

Die Wohnzimmer und die Lebensraum

When I was in college, I started learning German. I did not demonstrate a proclivity for it, and to this day my skills are limited to 'menu' German. But one word I did know – from a young age and fueled by a childhood fascination with World War 2 as manifested in my father's Time-Life reference books on the topic, was *Lebensraum*. In my first year of German class, I was confronted with a quiz on the domestic spaces within the home. Having not studied, I cast about for the word for 'Living Room' – I knew it wasn't 'right', but wouldn't *Lebensraum* do in a pinch? It would not. I received no credit for my application of the key concept from Ratzel's organic state theory to my vocabulary quiz. I am tempted to say that *Cryptic Concrete* proves me right.

In this volume, Ian Klinke innovatively re-considers our accepted narrative of German *Geopolitik*, in which the Nazi defeat made geopolitical thought anathema to post-war German society. Rather, Klinke illustrates how the concept of *Lebensraum* was inverted, shifting from a fixation on horizontal territory from which the vital nation could be sustained to a vertical, subterranean fixation on spaces of survival in which the German elites (and occasionally the people) could survive a nuclear war being fought on West German territory. Consequently, there was a concern with the production of domestic spaces within fallout shelters: an effort to bring normalcy to the apocalyptic. Game, set, and match, German professor from 1995.

More seriously, this is a literal hidden history, with bunkers overgrown by flora and oral histories helping to uncover secret government installations. Klinke personalizes the account by interweaving his own childhood (he was raised in the landscape in question, playing in and among the bunkers as a young

man) and with his own photography adorning the inside pages. It is a deeply personal project, and the way it is written, presented, and theorized is very distinctive as a result.

There are many virtues to the volume. First, Klinke highlights several flaws in the geopolitical and biopolitical literature thus far: the artificial divide between imperial and Cold War thought, the lack of attention to psychoanalysis, and the lack of attention to architecture and its role as the connection between geo- and bio-politics. On the first point, Klinke effectively demolishes the extant narrative of Nazi geopolitics, showing not only how ideas such as *Lebensraum* persisted in new forms after the war, but also how many of the military personnel representing West Germany in institutions such as NATO had previously been fighting against the allies previously. While I was aware of some holdovers, especially in the field of rocketry, I did not realize the scope of the holdovers from the old regime to the new. It is therefore not a surprise that some of the geopolitical ideology was held over as well.

On the second point, Klinke uses psychoanalytic approaches to explain the phenomena he studies. While other fields of geography have embraced this theoretical approach (if not warmly), geopolitics has mostly remained aloof. Yet Klinke's deployment of the death drive to make sense of the West German willingness to authorize tactical nuclear strikes on its own territory. Klinke really demonstrates the utility of this approach when he goes to work in the East German archives, reading their interpretation of the West German participation in war games. Even at the time, it seems, the East Germans could see something subterranean within the West German psyche, which could rise up and lead to devastation.

On the third point, Klinke positions himself alongside the recent turn towards materiality in political geography, showing how the archetypal architecture of the camp – so thoroughly explored in the literature on biopolitics – was topologically inverted and re-constituted in the biopolitical forms of the bunker (in which elite populations could survive, while those left outside would die) and of the missile silo (a complex geography of American exceptions to West German sovereignty).

Altogether, the volume is an impressively well-researched example of historical geopolitics that calls into question many of the field's assumptions. I would note though two criticisms. First, I wonder at Klinke's engagement with materiality. The book is, after all, called *Cryptic Concrete*, and it calls attention to the materiality of bunkers repeatedly in its review of the literature and in its argumentation. Further, Klinke is quite right that we rarely examine architecture in the realm of geopolitics. Nevertheless, in *Cryptic Concrete* the architecture feels more like an architecture of the mind than a material architecture. In Klinke's analysis it is, after all, the shaping of the West German collective subjectivity by the firestorms erupting from British and American bombers in the final stages of the war that drives them into the bunker. What role does the concrete of the bunker play in all of this, distinct from the traumatic geographies of the Germans? And given Klinke's time in the East German archives, I was curious how the East Germans related to *their* concrete bunkers, given they had similar traumatic pasts and a similar geopolitical situation (on the front lines of a putative World War 3) during the Cold War? In short, there is something overdetermined about this account of collective trauma. Both the people and the concrete seem to be lacking in agency, instead perpetually haunted by the past.

Finally, I wondered where this work might go? How might I take it up in my own work, or for what would I recommend it to students? Much of Ian's account focuses on looking for continuities where before none (or few) had been assumed. This is valuable work. But I struggle to think of where the contemporary resonance of this work can be found (Klinke seems to hint that nuclear weapons provide this resonance; I remain skeptical). Perhaps this is my failing, though. Climate change and its geo- and bio-politics might offer some purchase, but one of Klinke's more puritanical points is that the term 'geopolitics' needs to retain a link to previous discourses that animated it; presumably he is opposed to a climate change 'spin' on his concepts. What are the modern-day bunkers in geopolitical life, either others' or ours? Or is this kind of work so methodologically rooted in archives that our unconscious cannot be accessed in a contemporary setting?

These questions are small, though, in the grand scheme of things. This book is a valuable contribution to the historiography of geopolitics, and a theoretical contribution to our understanding of the spatiality of biopolitics. Most importantly, it allowed me to settle a beef with my old German professor.