

INSIDE VIEWS

From a hidden place

Then and now. Sometimes the difference can be enormous; sometimes nothing seems to have changed. In the case of Germany, this comparison tends severely toward the former. Especially concerning the secret service organisation, otherwise known as the Bundesnachrichtendienst, or the German Federal Intelligence Service. In a recent gesture of blatant otherness, the government decided to reverse the secret nature of its practices hitherto and gather the involved individuals together in a grand, if architecturally dull building. But in this article, DAMN° concentrates on the inside views of the formerly hidden places as experienced by photographer Martin Schlüter, who was the first to step into them before they became passé.

SANDRA HOFMEISTER
ALL IMAGES © Sieveking Verlag, Martin Schlüter, 2014



SECRET SITE OUTSIDE OF PULLACH
Signal Intelligence Control Centre (SIGINT).
With the lights on.



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MAIN ENTRANCE DRIVE (1)
Main entrance drive with gatekeepers' booths.

GEOGRAPHIC SERVICE (2)
Some parts of the world are not mapped digitally, thus the Bundesnachrichtendienst has an extensive cartographic collection.

For 60 years, the German Intelligence Service, aka Bundesnachrichtendienst, was located in Pullach, a quiet residential quarter in Munich. The area comprised of 64 hectares and contained schools, shops, and hairdressing and tailoring facilities. The whole zone turned into a secret city within a city. Employees and their families were not registered in Munich's public records – nobody was allowed to know who worked in the secret zone of the BND. Some of the buildings in the area had been constructed by the Nazis as residential complexes for their elite, others were added in the 1950s and 70s. Parts of the zone will soon be demolished, as there is no more use for the buildings now that the employees have been relocated to a new headquarters in Berlin.

By chance, a short while ago the writer passed-by the new Federal Intelligence Service's headquarters in the centre of Berlin, and was impressed by the monumentality of the recently opened area. The huge complex in Chauseestraße seemed like a glittering and well-fortified castle. It stood-out. Situated behind a 300-metre-long high wall that surrounds the whole building, it was noticeable by its endless, equally positioned, monotone windows. "You don't know if you should laugh or be frightened", a daily newspaper pointedly remarked. Obviously, some-

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thing has changed in regard to the Federal Republic of Germany's self-image. That is to say, the world of secret agents and spies was formerly kept quiet. But now, contrarily, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) is asserting its power and influence in the centre of the German capital with an architectonic language that provides evidence of an overwhelming sense of self-representation. The time of hidden places and conspiratorial locations is over. Hence, the Federal Intelligence Service presents what it is – or maybe even more than what it is, frankly.

Martin Schlüter's images document the old days of the spy myth. The German photographer, born in 1977 in Hannover and awarded CNN journalist of the Year in 2012, was the first photographer ever commissioned to record the old BND-buildings in Munich. With one unique restriction: no people and no vehicles were allowed to appear in the images. With his photographs, assembled together in the book *Nachts schlafen die Spione* (The spies sleep at



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night), the whole world of the German Intelligence Service in Munich is made public – or at least, half-public. For decades, the area in Munich-Pullach, a quiet residential quarter near the river Isar, was hidden like a forbidden city. Nobody knew what was going on behind these walls that separated the BND from the rest of the city. Nobody ever claimed to have been there, even employees had to keep their working place a secret via a double identity. Nevertheless, with a bit of fantasy, one could have felt unease at what was going on in the buildings and pavilions in the forbidden zone. And clearly, this is the reason why the spy myth was able to continue to

CHEMICAL LABS (1)
A half-eaten sandwich indicates that someone had just been working there.

EMPLOYEE'S OFFICE (2)
Some BND employees tried to counter the dull atmosphere of their offices.

SANITARY SECTION (3)
Silicone masks used for first-aid exercises.

All photos in the spread are taken in the new part of the secret area.



in the newer part of the area: besides a portrait of German President Gauck, there are other pictures of Frederic the Great and Bismarck in the corridors.

Schlüter's photographs play with the bizarre – they uncover a world that couldn't be more nightmarish and narrow-minded. The photographer's trick was to take all the images at night. Thus, the viewer becomes a spy himself, exploring the interiors and buildings as if doing something forbidden. At the same time, crucial questions arise: are these dusty places really considered the spy reality in times of wiretapping operations and computer systems against safeguarded professional viruses? Only a few employees at the Federal Intelligence Service remain in Munich – all the others have had to move to the new headquarters in Berlin. The times of the cold war are over, but the myth continues, of course. <

grow for 60 years, as the German Secret Service was fed by rumours for decades. Now, as the vast majority of spies and officials move into the new building in Berlin, the whole myth begins to crumble. Take the main entrance door that Martin Schlüter saw in front of his lens: the German federal eagle looks like a hackly chicken printed on the wall. Or the collection of admission cards in the doorman's house, where every employee had to register when entering the zone: the letter cases where these cards are collected could be a slip box in an archive from the 19th century. Martin Schlüter also took photos of the dog kennels, the BND-Soshin-Group's exercise space, the post office for couriers, and the BND Tennis group's clubhouse. And what he discovered is astonishing: the BND headquarters was completely old-fashioned and out-dated. The scenes the photographer documented became even spookier as concerns the bungalow/villa of the BND President



Nachts schlafen die Spione, by Martin Schlüter, Letzte Ansichten des BND in Pullach, Steinking Verlag, Munich 2014, (language: German); c. 160 pages with c. 120 colour images, ISBN: 978-3-844874-03-6; €59

HOUSE 110 (1)
One of the older meeting rooms in the house is rarely in use, but the traces left on furniture and carpets make it obvious that the space was regularly used in the past.

Duty roster for the watchdogs (2)

CHEMICAL LABS (3)
Dusty bags forgotten in the basement. The purpose of their use remains unclear.

All photos are taken in the new part of the secret area.

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