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The bunker: mentality, materiality and metaphor

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The image of the 'bunker' has a deep resonance in contemporary organisational discourse. This paper seeks to explore the link between this metaphor and the materiality of the bunker as an actual place. The Twentieth Century origins of the bunker lie within the rise of aerial bombardment. The bunker, as a structure, is a triumph of function over form, yet it somehow also resonates at a symbolic level – either by invocation of the abject circumstances of Hitler's final days in his Berlin bunker or in the celluloid imaginings of the nuclear command bunker during the Cold War. In each case the materiality, the 'concrete' essence, of the bunker weaves in and out of its symbolic existence. This paper also considers the fate of these bunkers and what their ruins leave for us as traces of the essentialist organisational life lived *in extremis* by those who dwelt within them.

Keywords: metaphor; organisational symbolism; bunker; air-raid; phenomenology of dwelling; shelter; nuclear war; Hitler; Virilio; logistics of perception.

1. Introduction: the bunker as organisational metaphor

The image of the 'bunker' has a deep resonance in contemporary organisational discourse¹, particularly as a metaphor for the dying days of political regimes and their leaders. Take for example, Lord Donoghue, a UK Labour Party peer, attributing the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown's failing leadership to a 'bunker mentality' amidst the leader and his inner circle² thus:

"If you are locked in the bunker at Number 10 for several years, it's hard not to lose touch – and those around you are losing touch... Advisers need to be in touch with public opinion, and when you are working 14 hours a day managing day-to-day crises, you don't actually lead a normal life. You shut yourself off from normal life because you don't want people asking questions, you don't want to say something inappropriate that could be leaked to the media. So, apart from your family, you spend a lot of your outside time with people from the bunker." (Tweedie & Pierce 2009)

Here, the allusion implies, physical separation from the 'outside world' (and/or the thing that is *object* of the 'bunkered' political or managerial clique) debilitates and degenerates the ability to effectively perceive and manage that object. The bunker motif also appears in contemporary commercial discourse, usually associated with catastrophic business crisis – here in the words of AIG's CEO, Bob Willumstad concerning that corporation's struggle to secure a refinancing lifeline in September 2008:

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“On the one hand it was difficult to maintain morale during the financial crisis, but on the other, a lot of people at AIG were hardened. This felt like just one more event to struggle through. We had a bunker mentality, certainly at the end.” (Benner 2009)

Willumstad describes how this ‘bunker mentality’ arose from a combination of the prevailing financial crisis and of the inward focus of the senior management team and their crisis management stance – living and working together without respite or physical escape from their corporate HQ during the height of their emergency.

In contemporary usage ‘bunker mentality’ is attributed to a combination of the inward, and defensive, stance of the management clique, and also – implicitly or explicitly – to the influence of the physical form of the place that has been retreated to. Commonly, therefore, outings of the ‘bunker’ metaphor will feature three elements:

- i. The emergence of a disconnect between the object of control and those seeking to administer that control;
- ii. A paranoia (individual or collective), manifesting in excessive defensiveness within that clique; and
- iii. Physical retreat to, or situatedness in, a place of (chosen) confinement – and consequent feedback effects whereby that place amplifies the disconnect and the paranoia.

This paper enquires into ‘the bunker’ – not just viewing the bunker as a disembodied state of mind – but encountering it is also a place, a special kind of place, and seeks to understand the organisational relevance of this materiality. To explore the potency of the bunker metaphor this paper will adopt an essentially phenomenological stance, following a path trodden previously by Bachelard (1994), Virilio (2009), and King (2004) in their enquiries into the meanings of dwelling and shelter. The paper will seek to examine the essence, the contemporary ‘meaning’, of the bunker as both a symbol, and as an actual place of dwelling. To study this ‘idea-in-form’ (Barthes 1973, 121), we have to embrace ‘the concrete’ in a real sense, for these bunkers were made of that material. The analysis will draw upon metaphor in use, military archaeology, history, site visits and films. It will also touch upon the accounts of those who choose to visit now-abandoned bunkers as a hobby³.

2. Metaphors and management

This paper follows Morgan (1986) in its belief that metaphor, and metaphorical thinking, needs to be studied as part of organisational analysis. In doing so it seeks to delineate the ways in which bunker imagery resides in organisational discourse – and what that usage is alluding to. The analysis seeks, in particular to draw from (but also to mutate) Morgan’s metaphor of the organisation as ‘psychic prison’. The dark, symbolic, themes ascribed by Morgan to the image of a non-physical entrapment by ideas can equally be applied to the physical confinement of the bunker – and the ideas that led to its creation and the choice to retreat into its confines. Thus we will draw from Jungian psychology, cultural theorists like Virilio and broadly gothic tropes in order to interrogate the bunker, and its symbolic and material likeness to earlier dark archetypes: the ‘underworld’, the ‘labyrinth’, ‘the cave’, ‘the dungeon’, ‘the crypt’ and ‘the tomb’. In their material form such places confine or channel



Second World War coastal pillbox, Northumberland

(photo in the style of Virilio 2009).

movement and action within them. Yet that confinement and constriction is – to a degree - chosen. There is an emotive, 'dark', abject, dimension here: one that both attracts and repels due to the ontological instability of the bunker as a place that seeks to defer death, a place where the denizen lives moments and inches away from entombment – the sudden paradigmatic shift of the bunker from shelter to grave (applying Kristeva 1982). We will explore this abject dimension shortly – by looking at the resonance in the bunker metaphor of Hitler's final days in 1945 in his Berlin *Führerbunker*. Having explored this, we will then consider the actuality of organisational life within bunkers, before finally turning back to image in order to examine the symbol and reality of the hyper-modern, 'all-knowing' nuclear command bunker and its relationship with, what Virilio (1989) has called, 'the logistics of perception'. Here, once again, we will contrast image with the physical reality and capabilities of such bunkers.

3. The rise of the bunker

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a 'bunker' as "a reinforced underground shelter, especially for use in wartime" (Thompson 1995, 172). According to the OED the expression is of untraceable, Nineteenth Century origin – but appears to derive from nautical storage usage – the same root from which bunk beds, bunkhouse, coal bunker or golf course (sand) bunker take their meaning.

Bunkers emerged during the Twentieth Century, necessarily, as an organisational response to technological advances in warfare. They are a material testimony to the anxieties of their creators, for Vanderbilt, "abstract doomsday scenarios poured in hard concrete" (2002, 135). Their form reflects the essential features of the 'bunker' reflex: the urge for shelter, to roll defensively into a ball, to focus resources for survival and/or response to the prevailing situation, to dispense with the unnecessary. Bunkers are a physical embodiment of organisational essentialism. The retreat to the bunker is a retreat to a (pre-prepared) place of protection, a place where the organisation will 'know what to do', a place of reserve power and capacity to control (or at least monitor) the assailing circumstances. At its essence a bunker is (or claims to be) an individual and/or organisational 'survival machine' (Gane 1999, 90).

The trenches and defensive emplacements of the First World War are the origin of the bunkers we will examine. This is not to rule out precursors – the frontier and core defensive function of castles, forts, cave complexes and other pre-modern refuges cannot be ignored, however it is the industrialised scale of Twentieth century 'digging in' that is noteworthy, for those in command in 1939 had direct experience of bombardment in those 1914-18 trenches. The defensive medium of choice for the next Great War would be reinforced concrete, rather than mud. The speed and scale of construction of the resulting 'bunker mania', a wave of civil (and military) engineering on a par with the earlier 'manias' of intensive canal and railway construction in the Nineteenth Century, was testimony to advanced engineering, rational project management and procurement skills of the mid-Twentieth Century. In such outbreaks of bunker construction we see fear of attack physically written upon the land⁴. In the underground shelters and command centres we see emergence of an 'architecture of disappearance' (Vanderbilt 2002), a form seeking not to be noticed, to be hidden – in contrast to the traditional symbolic function of the linear defence – the fort or castle, for which visibility and seizure of the high ground is integral to the defensive function (Thompson 1991).

The bunker building mania was the result of widespread fear of aerial attack, an anxiety that grew steadily following the invention of powered flight (see, for example H.G. Well's *The War in the Air* (2009 – first published 1908)). Progressively through the first half of the last century the focus of war moved from the horizontal to the vertical axis. Aerial danger in the form of battlefield artillery of 1914-18 evolved into the airborne bomb, later the guided missile. In expectation of a second world war, and following the illustration of Franco's bombing of Guernica, everyone anticipated massive destruction from the air, and the consequent need for military, civilian and political shelter, below ground. The Cold War, and anxiety about nuclear Armageddon, only served to accentuate (and sublimate) a fear of danger from 'above' and urge on the drive underground, as one young boy put it when interviewed in the U.S. in early 1950s:

"Please mother, can't we go some place where there isn't any sky?" (Kahn, 1953, 23)

Our subsequent experience of nuclear anxiety, in Coupland's words our sublimated waiting for "the wrong sun" to suddenly appear in the sky (1994, 86), hinders our ability to understand the fear of spectre of 'conventional' bombing in the run-up to the Second World War. But as Calder (1991), Lindqvist (2001), Bourke (2005) and Holmes (2009) each show, that fear was as palpable in its day as subsequent nuclear anxiety⁵. That fear manifested itself in bunker building on a vast scale, and military and political command centres went underground (literally). Building command bunkers was a fashion, something embraced at first rather optimistically, as Churchill declared, with verve, in a letter to the worried wife of the former Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain at the inception of his own underground command centre in Whitehall: "I propose to lead a troglodyte existence with several 'trog's'."(Churchill 1940).

But Britain's bunker building was small scale compared to that of Nazi Germany. Britain's provision of civilian shelters can best be described as ad hoc, meanwhile Hitler took great interest in bunker building for both his own, and for civilian use. According to Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, Hitler (a failed architect himself) was, from the early 1930s onwards, obsessed with designing bunkers (Fest 2004, 16), and frequently ordered reinforcing work to his bunkers with the desire of outpacing the increasing destructive power of Allied bombs. This fortification mania reached its zenith with the Wolf's Lair (Hitler's eastern front HQ): here brutal concrete forms were created, colossal, near solid blocks of reinforced concrete, with small rooms sheltered deep within a much thicker carapace of concrete (Baxter 2009). These, like the Pyramids, were structures that inverted architecture: for their walls and ceilings were thicker than the rooms within. By May 1945 nineteen fortified underground (or semi-underground) headquarters for the Fuehrer had either been built or were under construction, all built by the Organization Todt (using Jewish and other slave labour) and consuming an estimated 12.9 million man-days work: a massive diversion of manpower and construction materials (Seidler and Zeigert 2004). Indeed, Speer conceded that construction of one Fuehrer Head Quarters (appropriately named 'Giant') consumed more concrete in 1944 than was available for air-raid construction use by the entire German population of 70 million that year (O'Donnell 1979, 39).

Thus fear of aerial attack drove governance underground, and to an extent the civilian population too. This was building for protection, for shelter in the most primal sense. Yet increasingly neither Allied nor Axis (or Soviet) powers found themselves able to fully protect



Entry to pillbox, Northumberland.



Eisenhower's 'deep shelter', Goodge Street, London – now Channel 4's archive.

their populace and the Home Front from destruction. We may view this failing as seed corn of Beck's 'Risk Society' (1992, 1996) thesis, for it is in public anxiety about the paucity of civilian shelters that fed much of the Anti-Nuclear movement's support. That a government either could not, or would not, take steps to protect its civilian population (but was prepared to protect itself with its own system of nuclear bunkers for the chosen elite) touched at something fundamental. Whilst "society must be defended" (Foucault 2003), and this primary drive for survival lies (for Hobbes 1985) at the heart of notion of a social contract underpinning the legitimation of those who rule, the reality appeared that even the modern, technologically advanced, state could not protect its populace against nuclear war.

4. The bunker as object place of defeat and degeneration

Analysis of a *Daily Telegraph* article on the troubled fortunes of Prime Minister Brown's rule (Tweedie and Pierce 2009) throws up some interesting pointers to a narrative that feeds the bunker metaphor. The article, in addition to the Lord Donoughue quote exhibited above, seeks to paint a picture of the Prime Minister as physically incapable of controlling his facial muscles, absent minded, stumbling with use of words and fatigued and attended by a "whiff of political mortality". The article cites sources alleging the Prime Minister to be "psychologically flawed", paranoid, unable to control his temper and with a tendency to "micro-manage".

All of these descriptions can be found in accounts of Adolf Hitler's final days in the lead up to his suicide in the *Führerbunker* in May 1945. The article therefore appears to attack Brown by allusion, without ever once expressly likening him to Hitler. It does so by invoking two powerful, and related, images – that of Hitler's degeneration in the final days of his life, and of the end-game played out in Berlin his crowded bunker in the grounds of the Reich Chancellery. Speer⁶, interviewed in the mid-1970s, gives us an eyewitness connection between Hitler's bunker and the bunker/bunker mentality metaphor:

"...the nihilist Bunker mentality at the end. Only Hitler, only that one Bunker, only the mountain people really counted." (in O'Donnell 1979, 293).

Much has been written about those final days. Both by eyewitnesses and subsequent commentators and cinematic interpreters. There can be few episodes of underground living that have been recounted in such detail, or which carry such loaded meaning. This paper cannot examine those accounts in detail, but can note the power of this narrative as a root feeding into contemporary bunker imagery.

The symbolism of Hitler's final 105 days, spent enclosed within that bunker draws from German Romanticism, Expressionism, Dante, Shakespeare and Greek tragedy, as a melodrama played out with intense emotion upon a single, confined, stage. And, it appears, even the participants were keen to embrace the mythic potential of the events and to interpret their situation through metaphor. Martin Bormann's wife (Fest 2004: 31) and Albert Speer (Lehmann 2004, 21) both anticipated a valiant death for Hitler in that bunker as chiming with Wagnerian opera – the *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods). But it was Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels who most consciously (and calculatingly) sought to construct a glorious, enduring, myth from those last days. Influenced by Georges Sorel's theory of the mobilizing power of 'social myth' and the virtue of violence (Sorel 1999), Goebbels sought to stage the death of the Nazi elite in symbolic terms that would inspire a

future revival of that movement (Trevor-Roper 1995, 41), yet, ultimately, only achieved the suicide of himself, his wife and the murder of their six children.

Whilst the Nazi's may have wished for the image of Hitler's last days to be one of a valiant death, the enduring image is that of a degenerate, out of touch, abject existence within that bunker. In the words of one of the officers stationed in the *Führerbunker*:

"The whole atmosphere down there was debilitating. It was like being stranded in a cement submarine, or buried alive in some abandoned charnel house. People who work in diving bells probably feel less cramped. It was both dank and dusty...the ventilation could now be warm and sultry, now cold and clammy. The constant loud hum of the Diesel generator... the fetid odours of boots, sweaty woollen uniforms, and acrid coal-tar disinfectant. Towards the end, when the drainage packed in, it was as pleasant as working in a public urinal." (Captain Beerman quoted in O'Donnell 1979, 26)

The testimony of other eye-witnesses draws upon similarly dark, abject, imagery – either experienced this way at the time, or adopted ex-post-facto as part of *mea culpa*. Thus the reader encounters a "dead room, oppressively quite like a tomb" (Schroeder 2009, 179), an "Isle of the Departed" (Speer 1975, 631), a "dungeon ... [with Hitler] keeping watch like Cerberus⁷" (Junge 2005, 121), a "waxwork museum" (Junge 2005, 179), a "House of Fools" (Von Loringhoven 2007, 158) and the "upside down world of the bunker [where] night merged into day, and days merged into one another" (Lehmann 2004, 232). Within this dystopian place, (according to Von Loringhoven in testimony at the Nuremberg trials):

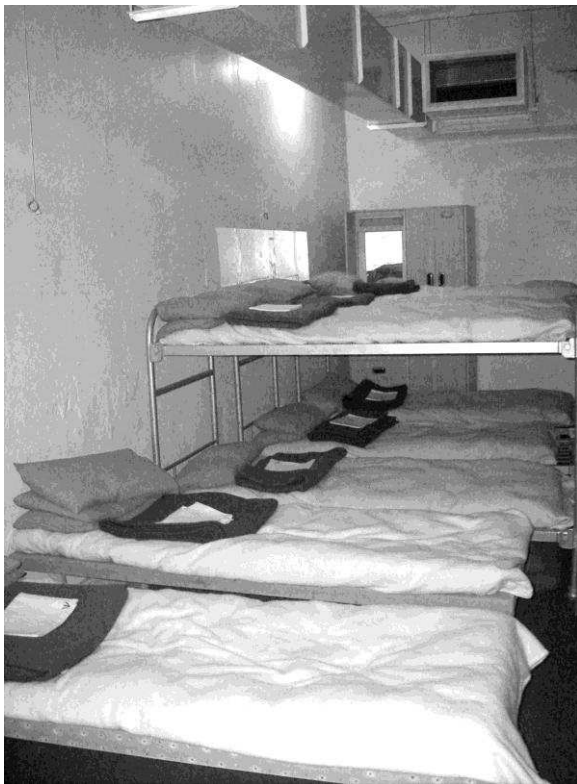
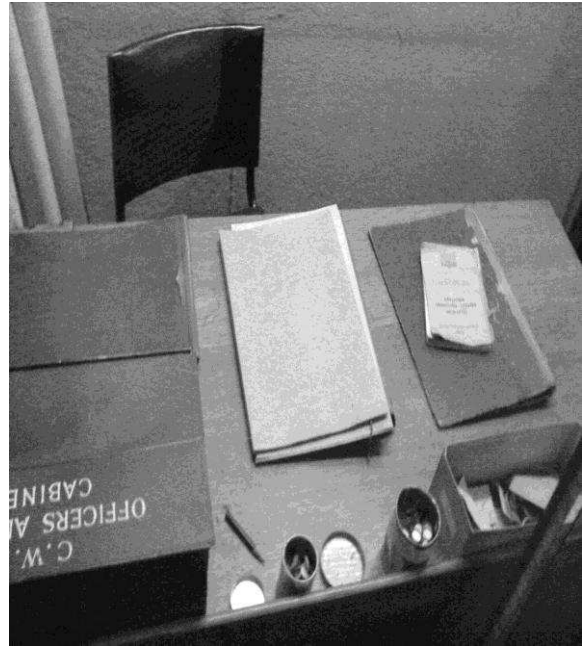
"Most of the people had nothing left to do there...They saw themselves as living corpses, and spent their final days in their rooms...A major topic in all conversations was when and how one was supposed to kill oneself..." (Taylor 2007, 184).

And above all (as root for the contemporary usage of the 'bunker' metaphor) it is the organisational paralysis that perhaps presents the strongest enduring image from the bunker, as encapsulated by academic historian Trevor-Roper (writing originally in 1947, and based upon his investigation, as a British Military Intelligence Officer, of those who were there, and his own inspection of the bunker in July 1945):

"Besieged in the shattered capital, cooped up fifty feet below the ground, cut off from ordinary communication, a physical and mental wreck, without power to enforce or reason to persuade, or machinery to execute." (1995, 149).

5. Interpreting life within the bunker

Trevor-Roper's seminal account of his investigation set the frame for the image of those last days – replacing the valiant with the abject. As myth, Hitler's bunker plays out in print, film and metaphoric usage as a dark, dysfunctional place. Indeed in many accounts the bunker (the place) and Hitler (the person) become entwined. For one witness (Von Stauffenberg⁸ in O'Donnell 1979, 41): "Hitler in his Bunker, that is the real Hitler". The parallel degeneration of Hitler's physical condition and the oppressive nature of physical surroundings are echoed in subsequent treatments of this story, most recently Hirschbiegel's cinematic interpretation: *Downfall* (2004). In linking the man and the bunker a form of environmental psychology is



Traces of dwelling – Cabinet War Rooms and Hack Green RSG

invoked, at times verging on architectural determinism: that the bunker formed the event. This depiction is also enmeshed with Jungian symbolism (Jung 1964, 1968). For Jung symbols are the primary means of communication with the unconscious – as these symbols resonate with underlying archetypal patterns – schemata of knowledge that are revealed metaphorically (Marshak 1996,150). Indeed O'Donnell claims for his interpretation - in the opening credits of *The Bunker*, the 1981 film adaptation of his account of the Hitler's final days in the bunker (Schaefer 1981) - if not a literal truth, then "a psychological truth" and in his book he claims support for this approach from Jung, who told him in 1961 that he considered Hitler's bunker to be "a dark reflection of a universal symbol in the collective unconscious of our culture" (O'Donnell 1979: ix). Hitler's bunker fate has an enduring, dark cultural resonance – one from which fiction has in turn drawn, and blended with other gothic tropes for example in the cross-over Nazi-bunker-zombie-horror of *The Bunker: The Evil is Within* (Green 2001) which centres around the abject depiction of the entrapment of seven Nazi soldiers within a bunker built on the site soon to be resurrected massacred plague victims.

Theorists who have sought to excavate the meaning of 'bunkers' tend to echo a Jungian view that the bunker operates as a primal archetype. For example Virilio found himself drawn to abandoned Nazi bunkers in the later 1950s, due to the primal role of the crypt as a sheltering place. Upon entering a derelict bunker Virilio found himself:

"...impressed by a feeling, internal and external, of being immediately crushed...A complete series of cultural memories came to mind: the Egyptian mastabas, the Etruscan tombs, the Aztec structures..." (2009, 11)

But Virilio's thrawl is complex⁹ – it is not simple repulsion or fear that these places command by their form. In this regard Virilio's standpoint is more attuned to Bachelard's (1994) phenomenology of shelter, his meditation on the home and other intimate places, and the way in which bodies and minds inhabit (and need) such places. Bachelard foregrounds the effect and sensory importance of the seemingly mundane - the cupboard, the attic and the garden shed and seeks to explain, through phenomenological description the importance of such taken for granted elements of the dwelling. Bachelard, thus points us in a direction that asks how these places were dwelt within *ordinarily*. Clearly there is nothing 'ordinary' about bunkers – but, following Auge (1995), Buchli (2002) and Anderton (2002) there is a need to enquire into the anthropology of dwelling within such places. Such studies need to examine both how official organisation is imprinted into the bunker by its design and arrangement and how the local dwelling practices of the denizens are revealed in their adaptation, their 'home making' behaviours. For example, when one examines the organisation of space within Churchill's cabinet war rooms the hierarchical nature of mid Twentieth century society is revealed in the physical division of labour in this two level bunker. Senior staff occupied the higher level, whilst more junior staff dwelt in the lower level, with a lesser headroom of only five feet.

Deriu (2001) explores a similar territory through his analysis of the modification and management of private and public space within the ad-hoc public air-raid shelters that emerged in London Underground 'tube' stations during the Blitz. At the start of the Second World War, the British authorities favoured a policy of dispersal, and avoidance of deep, mass, civilian shelter. In part the concern was one of avoiding concentrating targets, in part a



Views of the access hatch to a ROC Monitoring bunker

fear that once safely resided in deep shelters the population would refuse to return to the surface and participate in the war effort. However, in the face of such official opposition the public made the shelters their own and developed an accommodation to the daily routine of living and working above ground, but retiring to a second home / world underground each evening – habituating to an essentialist mode of life that had to take privation of tunnel dwelling in its stride and which largely retained a *social* (i.e. necessarily collaborative) approach to dwelling. Indeed, by the time of the Cold War it was the prospect of *disassociation* from the social, in distributed, small size shelters, that was feared by the authorities:

“To burrow beneath the ground for weeks, even longer, means for human beings a denial of most of the values which have been acquired slowly and painfully in the process of creating a democratic society. Instead of community, there is the splintering into isolated individuals or tiny groups. Instead of cooperation, there is violent competition for available space. Instead of mutual aid, there is a selfish struggled for individual survival.” (Kleinberg 1962, 165)

And Rose, in his analysis of the impact of the Cold War fallout shelter upon American culture, points to the vexed topic of ‘shelter morality’ – the anticipated need to defend personal shelters against neighbours, and the ethics which should govern this – which had become an intensely unsettling and debated topic in early 1960s North America (2001, 93).

The act of dwelling within these spaces (or preparing them for dwelling *in extremis*) left traces of personalisation and adaptation to the individual, homemaking (albeit of a rather constrained type). This tendency can be illustrated by the den-making activities of Royal Observer Corps (ROC) volunteers manning the UK’s network of 1,500 nuclear fall-out monitoring bunkers during the period 1950 – 1991. These bunkers were small underground chambers, designed to be occupied by three ROC members at a time. In the event of a nuclear attack they would dwell within the bunker for two weeks, monitoring fallout levels and reporting the data through to regional command bunkers (Cocroft et al 2004, 181; McCamley 2009, 129). These, now abandoned, bunkers were rudimentary, probably ineffective as survival machines in the event of a near-burst, but they were the object of considerable affection and pride by their occupants. Instances of decoration, adaptation and subsequent cherishing have been recorded (Deyner & Wakefield 2002; Croce 2008; Subbrit / ROCA 2004). In their ruin, abandoned en-mass in 1991, these bunkers (following Edensor (2005), de Certeau (1988) and de Certeau et al (1998)) reveal the ‘ghosts of place’. The activity of previous denizens is scriptural, it leaves traces, traces of their organized activity and purpose (whether intended or actually ever implemented). In the abruptness of their abandonment (or – in the case of bunkers still maintained in readiness of potential emergency use – their *preparedness*) bunkers leave Pompei-like traces of a moment of living, in their monitoring equipment, charts and powdered bleach and Ministry of Defence standard issue toilet roll (for an example see Hi Viz Ninja 2007)¹⁰. Meanwhile Ross’ (2004) photographic survey of nuclear shelters around the world finds traces of the vernacular in national and personal interpretation and execution of this most functional, and supposedly generic, of architectural form.

6. The bunker as supreme citadel of control

For Vanderbilt the image and reality of nuclear bunkers are out of alignment in Western culture: as the only public representations of these places during the Cold War were those imagined by film makers. Thus:

"While actual shelters were usually dark, cramped, mildewed affairs, in the realm of the subconscious desire they were always spacious, ridiculously well-stocked playrooms with artificial sunlight and state-of-the-art entertainment systems, inhabitable for years and years." (2002, 110)

If German Romanticism fed the myth for Hitler's last days, American Modernism fed the image of the nuclear shelter. These places were top secret – no image of the real was available during the Cold War. Thus film and fiction took over. It is only since 1990 that we have progressively been able to get to see these places and thus compare image with (a) 'reality'

Ken Adam had an important role in forming our image of the nuclear bunker. As the production designer for *Dr Strangelove* and seven James Bond films in the 1960s and 1970s, his designs augmented reality, inventing views of places that could never be seen for real – for example inside Fort Knox and the megalomaniac's lair. To depict the Pentagon War Room in *Dr Strangelove* (Kubrick 1964) Adam designed a vast, dark, triangular hangar (drawing, as Sylvester shows (1999), from Bauhaus Modernism, German Expressionism and the grand Eighteenth century memorial cenotaph architecture of Etienne-Louis Boullée¹¹). Here a massive conference table flanked by enormous screens depicting the flight of ballistic missiles towards the Soviet Union. President Reagan is rumoured to have asked to see the room when he visited the Pentagon for the first time upon taking office (Sylvester 1999, 13). It didn't exist, but we came to expect command bunkers to look that way. Surely world domination (or world destruction) could only originate from such awe inspiring places?¹²

Frayling (1999) notes how in Adam's designs these sets are machines for tyrants to live in, the vast submarine hangars, the missile launch pads hidden in volcanoes, the underwater mansions – all of these facilities absorbed industrial quantities of steel and concrete. They were simultaneously real and artificial. For French (1999, 32) Adam's style shows how:

"in the 1960s the subterranean world became an elegant metaphor for power and the hubristic belief of the powerful that they might survive the horrors that their madness – whether criminal or political – would bring about."

These unreal places were an embodiment of the ascendant globalising technological capitalism of the 'jet set' age. In the world of fiction subterranea was a new frontier to be exploited, one in which the physical reality of cost, engineering feasibility and groundwater did not apply, Thus Willy Wonka announces at the start of his Chocolate Factory tour:

"We are now going underground! *All* the most important rooms in my factory are deep below the surface...there wouldn't be *nearly* enough space for them up on top!...But down here, underneath the ground, I've got *all* the space I want. There's no limit – so long as I hollow it out." (Dahl 2004, 59) (emphasis in original)



Incident control desks, Hack Green RSG

But the 1960s also saw the emergence of oppositional research into the materiality of the secret state, protesters against the existence of nuclear defence for government (but no corresponding protection for the populace) started to search for the 'real' citadels of control.

What these amateur investigators found was scary in its own terms:

"In the concrete of bunkers, in the radio towers, the food stores, the dispersed centres of government, [one] can read the paranoia of power. This evidence is written on the face of England." (Laurie 1979, 9)

Researchers such as Laurie (1979) and Campbell (1980) had found physical evidence of military and governmental bunkers. Here was tangible, embodied, evidence of a secret state, but the cramped, drab bureaucratic form of the bunkers didn't fit with the movies, they lacked the panache of Ken Adam¹³. Image and reality tended not to marry up – bunkers were built quickly and were a triumph of function over form. They were, in essence, burrows – and building underground was expensive and suffered from all sorts of prosaic physical constraints. As Holmes notes when interviewed within the warren of rooms comprising Churchill's bunker beneath Whitehall:

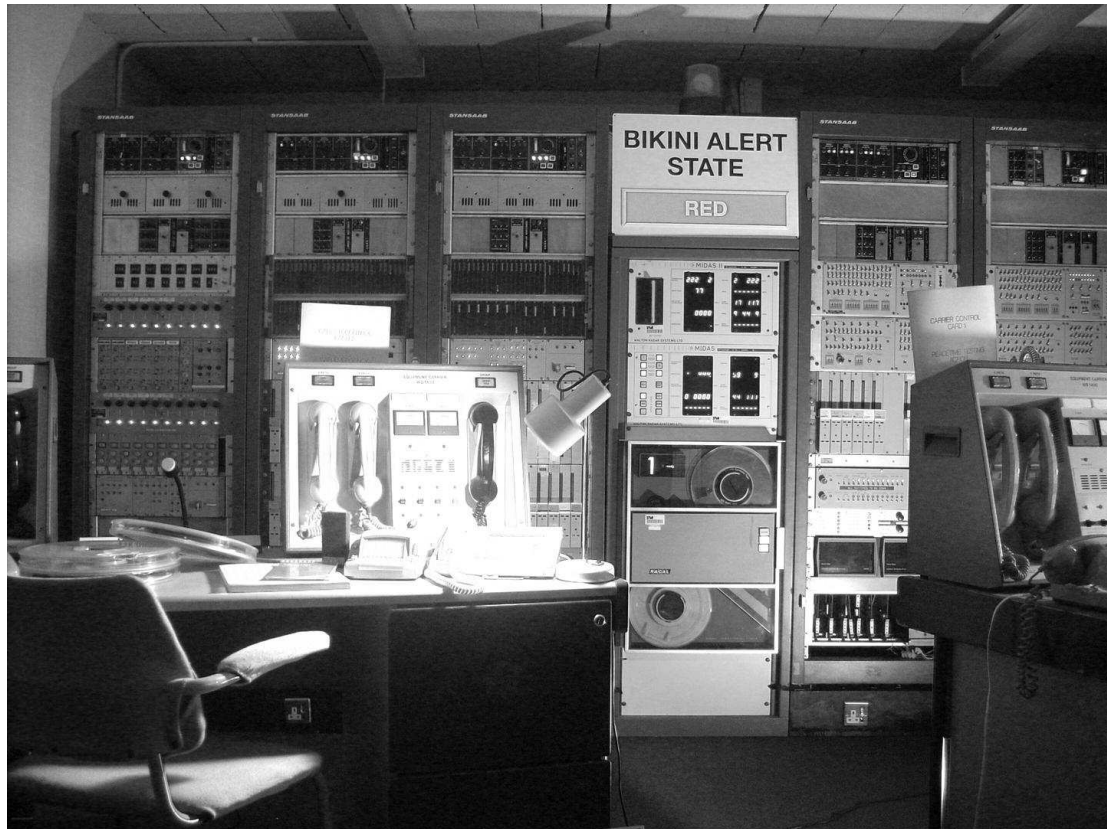
"look at the ceiling, it's an electrician's nightmare, isn't it? And if somebody was going to do a mock up - they wouldn't do it like this, and I love this place because it's real." (in Naughtie 2009).

Like the ROC bunkers described above, these bunkers reveal in their form and content the bureaucratic institutions that built them, and the organisational systems that would have run them, they presented the State in microcosm – revealing the minutiae and vulnerability of preparedness and provisioning.

Viewings of Cold War bunkers, now that they are abandoned, declassified and (in some cases) open to public inspection attest to the approximateness of these places. Commentators frequently remark that control rooms are smaller than they expected. Hodge & Weinberger entitled their description of a tour of the U.S. Strategic Command's ballistic missile control bunker in Nebraska, "where's the big board?"(2008, 86), typifying the reality gap between the Ken Adam induced expectation of the *Dr Strangelove* missile control screen and the modesty of the real control room. Hennessey (2003) expresses similar surprise in his account of visit to the former UK Central Government bunker set within a vast underground quarry near Corsham, Wiltshire and then describes the crude personalisation of the control room and its far from Ken Adam styling:

"What of the [RAF operations] room my team and I were admitted to that afternoon? Two things, above all, catch one's eye. The once-illuminable board beneath the ceiling listing the various alert states and the two murals on the wall, one of a tiny boxer knocking out a grinning and much larger opponent, the other of wrestlers in action. Just through the door was a large and very striking depiction of cricket on a village green. On the table lay a guide to radiation protection and some old maps. Like the furniture (standard Ministry of Works chairs) they were damp, dirty and mildewy. A train in Box Tunnel could just be heard beneath." (2003,191)

As research for this paper the author visited the former Regional Seat of Government (RSG), bunker at Hack Green, Cheshire. This facility had served as a Second World War radar



Images of control

Hack Green RSG control room; Northumberland ROC access hatch with Bamburgh castle in the background.

station before being commissioned as an RSG bunker, closing in 1993. It reopened as a tourist attraction in 1998. Hack Green features equipment assembled from various civil and military sites across the country, and of various vintages. A permanent sign at the exit to Hack Green declares, "visit us again - more secrets revealed soon" - suggesting the site's visitors have an insatiable demand for de-classification and that such demand can be eternally fed. Yet the manner of feeding appears not, in reality, to be ever-deeper revelation - but rather tangential addition like the UK's Geiger Counter collection or the introduction of a *son et lumiere* experience: a musty smelling room, empty but for utility chairs, a flickering red light and recorded sounds of the air vent - and the opportunity to await here the simulated flash every five minutes and attendant recorded sounds of blast wave and collapsing surface structures. The experience is disconcerting - a strange form of entertainment. The overall feel of the "attraction" at Hack Green is very down to earth, this could be a small museum of any type. A café cum gift shop offers the usual logoed pencils, rubbers and soft toys, with the occasional twist in stock (for example genuine USSR party member "passports" £6) to acknowledge the subject matter of this attraction. Kids are engaged - but in a treasure hunt to spot the mouse doll hidden in each room (the so called "Soviet Spy Mouse Trail"). But, echoing Hodge & Weinberger's (2008, 51) remarks on the US nuclear museums that they visited - it is unclear what message the curators are expecting children to take away from this place.

However, the place "made sense" to me - perhaps more than I was expecting. Here was a time capsule that could recall my own feelings and experiences of nuclear anxiety as a teenager twenty five years ago. That time and feel was embodied in the furniture design, the shape of the computer consoles and telephones, the inscribed *mores* and behavioural codes of that time gone by via the newsreels and public information leaflets of that era, the world of memos, notice boards and room-size control panels. Above all, the bunker struck me as a physical manifestation of the vulnerability, contingency and approximations of governance. Here was a room with twelve desks, with one person to run an entire functional area (NHS, water supply, disposal of the dead), using only telephone, paper, pen and voice. This place did not resonate the strength of the state, but rather its fragility, and its embodiment in flesh and paper. The building (which was only partly underground) did not appear strong enough to withstand a nuclear blast (and indeed, following the advent of the H-bomb in the 1950s the efficacy of sheltering from nuclear blasts came into question). Yet there was lip service (and considerable public expense) invested in these 'governance' bunkers, with resurgence in bunker spending during the Thatcher era as a partial reversal of the 1968 abandonment of any wider civil defence planning and funding.

Whilst the RSGs and their civil defence function were abandoned at the end of the Cold War governmental and military control bunkers live on. The image of the modern command bunker sees war enacted as video game. Fighting becomes a desk job. Drones are flown by remote control from offices half way across the world. Everything is known and controllable 'thanks' to satellites and remote sensing, a war of pictures replaces a war of objects (Virilio 1989, 4).

That's the theory. But even the 'modern' bunker has its limitations in terms of the ability to understand what is going on 'in the outside world'. Like Plato's man in the cave, the bunker denizen seeks to perceive the world by whatever feed of data can still reach him - and in turn comes to believe that image to *be* reality (Morgan 1986: 1999). But the image perceived

within the bunker is not reality. Eyewitnesses in Hitler's bunker repeatedly point to Hitler's fixation upon his battle maps and deploying upon them the models representing named military units – yet the reality, in the 'outside' world, was that those units survived in name only, they were emasculated and could achieve nothing when deployed by Hitler into the battle, via this board game in the bunker (Von Loringhoven 2007, 80). In the isolation of this command bunker the only direct perception of the outside world was that of vibration transmitted through the concrete:

“Above our heads Berlin was burning, yet we knew nothing of what was actually going on behind the heavy thumps of explosions that came ever closer, the shuddering of the concrete walls and the dust falling from the ceilings.” (Von Loringhoven 2007, 157).

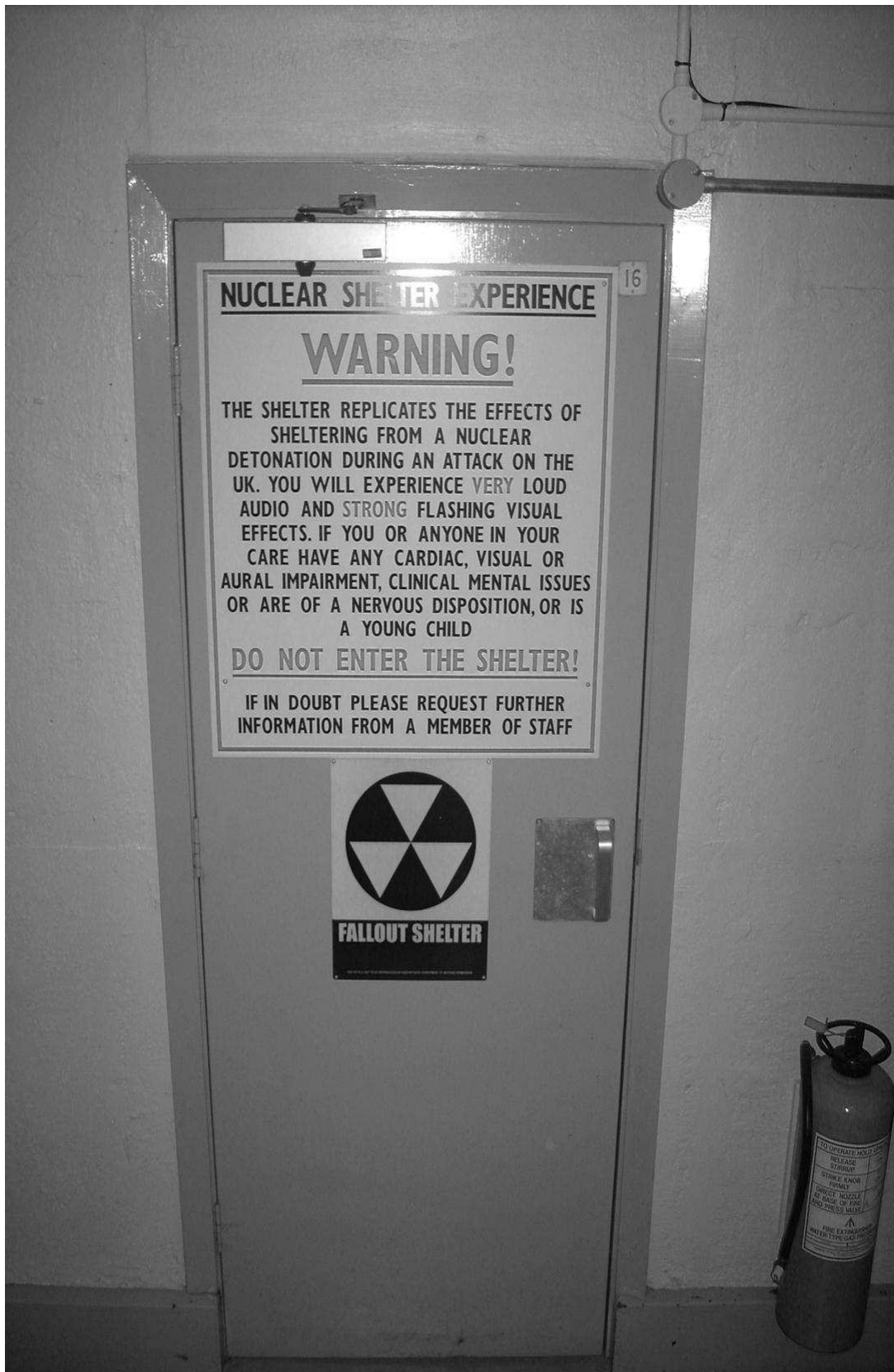
For Virilio (1989: 65) it is the isolation of the commander from the 'ordinary world' that is the consequence of an evolution towards a style of warfare based upon 'perceptual fields' (1989, 7) rather than physical presence upon the battlefield. Macintyre writing a reflection on his visit to Churchill's underground war rooms in November 2001 for *The Times* was keen to emphasise how much has since changed in the “logistics of perception” (Virilio 1989):

“This was a war fought with drawing pins and bits of coloured wool, with pen and ink in dusty corners, in rooms so gloomy that sun-lamps were brought in to try to boost the vitamin D levels of workers living a troglodyte existence in a six-acre underground maze with more than a mile of corridors. By contrast, Blair's war day is a frenetic succession of carefully measured meetings, travel, public statements, private e-mails and telephone calls, starting at 8am and ending when the last call is made to the US, often after midnight. Modern technology ensures that information moves at blinding speed, between individuals, departments and capitals; the rules of modern politics require that as much time is spent on presentation as policy. Coloured pins on wall maps showed Churchill the Second World War's approximate progress; Blair gets a daily computer printout, depicting the bombing of Afghanistan with pinpoint accuracy.”

Yet this faith in cybernetic advance needs to be tempered. Subsequent experience has shown the fallibility of the intelligence data and the not-so surgical nature of modern weaponry. To envisage the modern command bunker as having now achieved the all-knowing Panopticon is to still fall victim to the filmic image rather than the chaotic reality of the 'logistics of perception'. For example, Ridgeway notes the confusion in the White House bunker on that September day in 2001, and notes President Bush's testimony to the 9/11 Commission that his attempts to contact his representatives in the Presidential Emergency Operations Center (PEOC), a command bunker beneath the east wing of the White House were:

"frustrated [by] poor communications that morning. He could not reach key officials, including Secretary Rumsfeld, for a period of time. The line to [PEOC] —and the Vice President—kept cutting off." (NCTAUUSA 2004, 40)

Writing of the chaos in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the failure of US Federal and State authorities to successfully rise to the challenge of a decimated New Orleans, Thomas (2005) portrays how:



Awaiting the “abstract surprise moments of modern war” (Virilio 1989, 48)

Hack Green RSG's nuclear strike simulator

"In a squat, drab cinder-block building in the state capital, full of TV monitors and maps, various state and federal officials tried to make sense of what had happened."

Here the key words are 'tried to make sense of'. For all the surveillance technology that the world's superpower has to offer, governance failed. Society was not defended, for a command bunker is still not omniscient in the way portrayed in Hollywood blockbusters. The contemporary limitations of effective perception within the bunker are not that far removed from Hitler's staff having to telephone random residential numbers asking the residents, "have you seen the Russians yet?" (Von Loringhoven 2007, 152) or Churchill cramped in his pretend toilet cubicle, the secret site of his transatlantic telephone link to the US President (via a room sized encryption machine in the basement of Selfridges department store) (Holmes 2009, 147).

7. The bunker is dead; long live the bunker

In 1984 Churchill's underground bunker, the Cabinet War Rooms beneath Whitehall, was opened to the public, as culmination of a project championed by then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (Holmes 2009, 193). The war rooms, now augmented by an underground museum dedicated to Winston Churchill's life, form part of the symbolic heritage of national survival against the odds under the management of the Imperial War Museum.

In contrast Hitler's *Führerbunker* stood abandoned in the no-man's land of the Berlin Wall 'death strip' until finally being dynamited and infilled in 1987 and then, in 1994, overlain by several large apartment buildings. Whereas Churchill's bunker comes to operate as a shrine to a war leader, successive attempts have been made to eradicate the 'negative heritage' (Haakonsen 2008) of the *Führerbunker*. Ladd (1997, 133) describes the charged political significance of the unearthing in 1990 of a forgotten SS guard bunker near the location of the now obliterated *Führerbunker*. The question of whether or not the SS bunker should be preserved or erased polarised Berlin.

The Churchill and Hitler bunkers each have a narrative – but whilst one is a symbol of pride, ingenuity and resistance the other is feared as a 'dark' cipher for evil and a potential beacon for resurgent far Right extremism. But what of the other bunkers – the regional command centres, the pillboxes, the ROC monitoring posts? These largely have no narrative, no clearly ascribed place in national memory. Their recording, preservation and portrayal is left to amateur 'enthusiasts' (Wills 1985; Osborne 2004 & 2008; McCamley 2009; Foot 2007) or the ambiguity of small museum status (as in the case of Hack Green 2010).

This poses the question of whether the 'bunker' metaphor might die out as the Second World War and the Cold War pass beyond the lived experience of current generations. As noted above, there are still bunkers – but it appears that image and reality are now converging. Bunkers now seem less secret, less abject, less awe inspiring. As one amateur bunker explorer notes wistfully:

"a modern bunker is not like the bunkers we know and love, they really are quite boring...just underground office blocks. There's nothing to beat a two level operations room, with a gallery, with windows looking down onto the map tables below, people pushing tanks along with sticks. That's my idea of a good military bunker." (Croce 2008)

The Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBRA) provides the cockpit of contemporary crisis management for the UK Government. Moore's photographs (2008) of COBRA portray a banal normality. A place that looks very much like a modern office, except it is underground and there are no windows. But this begs the question, is the bunker really very different to the 'normal' sites of the organisation in question? And why should it be – apart from the form follows function constraints? These places are, after all, trying to ape (albeit in pared down form) the organisations and places from which the denizens would have come. Hennessey (2003) found the Corsham Cold War bunker to be a strange juxtaposition of civil service paraphernalia and hewn underground rock walls. Bunkers are, and have always been, offices or dormitories underground – the bunker reflects the society that made it (and this is no different to cairns or ancient tombs). And like tombs, bunkers have always had, as part of their purpose, the protection and transmission of culture. They operate as a cultural ark – and what is preserved / valued for preservation speaks of what is privileged in the host society. The afterlife of bunkers now lies in the provision of secure archival storage. These places that once offered shelter for people or national treasures (McCamley 2005) now live on (if at all) as data stores. Eisenhower's underground command centre, near Euston station, now serves as Channel 4 TV's media archive. The bunker remains as a survival machine, one that can preserve organisational culture, but not one that now requires (many) humans to enable that process. Our bunker metaphor may have to evolve too – if the bunker no longer has any humans in it.



New clear skies?

Notes

¹ The bunker metaphor is found in political discourse on both sides of the Atlantic, levied against politicians and candidates of both left and right political persuasion (see for example, Thomas 2005) and can be found deployed by protagonists in seemingly banal policy spats – for example in relation to the introduction of ‘Home Information Packs’ for homeowners (see Knight 2007).

² This usage can also be found in the liberal media, for example *The Guardian* (Watt 2010).

³ The motives, methods and meanings of such amateur ‘bunkerologists’, and their exploration of abandoned bunkers forms the focus of a separate study by the author, see Bennett (forthcoming).

⁴ Albania is an extreme example of this phenomenon- between 1950 and the death of dictator Enver Hoxa in 1985 an estimated 700,000 pillboxes were emplaced across the country to repel the perceived threat of foreign invasion (Howden 2002).

⁵ Calder (1991: \$2, 60) cites official UK pre-war predictions of 600,000 air raid deaths and an actual death toll of 60,000. By contrast Calder estimates that up to 50,000 residents of Dresden may have died in the 13-14 February 1945 air raids alone.

⁶ Albert Speer was Armaments Minister, with responsibility for German factories and infrastructure. At the Nuremberg war trials he was spared a death sentence because evidence showed that he had opposed Hitler’s ‘Nero’ Decree of 19 March 1945, an order calling for the destruction of Germany’s civil infrastructure, and had planned an abortive assassination attempt upon Hitler in the *Führerbunker*.

⁷ In ancient Greek and Roman literature a three headed hound which guarded the gates of Hades (Hell).

⁸ Von Stauffenberg led *Valkyrie*, the unsuccessful 20 July 1944 attempt to assassinate Hitler in the Wolf’s Lair bunker.

⁹ And long lasting, as Redhead (2004) and Gane (1999) both note – the bunker recurs as a point of reference throughout Virilio’s (more widely known) later work.

¹⁰ This feature has been exploited by fiction too, for example the attempt to understand an abandoned bunker, and the mysterious organisation to which it belonged, by reference to the equipment left within it is given a thorough treatment in the early series of the T.V. show, *Lost* (Abrams 2004-2009)

¹¹ Speer also acknowledges Boullée as an admired influence upon his Nazi architectural style (1975, 232).

¹² Furthermore Virilio (1989, 64) notes that the production designer of both *Star Wars* (Lucas 1977) and *Alien* (Scott 1979) was influenced by Adam’s *Dr. Strangelove* control room

design. We might therefore speculate that depictions of spaceship interiors in contemporary fiction owe much to attempts to depict Cold War bunkers.

¹³ In a post-modern turn an ex-nuclear bunker in Stockholm is reported to have been refitted as a command centre 'in the style of Ken Adam' as part of its redevelopment as a secure data centre (Judge 2008).

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