to aggregate and define sites of contestation is one legacy of Cold War thinking, then Guantanamo Bay, the extraterritorial site annexed from Cuba, where the Cold War had one of its hottest moments, is an outrageous irony – the answer to the question “where are They?” being, of course, the performative act of rendition: “*here*, these are the enemy; we have produced them.” It is worth dwelling on the word “rendition” for a moment, replete as it is in its many historical meanings. From the French *rendre*, to render, means yielding up, but also offering recompense or returning something; it can mean to surrender or pay homage; but it can also mean to make an artistic depiction or representation generally. Finally, it can mean covering a surface with a layer of plaster; or melting down fat (this meaning carries, no doubt, an associative connection with the etymologically distinct “rending,” violently tearing away or breaking apart). The *OED* suggests that “rendition” historically carries most of these meanings. One might say that rendition is at once a representation, a covering up, and a violent recompense conceived in terms of surrender or annihilation. Seen in this light, America’s extraterritorial prison seems a version of a Cold War fantasy: one in which the enemy is made visible, produced through an imagined act of destruction which at the same time obscures what the enemy really was. That is paralleled by what Adam Piette describes in *Lolita*: the sterile, radioactive gaze of Humbert penetrates its victim’s body in the name of a desire it locates within, bringing terror and death. As Gibson puts it, “modern innocence continually provokes the very menace which unflinchingly returns to haunt it.” In terms of its technology, what Bishop and Phillips call “projectile identification” shares this penetrative logic, in which a target and its representation are rendered identical.

Read this way, the extraterritoriality and states of legal exception involved in recent detention policies have antecedents in the history of both targeting and covert operations, just as American military policy involves the long-term absorption of the lessons of Vietnam. The rhetoric of the “Axis of Evil” has roots in the past, and, as Gibson’s essay on Graham Greene powerfully argues here, continues to produce a world in which the claims of the local are repeatedly dematerialized in favor of an immanence of Western

interests. The fact that those interests have been articulated in terms of the multinational company rather than the nation state has been the burden of much recent political thinking, which sees a decisive shift toward globalization in the period which includes the expansion of Eurodollar markets in the 1960s, the 1973 oil shock, the financial deregulation of the 1970s and 1980s, and the increasing role of the IMF in the global economy (see e.g. Appadurai 1996; Arrighi 1994; Denning 2004). But while the needs of the multinational company may differ significantly from those of the state (many commentators point out that Bush's foreign policy adventures are unpopular with business sectors not tied to the defense industries), nevertheless transnationalism often works hand in hand with America's role as a world power, not least in terms of the omnipresence and puissance of the global brand: Microsoft, McDonald's, Google. We need to think of such issues in terms of what Giovanni Arrighi calls the "long" twentieth century – a period whose underlying trends include the yoking of world financial systems to American political and cultural hegemony, the strengthening of the bureaucratic and war-driven state, and of the control of energy and information. In both military and commercial terms, the "bringing-near" (a tele-touch) which Bishop and Phillips discuss is one aspect of that power, involving the creation of a deterritorialized system of command and control.

An issue which immediately flows from these considerations is that of resistance in the face of the globalized systems which are one legacy of the Cold War. As Jackson Lears comments, dissent was systematically "rendered marginal or even invisible to the wider public culture" (1989: 49–50). This is an issue raised most directly by Alex Houen's essay in this issue on Ginsberg and the counterculture; though it is also implicit elsewhere (in relation to the question of what satire does, for example). Alain Badiou has recently characterized the role of the twentieth-century poet as the search for the "real" in something like the Lacanian sense: a real which is partly horror and which is always fugitive. Ginsberg, in Houen's account, attempts to think "OUTSIDE the war psychology" – a thinking which must circumvent what Houen calls the "*technologized reflex response*" which emerges from the Vietnam War. The difficulty of rerouting thought away from the circuit involves a seemingly inevitable turn toward the broken and isolated modes of satire and irony, in which a world is imagined in fragments.

The problem of resistance includes that which Badiou identifies as the "question of the 'we'"; that is of how a collectivity is to be imagined: as founded on warfare and opposition, creating "the 'we' that has the 'I' as its ideal and for which there is no alterity than that of the adversary" (2007: 96); or as subject-less and bound to a notion of the "event." If the political groupings of the Cold War are what Badiou labels "inert collectives" (ibid.: 103), representing ideas frozen into opposition rather than existing dialectically or even

for their own sake, then finding a ground for the manifestation of opposition is difficult, and at best fugitive and momentary.

I have just one hint to pursue here: one which involves that issue of repetition and nostalgia with which I began (and which is explored in David Humphrey's artworks and commentary, in which Ike's own nostalgic paintings take on an uneasy new life). To return to such cultural artifacts as *Lolita* and *Dr. Strangelove*, for those who grew up with them, can involve a certain bittersweet nostalgia. To some extent the topic of nostalgia is written into the Cold War's later stages, with the decline of American global power in the 1970s, defeat in Vietnam, oil shocks, terrorism, the flight to the suburbs, inflation, and unemployment, giving rise to a compensatory return to the youth culture of the 1950s in *American Graffiti* and *Happy Days* (in the UK there was a fascination with the alleged certainties of Edwardian England, visible on TV in *Upstairs Downstairs* and in the best-selling *Diary of an Edwardian Country Lady*). If nostalgia involves the notion of a safer or better time, we should remember that the root of the word (Gr. *algos*) suggests pain: in its recursiveness it signals a blocked or uncertain future and a suspended present. Andrei Tarkovsky's 1983 film *Nostalgia*, made just before his departure for the West, seems preemptive in its sense of longing for a homeland lost even before it is abandoned, just as the world in his final film, *The Sacrifice*, can only be saved as it is lost – "saved" in this case from a threatened or imagined nuclear Armageddon by an act which the world interprets as a retreat into madness (the film thus confronts the logic of MAD, mutually assured destruction, with a gesture of sacrificial self-abandonment).

Tarkovsky's work suggests the possibility of a more utopian form of nostalgia in which the promise of hope is realized. That, joking or tragicomic, has been a feature of a number of films, including the 2003 German comedy *Goodbye Lenin!* (Dr. Wolfgang Becker). In Becker's film Alex (Daniel Brühl) haplessly attempts to recreate a hybrid, transitional history for his mother, a GDR patriot whose chronic heart condition and eight-month coma over the period of the coming down of the Berlin Wall means that she must be protected from the shocks of history.<sup>2</sup> She is convinced, via such devices as bogus TV news programmes concocted by Alex's friends, that the Cold War has ended because of the gradual triumph of socialist ideas in the West. Even Coca Cola turns out to be a communist invention. In constructing ideas in this hilarious counterfactual world, underpinned by defunct brand labels of East German pickles which have to be attached to new jars, the film underscores the point that the function of nostalgia is, in part, to locate a certain utopian potential in the past; a potential for change which was never fulfilled because of the catastrophism of the Cold War system.

For that reason, nostalgia can be a powerful element in readings of the Cold War, providing a cultural mode that can be attentive to its costs, to counterfactual histories, and to the uncertainties

of parallels between “then” and “now.” Readings attentive to the possibilities of nostalgia open up history, allowing for both repetition and discontinuity. (Compare Bishop and Phillips on Heidegger: “In Heidegger’s analysis the *present* is nothing but a possibility of repetition. Nothing could ever live up to such a possibility without a permanently *futural* and thus *indeterminate* element.”) The original ending filmed for *Dr. Strangelove*, Steven Morrison tells us, was a pie-fight in the War Room, allegedly abandoned because of the assassination of President Kennedy (“he’s hit”). In that omitted scene, as in the mysteriously improved pickles in old jars of *Goodbye Lenin!* or in Humphrey’s queering of Ike, one might see the potential for a comic rerouting of history’s paths. Similarly Alex Houen’s reading of “Witchita Vortex Sutra” suggests that one legacy of Ginsberg’s attempt to “short-circuit” the dominant political ideology is a move toward a kind of mobile, carnivalesque, occasional politics of which there are more recent examples. In such moments, our own sense of mild wonder at the quaint specifics of Cold War doctrine – did anybody really believe in a race of elite humans emerging from bunkers? In Reds poisoning the water supply with fluoride? That the USSR wanted to rule the world? – might become something more: a sense that our own time might be similarly shifted from its ideological consistency, and a path to the future opened.

## NOTES

1. The earliest papers gathered here derive from a conference on “Nuclear Anxiety” at the Institute for English Studies at the University of London in 2005; others have been added. I would like to thank the IES Director, Warwick Gould.
2. A more harrowing example is *Die Unberührbare* (*The Untouchable*) (2000), dir. Oskar Röhler, released in English as *No Place to Go* – a film describing the destitution and suicide of a West German woman whose socialist novels had been supported by the GDR.

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