

Counter-Sites and Other Measures

Jane and Louise Wilson often approach sites through photography as an initial mode of encounter, before developing works in moving image and installation. Yet their analogue photographs already carry filmic qualities: temporality, suspension, and dense atmospheres. Like film stills, the images suggest a charged interval between before and after, presence and absence. Departing from typological architectural photography – such as that associated with Bernd and Hilla Becher – the Wilsons do not seek to classify or order forms. Instead, they explore the affective and psychological dimensions of politically and historically charged modernist sites.

Their DAAD fellowship in post-reunification Berlin in 1997 marked a formative moment in their work. In *Stasi City* (1997), shot at the former headquarters of the GDR Ministry for State Security, uniform corridors, surveillance systems, and double doors condense into an atmosphere of unresolved power. This was followed by further investigations into Cold War infrastructures: abandoned military bases, border zones, and the Baikonur Cosmodrome, the central launch site of the Soviet space programme. The artists also turned their attention to consumer architectures in the United States, such as labyrinthine casinos, revealing parallel systems of spectacle and control. Together, these locations trace the fault lines of competing visual cultures and geopolitical imaginaries.

Throughout their practice, the Wilsons approach modernist architecture as a promise of transparency, rationality, and progress. Military architecture initially appears as its antithesis, marked by opacity and isolation. In their photographs of the Atlantic Wall bunkers, the former structures of surveillance and defence appear archaic and psychologically charged, evoking organic forms or symbolist imagery. The concrete pavilions of Orford Ness, the former British nuclear weapons testing site, echo architectures of the International Style while concealing technologies of catastrophic potential.

Central to the artists' research on Chernobyl is Vladimir Shevchenko's 1986 documentary *Chernobyl: A Chronicle of Difficult Weeks*, whose understated title belies the scale of the disaster. From this encounter emerged photographic works, film installations, and *Toxic Camera* (2012): a bronze cast of Shevchenko's camera, whose radioactive contamination ultimately proved fatal, extending beyond Shevchenko to others who came into contact with it after the shoot.

More recent works signal a shift in scale and sensibility. On Gapado Island in South Korea, the artists turn from monumental infrastructures toward communities and their rituals, geological formations, and fragile ecosystems. Across these projects, *Countermeasures* can be understood as an intuitive condition: an internal calibration that absorbs the atmospheres of sites shaped by power and history and returns them as spaces of heightened perception.

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