

# Geopolitics and ‘the vision thing’: regarding Britain and America’s first nuclear missile

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Critical geopolitics, despite its radical ambitions, has been reluctant to shift its emphasis from the figure of the geopolitical tactician, ‘decisive’ events and the agency of the military-state. This paper, in common with recent work on ‘popular geopolitics’, offers a different agenda. It takes up the story of Britain and America’s first nuclear missile – the US-made ‘Corporal’ – through the testimony of a self-described ‘space-daft’ schoolboy who, in 1959, travelled alone across Scotland to witness the first British testing of the missile. However, unlike much of the literature on popular geopolitics, this paper is concerned with the more-than-representational question of observant practice. Addressing recent calls for a more empirical enquiry into the relationship between geography and visual culture, the paper examines how geopolitical power operates through sights and spectacles.

**key words** Hebrides geopolitics visual culture observant practice  
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And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. (Numbers 21 v. 8)

## Introduction

On the 23 June 1959, the islanders of South Uist in the Scottish Hebrides were witnesses to an unprecedented Cold War spectacle: the launch of the US-made Corporal missile, the ballistic carrier for Britain and America’s first guided nuclear warhead. One local crofter whose land was within a mile of the launch pad described how he saw it ascend ‘straight into the sky with a blaze of light behind it’ (Anon 1959a). ‘It was’, he added, ‘a most beautiful thing to watch’. *The Glasgow Herald* reported that the noise of the launch was so loud that it could be heard all over the island. ‘Army’s success with the Corporal’ was the triumphant

headline that would have relieved the senior command at the British army (Plate 1). They had, after all, bought an American missile that was dismally inaccurate, notoriously unreliable and astonishingly expensive. Local and national protests had dogged the construction of the Hebridean testing range. Even this first launch – which had initially been scheduled for the Queen’s official birthday on 11 June – had been delayed for two weeks on account of ‘technical difficulties’. Supportive media coverage of the Corporal’s debut performance was therefore tremendously important, both for shoring up domestic support for Britain’s home-grown nuclear weapons programme and also, more strategically, for asserting Britain’s continuing claim to geopolitical significance. The spectacle of the ascending Corporal, it was hoped, would testify to Britain’s continuing presence on the international stage.

This paper is concerned with the cultural and geopolitical import of the Corporal, a missile that,

## Army's Success with the Corporal

### FIRST OF SUMMER SERIES

The first Corporal missile was yesterday successfully fired into the Atlantic from the guided weapons range in the Hebrides, it is announced by the War Office. All the safety arrangements worked satisfactorily.

This marked the opening in South Uist, near the township of Geirinish, of the first Service range of its kind in the United Kingdom and the start of a series of firings by the Army this summer.

The Army chose a fine day for the firing. Many islanders who were stacking and drying peat paused in their work to watch the missile rise from the launching-pad. One crofter, describing its flight "straight into the sky with a blaze of light behind it," said it was "a most beautiful thing to watch."

The Corporal, a surface-to-surface missile, is 45ft. long and weighs about five tons. It is powered by a liquid-fuel rocket motor and has a range between 50 and 75 miles. It can be fitted with a nuclear warhead which would give each missile a fire-power equivalent to about 10,000 tons of T.N.T.

The preparations for the firing yesterday, the range instrumentation, and all the technical equipment were entirely in the hands of men drawn from the Royal Artillery, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, and the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. The safety arrangements were handled entirely by the Army.

The only civilians concerned in the series are two Americans from the U.S. firms who make the Corporals.

The noise the Corporal made as it was launched was said to have been so loud that it was heard

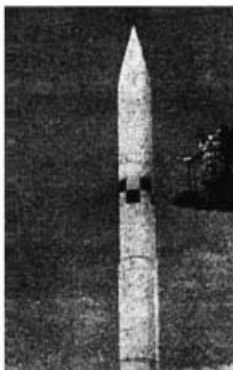


Plate 1 'Army's success with Corporal'

Source: *The Glasgow Herald*, 24 June 1959

as the first NATO weapon authorized to carry a guided nuclear warhead, represents the ultimate progenitor of contemporary weapons of mass destruction. Although I shall go on to detail the geopolitical context behind the use of the Corporal and the circuits of (super)power within which it moved, one of my central arguments is that force of the missile was less 'technical' than cultural and rhetorical. That is to say that the missile's power was represented less by its ability to propel a 680 kg, 20 kiloton XW-7 nuclear fission warhead 40 km high, than it was by being a culturally configured object that traded on a slippage between two popular genres: 'rockets' and 'missiles'. The former category implies a benign ascent into space, the meaning of the rocket being founded on older imperial ideas about scientific exploration and the

discovery of 'new worlds'. 'Missile', by contrast, carries a very different cultural freight, implying both impact and annihilation. The Corporal was discursively constructed as both rocket and missile: as a peacetime research vehicle and as a Cold War weapon of mass destruction. While the rationale for the Corporal was largely a product of Cold War military tensions along the borders of Eastern Europe, the widespread enthusiasm about rocketry and space exploration in the 1950s eased the passage of the missile into the Western popular and political cultures of the era.

My particular interest in this essay is concerned with the Corporal as an object of visual enquiry, attention and curiosity. As such the paper seeks to develop geography's long-standing engagement with visual culture, a theme that has returned to prominence in recent years (Rose 1992 2003; Nash 1996; Ryan 2003). One of the sub-fields of geography that has been most exercised by questions of visibility is the diverse body of work under the rubric of 'critical geopolitics' (Ó Tuathail 1996a 1996b; Smith 2000; Heffernan 2000). In Gearóid Ó Tuathail's influential book of this title, he describes the geopolitical tradition as being 'ocularcentric' insofar as the competition between states was regarded 'with a natural attitude, a philosophical approach to reality grounded in Cartesian perspectivalism' (Ó Tuathail 1996a, 23). In a break with this tradition, Ó Tuathail argues that the geographer is an active agent rather than a passive observer of geopolitical phenomena. Indeed, the notion of observation as an expression of, and metaphor for, geopolitical power lies at the heart of his critique. While acknowledging the value of Ó Tuathail's concern with the apparent ocularcentricism of geopolitical discourse, I want nevertheless to undertake a more specific examination of the relationship between visibility and geopolitics. In doing this, I wish to respond to Gillian Rose's call for a more empirical form of geographical enquiry into visual culture (Rose 2003; for earlier models, see Matless 1996; Driver and Martins 2002).

Throughout my cultural history of the Corporal missile lies a concern with what Hayden Lorimer, softening the binary of non/representational theory, has called the 'more-than-representational' (Lorimer 2005). This concern for a more lively enquiry into the geopolitical pulls me in different directions. Until recently, I wanted to distance my project here from Nigel Thrift's provocative claim that critical geopolitics has been 'taken in' by rep-

resentation, with its 'mesmerized attention to texts and images' (Thrift 2000, 385, 381). At the time, this seemed to me an unsatisfactory characterization of the literature that inadequately acknowledged those contributions which had taken a different approach (for instance, Gibson 1998). Another five years of geopolitical scholarship, however, makes Thrift's claim harder to dismiss. While I remain unconvinced that critical (or more specifically, popular) geopolitics has been 'taken in' by representation, it has undoubtedly remained the primary focus, with new work on cinema (Dodds 2003 2005; Acland *et al.* 2004; Lukinbeal 2004; Ó Tuathail 2005; Power and Crampton 2005), photography (MacDonald 2004), literature (Kirkby 2000), cartoons (Dittmer 2005), cartography (Vujakovic 2002; Cosgrove and della Dora 2005) and curatorship (Luke 2004). This work has been important, and yet it largely fails to attend to everyday citations of geopolitical power that reside in what Thrift has called 'the little things' (Thrift 2000). Recent work on embodiment or affect, for instance, is only just beginning to find an expression in the geopolitics literature (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Ó Tuathail 2003; Collis 2004).

In this context I adopt a 'having-one's-cake . . .' approach that builds upon earlier geopolitical studies of iconography (see, for instance, Caputi 1995; Dodds 1996 2003; Gusterson 1999; Kirsch 1997; Taylor 1998 2003), but is less concerned with analysing particular images *per se* than with using such images to open up questions about observant practice. I am interested in what it means to see and how geopolitical power is exercised through the experience of sights and spectacles. This consistent emphasis on visibility and the business of looking does not isolate sight from the other senses but attends to the ways in which vision is embodied and connective with other sensory registers (Ingold 2000). It also acknowledges that, as Matthew Kearnes points out, there is no simple correspondence between sight and articulation, but rather 'knowledge is composed of rough bifurcating combinations of the seeable and the sayable' (Kearnes 2000, 335). Drawing on Foucault, Kearnes argues that

one does not simply see, but rather objects and phenomena are 'seeable' or 'visible' in specific contexts . . . when the [embodied] eye is placed in machinic combination with discourses, knowledges and spaces. (Kearnes 2000, 335)

In this paper, then, I am interested in the wider cultural and geopolitical contexts that have made

the Corporal differently visible to a variety of observant subjects, a multiplicity of visual experience that should challenge the implicit homogeneity of the term 'scopic regime'.

I start by examining the relationship between critical geopolitics and visual culture, particularly as this is expressed in the work of, and responses to, Gearóid Ó Tuathail. I go on to briefly detail the construction of the Hebridean seascape as a theatre of military operations and the locus of Cold War rivalries over surveillance. This episode is then contextualized within a wider tendency in the Cold War geopolitics of NATO to prioritize nuclear technology, a policy shift that is articulated through the ocularcentric discourses and exhibitiv practices of the military state. My argument then departs from the state as the primary agent in geopolitics and takes up the story of a 13-year-old boy whose desire to see the Corporal for himself relocates the power of the missile in the realm of 1950s popular culture.

### **'The vision thing . . . is always more than just a vision thing'**

Critical geopolitics has emerged as a radical reappraisal of a longer geopolitical tradition associated with such notable figures as Nicholas Spykman, Isaiah Bowman, Fredrich Ratzel and Halford Mackinder (Ó Tuathail 1996a; Ó Tuathail *et al.* 1998; Smith 2003). Within the last decade, critical geopolitics has been most significantly advanced by Gearóid Ó Tuathail, who has laid the groundwork for understanding the discursive apparatus of power within international relations. In particular, he has challenged the idea of the geographer as a passive observer of geopolitical phenomena, but has instead highlighted the agency of geographers and geography in the scripting of global space. Indeed, the notion of observation as an expression of, and metaphor for, geopolitical power lies at the heart of his critique. In figures like Ratzel and Mackinder, Ó Tuathail identifies an ocularcentric conception of international relations that is grounded in the philosophy of Cartesian perspectivalism. By taking this notion of Cartesian perspectivalism out of art history, Ó Tuathail argues that, as a philosophical principle, it usefully explains the dominant position of the geopolitical theorist in relation to the phenomena that is being described. In this model, the intellectual is seen as independent of, and set apart from, a pre-existing social reality along the lines

of the simple Cartesian binary between an 'in here' mind/self/consciousness and an 'out there' world of objects. The 'gaze' of the geopolitical theorist is constructed as neutral and disembodied and, by implication, blind to issues of personal subjectivity. Occasionally, Ó Tuathail uses an example – such as Halford Mackinder atop Mt Kenya – of actual practices of observation, but for the most part his analysis is concerned with using the philosophical model of Western visuality, as outlined by Martin Jay, to explain the textuality of geopolitics (Jay 1993).<sup>1</sup> Ó Tuathail's interest in the visual is primarily as a metaphor for the failure of geopolitical theorists to be aware of their own agency in the shaping and scripting of global space. While acknowledging the value of this wider conception, I want to rethink the visuality of geopolitics in more specific and empirical terms that run against the grain of the Cartesian model.

Both Michael Heffernan and Neil Smith have been critical of Ó Tuathail's restricted interest in what Smith, borrowing a Bush-ism, refers to as 'the vision thing' (Heffernan 2000; Smith 2000). The substance of Heffernan's critique is that '[d]espite its message, *Critical Geopolitics* is a very textual account in which the techniques used by cultural critics to analyze, deconstruct, and challenge visual media have no place' (Heffernan 2000, 348). He laments the absence of 'any serious analysis of precisely how specific visual images have been deployed within Western geopolitics' (348). In his response, Ó Tuathail acknowledges that he could 'have more effectively pursued the question of visuality through an analysis of certain specific images as geopolitical texts in their own right', adding that he 'hope[s] that such work will emerge in the future' (Ó Tuathail 2000, 389). This is a comparatively small concession, however, alongside his insistent refusal to recognize a meaningful distinction between image and text in the first place. He argues instead that there is a need to demonstrate 'the dependence of the geopolitical gaze upon that which it tries to occlude: writing in general. The vision thing, in other words, is always more than just a vision thing' (390).

Ó Tuathail's gesture towards a research agenda on the co-constitution of geopolitics and visual culture remains both timely and important. Even more than the first Gulf War, the recent war against Iraq has been waged through photography: from Colin Powell's satellite 'intelligence' shown to the UN Security Council to the digital snaps of torture

at Abu Ghraib prison (see Gregory 2004). A close visual exegesis of these images need not been caught within an older art-historical paradigm of the 'representational'. Such a line of enquiry can also consider the production of photographic space; the mobility of image-objects (Hughes 2003); and performative aspects of both creating and viewing photographs. Above all, as Kearnes has pointed out:

any negotiation of visual experience is ... less about determining the 'meaning' of pictures and images and more about examining the various combinations and conditions under which the subject of the picture becomes both visible as a subject and *the subject* of the picture. (Kearnes 2000, 338)

The usefulness of such images is that they can lead us back to the figure of observer, to the construction of the observant subject and to a prior cultural moment of 'bearing witness' (Crary 1992). However, I want to move beyond the detached model of the Cartesian subject towards an idea of perception as more expansive than merely the human body as a discrete and bounded seat of awareness (see Wylie 2005). As Tim Ingold argues, 'the gaze is caught up in a dialogic, exploratory encounter between the perceiver and the world' (2000, 263). This paper, then, is not primarily concerned with specific images but with the geopolitics of *observant practice* – quite simply, what it means to see – from supra-state surveillance and counter-surveillance to the enraptured gaze of a teenage boy. An emphasis on the embodied practice of vision substantially complicates the alleged oclarcenrism of geopolitical discourse (to which I will later return) and takes us towards the 'more extensive theorization of particular techniques of observation and sight' which Ó Tuathail suggests 'would ... have enriched' his *Critical Geopolitics* (Ó Tuathail 2000, 390).

With this debate in mind, I am interested in how the Corporal missile, one of the earliest vehicles of NATO's Cold War nuclear doctrine, was subject to three regimes of visuality – display, surveillance and spectacle – each with corresponding forms of observant practice and embodying different configurations of power. Although the discussion in this paper is largely confined to ideas of spectacle, the politics of military display are fleetingly addressed when I consider the exhibition of the newly purchased Corporal by the British Territorial Army, in a bid to mobilize the patriotic enthusiasm of potential recruits (other models for this work include

Matless 1998, 173; Woodward 2004). Ideas about surveillance and counter-surveillance inevitably arise in relation to the testing of the Corporal.<sup>2</sup> My interest in the culture of surveillance around the Corporal missile is in the extent to which it invokes the control of time, territory and the moving object. Vision, after all, is not just about passive 'seeing', but about active 'looking'. And to look at an object is, in John Berger's analysis, to construct the relationship that exists both between things, and between things and ourselves:

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach – though not necessarily within arm's reach. To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it. (Berger 1972, 8)

The French urbanist Paul Virilio, whose writings are gloomily concerned with the pervasiveness of military surveillance, is apt to quote the former US Undersecretary of Defense, W. J. Perry, who famously remarked: 'I'd say as soon as you can see a target you can hope to destroy it' (Virilio quoted in Leslie 2000, 55). Looking, in military terms, has become performative: to have a target in sight is to have already changed the relation between subject and object. The technology of optics, from the earliest field telescope to modern systems of radar and optoelectronic surveillance, can arguably be reduced to the triumph of speed and the defeat of proximity. There is therefore an important relation between practices of looking and the control of territory, 'for to possess the earth, to hold terrain' writes Virilio, 'is also to possess the best means to scan it in order to protect and defend it' (Virilio 1998, 24). Space exists in relation to our ability to command it: the evolution of optical or scanning technology has made possible the remote control of human action. So if the human gaze situates the observer in the world, the military gaze establishes the political space of the state in a world of competing sovereignty. As part of this contest, the Hebrides were recruited as a territorial fringe set aside for the 'infinite preparation' of a 'pure war', in which states of war and peace, being mutually enfolded, were endlessly deferred: 'neither war nor peace but permanent logistic struggle in which warfare preparations reorganize social and economic relations in order to secure peace' (Luke and Ó Tuathail 2000, 367; Luke 1989; see also Law 1999).

This peaceful readiness for war had its own uneven geography. The British purchase of the

Corporal missile required a suitable area within the British Isles for missile testing and training, an extensive activity that was directed to the most marginal corner of the UK – the Outer Hebrides – where space could be more freely appropriated without undue political cost.<sup>3</sup> This proposed 'rocket range', as it came to be known, required a rangehead base 3 miles long by 1 mile deep (on South Uist); a suitable area of flat land for a runway (Benbecula); a sea danger area, 250 miles by 100 miles free from intensive shipping and with a conveniently located and uninhabited island (St Kilda), from which to monitor the trajectory of the guided missile. While other locations were ostensibly considered and rejected, the Hebrides were the most obvious choice for this massive topography of observation. Ultimately, their strategic position on the shortest route by air and sea between Europe and America meant that these same monitoring stations would become part of the NATO Air Defence Ground Environment (NADGE) providing early warning of an anticipated Soviet threat from the North Atlantic (Spaven 1983). In this way, the Hebridean landscape and seascape not only became a theatre in the specular sense, but a theatre of military operations and the arena of clandestine military intelligence. The visibility of state secrets became such a matter of national security that the British state was forced to annex the hitherto unclaimed stack of Rockall, simply to monopolize what was one of the most valuable perceptual fields in the world (MacDonald forthcoming). The geopolitical theatre of the Cold War consisted of many such minor cameos: oddly literal struggles for visual dominance.

The primary theme of this paper is not surveillance but spectacle; the perspective is not that of the military state with its advanced orbital vision, but the embodied eye as the means of situating the 'ordinary' citizen within the political world of the state. A similar approach, in relation to the 'spectacularization' of the atomic explosion, has been employed in the perceptive work of Scott Kirsch (Kirsch 1997 1998 2000; Kirsch and Mitchell 1998). Kirsch details the US Atomic Energy Commission's creation of a public spectacle out of one of the early atomic explosions, most famously manifest in a full page colour photograph of the mushroom cloud published in the 16 July 1951 issue of *Life* magazine (Kirsch 1997). In his analysis, Kirsch uses Noam Chomsky's theory of a 'spectator democracy' in which 'the public is reduced to a spectator's role in

the management of political affairs' (229). Colour photography was the principal apparatus in staging this spectacle, allowing 'the explicitly visual aspect of the tests' to be celebrated (237). There is a sense, however, that the idea of the spectacle – disclosing its origin in Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* – represents a linear and a non-reciprocal power relation, in which the citizen-observer is constructed as a passive subject and the 'eye-catching qualities of the spectacle' can 'mask other (less visible) political and economic realities' (Kirsch 1997, 242; Debord 1994). While Kirsch acknowledges that spectacles are differently negotiated and can 'generate their own contradictions' (246), I want nevertheless to further problematize the question of agency that adheres to the spectacular. A reassertion of the active nature of the observant subject is perhaps particularly apposite in relation to the visual culture of nuclearism. In Fermi and Samra's account of the US Manhattan Project – the first atomic explosion – they describe how in the countdown to detonation, project staff gathered outside the control bunkers and were told to lie face down, flat, with feet pointing towards ground zero. Edward Teller, the so-called 'father of the bomb', recalled that 'no-one complied. *We were determined to look the beast in the eye*' (Fermi and Samra 1995, 149, my emphasis). Even if Teller was not a typical observer, there is a sublimity to the nuclear spectacle that belies a passive viewing.

These spectacular geographies of nuclearism must not eclipse the importance of what Heffernan has called 'the most obvious visual form of geopolitics', namely cartography (Heffernan 2000, 349; see also Cosgrove and della Dora 2005). While it is not a project developed in this paper, it is worth mentioning an earlier nuclear geography in the form of William Bunge's *Nuclear War Atlas*, in which he takes up such geographical tropes as 'nuclear geomorphology', 'the geography of radiation' and nuclear war as 'the region of no return' (Bunge 1988). Bunge's *Atlas* maps out a post-apocalyptic terrain, without any attempt to soften the theme of 'unremitting and sense-numbing disaster' (Bunge 1988, 178). Few geographers have offered their readers such a bleak cartography. 'The maps use the colour red for death, and death is everywhere in this atlas', wrote Bunge. The *Atlas*, he added with foreboding, was 'merely a shopping list of alternative deaths for readers and their families'. The overt sense of dread so prominent in Bunge's *Atlas* is not at the forefront of the narrative that

follows. Nor does this paper address the social and environmental consequences of 'peaceful' nuclear activity (Davis 1993; Kirsch 1998 2000). This is not to belittle the urgency of a nuclear critique, either at the height of the Cold War or in our own no less dangerous era of arms proliferation. Rather, my intention is to attend to the cultural circumstances in which the horror of nuclear annihilation could be occluded or aestheticized. Before introducing the popular geopolitical narrative about watching the Corporal, I want firstly to explore the formal and practical geopolitics of nuclear security.

### Envisioning an era of nuclear security

From the outset, Britain has strived to be a nuclear power. But by the time it started to develop its own nuclear device at the end of the 1940s, the United States and the USSR had already tested theirs (Navias 1991, 13). One might argue that this failure to 'keep up' with the superpowers has haunted British nuclear policy ever since, underscoring the international retrenchment of its geopolitical power with the waning of Empire in the middle of the twentieth century. However, the fact that Britain succeeded in developing *any* independent nuclear capability was enough for it to gain limited admittance to the American stockpile; indeed, this has been the persistent goal of successive British governments since 1945 (Twigge and Scott 2000, 100). Britain had nothing like the technical and logistical capabilities for arms production of the US, but it was arguably more responsive in terms of military strategy. Winston Churchill's 1952 Report of Defence Policy and Global Strategy was the earliest intimation of a NATO policy that would define the Cold War era. It staked out the view that nuclear weapons would form 'the foundation of strategy rather than baroque ornamentation' (Twigge and Macmillan 1996, 263). The political context for this shift was that Britain's international standing in the 1950s was looking somewhat uncertain. Even before the ignominies of Suez, it had 'lost' India and Pakistan to independence movements; surrendered the Palestine mandate to the United Nations; and passed responsibility over Greece and Turkey to the United States. Possessing a nuclear missile was seen by Winston Churchill as a shortcut back to the international stage. As the first country in the world to suffer a missile attack, when it was the target in 1944 of the Nazi V1 flying bomb and the V2 rocket, it is also unsurprising

that Britain's Cold War remilitarization should prioritize the development of a tactical and strategic missile capability alongside technologies of observation, detection and transmission. When military labour was being scaled down from its expensive wartime heights, nuclear weapons were thought to offer a more cost-efficient form of geopolitical muscle. While this was a dramatic change in military strategy, the underlying principles of Churchill's report – including the key notion of 'nuclear deterrence' – were nevertheless reflected two years later in US President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 'New Look' national security policy (Navias 1991, 2).

#### *From New Look to VIOLET VISION*

Gearóid Ó Tuathail has drawn attention to the double ocularcentrism of geopolitical discourse, such that not only is the situated character of the tactician eclipsed, but that metaphors about vision are frequently prominent. 'Ocularcentrism' he writes, 'should be understood as a condition of all geopolitical texts in the broadest sense, whether they be photographic images or grand strategy' (Ó Tuathail 2000, 390). While George Bush's phrase 'the vision thing' – implying strategic doctrine – is perhaps the best known example, other ocular metaphors frequently recur in the military discourse. The US Defence Department's recent *Joint Vision 2020* document famously coined the phrase 'full-spectrum dominance' to refer to the ability of the US armed forces to control any situation across a range of military operations. Eisenhower's New Look policy was another such instance, implying a suitably modern course of action that vigilantly surveys the changing security environment. In a departure from 'conventional' defence, this new approach promised 'massive nuclear retaliation' while simultaneously making peace with the Soviet Union and protecting America's economy, what Kevin Soutor has identified as the 'true Cold War weapon' (Soutor 1993, 682; Dockrill 1996). This emphasis was again taken up in another review in 1957 by the British Minister of Defence Duncan Sandys, who further elevated nuclear reliance and nuclear deterrence as the central pillars of defence strategy. For both Britain and America, a compromise had to be found, however, between a policy of massive nuclear retaliation and the doctrine of a 'flexible response', which might include the large-scale deployment of conventional forces as well as

small-scale 'tactical' nuclear weapons. The changing security environment in Eastern Europe meant that the American policy, and that of NATO more broadly, was geared to the possibility of fighting a 'limited' nuclear war using lower yield tactical weapons. This scenario, first outlined by a team of academics under the ocular auspices of 'Project Vista', set the strategic context for the Corporal, being the first operational guided missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead (Elliot 1986).

As Britain's home-grown missile programme was insufficiently advanced to offer an independent deterrent (Hill 2001), and the V-bomber nuclear strike force had other constraints,<sup>4</sup> the UK looked across the Atlantic for a stop-gap measure until its own generation of rockets would come into service. The Corporal was considered the ideal solution. Such an exchange of information and technology would be important evidence of the bilateral ties that could be developed between nuclear allies (Twigge 1993; Twigge and Macmillan 1996). Sir Richard Powell, Permanent Secretary at the War Office, acknowledged that 'the Corporal problem' would be 'a very important test of our proclaimed policy of increasing cooperation with the United States and taking American weapons when they are suitable'.<sup>5</sup> The 'problem', however, was that while Britain was interested in the Corporal as the vehicle for carrying an atomic warhead, the US had legislation under the 1946 McMahon Act that explicitly prohibited the sharing of its nuclear secrets (Ball 1995). Britain would have to be content with the missile minus its payload.

In 1954, America agreed to sell the Corporal programme complete with 113 missiles, ground launchers, handling, guidance and control equipment (Army Ballistic Missile Agency 1961, 263). Initially the warhead problem was not considered insurmountable. Britain was already developing its own nuclear warhead for a freefall bomb under the code name RED BEARD (a refined version of its earliest nuclear device, BLUE DANUBE) which was thought could be modified to fit into the Corporal casing.<sup>6</sup> The project to develop this new tailored warhead was assigned the code name VIOLET VISION (Twigge and Scott 2000, 196). These colour code names, followed by a noun, were routinely given to the major British weapons projects since 1945 (Gibson 2005). VIOLET VISION, however, is particularly suggestive: as the active component of Britain's first nuclear missile it



**Plate 2 Monumental visibility: a replica of the newly purchased US Corporal missile stands alongside the Scott Monument in the centre of Edinburgh, 1958**

*Source:* The Scotsman archive, © The Scotsman Publications Ltd, reproduced with permission

inevitably invokes the spectacular outcome of the explosion. In the famous photograph of the first atomic explosion published in *Life* magazine, much was made of the 'mysterious violet haze' that appeared at the top of the mushroom cloud (Kirsch 1997, 227). This particular VIOLET VISION, however, was never to be realized. Eisenhower succeeded in amending the McMahon Act in 1958 with the result that Britain was able to receive American warheads by 1960, sparing the prohibitive cost of the home-grown programme as well as the difficulty

in procuring sufficient fissile material (Navias 1991, 87; Clark 1994, 41).

#### *Monumental visibility*

The detail of warhead specification was not of primary interest to domestic audiences back home. As far as the media and the military were concerned, Britain had purchased a flagship missile, a 'Corporal' that was to guard the nation from the Soviet peril. Its arrival in Britain was scarcely an inconspicuous event. On the one hand,



details of the most prized weapon in the country's arsenal were a state secret, and managing its security was itself a major operation. On the other hand, the whole principle of 'deterrent' was premised on the explosive potential of the missile being internationally *visible*. The ideology of defence needs to create an image of power and sovereignty that will affirm the confidence of citizens in the legitimacy and inviolability of the state, while also deterring rival colonists and hostile powers (Gold and Revill 2000, 238). For that reason, the apparatus of defence, while its technical workings are kept secret, must still be seen in order to be effective. People must look at the Corporal missile in much the same way as the God of the Old Testament instructed the Israelites to survive the plague of snakes: behold the serpent on the pole and live! The citizen was to look upon this very emblem of apocalyptic destruction with the political faith that it alone could deliver them from death. The Corporal therefore became a national monument, not only as an emblem of the aggressive virility of nationhood but, in the terms of psychoanalysis, this was the signifier of a symbolic order through which the citizen could reconcile themselves to the phallogocentric power of state 'defence' (see Nast 2003).

Once again, the visibility of defence is also a question of geography. The missile had to be taken out of the silo and into the street. The Territorial Army toured the nation's towns and cities with a Corporal as a prop to encourage recruitment. A replica was erected alongside the Scott monument in Edinburgh's Princes Street, a primary of space of national representation (Plate 2). Bryan Taylor, reinvigorating the ailing genre of 'nuclear criticism', has argued that the paradoxical conditions of Cold War deterrence 'effectively fused nuclear arms and monuments' (Taylor 2003, 2). Because both super-powers built up sufficient arsenals to ensure mutual destruction, nuclear weapons 'could only be used as symbols of national capability and intention'. In Derrida's famous formulation, missiles thus became 'fabulously textual': that is to say that the referent of nuclear narratives could only be realized with the erasure of narration itself (Derrida 1984, 23; Taylor 2003, 2). This culture of display on Edinburgh's Princes Street, then, *is* the power of the missile; we are dealing with the effect (and not the referent) of representation (Taylor 2003, 6). The visibility of military hardware, however, is not always that which is deliberately sanctioned by the state. When the

Corporal was exhibited in Edinburgh, it certainly made demands on the visual attention of passers by: it asked that the wandering eyes of the passive observer rest, if only for a moment, on the missile. But in the narrative that follows, the Corporal was the subject of a more determined and enraptured gaze.

### Watching the Corporal: 'Rocket Boy' and the NATO chiefs

The critique of Ó Tuathailian geopolitics, even from such disparate quarters as Neil Smith and Nigel Thrift, has made much of the over-reliance on the nation-state as an agent in both traditional and critical geopolitics (Thrift 2000; Smith 2000). While Smith seeks an agenda that 'would interrogate both the historical construction and contemporary reproduction of contemporary nation-states' (Smith 2000, 370), Thrift's emphasis has been on the lack of attention to the human body. He advocates a form of enquiry into the geopolitical that takes seriously 'the special qualities of embodiment which fashion semblances and conjure social worlds' (Thrift 2000, 383). It is in this context that I want to introduce the experience of Duncan Lunan, a 13-year-old boy who was determined to see the Corporal for himself. His story is a suitable antidote not just to the state-dominated field of geopolitics, but also to the no less state-dominated histories of nuclearism (Hughes 2004, 456). This sort of biographical approach is by no means new in geography (see Lorimer 2003). It also falls within a wider re-orientation of critical geopolitics, from the manoeuvres of elite men to the 'little details' of 'ordinary' people and the construction of an 'everyday' or popular geopolitics (Thrift 2000; Sharp 1996 2000a). An emphasis that takes popular culture seriously as an arena for geopolitics has been particularly developed by Joanne Sharp in her analysis of the *Reader's Digest* in the construction of Cold War 'danger' (Sharp 2000a 2000b). The conception of the 'popular' in operation here is less concerned with texts (narrowly defined) than with popular practices, in this case the schoolboy desire to witness in person that which had been imagined through science fiction. It is a narrative that can tell us a great deal about the tension between the Corporal as a subject for public spectacle and for secret intelligence. The story was first brought to my attention by the editor of the *Journal of the Royal Artillery* who, knowing of my interest in

## VISITOR AT UIST—AND THE NAME'S LUNAN

# Rocket boy's 250-mile trek

By **DUNCAN McNICOL**

**D**UNCAN LUNAN, a 13-year-old Troon schoolboy, wants to be the first man on the moon.

This week, the boy with the name that fits took a tidy step along the way to the stars when he saw Britain's Corporal guided missile soar into a blue Hebridean sky and streak out over the



**Duncan at home with his collection of model aircraft.**

Plate 3 News article

Source: *Glasgow Evening Citizen*, 26 July 1959

the Hebridean rocket range, forwarded to me a manuscript by Duncan – now a writer of science-fiction and a communicator on space matters – recounting his own experience. What follows is drawn from Duncan's own extraordinary account (Lunan 2002), with additional detail obtained from our subsequent three-year correspondence, an exchange which has fostered my own interest as a geographer in thinking differently about space.

Space was Duncan Lunan's passion. As a 13-year-old schoolboy from Troon, near Glasgow, he avidly read science fiction comics, kept abreast of emerging developments in rocket science and collected an array of space-related models (Plate 3). So when the British military developed a rocket range in the Scottish Hebrides, Duncan was naturally interested in what might take place there. He had even started writing a novel about the British space programme and had included South Uist as the site of his fictional launch complex (Lunan 2002, 36).

Duncan's first step was to write to the Commanding Officer (CO) on the Hebridean range, Lt. Col. E. G. Cooper, asking if he could come and watch. 'I have been studying rockets since I was seven and know no Russians', wrote Duncan, amid other details of his space-related reading and with an assurance that he hoped to join the army cadets when he was old enough (McNicol 1959). Cooper's reply was encouraging, but ultimately non-committal, stressing that 'security regulations prevent me from giving you dates or from allowing you to be within a prescribed distance at the time of launching' (Lunan 2002, 37). This uncertainty about dates was soon clarified by another article in the *Glasgow Herald* that particularly caught his eye. The paper reported that on the 11 July, a Corporal launched in front of Christopher Soames, the Secretary of State for War, had failed to develop sufficient power and struggled to get even beyond the land before its operatives aborted the flight. Amid the

details of this conspicuous failure, it was reported that there were still another three launches before the end of the firing season (Anon 1959b). For Duncan, this was the information he needed. Assisted by family and friends at connecting points of the journey, Duncan used his savings to travel to Uist.

On arriving at the Carnan Inn, South Uist, he discovered that he was only just in time: two of the last three rockets in that season's firing had already gone and the third was due for the following morning. Having hitched a lift to the range the next day, the primary difficulty was gaining admittance. His only identification was a positive, if rather vague, letter from Col. Cooper. Mentioning the name of the CO at the gate persuaded the sentry to let him through, with instructions to report to the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM). What Duncan did not know was that being the last firing of the season, the Army had invited all the heads of armed services in NATO to witness the event, constructing a special grandstand 400 metres from the launch pad, from which to view the spectacle (Plate 4). The RSM was confused as to how Duncan had been allowed in, but decided to pass the responsibility to another RSM – RSM Jennings – leaving a rather inexperienced private in charge of directing the boy in the meantime. As RSM Jennings was reported to be up at the rocket, the private drove through another security cordon to the very base of the Corporal missile, with Duncan hanging excitedly out of the window, camera in hand.

'The scene that followed', wrote Duncan over 40 years later, 'was pure farce' (Lunan 2002). Although the noise of the fuelling process was so loud that the conversation was impossible, they were left under little doubt that the ground crew were desperate for them to leave the immediate danger area and that RSM Jennings was not there (Plate 5). When RSM Jennings was eventually found, he was greatly concerned at what Duncan had just seen, but decided to allow him to stay for the launch, given that he had already witnessed matters that were potentially much more sensitive. The 12.30 pm launch was running late and Col. Cooper was busily engaged in giving a commentary to the assembled dignitaries at the grandstand. Being a formal military occasion, Cooper was in full dress uniform, wielding his 'swagger stick' – a ceremonial prop – to command the audience and point to features of interest (Plate 6). Col. Cooper told the NATO chiefs,



**Plate 4** The grandstand vacated by the heads of NATO armed forces after the delay in launch

Source: Duncan Lunan

You may have heard that there have been technical difficulties with the Corporal missile. Well, gentlemen, I am here to tell you on behalf of the British Army that having the Corporal in service, and complaining about technical problems, is like being married to Brigitte Bardot and complaining about the shape of the bedpost.

Carol Cohn has shown how nuclear language often works through a discourse of competitive male sexuality, constructing a particular form of heterosexual identification in which men are controllers of machinery and/or women's bodies (Cohn 1987a 1987b). One need not be a committed psychoanalyst in order to see how the missile could become acculturated in this way. In the James Bond novel *Goldfinger*, for instance, the villain's plan to contaminate the gold reserves of Fort Knox with a stolen Corporal warhead is foiled by the deft (though decidedly straight) manoeuvres of 007 and Pussy Galore (Fleming 1959).<sup>7</sup> While Matthew Sparke has rightly urged caution about attempts to marshal psychoanalytic



**Plate 5 Missile erection on the machair**  
*Source: Duncan Lunan*



**Plate 6 Lt Col. Cooper holds his 'swagger stick' upright**  
*Source: Duncan Lunan*

authority for arguments about masculinity and territoriality (Sparke 1994), it is striking how even the dry and technical information within the declassified military papers relating to the Corporal is replete with the language of 'warhead mating', 'missile erection', 'orifice position' and so on. As many nuclear critics have pointed out, it seems as if there is a frequent slippage between a discourse of national security and masculine *insecurity* (Sparke 1994, 1071; Caldicott 1984). But if security discourse is ocularcentric, it is also inevitably a spatializing discourse. As well as being a metonym for male sexual desire, the Corporal is also the figuratively male protector, standing sentinel – an observant position – over the feminized nation-state (see Enloe 1989).

After the laughter from the Brigitte Bardot gag had died down, it became apparent that there was indeed a major problem. Having been tested and developed in the desert environment of White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico, the Corporal was experiencing some performance anxiety induced, no doubt, by successive Hebridean cold showers which were playing havoc with the missile's telemetry

system (Army Ballistic Missile Agency 1961, 138). As the delay for this particular launch lengthened and the NATO dignitaries eventually left, Duncan wandered around, taking notes and asking questions. He was even allowed to look through one of the optical trackers 'which brought the missile almost as close as I had already been to it for real' (Lunan 2002). A mobile radar operator, who powered up his machine especially so that Duncan could witness it working, picked up an unexplainable echo which the telescope aligned with the antenna revealed to be a golden eagle flying over the sea (Plate 7). Far from being the detached Cartesian observer, Duncan is encompassed by that which he came to see; these instruments of vision become prosthetic extensions of his own body, recruiting him into a web of military hardware that fostered unexpected visual intimacies with both raptor and rocket. By 8.30 pm permission to launch was eventually given, in part because it was simply too hazardous to dismantle the missile now primed with highly dangerous red fuming nitric acid and analine. Except for a 13-year-old boy and his three military minders, the grandstand for this historic firing was empty (Plate 4).



**Plate 7 Mobile radar**

Source: Duncan Lunan

The numerical countdown to 'fire' was followed by a 'count-up' the phonetic alphabet – 'Alpha, Bravo, Charlie ...'. At 'Charlie', Duncan recalled that 'the first red flash of the ignition occurred under the rocket, and I never got to hear "Delta"':

The sound was much too loud to hear, just a dry rattle in the ear drums ... the rocket was surrounded by smoke which was turned a deep red by the diffused light from the rocket flame, but turned black as it pulled away. The flame was so dazzling that the missile was through its four-second hover and climbing before my eyes adjusted to see it again [...]

At first all I could see was the black nosecone and fins, with the incandescent red flame below about three times as long as the rocket itself, and a thin straight tail of smoke. [...]

Watching it climb at that steep angle made the whole sky suddenly three-dimensional. [...] As the Corporal entered the cloud the flame illuminated a big circle around it in pink, amazingly beautiful. (Lunan 2002, 40)

One could analyse this description with its integration of looking-and-listening in terms of 'percept' and 'affect', even if this complicates our understanding of what constitutes a field of vision (see Wylie 2005, 236). These terms might begin to open up the odd configurations of light and dark, stillness and movement, silence and uproar, anticipation and awe, greyness and hue, from which boy and projectile emerge as points in a circulation of percept and affect, rather than the discrete and stable 'observer' and 'observed' (Wylie 2005, 236). It is clear, I think, that Duncan's attention to the detail of colour and motion is too finely wrought to have been seen through a camera viewfinder; with the NATO chiefs gone, the task of capturing the scene on Duncan's camera was delegated to Col. Cooper's second-in-command. The resulting photograph picks out the ascending rocket, a numinous emissary between the terrestrial and the celestial (Plate 8). Inasmuch as this was a visual spectacle, it also required Duncan's body to respond (sometimes too slowly) not just to colour and contrast, but to sound as well as mechanical perturbations. The sensory experience is also, of course, about a wider perception of space. The spectacle of launch is arguably the spectacle of the vertical plane; of diminishing glow and fading sound. It would be a mistake therefore to pass over the meaning of the Corporal's disappearance, for it is the ultimate *invisibility* of the missile that makes it an object of visual curiosity in the first place. John Berger has often returned to this theme of the enigma of vision: a mystery of presence and absence, whereby we no longer see what we saw.

We face a *disappearance*. And a struggle ensues to prevent what has disappeared, what has become invisible, falling into the negation of the unseen, defying our existence. Thus, the visible produces faith in the reality of the invisible and provokes the development of an inner eye which retains and assembles and arranges, as if in an interior, as if what has been seen may be forever partly protected against the ambush of space, which is absence. (Berger 1984, 50)

After the event, Col. Cooper arranged for Duncan to be accompanied back to Glasgow with a party of soldiers going on leave, from whom the boy was to glean more information about future missile plans, all of which went into his diary. But Duncan's witnessing the Corporal at such close quarters was to become a problem for both the military and the Civil Service. The Scottish Office, being keen to



Plate 8 Corporal launch, 8.30 pm South Uist July 1959

Source: Duncan Lunan

prevent a breach of security from being embarrassingly public, summoned Duncan to a meeting immediately after his return home. Photographs and his detailed diary were handed over, but only the former were returned. Arranging an 'interview' for Duncan with Glasgow's *Evening Citizen* was a decisive move intended to turn a bad situation to military advantage; such a pre-emptive media strike was also able to iron out an 'official' version of *what Duncan saw* largely unencumbered by the

experience of the observant subject himself. That the story appeared – 'Visitor at Uist – and the Name's "Lunan"' ... 'the boy with the name that fits' – without any inappropriate detail, did not prevent the arrival of a string of new visitors to the Lunan household in Troon: in addition to Scottish Office personnel, came CID, Army Intelligence, MI5 and even the CIA. All wanted to be able to trace the breaches in security to individual soldiers but, fortunately for those concerned, Duncan had not recorded the names

of his sources and no action could be taken. One of the investigators confided to his parents

that all the technical information had long since been published in the USA and would doubtless be well known to the Soviets: it was only the British public (who were paying for it) from whom it had to be kept secret, just to prove that we could. (Lunan 2002, 41)

The rites of secrecy had to be observed for the sake of diplomacy, not because information had to be concealed from the enemy. One of the supreme contradictions of secrecy in this case is that the 'enemy' is assumed to be one of the privileged bearers of visual intelligence; it is the state's own citizens who must be kept in the dark. Secrecy, then, is generative of further secrecy, even if maintaining the appearance of covert behaviour outlived the original rationale for bounded knowledge. As Brian Balmer has argued, military secrecy has its own geography, controlling where people can go and what they can do (Balmer 2004, 199). The trail of besuited men at the Lunan household were less worried about the schoolboy leaking the state's military secrets than the reputation of state security being visibly compromised. Any evidence that the boundaries of military intelligence had been breached, not least by a teenager from Troon, could crucially weaken the bi-lateral trust that had been built up between the UK and the US as the nuclear axis of NATO.

As it turned out, the British Army had well-founded concerns about Soviet counter-surveillance on the rocket range. In the second year of Corporal firings, the *Scottish Daily Express* reported that Soviet ships 'posing as fishers' had been 'snooping' in the waters off St Kilda (Anon 1960, 1). This was the competitive peace-time detection and interception of electro-magnetic emissions which might be used to sabotage or 'jam' the Corporal, rendering the allies 'blind' in the theatre of war. The science of tracking the trajectory of the missile, both by direct vision and by electronic means, was central to developing its effectiveness and accuracy as a weapon. But the fact that it also revealed the spectacular inaccuracy of the missile – around 46 per cent success in 1959 – was unfortunate. Indeed, such was the concern about the Corporal's accuracy that questions were being asked about its operational effectiveness on the front line in Germany.<sup>8</sup> And some mistakes were more embarrassingly public than others. At one Hebridean launch on the 10 May 1966, a Corporal wrongly turned east, 'screamed over houses in South

Uist (narrowly missing a manse and a hamlet) and crashed into Loch Druidibeg, miraculously without casualties' (Spaven 1983, 89). The incident was satirized by a local Hebridean bard, Donald John MacDonald in a 13-verse song 'Oran na Rocaid' (Song of the Rocket) in which military omniscience and panopticism are mocked by the islanders (MacDhòmhnaill 1998, 235):

Bha 'n Còirneal agus prospaig aig  
A' boast-adh ris na privates  
'S e 'g inns dha na gillean  
Mu gach inneal bha gam fire-adh;  
Ach nuair a chual' e starram  
Chaith e ghlainne fad a làimheadh:  
'The devil take the hindmost,  
I'll hide in my car!'

The Colonel with a telescope  
Was boasting to the privates,  
Talking to the lads  
About each device that was fired;  
But when he heard the racket  
He threw the glass away:  
'The devil take the hindmost,  
I'll hide in my car!'

The bard uses the telescope as an instrument of authority, an emblem of the military's elite way of seeing that is rendered useless when the missile fails to respect boundaries of 'secure' knowledge and crashes through the immediate cognitive horizon of the local community.

## Conclusion

What then can we conclude from this *Boy's Own* adventure? There are five points of analysis I want to draw out of this episode. The first is that it speaks powerfully of the central paradox in the military strategy of the modern state; state and supra-state power straddle the dialectic that it must be transparent in order to be an effective deterrent and yet it must also be sufficiently opaque to retain its competitive military capacity. As the argument about *what Duncan saw* makes clear, there is a sort of schizoid military tension between being known, seen and understood on the one hand and being secretive and protective of visual intelligence on the other. Into this awesome realm of competing tensions blunders a teenage boy, whose passion for 'space' reveals the extent to which military hardware was sustained by a popular longing to get beyond a terrestrial perspective,

whether it was landing on the moon or seeing the Earth from space (see Cosgrove 1994). There is no doubt that Duncan Lunan's eleventh-hour privileged access to the missile was, lax security notwithstanding, predicated on the (perhaps misjudged) notion that his story could be valuable to the military at a time when local and national opposition to the tests was still significant. The significance of Duncan's story is that it reveals a hapless and unsanctioned crossing of the closely-maintained boundary between public spectacle and military intelligence. In a sense, the stray Corporal that narrowly missed the manse and crashed into Loch Druidibeg was a transgression of similar kind.

Secondly, Duncan's presence on the rocket range also re-orientates the question of agency in geopolitics. The sub-field of popular geopolitics has made considerable progress in demonstrating how geopolitical power operates through the domain of popular culture as well as through the formal and practical application of statecraft. Even here, however, there is a need to expand the emphasis beyond representation (in the form of literature, film, media and so on) to ordinary and less-ordinary events, biographies, practices and encounters. Duncan's visit to South Uist was to see a rocket, a vehicle for aspirations greater than nuclear destruction. The NATO chiefs, meanwhile, had travelled to see for themselves the flight of a missile: the premier weapon in their Cold War arsenal. Their status as decision-makers – or as agents of geopolitical power – is already assured by military rank. That Duncan outstayed the NATO chiefs in waiting for the launch says something about the persistent significance of popular imaginings. Playing with the slippage between 'missile' and 'missive', Derrida has questioned what – or rather who – is the vector of nuclear delivery?

Nuclear war is not only fabulous because one can only talk about it, but because the extraordinary sophistication of its technologies – which are also the technologies of delivery, sending, dispatching, of the missile in general, of mission, missive, emission and transmission, like all technè – the extraordinary sophistication of these technologies coexists, cooperates in an essential way with sophistry, psycho-rhetoric, and the most cursory, the most archaic, the most crudely opinionated psychagogy, the most vulgar psychology. (Derrida 1984, 24)

We can easily conceive of the Corporal as the ballistic delivery system of a nuclear warhead. It is harder perhaps to also conceive of a 13-year-old

boy as the delivery system; as an unlikely mechanism by which the passage of the missile is eased into the political culture of the era. In this analysis, geopolitics is child's play.

That this is an agency that operates through visual culture brings me to my third point. To come to terms with the power of the missile it is necessary to understand how it was configured as an object of visual curiosity. This is a power relation that cannot be easily reduced to a matter of 'spectacle' – with the linear power relations that this implies – but rather invites an analysis that takes seriously the active character of observant practice. 'We only see what we look at', wrote John Berger (1972, 8). 'To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach'. There is, of course, an inevitable problem in attempting to translate this sort of visual experience into written form – that is to say, into the sense-making space of articulation (Kearnes 2000, 332). It should be clear that there is nothing 'obvious' about either sight itself or the processes which rendered this particular object into a subject for visual experience.

Fourth, it is important to emphasize the excessive, the 'more than . . .' character of Duncan's visual experience. To some extent, this is already acknowledged in the idea of 'spectacle'. What I am getting at is by no means unique to the sight of an ascending missile, but there is still a very particular sublimity to such an awe-full harbinger of destruction. The spectrality of this object – at once monstrous and hellish, trailing fire in its wake – brings to mind some of the clichés about the visceral truth of visual experience: the Corporal had to be seen for *real*, *in the flesh*, and with *his own eyes*. This takes us back to John Berger's point about the duration of vision, beyond mere presence. He argues that 'the desire to *have seen* – the ocean, the desert, the aurora borealis – has a deep ontological basis' (1984, 50; original emphasis). This enigma of vision is perhaps nowhere more present than in the experience of the sublime: in an encounter with beauty or awe. Beauty's revelation, he suggests, is the fusion between appearance and significance, look and meaning. 'Such a fusion changes one's spatial sense, or, rather, changes one's sense of Being in space' (Berger 1984, 51).

Lastly, if the conceptual starting point of this paper has been Gearóid Ó Tuathail's critique of the alleged 'ocularcentrism' of geopolitics (apparently supported by the naming of New Look and VIOLET VISION), then thinking through Duncan's story has made me less certain about the traction



of this argument. I am more circumspect about Ó Tuathail's claim that 'ocularcentrism is the condition of all geopolitical texts' (Ó Tuathail 2000, 390; my emphasis). The observant subject of Cartesian perspectivalism, with its detached, remote and disembodied eye/'I', is certainly analogous to the Olympian (and ultimately unreflexive) perspective of the geopolitical tactician. Geopolitical agency, however, is more diverse and diffuse than this singular figure of the theorist/tactician. Ó Tuathail's critique of ocularcentrism succeeds, then, in drawing attention to the co-constitutive character of geopolitics and visual culture. The problem is that while vision in his account remains largely at the level of philosophical abstraction, the active character of *observant practice* (which is situated, embodied and connective with other sensory registers) is itself lost. Duncan's story may be about a visual spectacle, but the model of ocularcentrism does not readily fit his integrated perceptual experience of the ascending missile. Nor, in a metaphorical sense, does Duncan easily occupy the Olympian place of the tactician. All of this affirms that there is much to be done on the relationship between geopolitics and visual culture which can go beyond an analysis of texts or images, to address more searching questions about what it means to see and about the unruly character of observant practice.

The vision thing, in other words, is always more than just a vision thing.

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### Notes

- 1 Ó Tuathail would contest the validity of this distinction (Ó Tuathail 2000).
- 2 These themes are also the subject of recent critical attention, particularly since the establishment of the journal *Surveillance and Society*, edited by the geographer David Wood.
- 3 A fuller account of the history of the rocket range is given in MacDonald (2003). All of this material is

based on declassified military files at the Public Record Office (PRO), London. Files of particular relevance were: Air Ministry boxes: BT 217/577; BT 247/577; BT 247/98; Ministry of Aviation boxes: AVIA 2/2648; AVIA 2/962; AIR 19/723; CAB 124/1601; T223/291.

- 4 Throughout the 1950s the V-bombers (Valiants, Victors and Vulcans) became increasingly vulnerable to anti-aircraft missile attack.
- 5 Letter to Lt General Sir Frederick Morgan, Ministry of Supply from Sir Richard Powell, 2 March 1955, PRO AVIA 65/1106.
- 6 See PRO files: AVIA 65/1108 Warhead for Corporal – Violet Vision correspondence; AVIA 65/1106 1953–1954 Proposal to adopt weapon system Corporal; AVIA 65/1107 1954–1957 Corporal Violet Vision warhead requirements; AVIA 65/1108 1954–1957 Corporal Violet Vision warhead requirements; correspondence. The testing of the RED BEARD warhead at Maralinga, South Australia in 1956 went ahead with no adequate warning given to Aboriginal people in the vicinity, four of whom were immediately killed (James 2001).
- 7 For an analysis of the geopolitical significance of James Bond see the work of Klaus Dodds (2003).
- 8 See PRO DEFE 7/1349. 70/GW/1035.

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